

# The Phonemic System and Script of Kannada



*A modern stone inscription from the year 2000 made in a 1000-year-old style near the statue of the Jain saint Bāhubali at Venur, recording details of the renovation of the site<sup>1</sup>*

Like all the other indigenously created Indian scripts (with the exception of those that are derived from the Perso-Arabic system), also Kannada script is syllabic: what appears to be a single 'letter' or sign usually does not represent a single sound, but a syllable. The basic forms in the script either represent the initial vowel of a word or the combination of a consonant and a vowel, namely, the so-called 'inherent' vowel (which is a short *a*). By means of additional signs, the vowel of

a syllable can be altered, or a single consonant can be turned into a compound consonant.

This means that the Kannada script system differs considerably from what is used in European languages. A learner who is not yet familiar with such a script (the type of script that is not termed 'alphabet' but *abugida*) may need a little time to grow familiar with its principles but will soon realize its basic simplicity and will appreciate its logical structure. Essentially, Kannada words are pronounced *exactly* as they are written. There are no odd spelling conventions like the 'th', 'sh' and 'ch' in English, or the 'sch' in German, where the pronunciation has little to do with the sounds that are represented by 't', 's', 'h' and 'c'. Also the dictionary order of the signs in Kannada script is highly rational and very quickly learnt.

Kannada has borrowed many words from Sanskrit since earliest times, and along with those words came some influence of the Indo-European languages, namely, the use of aspirated consonants. Also the special, not often used sign called *visarga*, and the modern use of the *anusvāra*, are a result of Sanskrit influence.

## The vowels

Kannada distinguishes the five short vowels *a*, *i*, *u*, *e* and *o* (in this alphabetical or dictionary order), as well as the long versions of these same vowels, which are pronounced by simply prolonging the short ones to approximately twice the length. In Latin transliteration the long vowels are indicated by means of a macron, as *ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ē* and *ō*.<sup>2</sup> There are two diphthongs, indicated as *ai* and *au*.

A historical peculiarity is the so-called 'vocalic *r*', which occurs only in Sanskrit loan words. In the original Sanskrit, it was pronounced like the *er* in the Dutch word *vader* or in the Scottish pronunciation of the English *father*: a trilled *r* that has the quality of a vowel. In the Middle Indian dialects (Prakrit), this original pronunciation was replaced by a combination of a consonantal *r* and a faint short vowel, either an *i* or a *u*, producing 'ri' or 'ru' which, strictly speaking, is of course no longer a vowel. Most Kannada speakers pronounce the 'vocalic *r*' (which is represented as *r̄*) as *ru*, or as a combination that resembles the *re* in the French pronunciation of a word like *premier*.

In the Kannada 'alphabet' these vowels appear first, in this order:

<i>a</i>	<i>ā</i>	<i>i</i>	<i>ī</i>	<i>u</i>	<i>ū</i>	<i>r</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>e</i>	<i>ē</i>	<i>ai</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>au</i>
ಅ	ಆ	ಇ	ಈ	ಉ	ಊ	ಋ	ಎ	ಏ	ಐ	ಒ	ಓ	ಔ

The pronunciation of the Kannada vowels is, except for that of the ‘vocalic *r*’, quite like what the letters in transliteration suggest in the majority of Western languages that are written in Latin script.

<i>a</i>	like in German <i>Mann</i> , Dutch <i>kan</i> , French <i>chat</i>
<i>e</i>	like in German <i>Mensch</i> , English <i>bet</i> , <i>men</i>
<i>i</i>	like in German <i>ich</i> , Dutch <i>vlieg</i> , French <i>chic</i>
<i>o</i>	like in German <i>flott</i> , Dutch <i>hond</i> , French <i>botte</i>
<i>u</i>	like in German <i>und</i> , Italian <i>tu</i> , the <i>ou</i> in French <i>vous</i> , the <i>oe</i> in Dutch <i>toen</i>
<i>ai</i>	a diphthong, like the <i>ei</i> in German <i>Schein</i> or the so-called ‘long <i>i</i> ’ in English <i>like</i>
<i>au</i>	a diphthong, like in German <i>Frau</i> , the <i>ou</i> in Dutch <i>kou</i> , more closed than the <i>ow</i> in English <i>now</i>

The long *ā*, *ē*, *ī*, *ō*, *ū* are real long vowels:<sup>4</sup> they have the same quality as the short vowels but sound approximately twice as long as the short ones.

