



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.04.197>

## HISTORY OF TAMIL – EPIGRAPHY

**Dr. Sanmathi Kumar**

Professor, Department of History

Sri Dharmasthala Manjunatheshwara College (Autonomous)

Ujire, D.K, Karnataka, India

**ABSTRACT:** Epigraphy symbolizes interpretation the ancient inscriptions or study of engraved materials. The Epigraphs are engraved the scripts on the granite-stones, Stone - Rocks, Stone - Boulders, Copper-plates, Coins and other materials are called an Antiquity. In the ancient Tamil country before Historical Period (CEB- 500) ancient men used the Graffiti marks, Symbols and Paintings for communication each and one another to show the expertise that, they had during that ancient time. In this connection for few important examples are given here as the site's names, Arikamedu, Alagankulam, Udaiyaanatham, Kal-sirunnagalur, Kilvalai, Melvalai, Kodumanal, Kulamtakka, Sikkadu, Settavarai, Thirumalai, Neganurpatti, Padiyenthal, Perumukkal, Mallachchattiram, and Vettavalam respectively. Tamil inscriptions the different Type scripts, paleography, Dynasty, Time, Royal orders, Political Territorial- divisions, Donations, Cultural activities, Social - setups, Economic - status, Religious - position, Administrations power, Arts, Architectures, Education- centers, Hospitals, Libraries, Marriage and other lovely matters are come - across of our hoary - past. It is important evidence for Tamil Epigraphy.

**Keywords:** Epigraphy, Brahmi, Tamil Inscriptions, Antiquity, Script.

**Introduction:** What is an Epigraphy? The word Epigraphy is combination of two Greek words epi - and - graphy. The epi means for on or upon and the suffix graphy indicating engraving or scripts. Hence the word Epigraphy symbolizes interpretation the ancient inscriptions or study of engraved materials. The Epigraphs are engraved the scripts on the granite-stones, Stone - Rocks, Stone - Boulders, Copper-plates, Coins and other materials are called an Antiquity.

What is the meaning of Antiquity? Antiquity means, the ancient Archaeological materials covered the period from stone - age ie, Stone tools, pot - shreds, iron - objects, bones, plant-pieces etc. As like written evidences called engraved on granite - stones inscriptions, copper- plates, coins etc, which are those above 100 - years old considered as the Antiquity as per the Indian Antiquarians laws.

**Tamil Inscriptions:** In the ancient Tamil country before Historical Period (CEB- 500) ancient men used the Graffiti marks, Symbols and Paintings for communication each and one another to show the expertise that, they had during that ancient time. In this connection for few important examples are given here as the site's names, Arikamedu, Alagankulam, Udaiyaanatham, Kal-sirunnagalur, Kilvalai, Melvalai, Kodumanal, Kulamtakka, Sikkadu, Settavarai, Thirumalai, Neganurpatti, Padiyenthal, Perumukkal, Mallachchattiram, and Vettavalam respectively.

Apart from this in the continuous development men particularly using the knowledge of Tamil - Scripts to write the language and started records the events during that period called as Historical Period-CEB 500 -300CE (500 -BC to 300AD). From the Historical period or Iron Age period CEB 500-300 Men have the knowledge of using Tamil - scripts for the language and wrote their names in theirs used pottery along with the usage of already existing symbols either in the suffix or prefix in some cases in between the words also it has been used.

Their names' written scripts are called Tamil - Brahmi scripts. This was found from some Excavations sites from Arikamedu, Alagankulam, Mangulam, Kodumanal, Pombhukar, Karur, Maligaimedu, Kizadi and some of the best examples for this kind of Tamil - scripts with graffiti marks on the potsherds.

**Tamil Brahmi:** After this development they started engraving their name words on the day today using materials and ornaments like gold rings found in Karur, Alagankulam, neck-less found in uprooted tree at Thenur and etc through Tamil-scripts. These are found from the sites, are some of the good examples. Also, many of the sahgarn coins bearing the Tamil - Brahmi scripts belonging to the period CE 500 to 300 of Chera.Chola, Pandiya and Malayaman Tjirunutdikkari, and other chieftains who were ruled in Ancient Tamil - Country.

