

Unicode Technical Note #21: Tamil Numbers

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Originally, Tamils did not use zero, nor did they use positional digits (having separate symbols for the numbers 10, 100 and 1000). Symbols for the numbers are similar to other Tamil letters, with some minor changes.

For example, the number 3782 is not written as **௩௭௮௨** as in modern usage. Instead it is written as **௩ சூ ள ன ன அ ஓ உ**. This would be read as they are written as

Three Thousands, Seven Hundreds, Eight Tens, Two; or in Tamil as

மூன்று-ஆயிரத்து-எழுநூற்று-எண்-பத்து-இரண்டு. [1]

Reference [1] uses Tamil numerals for Chapter numbers. This usage is based on modern practice, using both positional digits and zero.

Reference [2] gives a list of numerals in the ancient format, with some equivalents in modern format, some in Arabic numerals, and a few in words. The list is reproduced below with Arabic equivalents, and a few modern word equivalents.

க = 1

உ = 2

௩ = 3

சூ = 4

௫ = 5

சூ = 6

௭ = 7

அ = 8

சூ = 9

ஓ = 10

ஓக = 11

ஓஉ = 12

ஓ௩ = 13

ஓசூ = 14

ଓଠ = 15

ଓକ୍ = 16

ଓଂ = 17

ଓଞ୍ = 18

ଓକ୍ = 19

ଓଓ = 20

ଠ = 100

ଓଠ = 200

ଠଠ = 300

ଠଠଓକ୍ = 156

କ୍ = 1000

କ୍କ = 1001

କ୍କଓଓ = 1040

ଞକ୍ = 8000

ଓକ୍ = 10,000

ଂଓକ୍ = 70,000

କଓଓକ୍ = 90,000

ଠକ୍ = 100,000 (lakh)

ଞଠକ୍ = 800,000

ଓଠଠକ୍ = 1,000,000 (10 lakhs)

କଓଓଠଠକ୍ = 9,000,000

ଠଠଠକ୍ = 10,000,000 (crore)

ଓଠଠଠକ୍ = 100,000,000 (10 crore)

ଠଠଠଠକ୍ = 1,000,000,000 (100 crore)

କ୍ଠଠଠଠକ୍ = 10,000,000,000 (thousand crore)

ଓକ୍ଠଠଠଠକ୍ = 100,000,000,000 (10 thousand crore)

ଠକ୍ଠଠଠଠକ୍ = 1,000,000,000,000 (lakh crore)

ଠଠଠକ୍ଠଠଠଠକ୍ = 100,000,000,000,000 (crore crore)

[1] mozi varalARu, by munucAmi varatarAcan, published by The South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, Tinnevely, Limited, November 1954, p. 357-358 (page numbers from 14th Edition, December 1996).

[2] iniya tamiz ilakkaNam by yokisri cuttAnan~ta pAratiyAr, published by Kavitha Publications, p. 201-204. Scanned source from URL:
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/5180/numeral.html>