## The consonants

Like in all the other Indian scripts that are derived from the common ancestral Brāhmī script, the Kannada script system has five *varga*-s or ‘groups’ of consonants, which are alphabetically listed after the vowels, in groups of five each, i.e., four plosives or occlusives and the corresponding homorganic nasal (i.e., the nasal that is pronounced with the tongue in a similar position). These groups are termed *kaṇṭha*, *tālavya*, *mūrdhanya*, *dāṃṭa* and *auṣṭhya*, or guttural, palatal, retroflex, dental and labial, according to the articulatory point where the tongue interrupts (in the case of plosives) or channels (in the case of nasals) the flow of breath while speaking: the throat, the palate, the hard palate in the middle of the mouth, the teeth, and the lips.

The plosives are either unvoiced or voiced, and unaspirated or aspirated. In the case of voiced consonants, the vocal cords vibrate during

pronunciation (e.g., English or German *d*, *b*, *g*), and not so with unvoiced consonants (e.g., English or German *t*, *p*, *k*). Aspirated consonants are followed, in careful pronunciation, by a clear puff of breath, which sounds like a soft 'h'. In English and in most regional varieties of German one hears a clear aspiration when a stressed syllable begins with a plosive: compare the two 'p's in the English word *paper* or the German *Papier*. In Kannada, as also in other Indian languages, all plosives can be aspirated, and this may demand a bit of practice of the average Western learner. However, in Kannada one can comfort oneself in the knowledge that also many native speakers (namely the less educated) do not aspirate, or actually aspirate the wrong consonants (in what is termed 'hypercorrection'), without their speech becoming incomprehensible.

The so-called palatal consonants are actually double consonants, but in the Indian linguistic consciousness they are treated as single letters. They are combinations of a plosive + a palatal sibilant, comparable to English *ch* (as in 'such') and German *tsch* (unvoiced) and English *j* or *dge* (as in 'budge') or German *dsch* (voiced), and these again can be aspirated or not. In usual scholarly transliteration these letters are represented as *c* and *j* (unaspirated) and *ch* and *jh* (aspirated, as in the English words 'check' and 'jump'); the homorganic nasal is *ñ*. The guttural (or velar) consonants, which are articulated in the throat, are *k* and *g* (aspirated *kh* and *gh*), with homorganic nasal *ṅ*.

The dental consonants, which are articulated against the front teeth, are simple, because they are very similar to German consonants: *t*, *th*, *d*, *dh* and *n*. The retroflexes are more difficult, because they have no equivalents in German or English. Here the tip of the tongue is bent back (retro-flex), so that it touches the palate in the middle of the mouth. This results in sounds that seem oddly 'thick' and 'heavy' to most European ears; they are heard in the speech of Indians when they speak European languages, because to most Indians the German and, especially, English 't' or 'd' does not sound dental, but retroflex.<sup>5</sup> In scholarly transliteration these retroflex consonants are written like the corresponding dentals, but with a subscript dot to distinguish them: *ṭ*, *ṭh* etc. The labials, i.e., the sounds that are articulated with the lips, sound just like the corresponding European consonants: *p*, *ph* (not 'f!') etc.

After the plosives and nasals, the semi-vowels follow in the Kannada abugida, which are represented in Latin transliteration as *y*, *r*, *l*, *v*; then follows the *varga* of the sibilants: *ś*, *ṣ* and *s* (palatal, retroflex and

dental), then the aspirant *h*, and finally the retroflex *l*, which stands at the end for no other reason than that it does not occur in the classical alphabetical order of Sanskrit, after which the Kannada order has been modelled.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the complete 'alphabetical' or dictionary order in Kannada is: *a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, r, e, ē, ai, o, ō, au; k, kh, g, gh, ṅ; c, ch, j, jh, ñ; t, ṭh, d, ḍh, ṇ; t, th, d, dh, n; p, ph, b, bh, m; y, r, l, v; ś, ṣ, s; h, l.*<sup>7</sup>

## The signs

Every sign in Kannada script represents either an initial vowel or the combination of 'consonant + short *a*'. When one wants to write the same consonant in combination with another vowel, then one must modify the sign; these modifications are on the whole quite regular. Thus the sign ಕ means *ka*, ಗ means *ga*, ನ means *na*. The upper right portion of these signs (') is called the *talekaṭṭu*, which literally means 'head-bind'. When this portion is replaced by a downward curl, ಁ, this means that the short *a* of the syllable is replaced by a long *ā*, and thus we get the signs ಕಾ *kā*, ಗಾ *gā*, ನಾ *nā*. When one wants to write only a consonant (e.g., at the end of a word), a different curl (the *virāma*: see below) is added, e.g., ಕ್ಕ *k*.