In further advancement in knowledge and usage they started using the various medium for writing the inscriptions one among the important medium is Granite - stones and copper plates. As its non-perusable material it is survives for long period they engraved



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.04.197>

on the stone -boulders, stone - slabs and natural- cravens. Most of the times, it records noticed the gifts of stone - beds given .to the Jain monks and rarely Buddhist in our country. These inscriptions discovered from the villages Mangulum, Pugulur, Jambai. Sittahannavasal and Thiruparankundram are some of the relevant beautiful examples. As like some of the slap stone inscriptions are found from the places Pulimankombai, Tatapatti, Nettrampakkam.

So far nearly 150 - Tamil- Brahmi scripts inscriptions ate discovered by the scholars in Tamil-Nadu and all this Tamil - Brahma inscriptions contain valuable historical information, mentioned that koluvanikan, aruvai-vanikan, karurponvanigan, Panidavanigan Ennaivanigan, Peruntachchan, Kudubigan, Matirai, Amanan, Eruminadu etc and in its act as primary source for knowing the hoary past during the historical period. In particular the names and places mentioned in the inscriptions are very much useful for comparative, analysis with Sangam - literature. This all Tamil Brahami inscriptions are critically written the book by Padmashri. Dr. Airavatam - Mahadevan as the early Tamil inscriptions.

In about CE300 AD - the horizontal and vertical feature of the Tamil scripts paleography slightly gets chance in to an angular fashion and attains the roundish forms. The cursive Tamil scripts are known as Vatteluthu. Hence the script is in roundish form it has been named as Vatteluthu. These Vatteluthu inscriptions largely found the region of the Pandya ruler and Northern region of Tamil Nadu, in the hero stones inscriptions are found more than 350 - till today. It all are compiled by Dr. Poongundaran who has written the valuable book also Dr. S. Krishnamoorthi.

It is some of the examples existing in the places Arachalur, Arasalapuram, Aragalur. Sengam, Koraiyar, Thirunatharkunru, Thenmangalam and etc. In the Pandya region the Tamil - Brahmi scripts are used with Vatteluthu scripts are originated and developed for example, Velvikudi copper plate, Malaiyadkikkuchchi siva -temple -pillar inscription is some of the examples. In noticeable manner in Malaiyadikuruchchi siva temple pillar inscription is some of the examples. In noticeable manner in Malaiyasikuruchchi pillar inscription engraved the Tamil Brahni scripts, Vatteluthu-scripts and Tamil - scripts are used in the same inscription is wonder. This was written by Dr K.G. Krishnan former Director of Epigraphy in Mysore.

Along with Tamil - Brahmi scripts and the Tamil - scripts also got developed in the paleographical changes and accomplish the full scripts for Tamil language in Thondaimandalam and Cholamandalam territorial divisions. The Vallam Tamil inscription of Mahendravarman - I was good example for fully written in Tamil language and scripts only. This was written by Padamashri Dr Nagasamy has clear vision.

Apart from this inscription available from the various dynasties like, Pallava period (586-888 AD), Chola period (846-1279 AD), Pandya period (600-1326 AD), Vijayanagar period (1336-1706 AD), Nayaka period (1552-1674 AD) are some best examples for Tamil inscriptions are discovered nearly 60000 by the Epigraphy Branch, Archaeological Survey of India.

### Epigraphy as a Primary source material

Epigraphical sources are being taken as one of the source materials only after the advent of European scholars. The Department of Epigraphy with Headquarters at Mysore, amassed more than a 100000 - of Impressions-or- estampages and its allied transcripts of Inscriptions. It is no doubt that it helps us to understand the historical prospective culture of our country legacy. Epigraphical sources are considered to be the authentic source materials to have thorough knowledge about not only political upheavals and decline, but also the Social, Religious, Administrative and Economic history of particular period or a reign or region could be undertaken.

