

# Tamil-Brahmi (Tamili) Pottery Shards of Tamil Nadu A Study

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**ABSTRACT**--Recent Archaeological excavated site at Kīladi brought to light several ways of ancient Tamils cultural history. The most important findings at Kīladi are inscribed pot-shreds. The findings of the archaeological excavated site Kīladi significantly revealed a new chapter in the archaeological context where a large number of brick structures along with antiquities have been unearthed which attracted the public as well as the academic forum. Especially the date of Tamili or Tamil Brahmi script has been arrived at the 6th century BCE based on AMS dates. It gives the clue that the Tamili is the earliest known script in India which was prevalent amidst the people of Tamil Nadu as people's script. The scientific data arrived at by the Department of State Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu for the Tamili script through an analysis at Beta analytical center at Florida, The United States of America voiced the opinion of many renowned scholars and changed the view on the origin and writing system of Tamili script (Tamil script) as well as its authorship. The AMS dates from three excavated sites namely Porunthal, Kodumanal, and Kīladi significantly fixing the date of Tamili script to the 6th century BCE which is the earliest date for an Indian script used by the common folk of Tamil Nadu, the southern part of the Indian Sub-continent. Hence, the topic literacy of the Ancient Tamilagam has been taken in the academic forum.

**Keywords**-- Kīladi, Brahmi, Tamili, Excavations, Tamilnadu

## I. INTRODUCTION

The earliest evidence for written documents in India was recovered from the excavated sites of Indus valley in the form of seals. Nearly four hundred and odd seals bearing the symbols with the pictographs have not been to date successfully deciphered. However, scholars believe that the Harappan culture is the Dravidian Culture and the scripts found on the seals are nothing but a proto Dravidian script especially relating to the Tamil language. If the script could be successfully deciphered and accepted, then the history of India based on written records must have been begun around 6000 years before the present time. Till then we have to depend upon the depiction that the *Tamili* (Tamil- Brahmi) script which was prevalent in Tamil Nadu and Kerala around 600 BCE.

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## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The available data related to the archaeological excavations conducted from various departments like Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), the State Department of Archaeology, University of Madras, the University of Pondichery and Tamil University. Secondary sources have also been consulted which were published by the above agencies in the form of excavated reports and journals like *Man and environment*, Archaeological Society of Tamil Nadu (*Avanam*), *Man in India*, *Purakala* and *Purattava*. These published data were recorded in a database and analyzed. The stored data was verified through intensive field investigations.

## III. ORIGIN AND CHRONOLOGY OF TAMILI

Edward Thomas an eminent scholar declared that the Brahmi script was the invention of Dravidian people (Edward Thomas, 1883). He was followed by another eminent Epigraphist T. N. Subrahmanyam and he strongly put forth the theory that the *Tamili* was originally invented by the Tamil people for their Tamil language (Subrahmanyam 1955). Further, he quotes that in all probability the Prakrit language itself in its original form was a South Indian product synthesizing the Dravidian language to make it understandable throughout the country. The origin of *Tamili* script was further researched by the following scholars and they inclined to accept that the script was originally invented by the Tamils around the 5 or 6th century BCE on paleographical and orthographical features. Among them, Dr. K. V. Ramesh, Dr. M. D. Sampath, Natana Kasinathan and Dr. S. Rajavelu researched on the above subject and concluded that the *Tamili* script is the earliest known script which was prevalent in the Tamil country before the Asokan Brahmi around the 5th or 6th century BCE. They fixed this date based on Palaeography, orthography, language, linguistic features and its simple form of the script as well as the potteries with *Tamili* scripts, recovered from the stratum of the excavated sites in Tamil Nadu. The basic symbols of the *Tamili* script were taken to suit the *Prakrit* language. For which they created more symbols to suit the phonetic (*varga* sounds) for their *Prakrit* language around 4th century BCE.