A few examples of words: ಮರ *marā* 'tree, wood' is very simple, consisting of two basic signs for *ma* + *ra*. ಕಾಗದ *kāgada* 'paper', consists of *k* + 'long *a*' + *ga* + *da*. ನಾನು *nānu* 'I' is *n* + 'long *ā*' + *n* + *u* (the hook at the right, the *koṃbu* or 'horn', signifies that the syllable contains a short *u*). ಬುದಿ *būdi* 'ash' is *b* + 'long *u*' + *d* + *i*, where (as is usual with the short *i*) the sign for short *i* takes the place of the *talekaṭṭu*.

The *virāma* (◌◌) is mainly used (except in Sanskrit manuscripts) for writing new loanwords from English and other foreign languages. The structure of modern Kannada is such that final syllables end in a vowel and preceding syllables that end in a consonant are written by means of conjunct consonants (see the following section).

## Conjunct consonants

The most complicated aspect of the Kannada script is the writing of the so-called *saṃyuktākṣara*-s or conjunct consonants. Graphically the first consonant in such a combination is written in normal size, and

any following consonants appear much smaller, below and slightly to the right of the first consonant, in forms that are called *ottakṣara* or 'compressed letters'. Most *ottakṣara*-s are easily recognizable, smaller versions of the big letters, but some of them can deviate strongly. In a word such as ಒಬ್ಬ *obba* 'a (human)', it is immediately clear that the *ottakṣara* is a *b*, just like the big letter; but in ಅತ್ತೆ *atte* 'mother-in-law' this is not so clear, and in ಅಯ್ಯ *ayya* 'lord' not at all. When one is unprepared, a strange-looking word such as ಸ್ತ್ರೀ *strī* 'woman' or ಲಕ್ಷ್ಮಿ *Lakṣmi* (name of a goddess; also a common personal name for women) can look frightening. Therefore, while learning the script, one must pay special attention to these few peculiar *ottakṣara*-s.

## Anusvāra

The sign ◌̣, the *anusvāra*, which in Sanskrit indicated the nasalization of a vowel, is customarily transliterated by an 'm' with an underdot: *ṃ*. Nowadays it is used in print as well as in handwriting for the homorganic nasal, i.e., a nasal that is pronounced with the speech organs in the same positions as for the following plosive consonant. In other words, its pronunciation depends on what follows it in writing. For instance, *t* is a dental plosive, therefore a word like ಅಂತೆ *ante* (meaning 'it is said that') is pronounced 'ante', because the *anusvāra* signifies the nasal from the same *varga* or category of consonants (the dental category, in this case) as the following *t*. In ಕೊಂಬು *koṃbu* (meaning 'horn') the *anusvāra* signifies a bilabial *m*, because it is followed by the bilabial plosive *b*, and the word is pronounced 'koṃbu', etc. When it precedes a sibilant (ಷ, ಸ or *s*), it is pronounced as a bilabial nasal ('m').

There is no unanimity about the place of this sign in the alphabetical order: sometimes it is treated as the final sign; sometimes it stands in the place of the homorganic nasal which it represents; sometimes it is treated as the very first consonant, before *k*. In this manual it will be treated as representative of the homorganic nasal, and as the theoretically very first consonant before a sibilant (this is also the accepted practice in most modern dictionaries that appear in India).

## Visarga

This sign (ಃ) appears only in certain Sanskrit loanwords. In Sanskrit it originally meant (depending on the phonetic environment) a variable

aspirant or sibilant. In south India it later became a peculiar, *h*-like aspirant, after which the preceding vowel is gently echoed. A word such as ಪುನಃ *punaḥ* ‘again’ is pronounced almost like ‘punaha’ (and often it is thus written by less educated persons: ಪುನಹ ). It is usually found at the end of Sanskrit adverbs: ಪುನಃ, ಸದ್ಯಃ, ಪ್ರಾಯಶಃ *punaḥ, sadyah, prāyaśah*. There is no general agreement among dictionaries where the position of the *visarga* in the dictionary order is; usually it is treated as the very first consonant, before *k*.

