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Master of Science: Interactive Digital Media

Title: Reinventing Tamil Script – Transition from Palm Leaves to Digital Screens

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Abstract:

The rise in number of smartphones and ISP's competition to provide unlimited data at a lower cost has made it possible for people in rural parts of India to access smartphones. These people would want to access technology via smartphones in their regional language as they do not have proficiency in other languages. Recent surveys too confirm this by stating that there has been a decline in the usage of English language across the internet. The truth is, there has been a rise in people expressing their thoughts on internet in a language they are comfortable with, due to the advancements in telecommunication spectrum. Ever since, there has been a push to create digital typefaces for non-Latin scripts. Supporting this statement is a report, released by NASSCOM-Akmai Technologies last August, which said, 'by 2020, there will be an estimated 730 million Internet users in India — and of the new users, 75% will access it from rural India, and a similar number will engage using local languages.' This gives rise to the question, if we have enough fonts for every regional language, especially Tamil, which happens to be my native language. Upon reading through the works of various researchers and scholars, it was evident that the typeface designers and other tech giants like Google and Adobe have realized the potential to create digital fonts for Indian markets. Over the past few years, there have been a flurry of digital Indic fonts making its way to the font repositories, but these works are predominantly designed for Devanagari and other north Indian scripts like Bengali and Gujarati. Tamil is given very little attention. This thesis aims to identify the gaps in the research and typographical works of typeface designers, thereby establishing why there is a need for more digital Tamil fonts. This study also acknowledges the time and effort it takes to

create a typeface for Tamil script. It is partly due to the number of characters and also because it requires proper understand of the writing system. If ignored or slightly modified, these fonts might become illegible. Therefore these typefaces, while retaining their linguistic features, must be made available to the native readers, for them to customize them based on their requirements. With Google and Adobe expressing interest in Variable fonts and also trying to expand their Indic typeface collections, this thesis explores the solution of using type design technologies like OpenType Variable fonts, to reinvent Tamil script for digital screens.