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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### UNDERSTANDING THE PHONETIC VARIATIONS IN TAMIL LANGUAGE - THROUGH BRAHMI INSCRIPTIONS IN TAMILNADU

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#### Abstract

The history of the Tamil language is interwoven between various myths and difference of opinion among scholars. Many grammarians advise that one should write and speak according to the characteristics of a language through its formulas and rules. Accordingly, they mention some special features of Tamil, which is unique among Dravidian languages. They state that there are no 'Vargha Characters' say kha, ga, gha, saetcin Tamil and were later adapted from languages like Pali, Prakrit and Sanskrit. Many adherents of Senthamizh are strong to their point that the above vernacular languages are opponents of Tamil and vargha characters don't belong to Tamil language. This manuscript will establish the theory that Vargha letters that distinguish the sounds have been effectively handled in Tamil language with the evidence of Tamil inscriptions found in Tamil Nadu. This manuscript examines the two characters Cakaram–Sakaram with their grammatical rules, use in inscriptions and the uniqueness of the vargha letters in Tamil language in detail.

**Keywords:** History, Tamil Nadu , Brahmi Inscriptions , Language , Linguistics , Phonemes

#### Introduction

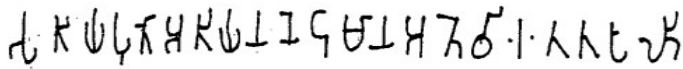
Inscriptions are considered unique among the primary evidences found in determining the history of Tamil Nadu. Inscriptions in Tamil - Brahmi script is considered to be the beginning of the historical period. Since the names mentioned in these inscriptions are similar to the names in the Sangham

literature, it can be said that these inscriptions belong to the Sangham period. Among these, Jambai inscription near Thirukovilur, Marukaltalai inscription in Tirunelveli, and Mankulam inscriptions in Madurai are taken as evidences for this manuscript. Because, these hold both the letters Cakaram and Sakaram in the same sentence. This manuscript will explain the essential position of vargha characters in the Tamil

language with the use of these letters. As there are difference of opinions among the scholars who have read these inscriptions, this manuscript studies the inscriptions as read by the scholar IravathamMahadevan.

### Jambai

There is a Tamil-Brahmi inscription in Jambai near Thirukovilur in Villupuram district. This inscription was found by K. Selvaraj, a student from Archaeology Department of Tamilnadu in October 1987(S.Sridhar, 2006:64).The inscription was read by theDirector of the Department R.Nagaswamy. While the inscription was published in various newspapers as articles along with pictures inTamil and english when it was founded

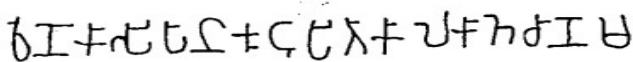


Satiyaputō'atianneṭumānañciittapali

The inscription says that thestone bed (palli) was gifted by SatiyaPutranAdiyamanNeduman Anji. There are various interpretations for this inscription.The Two types of sakaram-cakaram are used here.As the first sakaram is used as it is in Ashoka Brahmiiform, researchers believe that this form doesnot belong to Tamil language.

### Marukaltalai

Marukaltalai is located near the town of Seevalapperi in Tirunelveli district. There are some beds called as Panchapandavar Beds found in the caveon the western side of Pooviludayar Hill in this town.The inscription on the forehead of the cavewas first discovered in 1906 by Hemaïd,the then District Collector of Tirunelveli (S.Sridhar, 2006:31). He also said that it would have been a place for stay to the Buddhist monks.



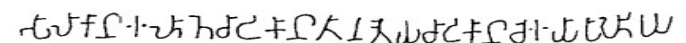
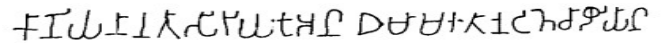
Veṅkāsiṇaṅkuṭupitakalkañcaṇam

This inscription states that the Kanjanam was given byVenkaasipan.Kanjanammeans a temple

structure or polished bronze plate in sanskrit(S.Sridhar, 2006:32). It is important to note that the Sakaram is used in the middle of the noun Kaasipan.

### Mankulam

There are five naturally formed cave sites on top of a hill next to the town of Meenakshipuram, near Madurai.Inscriptions show that these sites were built around 2200 years ago for a group of people to stay who were led by a Jain sage named Kani Nandan. Discovered in 1906, these inscriptions have been studied since 1968(S.Sridhar, 2006:16). These are relatable with the script inscribed at 'Battiprolu'. Among these, the second inscription as mentioned by IravathamMahadevan in his bookhas been taken for analysing in this manuscript (IravathamMahadevan, 2021: 359).



Kaṇiyantāsiriṅku'aṅtamamītāneṭiñcaḷiyan

sālakaṇiḷañcaṭikaṅtantaiycaṭikaṅcē'iyapaḷiy

The meaning of this inscription can be said to be,Satikan, the father of Ilanchadikan and brother- in-law of Nedinchezhiyan, has set up the stone bed (stone bed -a place to stay or rest) as a charity for Kani Nantasirikuvan. It is noteworthy that in this inscription both the charactersCakaram and Sakaram are used in the beginning andand middle of the words.