### Advice on learning the script

When learning any new script, it is important to know the graphemically relevant distinctions (i.e., in which respects the various signs differ from each other in such a way that they are recognized as different signs). In the chart that is given below, it will become clear that one such graphemic difference is that certain consonant signs begin, in the lower left corner, with a small wave (e.g., ನ, ಸ, which stand for *na* and *sa*) and others with a round shape (ವ, ಪ, which stand for *va* and *pa*). Another important distinction is that the horizontal bar at the top of the sign can be connected to the lower part (as in ವ, ನ ) or be separate (this separateness is usually, and in print practically always, emphasized by a small dot or circle, as in ವೆ, ಸೆ ).

In principle, every sign is written left to right and from below up. The learner will understand by simply observing the shapes that this is no hard and fast rule, and that it does not apply to shapes such as ಒ, ಓ, ಹೆ (where first the small ‘infinity sign’ is drawn), ಇ, ಠ, etc.

The student should carefully study, more than once, the chart that is given below with all the combinations of consonant signs with secondary vowel signs and note those combinations that one perhaps would not expect.

### Secondary vowel signs

The secondary signs for vowels are given in the table below. Most of them are attached in a very regular manner to the consonant signs (but beware of the combination consonant + *i*. Also beware of slight irregularities and surprises in *pu, pū, po, pō, phu, phū, pho, phō, mo, mō, vu, vū, vo, vō*).

$\bar{a}$	$i$	$\bar{i}$	$u$	$\bar{u}$	$r$	$e$	$\bar{e}$	$ai$	$o$	$\bar{o}$	$au$
ಾ	ಿ	ೀ	ು	ೂ	್ರ	ೇ	ೀ	ೈ	ೋ	ೋ	ೌ

Some of these signs are composite, for instance, the signs for long  $\bar{o}$  or long  $\bar{i}$ . The sign for  $o$  is a combination of  $e$  and  $\bar{u}$ , and together with the *dirgha*, a sign that merely indicates length (as with the long  $i$  and  $e$ ), a long  $\bar{o}$  is indicated.

The vowels  $i$  and  $e$  are both indicated by a small curl; here it is essential to know that if the curl appears as an extension of the basic consonant form, it signifies  $i$  (as in ನ ನಿ *na ni*, ರ ರಿ *ra ri*, ಬ ಬಿ *ba bi*, ಲ ಲಿ *la li*, ಸ ಸಿ *sa si*, ಗ ಗಿ *ga gi*, etc.), but if a horizontal bar (however short it may be) is drawn and the curl appears at the end of that bar, the curl signifies  $e$  (as in ನ ನೆ *na ne*, ರ ರೆ *ra re*, ಬ ಬೆ *ba be*, ಲ ಲೆ *la le*, ಸ ಸೆ *sa se*, ಗ ಗೆ *ga ge*, etc.).

One customarily finds the following table of the Kannada script (combinations of single consonants and vowels) in all Kannada learning manuals. Some purely theoretical combinations, such as the combinations ಢಿ  $\tilde{n}$  or ಣಿ  $\tilde{n}$  with vowels, have not been included here, because they never occur in practice.<sup>8</sup>