**Nature of Epigraphs:** Inscriptions on stones and copper-plates are two important categories. Most of the stone inscriptions are donatives in nature, while considerable numbers are secular. Innumerable numbers of inscriptions collected by our department are being chiseled on the wall of temple architecture which furnishes the details about ruling king at that time, the astronomical date, his administrative setup, the donor, the done, territorial division and nature of the donations, etc.

At the end of the inscription, imprecatory or benedictory verses like if the purpose for which it is not served or defeated, he will go to hell, otherwise if it is carried out perfectly, his foot (Pada) always on head etc. This was written by Prof K.A. Nilakanta shatri as The Chola History.

The copper plate records are mostly the royal order and gift of land grants made to the learned Brahmins and educational institutions and other purpose also. Most of the orders were issued by the king himself. Some of the records were also issued by the private. This was written by KG. Krishnan as karantai copper plates and Dr. T.S. Srithar IAS has written the book Indhalur copper plates in detail study. Tamil Nadu is famous for possessing Virakal or Hero-stones, which may be merely commemorative or even donatives,



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.04.197>

while Mahasati stone inscriptions described about the self-immolation erected in memory of (deceased hero's wives) self-killed women etc.

**Antiquity of writing in Epigraphy:** The engravings found on the seals unearthed in the Indus valley are said to be the earliest form of writing which is unfortunately not yet deciphered successfully. After the Indus scripts and before created the Brahmi scripts i.e., 5th century B.C. nothing is known about the system of writing of language as today.

**Early- scripts in Tamil - Epigraphy:** In the Southern India, a unique variety of scripts similar to Asokan Brahmi is found on the caves and cavern with some additional letters and symbols in Tamil Nadu. The scripts are specifically found from early Tamil language expect the letters la, ra and na. Hence, it is called by the Tamil Epigraphist and scholars as Tamil-Brahmi or Tamizi., belonging to 5th C-BC to 3<sup>rd</sup> C-AD.

From the 4th to 5th century AD onwards, we got thousands of Tamil inscriptions belonging to the various Dynastic rulers in Tamil Country like the Pallavas, the Cholas and the Pandyas etc. These Tamil records are written in three different type of scripts such as Vatteluttu, Tamil mixed with Grantha as bilingual.

The Grantha scripts are used for writing in the Sanskrit language in Tamil- inscriptions, because no scripts for the same in Tamil country, who introduced in Tamil-Nadu by Pallava – Dynasty.

**Language in Epigraphy:** In North-India the Prakrit was the most popular language during the period of the great king Asoka. . Subsequently during 2nd century onwards, Sanskrit became official language. Even in the copper plate charters of the Pallava, Chola and Pandya kings used in Sanskrit as an introduction part of writing for Royal order of copper plates. During the 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> century AD onwards, vernacular languages like, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam were adopted in writing inscription in their regions respectively in South India.

### What is verbalizing on Inscriptions?

**Importance in Epigraphy:** It is proud to say that, the prestigious Epigraphy office at Mysore preserves more than 100000 of Impressions or estampages along with their Transcripts. Out of these inscriptions nearly sixty thousand inscriptions are belonging to Tamil language and character, dated from early centuries of 5th C- BC to the modern British period These inscriptions are our treasure trove which helps us to understand and reconstruct the human history.

**Tamil Brahmi:** The origins and chronology of Tamil Brahmi are unclear. Several hypotheses have been proposed, with the views of epigraphist Iravatham Mahadevan being generally more accepted. According to Mahadevan, the Brahmi script from North India arrived via the southern inscriptions of Ashoka, and evolved into the Tamil Brahmi. This theory presupposes that the Brahmi script itself was either originated within the imperial courts of Mauryan kingdom or evolved from a more ancient foreign script and it was dispersed to South India and Sri Lanka after the 3rd century BCE. The alternate theory proposed by Nagaswamy is that there was an indigenous common source (proto-Vatteluttu) script from which both northern and southern Brahmi script emerged, which he respectively terms as Brahmi and Damili scripts Richard Salomon favors the Mahadevan theory.

