Interpreting the Indus Script: The Dravidian Solution*

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Dravidian University has been established to promote research into Dravidian languages, literature and culture. Location of the University at Kuppam, the tri-junction of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu, symbolises the objective of the University to serve the cause of the Dravidian.

The venue and the occasion have pre-determined the subject of my address today, namely, recent advances in the study of the Indus Script. My field is Tamil Epigraphy, with special interest in Brahmi and Indus scripts. I consider it providential that the present occasion has coincided with two important landmarks in my research career spanning more than half a century. One of them relates to the Brahmi and the other to the Indus scripts. I shall mention their significance briefly before proceeding with the subject matter of today’s address.

Recent discoveries in early Tamil epigraphy

The first is the recent publication of the second and enlarged edition of my book, *Early Tamil Epigraphy*. This edition includes not only Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions, but also the earliest pottery inscriptions in Prakrit and Old Sinhala languages found from recent excavations in Tamilnadu. Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions are the earliest records in Dravidian. Pottery inscriptions in the neighboring languages found in Tamilnadu represent the earliest attestation of the interaction of Dravidian with Indo-Aryan cultures in South India. Some of the

remarkable new discoveries in this field which deserve special mention include:

- Herostones with Tamil-Brahmi inscriptions dating from the late megalithic period;
- Enormous quantities of Tamil-Brahmi pottery inscriptions excavated at Kodumanal, an important centre for manufacture of gemstones;
- A very early Tamil-Brahmi pottery inscription assigned to about 200 BCE excavated at Tissamaharama in Southern Sri Lanka, which records the ‘written agreement of the assembly’, probably a trade guild of Sri Lankan Tamil merchants, which also issued coin-like lead tokens with Tamil-Brahmi legends;
- Tamil-Brahmi pottery inscriptions from the excavations at Pattanam, identified with Muciri, the famous Cera port, engaged in extensive trade with Rome in Classical times;
- Tamil-Brahmi pottery inscriptions found abroad at Quseir al-Qadim and Berenike in Egypt, Oman in South Arabian Peninsula and in Thailand.

These discoveries shed new light not only on the extensive maritime and inland trading by the Tamils, but also on the early and widespread literacy in Tamilnadu. I have no doubt that the recent discoveries in this field will steer the course of historical and linguistic research towards new directions with greater focus on the impact of early literacy in Tamilnadu and the early interaction of Dravidian with Indo-Aryan languages in South India.
Recent advances in the study of the Indus Script

The second recent development is what I claim to be a major breakthrough in interpreting the Indus Script. It is this which has prompted me to choose this challenging topic for today’s address.

The results I have obtained so far confirm that the language of the Indus Script is an early form of Dravidian. I do not claim to have deciphered the Indus Script completely. But I sincerely believe that I have discovered important clues for interpreting many of the frequent Indus signs and sequences proving conclusively the Dravidian character of the language and the survival of the Indus elements in the twin streams of later Dravidian and Indo-Aryan traditions. Taking into account the occasion and the time constraint, I shall restrict today’s presentation to the Dravidian character of the Indus Civilisation and its later survivals in the Dravidian South. I shall be making only incidental references to the Indo-Aryan survivals through loan translations which corroborate the Dravidian origin of the Indus Civilisation.

‘Aryan’ and ‘Dravidian’ are languages, not races

I should like to clarify at the outset that I employ the terms ‘Aryan’ and ‘Dravidian’ purely in the linguistic sense without any racial or ethnic connotation. It cannot be otherwise, as people could, and often did as in the present instance, switch over from one language to another. Speakers of Aryan languages have merged with those of Dravidian and Munda creating a composite Indian society containing elements inherited from every source. This makes it likely that the Indus art, religious motifs and craft traditions survived and can be traced in Sanskrit from the days of the RV and also in Old Tamil anthologies. This is indeed the basic assumption
that underlies my work on interpreting the Indus Script through bilingual parallels.

**Indus Civilisation was Pre-Aryan**

There is substantial evidence that the Indus Civilisation was pre-Aryan.

- The Indus Civilisation was mainly urban, while the early Vedic society was rural and pastoral. There were no cities in the early Vedic period.

- The Indus seals depict many animals but not the horse. The horse and the chariot with spoked wheels were the defining features of the Aryan-speaking societies. The bronze chariot found at Daimabad in Western Deccan, the southernmost Indus settlement, has solid wheels and is drawn by a pair of humped bulls, not horses (Fig. 1).