## IV. IRAVATHAM MAHADEVAN'S THEORY ON THE DATE AND ORIGIN OF TAMILI

Iravatham Mahadevan strongly advocated that the *Tamili* script was derived from Mauryan-Brahmi of 2nd century BCE which was brought to Tamil Nadu by the Jaina monks from North India (Mahadevan, 2003). He traces the migration of the Jains from Sravanabelagola in Karnataka. A late Kannada literature records a traditional story of Chandragupta Maurya of Magadha who came to South India along with his preceptor Bhadrabahu and finally settled down in Sravanabelagola when a severe famine-affected in his country Magadha. They spread Jainism in Karnataka around the 4th century BCE. Bhadrabahu's disciple Visakha Muni went further south i.e., ancient Tamilagam along with Jaina monks and they were the ones who introduced the *Tamili* script in Tamil Nadu.

## V. THE DATE OF ŚRAVANA-BELGOLA

This traditional story of Bhadrabahu and Chandragupta Maurya's migration to Srvanabelagola appeared in the late inscriptions and Kannada literature of the late period. No single inscription of Brahmi characters of the pre-Common Era was found in this hilly village. Even if we accept that the author of Tamil Brahmi was the Jaina monks of Visakha Muni, the disciple of Bhadrabahu, certainly one should have come across some early inscriptions written in Brahmi scripts at Śravaṇa-Belgola itself around the 4th or 3rd century BCE., as we found in the natural caverns of Tamil Nadu. The earliest inscription in Śravaṇa-Belgola belongs to the late 6th century CE. It clearly shows the theory of Iravatham Mahadevan regarding the origin of *Tamili* would be re-examined with the light of recent excavations and the scientific date arrived for *Tamili* script.

## VI. POTTERY INSCRIPTIONS IN TAMIL NADU AND ABROAD

Tami Nadu is rich in pottery inscriptions of *Tamili* characters. Nearly 35 excavated sites yielded Tamil-Brahmi label inscriptions. These sites are closely associated with Sangam Period. Around 1200 potteries have been reported in these sites including the site Kīlāḍi in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu. The names of individuals written on Tamil-Brahmi characters on the potteries which suggest that the people of Tamil Nadu used to write their names on the earthen utensils. Some of the pottery sherds with the Tamil names in characters of *Tamili* scripts have also been reported in the excavated sites at Quesir-al-Quadim, Berenike in Egypt, Khor Rori in Omen in the Red sea area, Phu Khao Thong in Thailand, Tissamaharama in Sri Lanka and 6 more excavated sites in Sri Lanka also yielded Tamil Brahmi inscriptions.

**Places with *Tamili* script Pottery Inscriptions in Tamil Nadu**

Si.No	Site	District	Scientific Date	Excavation / Exploration
1	Alagankulam	Ramnadu	4th century BCE	Exc
2	Alagarai	Trichy	---	Exc
3	Arikamedu	Pondy	---	Exc
4	Attur	Karur	---	Exp
5	Jambai	Villupuram	---	Exp
6	Kadatthur	Dharmapuri	----	Exp
7	T.kalluppatti	Madurai	----	Exc
8	Kanchipuram	Kanchipuram	----	Exc
9	Karur	Karur	----	Exc
10	Kīlāḍi	Madurai	585 BCE	Exc
11	Kodumanal	Erode	450 BCE	Exc

12	Korkai	Tuttukkudi	785 BCE (C14 date is arrived by the excavator in this site has not pointed out the Tamili potsherds available in the dated strata)	Exc
13	Kovalanpottal	Madurai	-----	Exc
14	Maligaimedu	Cuddalore	----	Exc
15	Odaikkalpalaiyam	Coimbatore	----	Exp
16	Palaiyarai	Thanjavur	----	Exp
17	S.Pappinayakkanpatti	Madurai	----	Exp
18	Periya Tadagam	Coimbatore	-----	Exp
19	Poluvampatti	Coimbatore	-----	Exp
20	Pompukhar	Nagappattinam	----	Exc
21	Porunthal	Dindukal	485 BCE	Exc
22	Madhagam	Pudukkottai		Exp
23	Marunkur	Cuddalore		Exp
24	Mayiladumparai	Krishnagiri		Exc
25	Sivakasi	Sivakasi	----	Exc
26	Teriruveli	Ramanathapuram	-----	Exc
27	Uraiyur	Trichy	-----	Exc
28	Vallam	Thanjavur	-----	Exc