According to Kamil Zvelebil's chronology proposal of 1973, the earliest Tamil Brahmi inscriptions such as the Netunceliyan rock inscriptions at the Mangulam site were derived from Ashokan Brahmi that was introduced to the Tamil region around 250 BCE It was adapted for the Tamil language by 220 BCE and led to the standardization of the Tamil language and literary norms of Maturai between 200 and 50 BCE These developments transformed the oral bardic Tamil literary culture to the written Sangam literature in the centuries that followed. The use of Tamil Brahmi continued through the 6th century CE, states Zvelebil.

Traditions acclaimed that this fertile land was once ruled by trio-kings viz. Chera, Chola and Pandya and Cheiftains. For the first time this fact is attested by an inscription engraved on the Grinar- rock –edict XIII during the reign period of the great Mauryan king Asoka, who ruled Maghada between 272-232 B.C.

The earliest rock Tamil - Brah.mi inscriptions found at Mangulam of Madurai District in Tamil Nadu, which exposed the name of title of the Pandya king as Neduncheliyan, Kadalagan, Vahadhi etc. In support of this evidences, Dr. Krishnamoorthy discovered a coin which read as Peruvaludi who is identified as Pandya king during Sangam period of 5th C BC to 3rd C AD.



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.04.197>

Another Tamil-Brahmi inscription discovered from the place Pugalur in Karur-District is attributing to the Chera kings' names Sellirunporai or Selvakadunko son Perunkadunko son Ilikadunko. This same also mentioned in Sangam literature i.e Pattupaattu. A Sangam age chieftain Athiyan-Neduman-Anji name is known from the inscription recovered from the place Jambai in South-Arcot District.

A lot of inscriptions in Vatteluttu Character and Tamil language have been copied by the ASI Mention may be made that the inscriptions are very important to be discussed here under. An inscription copied from Arachchalur in Erode district mentioned the dance system. And Arasalapuram in South-Arcot District depicted the figure of the rock-Kozi fighting, besides an inscription in Brahmi and vatteluttu characters. Another Important inscription from Amballur, speaks about the loyalty shown to the master by a Dog and village Eduttavainattam.

An interesting inscription copied from Irrattaimalai in Trichirappalli -District shows the various types of weapons used during 10th century A.D. Epigraphs engraved on the carved grinding stone upon rock have been copied from various places in Tamil Nadu by the Epigraphy office of Southern Zone, Chennai.

The place called Tiruvalangadu found the copper plates named after the same issued by Rajendra- chola dated 1012-1044 AD, Kanyakumari stone inscriptions issued by Virarajendra dated 1063-70 AD are said to be source of information in regard to the existence of early Chola dynasty and other copper plates also say examples for the same.

The rulers of Tamil country were having begun administrations in those days. The whole territory of ancient Tamil - Nadu was divided into so many mandalams which in turn bifurcated into so many Vala- nadus created by the great Chola king Rajaraja-I (985-1014 AD) which were further classified into many Kurrams and each Nadus, Kurram that administrative unites as many Urs or Villages, the lowest unit of hierarchical administrative set up known as Pidagai and kudumpu.

This was written by the famous eminent Epigraphist Dr. Prof. Y. Subarayalu and his book name is The political Geography of the Chola-Country also his student Dr. K.Panneerselvam has published the book named in Tamil literature.

The Brahmadeya village was maintained by the Sabha to which members had been selected from the Vedic - Brahmins [during the reign period of Parantaka Chola 907-955 A.D.] in a democratic way. It is well illustrated by the inscription recovered from the village Uttiramerur nearer in Kanchipuram. Other inscriptions from the place Thalaignaiyiru and Seygnalur in Tanjore District speaks about the rules regarding the election of members to the assembly of Kulottunga – Cholan Taninayakachchaturvedirmangalam during the period of Kulatturiga - Chola - III (1178-1212 AD.)

The Manur inscription of Marajadaiyan is furnishing the required qualification to become a member of the Assembly of ancient village of Mananallur.