- The tiger is often featured on Indus seals and sealings, but the animal is not mentioned in the *RV*.

**Indus Civilisation was Dravidian**

There is substantial linguistic evidence favouring Dravidian authorship of the Indus Civilisation. The evidence includes –

- The presence of Dravidian loanwords and loan translations in the *RV*.

- The substratum influence of Dravidian on Indo-Aryan as seen in phonological changes like introduction of retroflex sounds, morphological changes like switch-over from inflexion to post-fixation, and near-identical syntactical structures moving Indo-Aryan closer to Dravidian than to Indo-European languages.
- Computer analysis has shown that the Indus language had only suffixes (as in Dravidian) and no prefixes (as in Indo-Aryan) or infixes (as in Munda).

- The Indus religion as revealed by pictorial depiction on seals and sealings included worship of a buffalo-horned male god, mother-goddesses, the pipal tree, the serpent and possibly the phallic symbol, all of which are known to have been derived from the aboriginal populations.

I had earlier considered Brahui, a Dravidian language still spoken in Baluchistan, as evidence for the Dravidian character of the Indus Civilisation. I have revised my opinion as experts in Dravidian linguistics now hold that Brahui was originally a North-eastern Dravidian language with many shared features with Kurux and Malto, and that it moved to its present location in later times. (Bh. Krishnamurti 2003:27).

**Aryan Migration into South Asia**

The Aryan-speaking people migrated into South Asia in the second millennium BCE in the wake of the decline and eventual collapse of the Indus Civilisation. The incoming Aryans were much fewer in numbers, but could achieve elite dominance over the local population due to their better mobility and advanced weaponry. Some sections of the Indus population, unable or unwilling to be assimilated into the new social order, migrated southward and eastward to establish new settlements. But the majority of the Indus population stayed back, and in course of time, adopted the dominant Aryan speech. Thus was born the Indo-Aryan society speaking Indo-Aryan languages, but retaining much of the pre-Aryan Dravidian cultural elements in religious practices, agriculture, craft traditions and social institutions.
Southern Migration of the Indus people

Re-interpretation of the Agastya legend

The southern migration of Agastya, attested in both Indo-Aryan and Dravidian sources, is the most important evidence to link the Indus Civilisation with the Dravidian South. It has generally been held that Agastya led the earliest Aryan settlement of South India and introduced Vedic Aryan culture there (G.S.Ghurye 1977). This theory does not explain how Agastya, the Aryan sage, became the founding father, not of Vedic religion or culture in the South, but of Tamil language, literature and grammar. The interpretation of the Agastya legend in terms of Aryan acculturation of the South was mainly developed before the discovery of the Indus Civilisation. It has now become necessary to take a fresh look at the Agastya legend and attempt an alternative interpretation which would harmonise the core features of the legend, namely the northern origin of Agastya and his southern apotheosis as the eponymous founder of Tamil language and culture.

The migration of the common ancestors of the Vēḷir-Yādava clans led by Agastya from Dvārakā in Gujarat to South India in pre-historic times has been extensively documented by M.Raghavaiyangar in his classic Vēḷir Varalāru (1907). I have extrapolated his theory back in time to link the Indus Civilisation with South Dravidian cultures, especially Old Tamil (Mahadevan 1970, 1986, 2009 & 2010). I have also identified the reference to Agastya and his inseparable water-pitcher in the expressions vaṭapāl munivan (‘northern sage’) and taṭavu (‘jar’) occurring in Puranāṇūr (poem 201), one of the earliest Old Tamil anthologies containing much older oral and bardic traditions.
The story of the Southern migration of the Vēḷir from Dvārakā under the leadership of Agastya is told by Naccinārkkkiṉiyar at two places in his commentary on Tolkāppiyam (pāyiram; Porul.34). He narrates how Agastya led eighteen kings and eighteen families of the Vēḷir to the South, where they settled down clearing the forests and cultivating the land, while Agastya himself took his abode in the Potiyil Hill in the extreme south.

It is significant that the name Vēḷir which refers to a class of petty rulers and chieftains in Old Tamil, is derived from the root ṣēl ‘to worship, offer sacrifices, a priest’. This interpretation links the Vēḷir of the South with the priest-rulers of the Indus Civilisation.

