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### **My views on Encoding Grantha in Unicode**

As a linguist committed to promoting linguistic diversity, I support making technologies accessible to any language or script, whether they are used currently or were used in the past, whether they are used by a small or a large number of people.

Grantha script was used to write some languages of India such as Sanskrit, Tamil, a mixture of these two and a few more. It was and is a secondary script for languages which have their primary script. To understand and use those texts of the past for research of historical value, encoding Grantha is necessary. It is used now by some to write Sanskrit in South India to make this language accessible to those who are not comfortable with using Devanagari. To aid these users, printing is done in Grantha in a small scale.

Some believe that Grantha will be used as an alternate script to Indian languages so that there will be a common script for all Indian languages. But this will not come into practice because Grantha does not have any edge over other two contending scripts for this role viz., Devanagari and Roman. A sub-part of this belief is the belief that Grantha will be used as a vehicle to transliterate a cited text of one language into the main text of another. This assumes that the readers of this another language are familiar with the Grantha script, which is not true. If at all a cited text is transliterated (rather than translated) and reproduced in the text of another language, it will be in the script of this another language (i.e. the citing language, not the cited language). Commonly, the cited text will be translated. The writing tradition in India is to cite in Roman script only English texts, as in a Tamil text. This is because educated readers are familiar with the Roman script and the English language, which cannot be said about the Grantha script and the Indian language whose texts will be transliterated with it.

There are two positions regarding what constitute the character set of the Grantha script. One position looks at the Grantha script as a heritage script and it does not want any change, for example, addition to the existing Grantha characters. The other position looks at Grantha as a script that needs to be modernized to expand its use for the purposes of the modern period. Looking at Grantha as a modern script would make it necessary to add some new characters to it in order to represent loan words and names that have sounds not coded in the existing Grantha script.

Adding new letters to an alphabet is extremely rare in the history of languages; it may happen when loan words with new, unassimilated sounds are excessive in a language. This is not likely to happen in any language written with the Grantha script. The logical place for added characters in Unicode, if they are needed at all, would be Extended Grantha (like Extended Devanagari, Extended Roman etc.).

The opposition by a section of Tamil scholars to the addition of some characters borrowed from Tamil into Grantha is based on a fear that it would facilitate Tamil writers to mix Grantha letters in Tamil

words. This is the converse of using Tamil letters in words in a Grantha text. This fear is based on the language ideology of purism and a simplistic reading of the history of Grantha in Malayalam, a language separated from Tamil in the pre-modern period. Prevention of five or so Tamil characters in Grantha script will not prevent the feared mixing. Grantha characters can be used, if one wants, in Tamil words, whether Tamil characters are included in the Grantha script or not. Moreover, it is not the task of technology to design itself to prevent certain possible cultural happenings.

Independent of Grantha encoding, there is a proposal for encoding Extended Tamil in the Tamil block. This is to augment the Tamil script to write words with sounds that are not coded in it. One instance for this need is the custom of writing Sanskrit in Tamil script, by a section of Tamil speakers, who have reasons to learn Sanskrit without having to learn its modern script (Devanagari). I believe that there is a need to augment the Tamil script for other reasons (such as representing some sounds in spoken Tamil). But I also believe that Unicode should not preempt the choice of additional letters by encoding Grantha characters for this purpose at the cost of other possibilities. This will amount to technology preferring one cultural choice over others and not leaving it to the language (i.e. Tamil) community. When the Tamil community decides on the need for, and the nature of, the augmented letters for the Tamil alphabet, Unicode must then encode them, as it has encoded the five Grantha letters historically in use in Tamil.

Annamalai

To

The Technical Committee

Unicode Consortium