#### Tamili script Potteries from outside Tamil Nadu and Foreign countries

Si.No	Site	Province	Date	Excavation /Exploration
1	Salikundam	Srikakulam Taluk, Telunkana	----	Exc
2	Musiri	Kerala	-----	Exc
3	Ghottiporulu	Telungana near Nayudu pettai, Tamil Nadu border	-----	Exc
4	Anuradhapura And five more places	Srilanka	5th-4th century CE	Exc
5	Poonagari	Jaffna, Srilanka	Do	Exp

6	Qusir-al-Qudim	Egypt	----	Exc
7	Berenike	Egypt	-----	Exc
8	Khor-ori	Eman	----	Exc
9	Phughav Tong	Tailand	-----	Exp

## VII. PALAEOGRAPHY OF TAMILI

From the Palaeography of Tamil Brahmi, the simple and rudimentary form of letters both in the Cavern inscriptions and Pottery inscriptions, it is possible to arrive at the date of *Tamili* could certainly be earlier than the standard form of Asokan Brahmi. The absence of Vargas systems, (though Tamils used phonetic sounds wherever necessary with the usage of one letter); the absence of inherent a, the formation of letters such as short a and long ā vowels, consonants m, r, etc are comparatively the standardized form in Asokan Brahmi; whereas *Tamili* has rudimentary signs. In the initial stage of the *Tamili* inscription, the vowel consonants and basic consonants do not have any differences either using conjuncts or dot (*pulli*) marks as we have seen the formation of conjuncts in the Asokan Brahmi. This demarcation is clearly shown in the Asokan Brahmi by using conjuncts. Either they were written jointly from top to bottom or side by side. One can see the usage of the conjuncts which continued in all Indian scripts except in Tamil language to date.

The Tamils recognized this defect in a later stage around the 3rd century BCE after hearing the usage of the conjuncts introduced by Asoka in his edicts through the merchants of northern India at Kodumanal. Among the 985 potsherds with *Tamili* legends, nearly 25 potsherds from Kodumanal have writings with the conjuncts methods to indicate the consonants. But this practice, later on, disappeared around that period itself. The Tamils found a new technique by introducing the dot marks (*pulli* system) to indicate or differentiate the Consonants and Vowel consonants in the script including long and short e and o. This is the major development of the *Tamili* script. All these show that the *Tamili* script was an indigenous one created by the Tamils for their language Tamil around 6th century BCE from the Graffiti which were abundantly found on the potteries as well as some prehistoric paintings in Tamil Nadu.

## VIII. SCIENTIFIC DATE ARRIVED FROM PORUNTHAL AND KODUMANAL AND KĪLADI EXCAVATIONS

The scientific dates arrived recently by Prof. Rajan from the two excavated sites Porunthal and Kodumanal in Kongu region and Kīlāḍi near Madurai by the Department of State Archaeology, Government of Tamil Nadu are the turning point in the history of the chronology of *Tamili* scripts which strongly supports the Palaeographical date of the script *Tamili*. Prof. Rajan carried out excavations at a place called Porunthal in the year 2009 near Palani, the abode of Lord Murugan in Tamil Nadu. The seven radiometric dates received from two different laboratories from the USA pushed the date of Brahmi scientifically to the 6th century BCE. The Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (AMS dating) dates of Porunthal from the paddy grains dates to the 520 BCE (Rajan 2015). The paddy grains recovered from the trench along with the ring stand with writing reads *vayara* in

*Tamili* characters. On paleographical grounds, these letters are assignable to the second stage of *Tamili* characters.

Again, in the years 2012 and 2013, Prof. Rajan has conducted excavations in two seasons at Kodumanal in Erode District of Tamil Nadu (Rajan 2015). He collected five samples at various depths of the trenches for dating. The samples were sent to the above laboratory in the USA and five different dates have been obtained from them. The sample obtained at a depth of 120 cm shows the date to the 480 BCE. The total deposit of the trench further goes below 185 cm. According to the excavator Rajan, there is still a 65 cm thick cultural deposit containing inscribed potsherds both *Tamili* scripts and graffiti below this dated (480 BCE) level. Based on this, one can easily push the date of the earliest deposit in this site to the 6th or 7th century BCE. Kodumanal, an important commercial centre yielded nearly 1200 potsherds with *Tamili* letters till 2017 excavations. The lower most level of the trench yielded graffiti marks and in the above level, the excavator noticed graffiti and *Tamili* potteries within the thickness of 65 cm. Above that, the Tamil Brahmi letters have been found along with some Prakrit letters. This is dated back to 480 BCE. The Tamil Brahmi alone can be dated before the 480 BCE in all probability it could be fixed to the 6th century BCE.