The Agastya legend may now be reinterpreted as referring to the exodus of elements of Dravidian-speaking people to South India after the decline and collapse of the Indus Civilisation.

I have also been able to discover evidence from the Indus texts corroborating the historicity of the Agastya legend. The critical discoveries are the word aka-tt-(i) (‘Lord of the House’) and its constant association with the jar sign.

The most frequent initial pair of signs in the Indus texts is interpreted as aka-tt-, the oblique form of Dr.aka(m) ‘inside, house, place, fort, mind’; the corresponding personal noun is aka-tt-i ‘he of
the house’, which is the source of the loanword *agasti* (Atharvaveda) and *agastya* (RV). The most frequent end sign in the Indus texts is the jar. The myth of jar-born sages is very ancient and is found even in the RV (7.33). There it is said that Vasiṣṭha and Agastya were generated by Mitra and Varuṇa in a water jar. Agastya is especially known as the ‘jar-born’ sage (*kumbha-sambhava*). The constant occurrence of the jar sign following names and titles of the Indus ruling classes led in later times to the symbol being specially associated with priestly and royal families. Thus the jar sign of the Indus Script is the ultimate source of the myth of the miraculous birth of Agastya from a water pitcher and many other ‘jar-born’ legends in Northern and Southern traditions.

Re-interpretation of the Agastya legend has led to the discovery that *agasti* was not the personal name of an individual or a *gōtra*, but was originally the title of an office, ‘Ruler of the House’. Compare *aka-tt-i* with Old Ta. *aka-tt-ōn* ‘lord of the fort’ (Tol.Poruḷ. 20.12). Compare also the near-identical title of the ancient Egyptian rulers, Pharaoh, lit., ‘great House’, which evolved into an enduring royal title. The Egyptian parallel is not merely verbal, but is also graphic. The linguistic and graphic comparisons have resulted in the broad interpretation of three frequent Indus signs for ‘house (palace, temple)’, ‘fortified house (fort, citadel)’ and ‘city’ as illustrated in the chart. (Mahadevan 1981, 2009, 2010).
Archaeological evidence of Indus-like graffiti from Tamilnadu

The evidence of pottery graffiti supports the theory of migration of sections of the Indus people to South India. B.B. Lal (1960) has compared the signs of the Indus Script with the symbols occurring as pottery graffiti in chalcolithic and megalithic cultures. He found that “eighty-nine percent of the megalithic symbols go back to Chalcolithic-Harappan times (and) conversely eighty-five percent of the Harappan-Chalcolithic symbols continue down to megalithic times.” Lal’s work has shown that there does seem to be a deep genetic link between the signs of the Indus Script and the Indus-like graffiti found in Tamilnadu. I shall mention only a few of the more important finds in recent years.

Inscribed Neolithic Axe from Sembian-Kandiyyur

A Neolithic polished stone axe with three Indus-like symbols pecked on it was discovered accidentally at Sembian-Kandiyyur in the lower Kaveri delta in 2006 (Fig. 2). The three symbols on the axe...
are virtually identical with the corresponding signs in the Indus Script. It is likely that the symbols were marked on the axe during late Neolithic or early megalithic times. (Parpola, Fuller & Boivin 2007; Mahadevan 2009 for discussion.)

**Terracotta Dish from Sulur with Indus-like symbols**

An inscribed terracotta dish from Sulur dated in the first century BCE is in the British Museum (No.1935.4.19.15). The dish is incised on the concave inner side with a large X-like symbol occupying the whole field and with four other symbols in smaller size within the lower quadrant (Fig. 3). I have drawn attention to the remarkable resemblance of the Sulur Dish graffiti with the inscription on a miniature stone tablet from Harappa, showing not only similar signs but a similar sequence (Mahadevan 2007, 2009).

**Indus-like symbol on pottery from Sanur**

Pottery found from the megalithic graves excavated at Sanur is marked with a recurring group of three symbols (Fig. 4). Lal (1960) has drawn particular attention to the close similarity of one of these signs to a frequent Indus sign. This has turned out to be one of the symbols frequently found as graffiti from many sites including Pattanam (Muciri) in Kerala, Sembiyan-Kandiyur, Mangudi and Coimbatore in Tamilnadu. I have identified the Indus sign depicting a seated deity as the Dravidian god *muruku*. (Mahadevan 1999, 2006, 2009).