Dr.K Parmerselvam has written in the first time the book named as Democratic System of ur - sabhas as equal statues of Brahmadeya-Sabhas by the election system, nearly it covered 100 of Sabhas and 50-different varyiams and its identifications, during the historical period evidenced from the Thousands of Tamil inscriptions.

Right from the Sangam period 5<sup>th</sup> C-BC to 3<sup>rd</sup> C.AD, Tamil-Nadu had a clear - cut judicial system. The different type of disputes, unlike murders, various type of criminal's punishments whatever it accelerates would be settled within the limits of the Temples- Sabha Brahmiyas- Sabha and ur- —villages- sabha itself.

Some of the Tamil inscriptions are frequently referring to the word Dharmasana, which means the king's seat of justice. The Velvikudi copper plates brilliantly describe the judgment delivered by the Pandya king Nedunchelian to a Brahmin who got back the ancestral property after so many centuries passed off.

Another important inscription copied from refers to the court of justice of Chitrameliperiyanadu who settled the murder case of own brothers for property rights in amicably. As like many of the criminal cases come - across in the Tamil Inscriptions existed from Sangam period CE 5th BC down to The Nayaka period (1552-1674 Al)), etc

The existences of various communities are referred to in Tamil literatures and inscriptions as Andanan, Idaiyar, kovolar, urranar,baradavar, valanr, ulavar, mallar, kadainr, eyinar, kadambar, kuravar,kuttarr kadasiyar, , kuyavar, kollar, tachchar, vannar, ,



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.04.197>

tudiyar, panar, ilicinan, pulaiman, paraiyar, vettiyar, kosar, maravar, kalvar yavanar, malavar, milachchar, vadukar, viraliyar, vettuvar, kaikkolar, mudaliyar, nattamankal, malayamakal, kudippalli, kudumbarkal, uvachchavar, kammalar, chettiyarkal and etc. These above are professional groups, not for varanasirama system in ancient Tamil country.

**Status of women:** Some of the inscriptions are referring to the status of women. Some of the Inscriptions are refers to the liberal donation made by a maid servant of Royal household to build a religious mata as well as maintenance of a person to supply flower to the god. Another lady served as a bodyguard (anukkiyar) to the king Rajendra - chola - I (1012-1044 AD) was also referred to in an inscription from Tamil Nadu.

Important inscriptions are Rajaraja-Chola -I (985-1014-AD) and Kulattunga Chola I 1070-1120 AD furnished the details about the land survey was undertaken and fixation of tax according to the potentiality [taram and taramili] of the land, water tanks were constructed to supply water to cultivate lands. Tanks, lakes and rivers were well maintained. This was written by Prof. Dr. Shanmugam as the revenue system of Chola country.

Another inscription from Kolattur refers to a dispute over the ownership of river between the temple authorities and one Vikrama-Chola. Nadalvan Probably chieftain. Such a type of disputes were remain from Tamil inscriptions i.e land disputes, land ownership disputes, land document disputes, land boundary disputes, rights of tax collection disputes, rights of worship disputes in temple festival right disputes in the temple work rights disputes in the temple and communal disputes etc, existed. It was decided that after irrigating certain specified field, one half of the income from fishing in the -river should be made to the temple authorities while the other half to be retained by individuals.

One Inscription belonging to Virarajendra-Chola (1063-70 AD) found at Ennayiram in South-Arcot district furnished the provision made to maintain a hostel and a college for vedic-studies. In a stone inscription copied from Venkatesa-perurnal temple at Tirumukkudal near Kanchipuram, it is stated that besides a hospital, the temple maintained a hostel and a college.

One of the inscriptions copied from the place Tiruvorriyur, states that 60 veils of land was donated to maintain and upkeep of teachers and pupils to study 14 aphorism of the Vyakarananda-peramal (Parini Bhagavan] in the mandapa specifically constructed for this purpose. An important inscription found at Tiruvidavayal, contains II-verses of the sacred Tamil poem Thevaram written and sung by one of the 63- Nayanars (hagiologist), Gnansambandar who praised the god Tiruvidaivayal udaiyar.