### Rules Mentioned In Tamil Grammar Texts

Tolkappiyam is one of the oldest grammar bookssaid to have been written by tolkappiyargivesdetailed explanations on Tamil language. The second division of the first chapter ezhuthathikaram that speaks on orthography, mentions the letters that can appear as first and last in the language.Tolkappiyarstates that all the twelve vowels occur first in the language andconsonants do not occur first.

Katana pamaveṇumāvaitteḷuntum  
ellāvuyiroṭuñcollumārmutalē.  
Cakarakkilaviyumavarṛōrarra  
a'ai'auveṇumūṅralaṅkaṭaiyē

Tolkāppiyam, eḷuttu: 61, 62)

This verse states, five letters Ka, Tha, Na, Pa, Ma along with all the vowels appear first in the language. Although the Cakaram also occurs in the same way, it is defined that it does not appear first in the language if it is combined with the three vowels a, i, and au. Ilampuranar, who later wrote commentry on this text, also affirms that “Aryach Sitaivallatha Kadicholillai” (M. Sanmugampilla i, 2014: 39) Which indicates the character Cakaradoes not appear first in the Tamil language.

A grammar book named Nannool written in 12<sup>th</sup> century AD by Bhavanantimunivar also states the letters that precede in the language.

Paṅṅiruyirumka ca ta na pa ma vya

ñāñāraintuuyirmeyyummolimutal

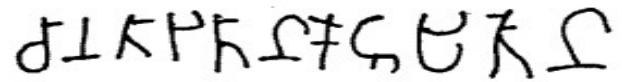
(nannūl, eḷuttu: 102)

The twelve vowels and the ten letters ka, ca, ta, na, p, ma, v, ya, are said to appear first in the language. Among these, there is no special rule for Cakaram. Thus, it is important to note that Nannool differs from Tolkappiyam. It does not state Cakaram combined with the vowels a, i, and au don't occur in the beginning of the language.

### **Tamil Scriptssakaram –Cakaram**

In the previously mentioned Jambai inscription, regarding the Sakaram mentioned in the beginning the word researchers denote it as sakaram from Ashoka- Brahmi. They say the Tamil Cakaram does not appear first stating the above-mentioned grammatical rules. However, in the Marukaltalai inscription the use of letter sakaram for the name Venkasipan and use of the so-called Tamil Cakaram for the word kanjanam, both in the middle raises a question here. There is a possible to assume Tamil language was used in the early writings. Hence, It can be established that Tamil was the precursor of all writing languages in India.

that this would be an error made by the inscriber. In the Mankulam inscription, Sagara appears in the words Nandasiri and Salakan and Cakaram in the words Nedinjazhiyaan, Ilanjadikan and Chatigan. This confirms that there is no possibility of Sakaram and Cakaram being mistaken in this inscription. It seems that these two characters in the inscriptions clearly distinguishes the sounds as in spoken form. Also, it is better to understand that grammar texts like Tolkappiyam arose to convey the definitions of Tamil literary works rather than being a grammar of the written language. Regardless, if we examine whether these rules apply to all written forms, the result would be nil. As proof, Tolkappiyam mentions that same ‘cakarakkilavi’ (The letter ‘ca’) does not come in the beginning of the language. But an inscription in Mankulam itself mentions a word Chantarithan. (Iravatham Mahadevan, 2021: 365)



Cantaritaṅkoṭupitōṅ

The meaning of this inscription is ‘Given by Chandarithan’. The grammatical rule on first letter for language does not fit here. Also, the difference in script of ‘ta’ mentioned in the words Itta, Nandasirii, Pata and the word tamam in a same inscription suggests that it is an attempt to differentiate the sound in the spoken language. Prakrit language was created for the writings of Dravidians a statement by T.N. Subramaniam in his book south indian temple inscriptions. Also, the Brahmi script itself may have been developed for a language, specifically Tamil. He has also questioned whether the Prakrit language could have developed and become a common language for all the people of India (T.N. Subramaniam, 1955:1607-1609). It is absolutely true that Ashoka has used the script which has been given in Tamil Nadu since before the time of Ashoka, adding some characters according to the Prakrit language (Natana. Kasinathan, 2014: 17). By analysing these evidences, it can be seen that the

### **Conclusion**

From the literary texts as evidence for the study of the Tamil language, initially the researchers stuck to the concept that Tamil and the Sanskrit are totally different in nature. Later, after Aryan invasion Sanskrit was mixed with Tamil and led to the formation of Manipravala style used in literary text. In this way, the early scholars who read the inscriptions classified the ancient inscriptions into two types of script, Tamil-Brahmi and Ashoka-Brahmi. Ancient Tamil Nadu, which had a vast territory, including Sri Lanka and many more countries of today. There is no denying that the use of vargha letters is essential in the Brahmi inscriptions of Sri Lanka. If Ashoka Brahmi script with vargha letters and the Brahmi script of Sri Lankan inscriptions are compared, the similarities between the two are evident. It is inevitable that Tamil has absorbed the influence of ancient languages like Pali and Prakrit. However, Tamil language as well, has efficiently used the vargha letters to avoid confusion and determine phonetic changes. The prevailing stand to classify Brahmi inscriptions into Tamil- Brahmi and Ashoka- Brahmi must be reconsidered by the future researches through their insights.

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