A solid early date for *Tamili* is attested from the excavations at Khiladi, the famous industrial site near Madurai. The Department of State Archaeology sent some objects found on various layers in the trenches to the same laboratory in the USA. They obtained the earliest date for *Tamili* script around the 6th century BCE. Hence, these scientific dates indicate that the *Tamili* script is indigenous to Tamil people especially the merchants and learned Tamil scholars before the 6th century BCE and in due course, these scripts developed into a standardized form. The merchants, monks of Buddhism and Jainism borrowed the basic letters from the Tamil people around the 4th century BCE and modified them to suit their Prakrit language and the Sri Lankan language. The Tamil script went by land route as well as sea route through Sri Lanka and the abundance of Brahmi script in Sri Lanka without conjuncts have been found on the natural caverns which were associated with the Buddhist monks. The Buddhist monks of Bhattiporulu modified the *Tamili* script and introduced the *varga* letters to suit the Prakrit language of north India around the 4th-century C.E.

The commercial and trade centers like Kodumanal, Arikamedu, and Azagankulam yielded 6 signs of northern Brahmi letters viz., *sa, śa ha, dha, da, bha* on the potteries. They were all found on the upper layers of the trenches. At Kodumanal it was found along with the Tamil Brahmi dated to the 480 BCE. It gives the clue that the Prakrit form of writing too was evolved in Tamilnadu and adopted by the traders of Sri Lanka and North India to suit their languages. They learned the *Tamili* Scripts from the Tamil people and introduced a few letters here itself and took it to their country, innovated many *vargas* and special letters for their languages. In the 2017 recent excavations at Kodumanal, the excavator found a pottery slate with Tamil- Brahmi alphabets starting from a to i. Since it is a broken piece, the remaining letters are missing. It shows that the non-Tamil traders learnt the script and practiced through pottery slates.

## **IX. TAMIL BRAHMI INSCRIPTIONS ON HERO STONES**

The discovery of Puliman Kompai Hero stone inscriptions, Tatappatti hero stone inscriptions, and Porpanaikkottai Hero stone inscription in *Tamili* characters are clinching evidence for the widened usage of

Tamili script amidst the pastoral community in Tamil Nadu. These inscriptions are an indication of the social life of the Tamils of the Sangam Period. Sangam literature and the grammatical treatise *Tolkappiyam* focuses on the cattle riding, cattle lifting, Hero stone worship, and its associated funeral-burial practices. The Puliman kompai hero stone inscriptions were found on the boulder of the megalithic burial complex whereas the Tatappatti Hero stone inscription is a Menhir variety. The fifth one from Porpanikkottai is dressed in a triangular shape which is based on Palaeography assignable to the 2nd or 3rd century CE. No sculptural representation of heroes is found sculpted in these early hero stones as we have generally come across from the time of the Pallavas of the 4th century CE in Tamil country. The pastoral community in the remote village learned the art of writing and produced Hero stones with inscriptions within a short period around the 6th century BCE in Tamil Nadu.

Among the three hero stone inscriptions of Pulimankompai, one inscription on Palaeographical grounds and its letter formations belongs to the 6th century BCE and the second one belongs to the 5th or the 4th-century BCEs and the last one which mentions the word *akol* is datable to the 3rd century BCE. The Tatappatti inscription is broken on the top and it mentions the word *Pakal pali kal*. The word *pali* generally we come across in the cavern inscriptions. According to Iravatham Mahadevan it was a Jaina *Palli* (Jain's school) to assign the authorship of cavern inscriptions to the Jains who had settled in Tamil Country around the 2nd century BCE from Karnataka. Now the theory of the Jaina origin is outdated since the date of *Tamili* is 6th century BCE which was the time of the budding stage of Jainism in North India. No philosophical and religious practices were prevalent at that time in North India. From the Tatappatti Hero stone inscription, it is clear that the word *pali* indicates a memorial stone (*pali kal*) installed to the deceased for their bravery exhibited in the society. The installation of memorial stones to the hero's is the social customs of the Tamils. The Sangam literature attests this practice in Tamil country. The practice was continued till the 18th century CE. The *pallippadai* temples (sepulchral temples) of the historical period, we come across in Tamil country from the time of Pallavas to the medieval period is the development of the Hero stone worship of ancient Tamils. Hence, it earned the name *pallippadai*. It indicates that these Beds in the natural caverns are the kind of memorial beds that were scooped for diseased. The practice of fast unto death by the Jains in the latter period (*sallekanam*) or *nisidhikai* is the later development of the Jains when they occupied these places in the 3rd -4th century CE in Tamil Country.

