Comment on archaic Malayalam glyph II encoding & Grantha writing of Dravidian languages

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L2/12-267 Review of Indic-related documents and Recommendations to the UTC states on the archaic Malayalam glyph for letter II.

" Rajan's document, L2/12-233, argues the proposed character is a variant glyph and should be handled at the font level. Of particular interest to the UTC is Rajan's concern ("Font Level Handling", page 3) that there is at least one font that already treats "archaic letter ii" as an alternate glyph. [...]

A core issue is whether a clear case has been made that the "archaic letter ii" is a distinction that should be maintained in plain text.

Recommendation: We recommend the encoding of a separate character MALAYALAM ARCHAIC LETTER II be discussed in UTC, taking into consideration that if the encoding for 0D08 MALAYALAM LETTER II were to be split, an existing implementation may be invalidated."

The core issue on whether the vowel letter II has distinctions in plain-text has an answer from academic works on Grantha script writing of Malayalam language. There is absolutely NO difference in plain text in Malayalam for the two glyph variants of letter II. Note that if the glyph variant for vowel II is encoded again, the vowel sign for II also do not match. Does TUS have another vowel sign code point for II also ?

All epigraphy experts advise all these glyph variants of II vowel and also the vowel sign II belong to the Grantha script heritage of writing Dravidian in it. Hence, these archaic forms of Tamil or Malayalam should be handled by archaic Grantha fonts in Unicode implementations in SMP.

The archaic II shape is from the days of writing Malayalam, a Dravdian language, in Grantha script. All scholars of Grantha script say that this Dravidian language was written in Grantha script. When Grantha script has the ability to write Dravidian languages such as Malayalam or Tamil, this glyph will be having the code point from Grantha block in TUS & old Malayalam, like old Tamil etc., can be written from Grantha fonts.

Please note that Grantha writing of the language Malayalam and other Dravidian languages has not only the vowel II and also the corresponding vowel sign II shapes different, but additionally some 18 letters are having glyphs different from modern Malayalam (encoded in TUS). For example, vowels, O & OO, vowel signs for O & OO, JHA, DDA, DDHA, TA, NYA, vowel sign II, vowel sign AA, vowel sign E & EE, etc., are different in Grantha script writing of Malayalam when compared to modern Malayalam script which is already encoded in TUS.

In sum,

(1) there is NO plain-text distinction between the two glyphs of vowel II in Malayalam.

(2) There are some 20 letters and vowel signs whose glyphs differ totally when Dravidian language, Malayalam is written in Grantha script when compared with Modern Malayalam now encoded in TUS. All academic books on Grantha script explain the fact that old Malayalam was written in Grantha script and once Unicode encoding for Grantha has the capability to write Malayalam script, all these archaic glyphs of Dravidian languages will be taken care of in Unicode fonts.

So, when Grantha has the capability to write old Malayalam the 20 or so letters that have different glyphs than modern Malayalam will be properly handled via Unicode Grantha fonts, including the Grantha II for Malayalam like the other 20 letters with code points in Grantha block.

Next week, I will show at the UTC meeting the many letters' glyphs in Grantha script while writing Malayalam - and how they differ from modern Malayalam script.

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