Introduction to the Syloti Nagri Script

This short introduction to the Syloti Nagri script is intended for people with no prior experience but can be used by anyone looking for more information on this unique script. It is based on the current Unicode proposal to encode Syloti and the successful implementation of the Syloti Nagri script by XenoType Technologies on a Macintosh running OS X 10.2.x.

The main purpose of this document is to provide information for software developers in an effort to promote the support of Syloti-enabled operating systems and support applications. We will not however delve into the specifics of programming support for Syloti Nagri — the information herein should provide an adequate starting point regardless of the operating system or technology involved.

To this end, we will frequently diverge from traditional linguistic terminology in an effort to point out or emphasize certain features of this script. Linguists and purists will have to forgive us.

Consonants
As currently proposed, the Syloti Nagri script consists of 44 basic letter shapes, or nominal glyphs, which can be further divided into consonants, vowels, punctuation marks and diacritics. The 32 base glyphs are shown here:

Vowels
Syloti Nagri uses independent and dependent vowel signs. As expected, the independent vowel signs are used to express word- or syllable-initial vowels while dependent vowels are used in conjunction with base glyphs. Both forms of the 5 basic vowels are illustrated below:

No graphic transposition is required to display these vowel signs properly so reordering of the text stream is not necessary.

There is an additional dependent vowel sign required to display Syloti text — \( \ddot{a} \). This vowel has no independent form of its own because it is always used as the second part of a diphthong, or compound vowel, ending in /-i/. It should be noted that this means it can also occur alone with a base glyph representing the inherent vowel followed by /-i/.
Diacritics
There are only two proper diacritics encoded to support Syloti — anusvara and hasanta.

◌/anusvarasylheti
◌/hasantasylheti

Aside from its traditional Indic designation, anusvara can also be considered a final form for the sequence /-ng/ which does not have a base glyph in Syloti Nagri since it doesn’t occur in other positions.

[We find the placement of anusvara in the current proposal unusual but this really plays no role in developing support for Syloti Nagri — its inclusion is all that’s required for proper display.]

Anusvara can also occur with the vowels ◌/ivowelsylheti and ◌/evowelsylheti creating a potential problem with the display of both items. We concur with the recommendation of the Sylheti Translation And Research organization that anusvara always be typed after any vowel signs, as a final character. Some font developers might consider requiring the user to key these items in reverse order, which could theoretically create a valid display (in the case of ◌/ianusvarasylheti), but this method should be discouraged. The best way to deal with these items is as ligatures and this is how XenoType Technologies supports the proper display of this sequence.

◌/ianusvarasylheti
◌/eanusvarasylheti

The use of hasanta is currently proposed as the best means of creating conjuncts, along the Indic and Burmese virama models. When hasanta occurs alone between two consonants, a conjunct is formed and hasanta is removed (the first example). However, if hasanta is followed by ZWNJ, then no conjunct occurs and hasanta remains visible (the second example).

_digits

O R 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Punctuation
With the advent of digital type and the modernization of the Syloti Nagri script, one can expect to find all of the traditional punctuation marks: period, comma, colon, semi-colon, question mark, etc. In addition to these marks, the Devanagari single and double danda are also used with great frequency. A well designed font should include these items from the Devanagari block in an appropriate style.
There are also several poetry marks included in this section — four native marks are currently proposed for the Syloti block and one additional flourish that has been proposed for inclusion in the General Punctuation block.

**Sample Text**
Below is a sample text that illustrates Syloti Nagri and most of the features required for proper display. This text is taken from a booklet entitled *Ten Sylheti Poems* translated by James Lloyd-Williams and Matiar Rahman Chowdhury.

পান বজার জা তাহে নৃশান ভগ্নে -
ভাঙ্গীতে পার প্রান জুড়ায়ে গা মুগ্নয়ে যমেয়ে*  
নুজ্জি ন বঙ্গনা নায়ক তান্ত্র এঁখানে  
দুন্যা পিতা নামন জাহান পার জানাতে*  
জানি শ্রুত, নুজ্জি বিজ্ঞান, প্রানীন খুননব নায়ক মাত্রানে জানি জ্ঞান জান জানাতে নামন নৃশান ভগ্নে  
পৌষ প্রথমীন জান নৃশান নজ্ঞি গাঁয়েন মানিয়ে বহন  
পান পৌষ প্রান জুড়া পারি বীজাগ জানে শন জানাতে*  

সাজন নৃশান নজ্ঞি প্রিন ১৮৪০-১৯২২ প্রাইমারিস্কোল, স্ত্রেং, সংগ্রামগীর