	$a$	$\bar{a}$	$i$	$\bar{i}$	$u$	$\bar{u}$	$r$	$e$	$\bar{e}$	$ai$	$o$	$\bar{o}$	$au$
$k$	ಕ	ಕಾ	ಕಿ	ಕೀ	ಕು	ಕೂ	ಕೃ	ಕೆ	ಕೇ	ಕೈ	ಕೊ	ಕೋ	ಕೌ
$kh$	ಖ	ಖಾ	ಖಿ	ಖೀ	ಖು	ಖೂ	ಖೃ	ಖೆ	ಖೇ	ಖೈ	ಖೊ	ಖೋ	ಖೌ
$g$	ಗ	ಗಾ	ಗಿ	ಗೀ	ಗು	ಗೂ	ಗೃ	ಗೆ	ಗೇ	ಗೈ	ಗೊ	ಗೋ	ಗೌ
$gh$	ಘ	ಘಾ	ಘಿ	ಘೀ	ಘು	ಘೂ	ಘೃ	ಘೆ	ಘೇ	ಘೈ	ಘೊ	ಘೋ	ಘೌ
$c$	ಚ	ಚಾ	ಚಿ	ಚೀ	ಚು	ಚೂ	ಚೃ	ಚೆ	ಚೇ	ಚೈ	ಚೊ	ಚೋ	ಚೌ
$ch$	ಛ	ಛಾ	ಛಿ	ಛೀ	ಛು	ಛೂ	ಛೃ	ಛೆ	ಛೇ	ಛೈ	ಛೊ	ಛೋ	ಛೌ
$j$	ಜ	ಜಾ	ಜಿ	ಜೀ	ಜು	ಜೂ	ಜೃ	ಜೆ	ಜೇ	ಜೈ	ಜೊ	ಜೋ	ಜೌ
$jh$	ಝ	ಝಾ	ಝಿ	ಝೀ	ಝು	ಝೂ	ಝೃ	ಝೆ	ಝೇ	ಝೈ	ಝೊ	ಝೋ	ಝೌ
$t$	ಟ	ಟಾ	ಟಿ	ಟೀ	ಟು	ಟೂ	ಟೃ	ಟೆ	ಟೇ	ಟೈ	ಟೊ	ಟೋ	ಟೌ
$th$	ಠ	ಠಾ	ಠಿ	ಠೀ	ಠು	ಠೂ	ಠೃ	ಠೆ	ಠೇ	ಠೈ	ಠೊ	ಠೋ	ಠೌ
$d$	ಡ	ಡಾ	ಡಿ	ಡೀ	ಡು	ಡೂ	ಡೃ	ಡೆ	ಡೇ	ಡೈ	ಡೊ	ಡೋ	ಡೌ
$dh$	ಢ	ಢಾ	ಢಿ	ಢೀ	ಢು	ಢೂ	ಢೃ	ಢೆ	ಢೇ	ಢೈ	ಢೊ	ಢೋ	ಢೌ

n	ಣ	ಣಾ	ಣೆ	ಣೇ	ಣು	ಣೂ	ಣ್ಯ	ಣೆ	ಣೈ	ಣೊ	ಣೋ	ಣೌ
t	ತ	ತಾ	ತಿ	ತೀ	ತು	ತೂ	ತ್ಯ	ತೆ	ತೈ	ತೊ	ತೋ	ತೌ
th	ಥ	ಥಾ	ಥಿ	ಥೀ	ಥು	ಥೂ	ಥ್ಯ	ಥೆ	ಥೈ	ಥೊ	ಥೋ	ಥೌ
d	ದ	ದಾ	ದಿ	ದೀ	ದು	ದೂ	ದ್ಯ	ದೆ	ದೈ	ದೊ	ದೋ	ದೌ
dh	ಧ	ಧಾ	ಧಿ	ಧೀ	ಧು	ಧೂ	ಧ್ಯ	ಧೆ	ಧೈ	ಧೊ	ಧೋ	ಧೌ
n	ನ	ನಾ	ನಿ	ನೀ	ನು	ನೂ	ನ್ಯ	ನೆ	ನೈ	ನೊ	ನೋ	ನೌ
p	ಪ	ಪಾ	ಪಿ	ಪೀ	ಪು	ಪೂ	ಪ್ಯ	ಪೆ	ಪೈ	ಪೊ	ಪೋ	ಪೌ
ph	ಫ	ಫಾ	ಫಿ	ಫೀ	ಫು	ಫೂ	ಫ್ಯ	ಫೆ	ಫೈ	ಫೊ	ಫೋ	ಫೌ
b	ಬ	ಬಾ	ಬಿ	ಬೀ	ಬು	ಬೂ	ಬ್ಯ	ಬೆ	ಬೈ	ಬೊ	ಬೋ	ಬೌ
bh	ಭ	ಭಾ	ಭಿ	ಭೀ	ಭು	ಭೂ	ಭ್ಯ	ಭೆ	ಭೈ	ಭೊ	ಭೋ	ಭೌ
m	ಮ	ಮಾ	ಮಿ	ಮೀ	ಮು	ಮೂ	ಮ್ಯ	ಮೆ	ಮೈ	ಮೊ	ಮೋ	ಮೌ
y	ಯ	ಯಾ	ಯಿ	ಯೀ	ಯು	ಯೂ	ಯ್ಯ	ಯೆ	ಯೈ	ಯೊ	ಯೋ	ಯೌ
r	ರ	ರಾ	ರಿ	ರೀ	ರು	ರೂ	ರ್ಯ	ರೆ	ರೈ	ರೊ	ರೋ	ರೌ
l	ಲ	ಲಾ	ಲಿ	ಲೀ	ಲು	ಲೂ	ಲ್ಯ	ಲೆ	ಲೈ	ಲೊ	ಲೋ	ಲೌ
v	ವ	ವಾ	ವಿ	ವೀ	ವು	ವೂ	ವ್ಯ	ವೆ	ವೈ	ವೊ	ವೋ	ವೌ
ś	ಶ	ಶಾ	ಶಿ	ಶೀ	ಶು	ಶೂ	ಶ್ಯ	ಶೆ	ಶೈ	ಶೊ	ಶೋ	ಶೌ
ṣ	ಷ	ಷಾ	ಷಿ	ಷೀ	ಷು	ಷೂ	ಷ್ಯ	ಷೆ	ಷೈ	ಷೊ	ಷೋ	ಷೌ
s	ಸ	ಸಾ	ಸಿ	ಸೀ	ಸು	ಸೂ	ಸ್ಯ	ಸೆ	ಸೈ	ಸೊ	ಸೋ	ಸೌ
h	ಹ	ಹಾ	ಹಿ	ಹೀ	ಹು	ಹೂ	ಹ್ಯ	ಹೆ	ಹೈ	ಹೊ	ಹೋ	ಹೌ
ḷ	ಳ	ಳಾ	ಳಿ	ಳೀ	ಳು	ಳೂ	ಳ್ಯ	ಳೆ	ಳೈ	ಳೊ	ಳೋ	ಳೌ

