

Clarifications re the proposed 0D00 MALAYALAM SIGN COMBINING ANUSVARA ABOVE

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2014-Oct-30

Re the character 0D00 MALAYALAM SIGN COMBINING ANUSVARA ABOVE proposed in L2/14-003 N4517, the script review committee notes in L2/14-268 p 2:

This character appears in material that predates the time when Malayalam is considered a distinct script, which raises a number of questions: Is it meaningful to include this character in the modern script?

I wonder if the following passage from my L2/14-069 was not very clear:

*At a sufficiently early epoch, Grantha and Malayalam are indistinguishable, as is only to be expected in the case of scripts that diverge with time. In this case, it is other factors such as the provenance of the writings that would decide the script identification when it comes to choosing a script identity for storage as digital text. These manuscripts are from Kerala, and the writing is indeed **more** similar to modern Malayalam than to modern Grantha. As such, scholars have identified this as part of the Malayalam script. Thus that is how this character should be identified and encoded.*

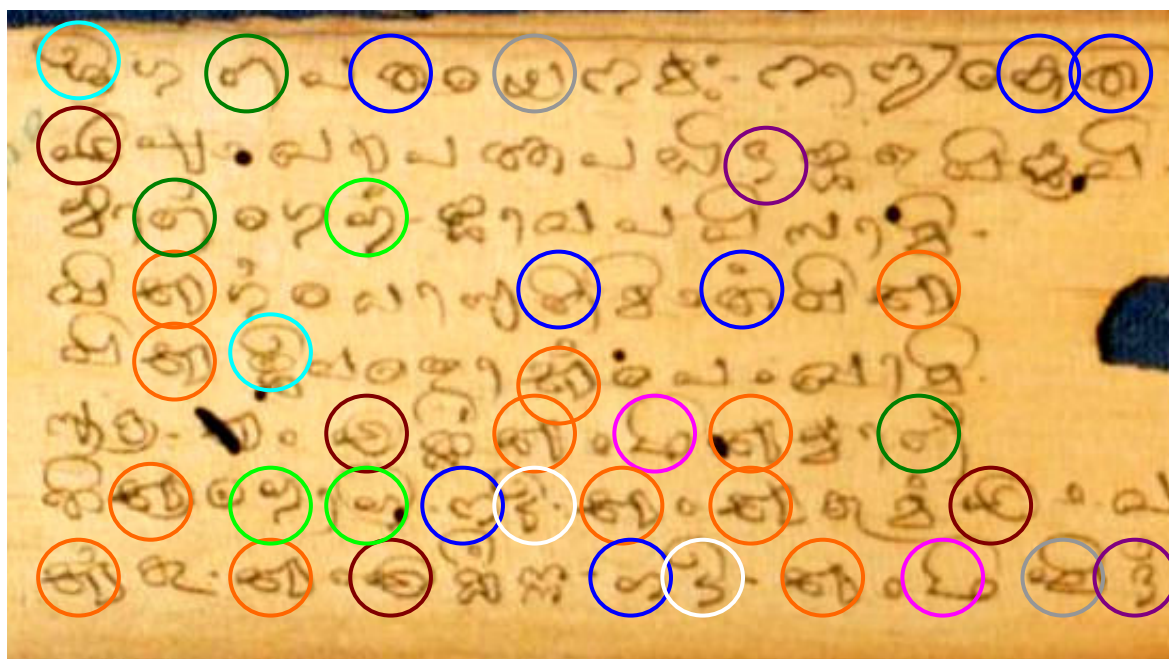
... leading the review committee to raise the issue of historic script identity.

“Indistinguishable” by laymen, not by experts upon close examination

The script under question is sufficiently far back in time that an *ordinary* native reader of either modern Grantha or modern Malayalam, i.e. one untrained in the reading of historical manuscripts or inscriptions, would not be able to identify the script as either this or that. Experts, however, are able to identify the script as either this or that without any doubt. This is just as ordinary Tamil people cannot read old Tamil inscriptions and whether the old writing is Tamil or not is only to be identified by experts.