Hence, the writing system in Tamil Nadu could have been pushed to earlier to the 7th or 8th century CE. The rudimentary nature of Mangulam inscriptions and few cave inscriptions in the Madurai region and the two Hero stone inscriptions at Puliman kompai in Teni region could have been dated to the 6th or 7th century BCE. In this connection, we should also recognize the c14 date of Korkai materials. Here the excavator assigned the c14 date to 780 BC. Korkai was the port city of the Pandyas where the excavator recovered some Tamili potsherds in stratigraphical levels.

## **X. THE NATURE AND CONTENTS OF TAMILI INSCRIPTIONS**

The Tamil Brahmi inscriptions are written in a simple form consisting of one to maximum five lines of writing. They have written without any religious words or auspicious symbols (*mangala suloga*) at the beginning of the inscriptions as we have come across in Tamil inscriptions from the time of Pallavas of the 6th century CE.

These inscriptions mostly record the donation of the beds in the natural cavern, the names of the donor and donee with their native place. In Asokan Brahmi, the edict generally starts with *devanam piya* (beloved to the god). In most of the inscriptions of North India, the auspicious signs or the auspicious word have appeared at the beginning of the inscriptions. The famous Hathigumpha inscription of Kharavela has *svastic* and *srivatsa* symbols at the beginning of the inscription. Here, in Tamil Nadu the cavern Tamil Brahmi inscriptions, though scholars inclined to climb to the Jaina pantheon, none of these records proclaimed any religious faith of that period in these inscriptions or any religious symbol on them. The earliest occurrence of auspicious word we do come across around the 3rd century CE in the Paraiyanpattu inscription near Gingee in Villupuram District. It starts with the auspicious word *namotthu* (Salute to the God). From this time onwards inscriptions of Tamil Nadu have the auspicious words *Śri*, *Svasthi Śri*, as preamble of the inscriptions. It was introduced by the Jains who came and settled in Tamil Nadu around the 3rd century CE in and around Kanchipuram and Tondaimandalam region.

## **XI. SANGAM LITERATURE**

The earliest literature in Tamil Country known as Sangam literature consists of Ettuttogai (the eight anthologies), the Pattuppattu (the ten Ideals) and the Padinenkilkanakku (the eighteen works of shorter verses). These Sangam works are classified into Aham and Puram works. They are the earliest works among the other Sangam literature. *Aham* is treats of love themes. Puram relates to warfare. The Tamils patronage these two folds of life in their living. These two-folds of life are totally against the philosophy of Jainism and Buddhism. If we accept that the Jaina monks were responsible for introducing the Tamil Script in Ancient Tamilagam, at least some of their religious order or their philosophy must have been referred to in this literature. There is no single evidence in Sangam literature referring to the Jaina religion or Jaina monks. They record love and warfare of the people in an elaborate manner which is totally against the basic theme of Jainism. The social and political history of the Tamils, customs and manners of their day to day life, warfare and love has been narrated in these poems. The arrival and spread of Jainism or Buddhism are not figured in the early literature. There is a reference of a word *amanan* in one or two cave inscriptions which is a general term to any monks who gave up worldly life. Asokan inscriptions refer to the word *sramana*, the prakriti form of Tamil *amanan* indicating as a general term to all the saints or monks who withheld worldly affairs. Both Jainism and Buddhism entered Tamil Nadu only in the post-Sangam period i.e., the 3rd century CE but not earlier than that. The post-Sangam works Naladiyar, Tirukadugam, the twin epics Silappadikaram and Manimegalai are later literature which referred to the above two religions Buddhism and Jainism spread over in Tamil Country.