Ottakṣara-s (secondary consonantal signs)

ಕ	k	ಖ	kh	ಗ	ಘ	gh	ಢ	ṅ
ಚ	c	ಛ	ch	ಜ	ಝ	jh	ಞ	ṅ
ಟ	ṭ	ಠ	th	ಡ	ಢ	dh	ಣ	ṇ
ಠ	t	ಥ	th	d	ಧ	dh	ನ	n

ಎ	<i>p</i>	ಫ	<i>ph</i>	ಬ	<i>b</i>	ಭ	<i>bh</i>	ಮ
ಶಿ	<i>y</i>	ಝ	<i>r</i>	ಲ		ವ	<i>v</i>	
ಶಿ	<i>ś</i>	ಷ	<i>ṣ</i>	ಸ				
ಠ	<i>h</i>	ಱ	<i>ḷ</i>					

Examples of the use of *ottakṣara*-s:

ಅಕ್ಕ	<i>akka</i>	elder sister
ಉತ್ಖನನ	<i>utkhanana</i>	excavation
ಹಗ್ಗ	<i>hagga</i>	rope
ಹೆಚ್ಚು	<i>heccu</i>	much
ಮಲೆಚ್ಚ	<i>mlēccha</i>	barbarian, foreigner
ಅಜ್ಜ	<i>ajja</i>	grandfather
ಜ್ಞಾನ	<i>jñāna</i>	knowledge
ಬೆಟ್ಟ	<i>beṭṭa</i>	hill, mountain
ದಡ್ಡ	<i>dadda</i>	dunce
ಅಣ್ಣ	<i>aṇṇa</i>	elder brother
ಅಪ್ಪ	<i>appa</i>	father
ಕೊಬ್ಬು	<i>kobbu</i>	fat
ಉದ್ಭವ	<i>udbhava</i>	origin
ಅಮ್ಮ	<i>amma</i>	mother
ಅಯ್ಯ	<i>ayya</i>	lord
ಪ್ರಭಾವ	<i>prabhāva</i>	influence
ಕ್ಲಿಷ್ಟ	<i>kliṣṭa</i>	complex
ತತ್ವ	<i>tatva</i>	principle
ಉತ್ಸವ	<i>utsava</i>	feast
ಕಳ್ಳ	<i>kalla</i>	thief

Beginners have some difficulties with the sign ಼, which is called ರೇಫ *rēpha* and means that an *r* is pronounced *before* the consonant *after* whose sign it is written. For example: ಕರ್ಮ *karma* 'trace of an earlier deed, e.g., a deed committed in a previous life'. The same word can also be written ಕರ್ಮ. It is to some extent a matter of personal taste, whether one writes *karma* (and similar words) in the first or the second manner, although the second possibility tends to occur more in the northern part of the Kannada speech area (northern Karnataka and southern Maharashtra). A clear majority of Kannada users prefers the *rēpha*.

For the sake of completeness, it should also be mentioned that two more consonants exist that are found only in Old Kannada and older Middle Kannada texts: the 'old *r*' ಱ *r* (an alveolar *r*) and the 'old *l*' ಳ *l* (a retroflex vibrant or fricative: the final consonant of *tamil*, the name of the neighbouring Dravidian language, which in modern Kannada is called ತಮಿಳು *tamilu*). From the twelfth century onwards, these two consonants were gradually replaced by *r* and *l*.