**Indus-like symbols on South Indian pottery from Thailand**

A potsherd of South Indian origin has been excavated in Thailand, which shows two symbols (including the ‘seated deity’) occurring with the same sequence as in the Indus texts (Mahadevan 2010) (Fig. 5).
Fig. 1. Bronze chariot from Daimabad, Western Deccan.
Fig. 2. Neolithic Polished Stone Axe with Indus-like graffiti. Sembiyan Kandiyur, Tamilnadu.
Fig. 3
A. A Terracotta Dish with Indus-like graffiti. Sulur, Tamilnadu.
B. Miniature stone tablet from Harappa

Fig. 4.
A. Pottery inscription with three Indus-like symbols. Sanur.
B. Pottery Inscription from Kalibangan
C. Indus signs depicting a seated deity
Fig. 5
A. South Indian megalithic pottery inscription found in Thailand.
B. Indus signs and texts with seated deity.

Fig. 6
A. Indus Seal impression. Vaisali, Bihar.
B. Frequent Indus Text on miniature tablets from Harappa.

Fig. 7. Jar sign incised on pottery. Kalibangan.
A comparison between the pottery graffiti and the corresponding Indus signs and sequences indicates that the languages are linked and can only be Dravidian.

**Eastern Migration of the Indus people**

Though the present study is concerned more with the southern migration of the Indus population, I shall make a brief mention of the evidence for their eastern migration as well.

**An Indus Seal from Vaisali, Bihar**

An inscribed seal (Fig. 6) was found during the excavations at Vaisali, Bihar (Sinha & Roy 1969). The legend on the seal is identical with a frequent three-sign text found mostly on the miniature tablets from Harappa (ASI Concordance 1977: pp. 197-203). The seal was found in the debris of the fortifications; hence the date (200 BCE-200 CE) assigned to it by the excavators is not based on stratigraphy. Most probably, the seal came from the lowest level reached at this site assigned to about 1100 BCE. The Indus text on the seal was later identified by B.B.Chakraborty (1981). I attribute the seal to the migrant Indus population settled in Eastern India after the collapse of the Indus Civilisation (Mahadevan 1999).

**Dravidian Interpretation of the Indus Script: Methodology**

**Identification of Dravidian roots**

Word signs in the Indus Script are interpreted conventionally as basic roots since the actual shape of the words cannot be directly ascertained unlike in alphabetic or syllabic scripts. The core meaning of the signs is determined from a broad range of etyma. Selection from among the suitable etyma is guided by the context which indicates whether the sign is an ideogram conveying meaning or a phonetic sign to be read through rebus.
**Rebus Writing**

All ancient pictographic scripts resorted to rebus writing for depicting words difficult to pictorialise. In this method, a picture sign is read with another meaning suggested by the same sound. For example, the picture of an ‘eye’ can be read as ‘I’ first person singular pronoun, if the language is English. Rebus writing is language-specific, and a successful identification guarantees that the underlying language has been correctly identified.

**A Sumerian Example**

In Sumerian, the word *ti* had the meanings, ‘arrow’ and ‘life’. Hence the Sumerian script employed the arrow sign, which is easy to draw, to depict the word for ‘life’.

**Identification of grammatical signs in the Indus Script**

(1) **The arrow Sign**

The arrow sign is also the best example so far discovered for rebus writing in the Indus Script. The sign is easily identified as an arrow from its shape. The most common position of the sign in the Indus texts is final indicating that it is a grammatical marker of some kind. The most common word for ‘arrow’ in Dravidian is *ampu*. The grammatical morph *(a)mbu* occurs as the non-masculine singular suffix in Old Telugu. The match provides a perfect rebus (Mahadevan 1998).

This single example of a perfect rebus in the Indus Script is sufficient to prove the Dravidian character of the Indus language.
The jar sign depicts a vessel with handles (ears) and a tapering bottom. The pictorial identification has been conclusively proved by the discovery of the sign incised realistically on pottery excavated at Kalibangan (Fig. 7).

The jar sign occurs mostly in the final position in the Indus texts and has been identified by structural analysis as a grammatical marker. Since the arrow sign has been proved to be the non-masculine singular suffix, it follows automatically that its more frequent twin, the jar sign, must be the masculine singular suffix.