## **XII. THE NATURAL CAVERNS IN TAMIL COUNTRY**

The orientation of the stone beds in the natural caverns is mostly not perfectly curved. They are varying in size and cut in all directions. One can see that these beds are not comfortable with the monks to sleep or for meditations. The sizes of the beds are ranging from 2 feet to 8 feet. All these give some clue that these were the beds curved for the deceased. It is also remembered here that almost all the Tamil Brahmi caverns are surrounded by megalithic burials. All most all the natural caverns where we get *Tamili* inscriptions are



narrowing in size and inaccessible to reach and stay permanently by the monks. They selected some natural caverns and made some drip lines on the eyebrow of the caverns to prevent the rainwater from coming inside the caverns where they cut smooth beds as memorials. The beds in the cavern were generally referred to in the inscriptions as *pali* or *adhittanam*. These two words are synonyms to each other which means the memorial bed. It indicated that these inscriptions are non-religious characters and scooped and cut by the Tamils for their diseased people. Almost all the Tamil Brahmi caverns are surrounded by megalithic remains in the form of burials. The best example is Sittannavasal. The Eladipattam hill is surrounded by megalithic burials consisting of dolmans, cists, urns, and menhirs (Baliga 1957). These megalithic burials are locally known as *pandavar kuzi* or *pandu kuzi* or Pandavar padukkai. It is also interesting to note that the beds of the natural caverns are also referred to as Panchapandavar *padukkai* by the local people; the hill where the natural caverns with beds are there, they are referred to as Pancha pandavarmalai or Aivar malai. The word Pandavar is the derivation of mandavar (one who died). As discussed earlier, on the hilly tract in the natural caverns, they cut the beds as a memorial tomb. This is another kind of burial customs of ancient Tamils.

### **XIII. SETTLEMENT OF JAINS IN TAMIL NADU**

No early settlements of Jains, we come across in Madurai and its neighboring districts of Tamil Nadu, where we get an abundance of cavern inscriptions in *Tamili* characters. The earliest settlement of Jains in Tamil Nadu is in the northern part consisting of Vellore and Thiruvannamalai, Kanchipuram and Villupuram districts of the Pallava region. They either migrated or converted into this religion during the time of Pallava period. This region is studded with many Jaina temples of early historic period and inscriptions of Jaina religions. The present Nainar (Jain) community lived in the Gingee and Cheyyar and Kanchipuram regions where the early people patronaged their religion Jainism in this region. The temple at Jaina kanchi received royal patronage of the Pallava kings. It continued during the time of Cholas too. The Cholas gave liberal donations to the Jaina temples and constructed many temples in the region. The earliest inscription of the Jains refers to many Jaina samghas like nandhi samgha, Yappiniya samgha, Dravida samgha etc in these regions around the 3rd or 4th century CE. The Jaina monks went to southern districts and stayed in the hilly regions and scooped bas relief sculptures of jaina Gods and Goddesses with the Vatteluttu inscriptions. They were the second settlers of the natural caverns and they were not connected with the natural rock beds or the *Tamili* inscriptions in the caverns. For meditations and religious purpose they modified some of the caverns and scooped sculptures of Jaina pantheons around the 4th -5th century CE. The Thirunatharkunru inscription and Paraiyan pattu inscriptions of the 4th century CE in Tondaimandalam are the earliest known inscriptions which are referred to the Jaina teachers and their religious practice like vadakkiruttal, salleanam, janam norral, etc (past unto death practice). None of the cave inscriptions of *Tamili* characters refer to these terms to support the Jaina religion.

### **XIV. LITERACY OF THE TAMILS**

From the above discussion, it is inferred that the majority of the common people in Tamil Nadu were highly educated and practiced the art of writing in their everyday life. The long literary tradition of Tamils suggests that the people of Tamil country were well versed with the writing system at least from 2600 years before the present.

Tirukkural the celebrated Tamil literature quotes all the letters beginning from the letter a (agaram) the world begins from the Lord, the first creator.

“Agaramudal eluttellaam adi  
Bhagavan mudarre ulagu”

The same literature further elaborates the existence of letters as well as numerals (writing and arithmetic) and their importance for the human being. He compares that they are the two eyes of a man.

