Guide to Reading and Pronouncing Bengali

The Bengali Alphabet and Roman Diacritical Equivalents

Vowels (*Svara-varṇa*)

অ a আ ā ই i ঈ ī উ u ঊ ū
ঋ ṛ এ e ঐ ai ও o ঔ au

Vowel Signs

Whenever a vowel follows a consonant, it is written in sign form as follows:

া **ā** ি **i** ী **ī** ু **u** ূ **ū**
ৃ **ṛ** ে **e** ৈ **ai** ো **o** ৌ **au**

The only exception is the inherent vowel, **a**. This vowel is considered inherent in all consonants unless they are assigned one of the aforementioned vowel signs or are the first members of a conjunct consonant.

Examples: ক **ka** কা **kā** কি **ki** কী **kī** কু **ku** কূ **kū**
কৃ **kṛ** কে **ke** কৈ **kai** কো **ko** কৌ **kau**
ল্ল **lla** প্ত **pta** ঙ্গ **ṅga** ন্দ্র **ndra**

Consonants (*Vyañjan-varṇa*)

Gutturals:	ক **ka**	খ **kha**	গ **ga**	ঘ **gha**	ঙ **ṅa**
Palatals:	চ **cha**	ছ **chha**	জ **ja**	ঝ **jha**	ঞ **ña**
Cerebrals:	ট **ṭa**	ঠ **ṭha**	ড় (ড) **ḍa**	ঢ় (ঢ) **ḍha**	ণ **ṇa**
Dentals:	ত **ta**	থ **tha**	দ **da**	ধ **dha**	ন **na**
Labials:	প **pa**	ফ **pha**	ব **ba (va)**	ভ **bha**	ম **ma**
Semivowels:	য (য়) **ya**	র **ra**	ল **la**		
Sibilants:	শ **śa**	ষ **ṣa**	স **sa**		
Aspirates:	হ **ha**				

Gutturals (***Kaṇṭhya-varṇa***)**:** consonants pronounced using the throat.

Palatals (***Tālabya-varṇa***)**:** consonants pronounced by bringing the tongue to the palate.

Cerebrals (***Mūrdhanya-varṇa***)**:** consonants pronounced by applying the tip of the tongue to the roof of the mouth.

Dentals (***Dantya-varṇa***)**:** consonants pronounced by applying the tip of the tongue to the back of the front teeth.

Labials (***Oṣṭhya-varṇa***)**:** consonants pronounced using the lips.

Semivowels (***Antaḥstha-varṇa***)**:** consonants which also function as vowels.

Sibilants (***Uṣma-varṇa***)**:** consonants pronounced by making a hissing sound. The three sibilants are also palatal (**śa**), cerebral (**ṣa**), and dental (**sa**) respectively.

Aspirates: consonants pronounced by exhaling air from the throat. The following consonants are aspirates: **kha, gha, chha, jha, ṭha, ḍha, tha, dha, pha,** and **bha**.

Conjunct Consonants

There are numerous conjunct characters in Bengali formed by the combination of two or more adjacent consonants. In most cases, these conjunct characters bear close resemblance to the features of the individual characters they represent; there are, however, a number of exceptions.

Typical examples: ল্ল **lla** প্ত **pta** ন্দ **nda** দ্ব **dva** ণ্ট **ṇṭa**

Atypical examples: ক্ষ **kṣa** স্থ **stha** ব্ধ **bdha** ত্য **tya** ঞ্চ **ñcha**
ষ্ম **hma** ঙ্গ **ṅga** ক্ত **kta** ক্র **kra** গ্র **gra** ষ্ট **ṣṭa**

Additional Signs

Anusvār: ং ṁ
Visarga: ঃ ḥ
Chandrabindu: ঁ
Reph: র্
Virām: ্

Examples: কং **kaṁ** কিঃ **kiḥ** কাঁ **kắ** র্ক **rka** ক্ **k**

Pronunciation
(*Uchchāraṇ*)

Vowels (*Svara-varṇa*)

a Like the **o** in c**o**t, but like the **u** in s**u**m or the **o** in g**o** when it occurs after a conjunct consonant or in the second syllable of a word; **a** is often silent when it follows a single consonant at the end of a word.

ā Like the **a** in f**a**ther or st**a**r.

i Like the **i** in b**i**n.

ī Like the **ee** in d**ee**p.

u Like the **u** in p**u**t.
ū Like the **oo** in m**oo**n.
ṛ Like the **ri** in **ri**m.
e Like the **ay** in pl**ay** or like the **a** in bat.
ai Like the **o** in c**o**t combined with the **ee** in s**ee.**
o Like the **o** in g**o**.
au Like the **o** in g**o** combined with the **oo** in m**oo**n.

Consonants (*Vyañjan-varṇa*)

k Like the **c** in **c**ot.
kh **k** pronounced with aspiration.
g Like the **g** in **g**ot; never like the **g** in reli**g**ion.
gh **g** pronounced with aspiration.
ṅ Like the **ng** in si**ng**.
ch Like the **ch** in **ch**op.
chh **ch** pronounced with aspiration.
j Like the **j** in **j**ob.
jh **j** pronounced with aspiration.
ñ Like the **n** in lu**n**ch.
ṭ Like the **t** in **t**aught (pronounced cerebrally).
ṭh **ṭ** pronounced with aspiration. Never like the **th** in **th**rough.
ḍ In between the **d** in **d**awn and the **r** in **r**aw (pronounced cerebrally).
ḍh **ḍ** pronounced with aspiration.
ṇ Like the **n** in **n**on.
t Like the **t** in **t**aught (pronounced dentally).
th **t** pronounced with aspiration. Never like the **th** in **th**rough.
d Like the **d** in **d**awn (pronounced dentally).
dh **d** pronounced with aspiration.
n Like the **n** in **n**on.
p Like the **p** in **p**aw.
ph **p** pronounced with aspiration. Often sounds like the **f** in

fall.

b (v) Like the **b** in **b**all. When **b** follows a consonant, it is silent and the preceding consonant is doubled.

bh **b** pronounced with aspiration.

m Like the **m** in **m**op. When **m** follows a consonant, it is often silent and the preceding consonant is doubled.

y When **y** is the first letter of a word, it is pronounced like the **j** in **j**ob. When **y** occurs elsewhere within a word and is preceded by a vowel, it is pronounced like the **y** in **y**awn or the **w** in **w**and. When **y** follows a consonant, it is silent and the preceding consonant is doubled, except when it is followed by **r**, in which case it is pronounced like the **j** in job.

r Like the **r** in **r**aw, though the tongue is slightly trilled.

l Like the **l** in **l**aw.

ś Like the **sh** in **sh**awl.

ṣ Like the **sh** in **sh**awl.

s Like the **s** in **s**ong or the **sh** in **sh**awl.

h Like the **h** in **h**ot.

Additional Signs and Conjuncts

ṁ Like a softened form of the **ng** in si**ng**.

ḥ **ḥ** is not pronounced when it occurs at the end of a word. When it occurs in the middle of a word, the consonant which follows it is doubled.

ঁ The chandrabindu indicates that the vowel beneath it should be pronounced nasally.

kṣ Pronounced like **kh** when at the beginning of a word and like **k-kh** when in the middle of a word.

jñ Pronounced like **g** when at the beginning of a word and like **g-g** between vowels. An **ā** following **jñ** is pronounced like the **a** in b**a**t.