This result is virtually independent of the pictorial or linguistic identification of the jar sign. However, I have also been able to determine the phonetic value of the jar sign as $-(a)nru$, the masculine singular suffix in Old Telugu. This result was achieved by a comparison with similar grammatical morphs in the earliest Kannada, Tamil and Telugu inscriptions, and also through rebus with ‘vessel’ words in Dravidian (Mahadevan 1970, 2009, 2010).
The occurrence of –(a)nu and –(a)pu respectively as the masculine and non-masculine singular suffixes is attested in the cave inscriptions of Mahendra Pallava (590-630 CE).

Old Telugu Inscriptions of Mahendra Pallava from caves in Tamilnadu

(3) Four-Stroke Modifier is the plural suffix

Some of the signs of the Indus Script have a modified form with the addition of four short vertical strokes placed symmetrically around the signs. Heras (1953) identified the four-stroke modifier as a plural suffix from parallels in the Egyptian hieroglyphic script. I have shown through an analysis of the fish signs that the four-stroke modifier functions like the jar and arrow signs and must therefore be a grammatical marker.

Fish signs with four-stroke modifier (epicene plural suffix)

Since the jar and arrow signs indicate the singular, the four-stroke modifier, the third member of the set, must stand for the epicene (masculine and/or feminine) plural suffix –ar in Dravidian (Mahadevan 1986, 2011).
**Gender-Number Paradigm in the Indus Texts**

The identification of the three grammatical suffixes discussed above has led to a major breakthrough, the formulation of the gender-number paradigm in the Indus Texts. The paradigm is the basic framework of the grammar of the Indus language. Discovering the paradigm in the Indus texts is bound to lead to rapid advances by identifying names and titles which form the bulk of the Indus texts, especially on the seals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIGN</th>
<th>Pictorial value</th>
<th>Phonetic value in Dravidian</th>
<th>Grammatical category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>🗯️</td>
<td>jar</td>
<td>-(a)nru</td>
<td>Masculine (human) singular suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>👆</td>
<td>arrow</td>
<td>-(a)mpu</td>
<td>Non-masculine singular suffix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>🏭️</td>
<td>four stroke modifier</td>
<td>-(a)r</td>
<td>Epicene (human male and/or female) plural suffix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Paradigm of Gender-Number Suffixes in the Indus Texts**

**Identification of Lexical Words in the Indus Texts:**
**Some examples**

**Place Signs in the Indus Script**

The Indus city was meticulously planned with grid-like streets oriented towards the four cardinal directions and a fortified citadel on a high artificial terrace. It seems likely that the major concepts around which the Indus city was organised would also figure prominently in the inscriptions of the period. It is thus probable that important places and institutions like the city, citadel, palace,
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indus Sign</th>
<th>Pictorial identification</th>
<th>Phonetic value in Dravidian</th>
<th>Old Tamil parallels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Indus Sign" /></td>
<td>city</td>
<td>pāl(-i)</td>
<td>pāḷi ‘town, city’. cf. pāḷi (Ka.) ‘row, line, order’; pāṇṭi ‘a Tamil dynasty’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Indus Sign" /></td>
<td>palace (fort, court)</td>
<td>aka-(tt-i)</td>
<td>akattiyān ‘eponymous ancestor of the Tamils’ (i) cōla, cōliya ‘a Tamil dynasty’ (ii) cūḷ ‘counsel’ (iii) uḷi, uḷai ‘precincts of the palace’ (iv) uḷaiyar ‘counsellors’ (v) ūḷiyar ‘temple/palace servants’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Indus Sign" /></td>
<td>assembly (place at four-road junction)</td>
<td>ampal(a)</td>
<td>ampalam ‘assembly, court, temple’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Indus Sign" /></td>
<td>exclusive quarters</td>
<td>kēr(-i)</td>
<td>(i) cēra, cēral ‘a Tamil dynasty’ (ii) cēri ‘exclusive habitation of Brahmans (inscr.) (or) excluded habitation of depressed classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Indus Sign" /></td>
<td>ordinary quarters</td>
<td>pāṭ(-i)</td>
<td>(i) pāṭi ‘hamlet’ (ii) pāṇṭi ‘a Tamil dynasty’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Place signs in the Indus Script and their evolution in Old Tamil polity
assembly hall, etc. would be represented by ideograms in the Indus Script. The place signs are likely to occur in the initial position, judging from later parallels in Old Tamil, Telugu and Kannada inscriptions. Place names in the Indus Script can also be interpreted as the corresponding personal nouns. The chart shows the ideographic identification of Indus signs depicting the city, palace/court, assembly, exclusive and ordinary quarters.