“Ennenpa enai yeluttenba ivvirandum  
Kannenba valum uyirkku”

Tolkappiyam, the grammatical works of the Tamils indicate that the Tamils knew the rules of composing literature and they were strong in literacy. The association of the academic forum of the Tamils is recorded in the inscription at Hathikumpha in Orissa issued by King Karavela who ruled around the 2nd century BCE. This inscription records the association of Tamils before 150 years from the date of this inscription i.e. 4th century BCE.

Besides, the writings on the pottery, seals, rings, coins as well as hero stone reflect the strong existence of a writing system in Tamil Country. The personal names on the pottery suggest that the common folk in everyday life used the Tamil script in the remote village of Tamil Nadu. Nearly 28 sites yielded Tamil Brahmi pottery either in the excavations or in explorations suggest that the Tamils were strong in their literacy. The 5 Hero stone inscriptions in Tamil characters show that the pastoral community made use of the script and issued Hero stones for the dead. None of the sites in other parts of India, the script was used by the common folk either on hero stone or on pottery. Literacy was widespread in the pre common era in Tamil Nadu both in rural and urban. One can see the elite Tamil language flow in the Hero stone inscriptions of Puliman kompai, Tatappatti, and Porpanaikkottai.

The reasons for the growth of literacy amidst the public in Tamil country are manifold. The political independence of the three Empire namely Chera, Chola and Pandyas and the petty chieftains ruled peacefully and independently without any interference from the northern kings. Asokan Rock Edicts records the independent rule of the Cholas, Pandyas, Cheras, Satyaputras, and Pulindas on his border region. The administrative system, state formation, commercial contacts with foreign countries, native religious system, customs and manners of Tamils, funeral rituals are the main reason for the growth of Tamil language without the influence of northerners till the 3rd century CE. The new religious systems Vedic, Jainism and Buddhism emerged from North India did not enter the Tamil country till the advent of the Pallavas around 3rd century CE which did not affect the existing indigenous language known as Tamil and it paved the way for the development of literacy. People were able to learn their native language and script without the influence of foreign language and scripts until the 3rd century CE. The maritime contacts between ancient Tamilagam and the Mediterranean world is yet another reason for the growth of literacy in Tamil country. The communication from orality to literacy already existed in these countries and the Tamil traders felt a need for keeping of permanent records for commerce as they witnessed in the then western world. The sophisticated writing system on the Nile valley region was known by the Tamil merchants and they patronaged the writing system in Tamil Nadu. Some of the names that occurred on the potteries and the mercantile groups namely *nikama*, *catan*, *kanan* and merchants which was referred to in the cavern inscriptions suggest their involvement in the growth of literacy in Tamil

Nadu. It is strongly believed that the *Tamili* script in all probability evolved from the native graffiti marks which are abundantly available on the rock paintings engravings and the potteries in Tamil Nadu. This long period could have paved the way for the creation of standardized symbols with phonetic values around the 6th or 7th century BCE. The discovery of red ware with the Tamil alphabets recovered from the Kodumanal excavations indicate that there was a school of learning in the trade centers like Kodumanal. The use of writing materials such as pottery, palm-leaves, and stones are easily accessible by the common folk. The word *kiral* in all probability is the derivation of *kirru* meaning *olai* in Tamil. The widespread of the ability to read and write in ancient Tamil people are known from 30 excavated sites that are connected mostly with the Sangam literature. The people of remote villages like Kodumanal, Pulumankompai, Tattappatti, etc knew the art of writing system which indicates the spread of literacy in remote places too. However, literacy rates are not known as we have today. The abundance of *Tamili* potsherds and Hero stone inscriptions significantly show the level of literature in Tamil society and their skills. The surplus growth of agricultural products and the emergence of other industries such as bead, iron and weaving industries in ancient Tamilagam and urbanization also is one of the main causes of the growth of literacy in Ancient Tamilagam.