Another sign that has practically disappeared from modern use is the ಞ for a final *n*. (This should not be mistaken for the *rēpha*.) Because all Kannada words end in a vowel since the twelfth century, and because one can write an *n* that is not followed by a vowel as ನ್ನ, the ancient sign ಞ is hardly seen any more.

With the help of the following examples, the learner will be able to understand how to write Kannada script.

ಅ ಅ ನ ವ  
 a aa na va

ನಿ ನು ವೇ ಸಾ  
 ni nu vē sā

ಶಿ ಗ ಗಿ ಲ  
 śi ga gi la

ಬ ಕ ಫ  
 ba ka pha

ಷ ಳ ಔ  
 ṣa ḷi au

ವೈ ಬೈ  
 vai bai

It may be helpful for the learner to see one and the same sentence in different typefaces, so that one develops an awareness of what is essential in the graphs and what is not:

ಈ ಕ್ಲಿಷ್ಟವಾದ ವಾಕ್ಯ ಹೀಗೆ ಕಾಣಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

ಈ ಕ್ಲಿಷ್ಟವಾದ ವಾಕ್ಯ ಹೀಗೆ ಕಾಣಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

ಈ ಕ್ಲಿಷ್ಟವಾದ ವಾಕ್ಯ ಹೀಗೆ ಕಾಣಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

**ಈ ಕ್ಲಿಷ್ಟವಾದ ವಾಕ್ಯ ಹೀಗೆ ಕಾಣಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.**

ಈ ಕ್ಲಿಷ್ಟವಾದ ವಾಕ್ಯ ಹೀಗೆ ಕಾಣಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

### Reading exercise

(Try to read the following sentences, checking your attempts with the help of the Latin transliteration, without thinking about the grammar for the time being.)

ಮರದ ಕೆಳಗೆ ಏನಿದೆ ?	<i>Marada keḷage ēnide?</i>	What lies under the tree?
ಅವರು ಬೇಗ ಮಲಗಿದರು.	<i>Avaru bēga malagidaru.</i>	He went to sleep early.
ಊಟ ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿದೆ.	<i>ūṭa cennāgide.</i>	The meal tasted good.
ಮನೆಯ ಹತ್ತಿರ ಕೆರೆ ಇದೆ.	<i>Maneya hattira kere ide.</i>	There is a water tank near the house.
ದೇವರ ದಯದಿಂದ ನಮಗೆ ಒಳ್ಳೆಯದು ಆಗುತ್ತದೆ.	<i>Dēvara dayadiṁda namage olḷeyadu āguttade.</i>	By God's grace good things happen to us.
ತುಂಬ ಜನ ಇಲ್ಲಿ ನಿಂತಿದ್ದಾರೆ.	<i>Tuṁba jana illi niṁtiddāre.</i>	Many people are standing here.
ನನ್ನ ಕೆಲಸ ಹೇಗಿದೆ ?	<i>Nanna kelasa hēgide?</i>	How is my work?

ಬಹಳ ಅಪರೂಪವಾಗಿ ಬರುತ್ತಾರೆ.	<i>Bahaḷa aparūpavāgi baruttāre.</i>	They come here rarely.
ಆ ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡುವವರು ಯಾವಾಗಲೂ ಯಶಸ್ವಿಯಾಗುತ್ತಾರೆ.	<i>ā kelasa māḍuvavaru yāvāgalū yaśasvīyāguttāre.</i>	Those who do this work always become successful.
ಕನ್ನಡ ಒಂದು ಹಳೆಯ, ಸುಂದರವಾದ ಭಾಷೆ; ನೀವು ಕಲಿತರೆ ಅದನ್ನು ತುಂಬ ಮೆಚ್ಚುವಿರಿ.	<i>Kannaḍa oṃdu haḷeya, suṃdaravāda bhāṣe; nīvu kalitare adannu tuṃba meccuviri.</i>	Kannada is an old, beautiful language; if you learn it, you will like it a lot.

