

Comment on L2/14-003:

Any need for Combining Anusvara Sign Above in Malayalam Block?

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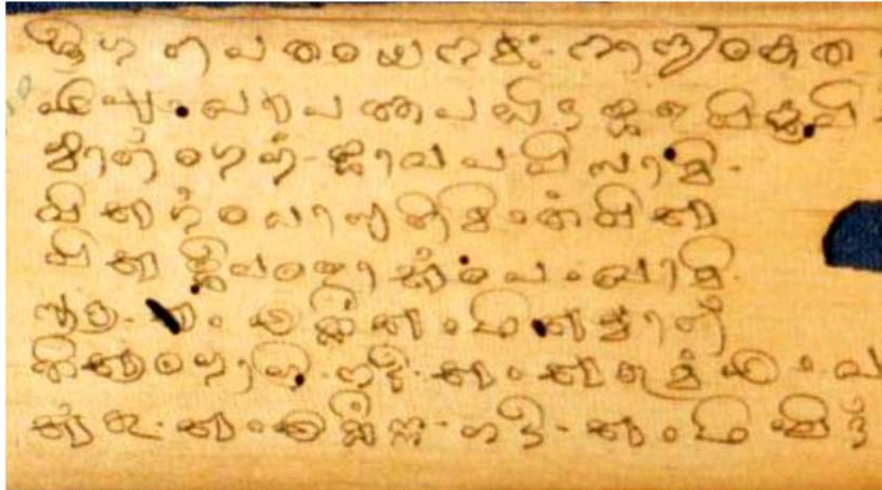
Reading the documents seeking a separate code point for Combining Anusvara Sign Above in Malayalam block (L2/14-003, L2/14-069 by S. Sharma, and also feedback by Cibu Johny, L2/13-029), it is clear that all the examples cited in L2/14-003 are before even Malayalam language came to be written in a specific Malayalam script. That is the reason there is NO printed books or Malayalam language manuscripts ever employ the Anusvara Sign Above in the Malayalam script. During the times of the Western Grantha script, (pre-)Malayalam was typically written **not** in Grantha but in Vattezhuthu script. Hence the “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” rightfully belongs to the Grantha block of Unicode.

With regard to the Grantha script, P. Visalakshy, The Grantha script, Dravidian Linguistics Association, St. Xavier's College, University of Kerala, 2003. Page 68:

" Considering the shape of letters, Grantha script can be classified into two varieties, the square and the round, The square variety was more popular among the Hindus and the round variety among the Jains of Arcot and Chennai regions. **The famous work 'Alphabetum Grondonico Malabaricum' printed in 1772 in the Polyglot Press, Rome is in the Grantha script and the letters of this work are of the square variety.** Depending upon the geographical variations, the Grantha script can be broadly classified into four types: the Pallava, the Cola, the Pandya and the Tulu-Malayalam."

So, even in the 18th century Western Grantha script book printing Sanskrit (Indo-Aryan) text, the Grantha “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” is missing. The centuries-earlier archaic Prakrit (Indo-Aryan) text belongs rightfully to the Grantha script. Note the Grantha manuscript cannot be classified as modern Malayalam script, but in fact it is actually in Grantha script writing a Prakrit text (Indo-Aryan) in ancient times.

Sanskrit means “well-constructed”, a sort of artificial dead language, whereas Prakrit means a natural language, used for speech by common people. People from Thunjat Ezhuttaccan onwards who created Malayalam script and subsequent users never have a need to print or publish Prakrit (Natural Languages of India) sentences with “Combining Anusvara Above”, all Prakrit sentences, whether old Prakrits or modern Prakrits (i.e., Indian languages of today) gets written and printed in books, newspapers, etc., using only one Anusvara that is placed to the right. Hence, Malayalam script in all its history of development has rejected the use of Combining Anusvara Above sign. And, Combining Anusvara Sign is left to be handled by Grantha script not modern Malayalam script. Modern Malayalam script handles Prakrit words using the spacing Anusvara sign placed to the right.



The examples shown in L2/14-003 are from **Prakrit**, an Indo-Aryan language (Note: Not in Malayalam language which belongs to Dravidian languages family). In those centuries, It is typical for Indo-Aryan languages such as Prakrit and Sanskrit to be written in archaic Grantha script. And, already to handle Prakrit texts like these, Grantha “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” is atomically encoded within Grantha block in Unicode Standard SMP. For the academic use of putting the Prakrit or Sanskrit text in (Western) Grantha script for which examples are given, Grantha fonts in the style of the manuscript will be easily able to represent the “Anusvara Sign Above”. This request is like different forms of Virama in Malayalam block, and the “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” is only used in Grantha script for Indo-Aryan (Prakrit) language texts. Hence Malayalam BMP block or Tulu block does not need this atomically, and archaic Grantha script text can be used in the Grantha font display in Unicode Standard.

Cibu Johny raised a valid question:

""Judging from couple of similar looking palm leaf writings, it is hard to make sure how widespread the usage was. Was it the fancy of one manuscript writer? The other manuscript linked in the cārudattam page does not use anusvara above:

<http://www.bhasa.indologie.uni-wuerzburg.de/mss/22848/61.html>""

In fact, this “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” was never used for Malayalam script, but it is used for Prakrit text in an earlier era belonging to the Grantha script. Only centuries later, Malayalam script was developed, and it lacks the Grantha’s “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” and there is only one Anusvara sign in Malayalam script.

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?

Yes. I want to submit that it is not meaningful or useful to have this Sign in modern Malayalam block as it is not used in Malayalam script at all. But it will be quite useful and meaningful to leave it to Grantha block fonts of the Unicode Standard to handle the shown examples of Prakrit texts of the early centuries.

Summary: As Malayalam script was not even born and at that time the script is known as Grantha, it will be useful to let Grantha fonts of the Unicode standard handle the Prakrit texts in archaic style. And, this can be done from the “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” code point in Grantha block itself. Since Malayalam script does not have this sign from the beginning of the script in the days of Tunjath Ezhuttaccan and all later authors, it will be appropriate to leave the handling of Prakrit texts using Grantha fonts in the Unicode Standard. Note that Tunjat Ezhuttaccan is called “Ezhuttaccan” i.e., “Father of Malayalam script” and he apparently, when he formulated Malayalam script, left the “Combining Anusvara Sign Above” to stay in older script of Grantha itself. It will be good to follow the Ezhuttaccan and later Malayalam script users’ community till today. Archaic Prakrit texts in western Grantha script manuscripts should be best handled via Grantha fonts and that capability need not be imposed on Malayalam script which always had only one Anusvara sign.