## XV. CONCLUSION

From the above discussions, it is clear that the *Tamili* script in Tamil Nadu is the earliest known script in India which was practiced by the Tamil People in the remote villages of Tamil Nadu around the 6th-7th centuries BCE. This script originated from the graffiti marks which were abundantly found engraved on the potteries of Tamil Nadu. The script was learned by the merchants of Sri Lanka and North India from the Tamils who visited frequently the commercial centers like Kodumanal, Alankulam, Arikamedu and Kaveripumpattinam and they introduced the soft and aspirate sounds (*varga* system) and some special letters to suit their languages Prakrit and *Sinkala Prakrit*. The script was attracted the Buddhist monks and they modified and fulfilled its final shape in the monasteries particularly in Bhattiprolu monastery of Andhra and traveled to North India. Finally, this was widely used by the Asoka in his edicts. The natural caverns with stone beds in various shapes and sizes yielded Tamil Brahmi inscriptions which were scooped by the native people i.e., the Tamils for their departed souls as memorial beds. These places were later on occupied by the Jains around 3rd century CE and they modified these places to stay and sculpted Jaina Tirthankaras around 5-6th centuries CE with the Vatteluttu inscriptions in these places. The Late reference of Bhatrapagu and the absence of early Brahmi inscriptions at Śravaṇa-Belgola do not suit within the chronological frame for *Tamili* script. The Radio carbon date, palaeographical and orthographical features of *Tamili* suggests that the *Tamili* was in vogue amidst the people of Tamil Nadu around the 7th-6th centuries BCE. In contrast, the spread or migration of Jains took place in the later period around the 3rd or 4th century CE when the Pallavas established their capital city Kanchipuram.

The natural caverns were mostly utilized by the local people for scooping the memorial beds for their departed soul as these places were surrounded by other megalithic tombs like stone circles, Menhirs, Dolmens, and Urns. The Tattappatti hero stone inscription is the clinching source for the word Pali-kal which indicates the memorial stone was erected for the deceased. Even if we accept the Jaina authorship for the caverns as well as for the *Tamili* script, naturally the script could not have been spread to the remote areas like Kodumanal

Tatappatti, Puliman kompai, porunthal and Porpanaikkottai at an early stage. The pastoral and agricultural Tamil people practiced the script for writing their names on the potteries and Hero stones. When there was no script before the advent of Jain, it is not possible to learn the new script within a short period in the remote villages. The theory of Jaina authorship to the natural caverns and the Tamil Brahmi associations with Jains are fully based on conflicting and contradictory nature of evidences. Those who are claiming the Jaina origin for Tamil Brahmi do not provide any authentic and contemporary evidences to prove the spread of Jainism in Tamil country around 2nd century CE,

From the above discussion, it is known that the migration Jains from North India to Śravana-Belgola under Bhadra Bagu is biased. The oral tradition appeared in the late literary sources and 7th-century inscriptional evidence. There is a variety of stories regarding this appearance in the following late literature of late-period'. The Sanskrit work *Brhat-Kathakosa* (10th century CE), Kannada work *Manivamsa* (1680), *Rajavalikathe* of *Devachandra* (1838) contain different story on the migration of Bhadrabāhu. The migration of Jains into Karnataka in the 3rd century BCE was questioned by several scholars like Hoernle. V.A. Smith, a well-known British historian. He quotes that the traditional story of the migration of Chandragupta along with the Jaina guru is an imaginative history. This may be accepted with all probability, he says. The other notable scholars to deny the above theory who was Fleet, Shama Sastri, and Govinda Pai. They identified Chandragupta with the Chandragupta II of Gupta dynasty and Bhadra bahu with Bhadra bahu II of 4th century CE.

On the light of the above, It is certain to conclude that the migration of Jains to Tamil Nadu must have taken place during the time of Pallavas not earlier than that and they first settled in the Vellore, Kanchipuram, Thiruvannamalai, Villupuram regions The Tamil Jaina community are still living in the above regions of Tamil Nadu. Jaina monks went to further south and selected their abode which was free from the crowd of people hence settled in the hilly places and scooped sculptures of Jaina Gods with the Vatteluttu inscriptions around the 5-6th century CE for meditation. The Jaina works *Āyaraṅga* quotes the Jaina ascetics put up their abode in the cemetery and mountain caves. Hence, in light of the above, it is clear that the author of Tamil Brahmi was the Tamil people. The natural caverns with beds are the creation of Tamils as one of the burial customs of the ancient period. They introduced the simple aksharas (letters for their language known as Tamil Brahmi around 6th-7th century BCE which was later on borrowed by the merchants of Sri Lanka and North India. The literary wealth of the Tamils and the political unity, commerce, complex and compact society in ancient Tamilagam was the basic cause for the growth of literacy in the remote villages and urban centers of the ancient Tamil country.

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