The ideographic and linguistic identification of the place signs in the Indus Script leads for the first time to the original significance of the Old Tamil words when compared with the Indus signs. Thus aka-ṭṭ-i ‘lord of the house’ was the Ruler. The cōla were counsellors ‘surrounding’ and ‘advising’ (cūl) the Ruler. The cēra or cēral were high officials residing in exclusive quarters (kēr(-i)) with restricted entry. The pānṭi were the commoners who resided in the streets, pāṭ-i of the (lower) city (pāḷ-i). These results corroborate the folklore that the cēra, cōla and pānṭi were brothers who lived together in one place in ancient times (Caldwell, Reprint 1961:14). It is significant that in the earliest Tamil tradition the names cēra, cōla and pānṭiya preceded personal names in the manner of place names, (e.g.) cēraṇ ceṅkuṭṭuvan (Mahadevan 1981).

The Indus heritage of Andhra

The Andhras are mentioned among the non-Aryan people living beyond the borders of the early Aryan settlements (Ai. Br. 7: 18). Since virtually every early Dravidian masculine name or title ended in -(a)nṛ- (see Pallava inscription on Page 18), the suffix became the source of the ethnic name andhra through a loanword:

Dr. anṛ- > IA andr- > andhra.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indus Signs</th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
<td>bearer (sustainer)</td>
<td>jar-bearer (food-bearer)</td>
<td>arrow-bearer (arms-bearer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Dravidian</td>
<td>por-ay &lt; poru ‘to bear’</td>
<td>cā(ta)- por-ay &lt;cāta(m) ‘food’</td>
<td>ey-por-ay &lt;ey ‘arrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vedic (Indo-Aryan)</td>
<td>bharata &lt;bhr ‘to bear’</td>
<td>bharad-vāja (vāja ‘food’)</td>
<td>bharanta (warrior caste)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purāṇic (Andhra)</td>
<td>vāhana &lt;vah ‘to bear, carry’</td>
<td>sāta-vāhana (cāta &gt; sāta)</td>
<td>sāli-vāhana &lt; śalya ‘arrow’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Tamil</td>
<td>porai, irum-porai</td>
<td>cāta- porai (ātan poraiyan)</td>
<td>evvi (a Vēḷir clan)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Indus Heritage in Indian Historical Tradition**
Indus origin of sata, the Andhra dynastic name.

A sacrificial vessel with food offerings used in Vedic ritual was called sata (VS, ŚBr.). The term sata occurs with the meaning ‘food’ in Kanheri cave inscriptions (Nagaraju, JASI 1979); cf. sādamu (Te.), ‘cooked rice’. The Andhra dynastic names, Sāta-vāhana and Sāli-vāhana seem to be loan translations from the corresponding Dravidian titles depicted by the Indus ideograms, JAR-BEARER and ARROW-BEARER as shown in the chart (See also Mahadevan 2010).

Indus Civilisation and the Indian Historical Tradition

The Indus heritage is shared by Dravidian as well as Indo-Aryan speakers. The Dravidian heritage is linguistic. The Indo-Aryan heritage is cultural preserved through loanwords, loan translations and myths. This important phenomenon is well illustrated by the bearer signs of the Indus Script and the evolution of concepts represented by the signs in later Indian tradition. Interpretation of the Indus Script through bilingual parallels has revealed hitherto unsuspected links among different languages and regional cultures. Thus the Indus-Dravidian title of por-ay ‘sustainer’ borne by the priestly office-bearers of the Indus Civilisation survived as Porai, the Cēra dynastic name in the far South. The same Indus title was translated in Vedic Sanskrit as Bharata, the name of an important people in the RV. They are also the central figures in the Mahābhārata, our national epic. The Bharatas gave our country its name Bhārata. In yet another variation of the same tradition, the Andhra dynasty, speaking Telugu, a Dravidian language, translated their names into Indo-Aryan (Sātakarṇi, Sātavāhana and Sālivāhana), as they were vassals of the Mauryan dynasty whose court language was Prakrit. As I read it, the message of the Indus Script is: unity in diversity.