### Vocabulary (in Kannada order)

ಅದನ್ನು	<i>adannu</i>	that (accusative case)
ಅಪರೂಪವಾಗಿ	<i>aparūpavāgi</i>	rarely
ಅವರು	<i>avaru</i>	they (plural, human)
ಊಟ	<i>ūṭa</i>	meal
ಏನು	<i>ēnu</i>	what
ಒಂದು	<i>oṃdu</i>	one, a
ಒಳ್ಳೆಯದು	<i>olḷeyadu</i>	good thing
ಕಲಿತರೆ	<i>kalitare</i>	if [one] learns
ಕೆರೆ	<i>kere</i>	tank, water reservoir
ಕೆಲಸ	<i>kelasa</i>	work
ಕೆಳಗೆ	<i>kelage</i>	under
ಚೆನ್ನಾಗಿದೆ	<i>cennāgide</i>	is good
ಜನ	<i>jana</i>	people
ತುಂಬ	<i>tuṃba</i>	many
ದಯೆ	<i>daya</i>	grace, mercy
ದೇವ	<i>dēva</i>	god
ನನ್ನ	<i>nanna</i>	my

ನಮಗೆ	<i>namage</i>	us (dative case)
ನಿಂತಿದ್ದಾರೆ	<i>niṃtiddāre</i>	they stand
ನೀವು	<i>nīvu</i>	you (plural / honorific)
ಬರುತ್ತಾರೆ	<i>baruttāre</i>	they come
ಬಹಳ	<i>bahaḷa</i>	many
ಬೇಗ	<i>bēga</i>	fast, soon
ಭಾಷೆ	<i>bhāṣe</i>	language
ಮನೆ	<i>mane</i>	house
ಮರ	<i>marā</i>	tree, wood
ಮಲಗು	<i>malagu</i>	to go to sleep, lie down
ಮಾಡು	<i>māḍu</i>	to do, make
ಮೆಚ್ಚುವಿರಿ	<i>meccuviri</i>	you will like
ಯಶಸ್ವಿ	<i>yaśasvi</i>	glorious, successful
ಯಾವಾಗಲೂ	<i>yāvāgalū</i>	always
ಸುಂದರವಾದ	<i>suṃdaravāda</i>	beautiful
ಹತ್ತಿರ	<i>hattira</i>	close
ಹಳೆಯ	<i>haḷeya</i>	old
ಹೇಗೆ	<i>hēge</i>	how

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The symbols at the top of the inscription identify the site as a Jaina religious site, with the hand in *abhayamudre* (Sanskrit *abhayamudrā*) bestowing fearlessness under the *svastika* that symbolizes the four categories of life forms that through the *ratnatraya* or three jewels of Jaina doctrine can pass to *siddhaśīle* (Sanskrit *siddhaśīlā*) or the abode of the eternally liberated souls. The site should remain blessed as long as the sun and moon continue to exist.

<sup>2</sup> A minority of authors who write about Indian languages seem to take Sanskrit as a starting point and prefer to treat any *e* and *o* as a long vowel (as they are in Sanskrit and in most modern north Indian languages) and do not use a macron to indicate when an *e* or *o* is long, but a breve to indicate that the vowel is short: ě, ō.

<sup>3</sup> Kannada script also has signs for the Sanskritic long  $\bar{r}$  and the vocalic  $\bar{l}$ , but these are used only for writing Sanskrit texts in Kannada script and are never found in Kannada texts.

<sup>4</sup> I.e., they are not like the so-called 'long vowels' in English, that differ from the short vowels mainly in quality (or actually are diphthongs, like the 'long i' in a word like 'mind').

<sup>5</sup> Actually these English consonants are neither dental nor retroflex, but alveolar; but most Indians (like most Westerners) do not realize that.

<sup>6</sup> The same goes for two consonants that are no longer in use since the 12th century, the  $r$  and  $l$ . In dictionaries one finds them either at the very end of the alphabetical order, or they are treated as forms of  $r$  and  $l$ .

<sup>7</sup> In some dictionaries one finds the combination  $k\zeta$  as the very last 'letter'. This is an old, irrational and nowadays not usual convention.

<sup>8</sup> Kannada script also has a sign for the Sanskritic long vocalic  $\bar{r}$  and the vocalic  $\bar{l}$ , but these are used only for writing Sanskrit and do not occur in Kannada texts. Typically, these signs are usually not included in modern Kannada computer fonts. It may be noted that many of the signs in this table are more of theoretical value than of practical use: words with the consonants ಘ, ಙ, ಞ are very rare. In decades of reading Kannada, the present author has never come across many of the combinations in this table: most of the combinations in the  $r$  column and in the  $kh, gh, ch, jh, dh, th, n, ph, \zeta$  and  $l$  rows.