As such, the research scholars have clearly identified the writing system in these manuscripts as Malayalam, which is why they have transcribed it using the modern Malayalam script. (See the proposal L2/14-003 pp 4-5 for scans from scholarly publications.)

In fact, I myself can point out several characteristics which identify the writing as Malayalam and not Grantha. I present one sample from the proposal:



- 1 śrī gaṇapataye namaḥ - nāndyante ta
- 2 e pu*khara patta paḍida jaḷa vindū vi
- 3 māṇaṃ gehaṃ - jāva pavisāmi -
- 4 via gaṃdho sunimi*taṃ via

- 5 via jīvaḷoaṃ pe*khāmi
- 6 sūtra - a*ye kiṃ a*thi ahmāṇaṃ
- 7 ti ā hohi - naṭī - a*ya tuvaṃ e*va
- 8 aṃtu a*ye kiṃ ~ - naṭī - a*thi ghidaṃ

| Colour | ISO | Mal. | Gran. | Distinctive features in Mal. |
|--------------|-----------|-------|-------|--|
| Dark green | ṇa | ണ | ṇ | No “nose” to top-right; no inner loops |
| Blue | ta na nta | ത ന ഞ | த ந ஞ | No “nose” to top-right |
| Grey | gha ya | ഘ യ | ய ய | Loop in center |
| Brown | ē | എ | எ | No loop to right |
| Violet | da | ദ | டி | 3-like shape |
| Light green | ha | ഹ | ஹ | No middle stroke in right-side feature |
| Orange | a ā | അ ആ | அ ஆ | Loopy feature to left |
| Pink | tha | ഥ | த | No middle stroke |
| White | ṭa | ട | ட | s-like shape |
| Cyan & white | -ī | ീ | ீ | Loop towards left i.o. right |

Thus there need be no doubt as to whether this writing is identifiable as Malayalam or not.

This is why the scholars who have been working on these manuscripts have explicitly identified the script as Malayalam (note the phrase “in the Malayalam script” used in the scholarly documents reproduced in the proposal) and also used the modern style of the Malayalam script to reproduce the old style Malayalam of the manuscripts.

Thus apart from the old manuscripts actually being clearly identifiable as old Malayalam, we have clear usage of the anusvara above in modern Malayalam in the scholarly publications which directly reproduce the old content in the modern style.

Thus there need be no doubt as to whether the anusvara above belongs to the Malayalam script or not, either.

Issue of encoding other scripts related to Grantha/Malayalam

The script review doc further raises the question:

If we encode Tulu and other characters ancestral to Grantha and Malayalam, will that present a problem?

Re Tulu, while we do not have a finalized encoding proposal yet, from my interactions over the last two years with people working on Tulu manuscripts, it appears that Tulu manuscripts are not only much less in number than Grantha and Malayalam manuscripts, but they are also restricted to Vedic and religious texts in the Sanskrit language. As such, it is highly unlikely that we will come across secular dramas in Prakrit language written in that script. Note that in Grantha and Malayalam, the anusvara above is used only in Prakrit language orthography. Of course, if we do come across such an anusvara above in Tulu, there need be no problem with encoding one there as well.

Re characters ancestral to Grantha and Malayalam, it would be probably premature to surmise as to the fine details of the character repertoire we are going to have for the old Grantha ancestral to modern Grantha, Malayalam and Tulu. Right now, we only have the encoding of the modern forms of these scripts. Hence the interaction of a future encoding with the present modern encodings can only be discussed when we do have a proposal.

Now “modern” Grantha, Malayalam etc doesn’t necessarily mean “20th century” but it does mean the forms of the scripts that have (largely) stopped evolving. Based on the available evidence and scholarly analysis of the writing, we have encoded an ANUSVARA ABOVE for modern Grantha, and similar evidence is now presented for Malayalam as well.

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