To: Unicode Consortium

From: Gihan Dias, Liaison to Unicode from ICT Agency of Sri Lanka

Date: 2020-05-03

Subject: Encoding of a character "Sinhala Chandrabindu"

I am writing in the capacity of the Liaison to Unicode from the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka.

We were recently informed that a character called "Sinhala Chadabindu" has been encoded in the Sinhala "code page" of BMP. This page is maintained in synchronicity with Sri Lanka Standard 1134, and any changes to Unicode without a corresponding change in SLS1134 will create a discrepancy.

We note that some Sinhala scholars had been consulted regarding the encoding of Chandrabindu, but the concurrence of the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka or the Sri Lanka Standards Institute had not been solicited or obtained before Unicode unilaterally encoded this so-called Sinhala character.

The Sinhala language and script is used almost exclusively in Sri Lanka, and its encoding is managed by the Sri Lanka Standards Institute in collaboration with the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka.

We therefore express our opposition to this move. We request Unicode to refrain from encoding any characters in the Sinhala "code page" of BMP without the express concurrence of the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka (which will co-ordinate with the Sri Lanka Standards Institute).

Please see the attached document for technical details of our objection.

Regards,

Gihan Dias
Liaison to Unicode from ICT Agency of Sri Lanka

<p style="text-align:center">Official Response to the Encoding of Chandrabindu in the
Unicode Sinhala Code Page</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka</p>

Introduction

It has been announced that the Chandrabindu, a Sanskrit diacritic mark has been encoded in the Sinhala code page of Unicode version 13. It has been named Sinhala Chandrabindu to differentiate it from the other Chandrabindu in other code pages, namely Telugu, Gujarati, Oriya, etc. A classical Chandrbindu diacritic mark takes the form of a dot inside the lower half of a circle such as in Devanagri (◌ँ) or Gujarati (◌ઁ). The Chandrabindindu is placed usually to indicate that the vowel that precedes it is nasalized or in classical Sanskrit, if it is placed upon a consonant, to denote conjunct consonants pronounced as nasalized double.

The Sri Lankan Government Position on encoding of Chandrabindu

Background:

The Sinhala script is primarily used to write Sinhala and Pali. Pali is the canonical language of Buddhist scriptures and it is derived from Magadi which was the vernacular Prakrit language that was spoken in North-Eastern India where the Buddha lived. Pali is written in many different scripts such as Sinhala, Myanmar, Thai, etc. Buddhist canon in Theravada Buddhism or Pali cannon was handed down from one generation of monks to another orally until it was committed to the written word using Brahmi/Sinhala script during the reign of Valagambahu in 29-17 BC in Sri Lanka. The Pali canon went from Sri Lanka to many countries subsequently and Sri Lankan monks played a major role in spreading the Theravada tradition of Buddhism in South East Asia namely in Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

Sanskrit became a very important language in Sri Lanka from 500 AD to the end of the Polonnaruwa period and many Sanskrit pillars had been found erected after 500 AD in Nagri/Devanagri in Sri Lanka. During this period, classical Sanskrit reached its peak in India and Kumaradasa a royal prince who was closely related to the reigning monarch of Sri Lanka was credited for writing Janaki haranaya in Sanskrit, which is considered to this day as one of the greatest epic poems with 20 cantos comparable to any of Kalidas' greatest works. Kalidas or Kalidasa in Sinhala is considered the greatest author of the classical Sanskrit period in India. Sanskrit was rarely written in Sinhala in ancient Sri Lanka and traditionally Sri Lankan scholars who were versed in Sanskrit learned Devanagri for writing Sanskrit. In the 19th and 20th Centuries, many Sanskrit books were translated into Sinhala such as Parashara (Vedic Astrology), Varamihira (Vedic Astrology), Sakunthala (work of Kalidasa), etc. Sanskrit verses were transliterated in Sinhala with the translation of those in Sinhala.

It was observed as a tradition, in these transliterations, the two Sanskrit dandas and diacritic marks such as Chandrabindu had not been used except in a few books which were written predominantly on grammar and these contained not only the Chandrabindu, but other marks such as dandas, etc. These books were targeted for Buddhist monks who studied classical Sanskrit grammar. The use of these diacritic marks lasted only until the latter part of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century and in Sinhala, Chandrabindu has no functional use.

Request from the Unicode Consortium:

In view of the above, it is the view of Local Language Working Group (LLWG)[1] of the Information of Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka that there had never been Sinhala Chandrabindu historically or otherwise. Therefore, LLWG herewith requests the following from the Unicode Consortium:

1. Either remove Chandrabindu from the Sinhala Code Page or deprecate it in the next version.
2. In future, UTC to inform LLWG of ICTA officially of any impending addition to the Sinhala Unicode Page.

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[1] LLWG is mandated by ICTA to guide and take policy directives on issues pertaining to local languages in Sri Lanka.