One of the divine duties of the rulers was to construct temples and dedicated to the god and goddess, they liked. The king of Panava dynasty MahEndravarma is the pioneer on this line of sacred duties.

**Grantha inscriptions:** The Grantha inscriptions engraved on the rock at Mandagapattu in South Arcot districts narrates the style of constructing an abode and dedicated to the tri-gods Eswara, Vishnu- and Brahma.

An inscription issued during the reign period of Rajaraja -Chola-I 1085-1014 AD, speaks about the erection of the big vimana - for the lord Shiva Rajarajeshwara temple at Thanjavur by the king named after him.

In those days a well-trained army was maintained to protect people from foreign invasion. A Tamil epigraph of Kulottunga - Chola - III 1178-1218 AD, copied from the village - Arakandanallur in Tirukkoviilur taluk of South-Arcot district, furnishes the political compact among the chieftains. The conditions laid down in the agreement are given below.

1. Injuries on any one would be injuries to all.
2. Enemies were common to all
3. Any hostility occurred should be opposed by all.
4. Treachery or betrayal would not take place.
5. Any territory acquired from enemy kings would be distributed equally among them.
6. Secret emissary would not be sent to enemy king.
7. If any peace committee from enemy kings arrived should be informed each other.
8. During the time of war over enemy kings, alliance partner would dispatch army.

One of the records of Pandya king, copied from the village Kunnandar-koyil, states that the chiefs of Irandumalai-nadu gave assurance -to-the-head:man of this place that when they take arms and -fight with each one to another they would desist from destroying



Cover Page



DOI: <http://ijmer.in.doi./2022/11.04.197>

the village under their protection [Kaval] and would cause no injury to the cultivators. If any person is so injured, they would pay a fine of 100 panam and if a village is destroyed, they would pay a fine of 500 panam and as like found many rebels in Tamil Inscriptions.

**Conclusion:** Thus, we come to know from the Tamil inscriptions the different Type scripts, paleography, Dynasty, Time, Royal orders, Political Territorial- divisions, Donations, Cultural activities, Social - setups, Economic - status, Religious - position, Administrations power, Arts, Architectures, Education- centers, Hospitals, Libraries, Marriage and first-nights and other lovely matters are come - across of our hoary - past.

What is not in available in our Epigraphy and related subjects? Yes, all in our hand, we will take up all for all our history. Because we are speaking about our history more than 175 - years, but not yet be completed, further need the research work critically, analytically, comparatively which are the new titles not taken up so far and make authentic good history of our great country in successfully.

### Reference

1. Iravatham Mahadevan (2003). Early Tamil epigraphy from the earliest times to the sixth century A.D. Harvard University Press. USA.
2. Rajan, K (2008), "Situating the Beginning of Early Historic Times in Tamil Nadu: Some Issues and Reflections", Social Scientist, Journal Chennai.
3. "Tamil Brahmi letters found in archaeological exploration" Deccan Chronicle. 2 November 2016. Retrieved 1 February 2019.
4. K. Rajan (2014). Iron Age - Early Historic Transition in South India (PDF). Institute of Archaeology. Chennai.
5. R. Umamaheshwari (2018). Reading History with the Tamil Jains: A Study on Identity, Memory and Marginalisation. Madras.
6. Subramaniam, T. S. (1 May 2006). "From Indus Valley to coastal Tamil Nadu". The Hindu. Chennai, India. Archived from the original on 6 May 2008.
7. "An epigraphic perspective on the antiquity of Tamil". The Hindu. 24 June 2010. Retrieved 23 February 2014.
8. Dilp K Chakrabarti (2009). India: An Archaeological History: Palaeolithic Beginnings to Early Historic Foundations. University of Cambridge: Oxford University Press.
9. <http://www.tnarch.gov.in/excavation/Sembiankandiyur.htm>
10. <http://www.tnarch.gov.in/excavation/ala.htm>
11. <http://www.tnarch.gov.in/sitemus/mus11.htm>
12. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/potsherd-with-tamilbrahmi-script-found-in-oman/article4038866.ece> . 2012.