

Tamil Lesson # 1

The Alphabet

How many letters are there in the Tamil alphabet? The standard answer to that question is 247. These 247 include 12 vowels and 18 consonants. The 18 consonants are the building blocks of the alphabet. Many of the others letters are variations of these basic letters.

There is also 1 letter, rarely used, that represents a syllable with a vowel sound followed by a consonant sound, and 216 letters that represent syllables with a consonant sound followed by a vowel sound (many of these letters are not single symbols but are composed of 2 or even 3 symbols). That adds up to 247.

However, there are also 6 letters borrowed from neighbouring languages that are sometimes used, though less and less, and most of these letters can be used with variations representing the vowel sounds that go with them. Also, there are some letters of the Tamil alphabet that are never used. As to the form of the letters, there is some degree of variation in details between fonts used in different books and magazines.

The Lessons

- Lesson 1 will introduce the 12 vowels and 18 consonants of the Tamil alphabet.
- Lessons 2 - 7 will introduce the syllable letters set by set. There are 12 sets of 18 letters. There is some variation in the details of drawing some the letters of the Tamil alphabet. The fonts used in some books and magazines may have an open curl where the fonts used in other books and magazines have a closed circle. Some of these variations will be mentioned as the 12 vowels and 18 consonants are introduced in the first lesson, but the variations will not be repeated in the subsequent lessons even though they would also apply to the syllable letters that correspond to the 18 consonants. You can choose how you would like to draw them according to your own preference.
- Lesson 8 will introduce the borrowed letters, sometimes called the Grantha letters, sometimes referred to as Sanskrit letters. (Sanskrit is an ancient language of India that, like Latin, is no longer spoken but from which several modern languages are derived) In each lesson there is vocabulary list. It will only include words composed of letters that you would have already learned at that point.

The Sounds

For each letter, an approximate equivalent sound from English will be given. However, it is important to keep in mind that these are only approximations. The set of sounds used in one language are never identical to those used in another language. Often sounds may be very close but not quite identical. To get the actual sounds of the Tamil letters and the Tamil language, it is best to listen to native Tamil speakers or recordings of reading in Tamil. In addition to hearing a sound, it is helpful to know just how that sound is formed in the mouth. Some explanations will be provided, especially for sounds that are formed differently from their closest English equivalents. A few Tamil consonants are formed at the tip of the tongue touching further up in the mouth than we do in English. This also tends to alter the vowel sounds slightly and this alteration in the vowel sounds from forming letters higher up in the mouth is what makes for the distinctive East Indian accent.

Memory Aids

As a help in learning the alphabet I have included a number of memory aids. You may use these if you wish or you may make up your own which might work better for you.

The Vowels

There are 12 vowels in Tamil. These vowels are only used when a word begins with a vowel sound. If the vowel sound comes later on in the word it is included in one of the syllable letters.


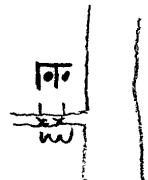
In English the distinction between a long and short vowel actually has more to do with the sound of the vowel than the length of time for which the sound is held. In Tamil, there are 5 pairs of vowels where one is considered to be 'short' and the other is considered to be 'long'. Undoubtedly the 'long' sounds are held for a little bit longer, although this is rather difficult to detect at the rapid pace of everyday conversation. What is easy to detect, even when someone is speaking rapidly, is stress. In any word, the long vowel sounds are the stressed syllables.

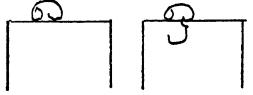
For two of the pairs the sound of the long and short vowels is the same, but the long vowel is stressed and held slightly longer. However, for the other 3 pairs, although some textbooks state that the sound is identical for the short and the long vowels, in fact, in Tamil spoken today, the sounds are different. This makes it much easier for an English speaking person learning Tamil. It is very hard to distinguish between two vowels if the only difference between them is the length of time for which one of them is held. It is easier to see a difference in stress. It is much easier to distinguish differences in sound. Besides the 5 pairs, there are two other vowels. One is rarely used. The other is quite common. Both are considered to be long vowels. However, the stress, if any, is very very slight for these vowels.

The Consonants

The 18 consonants of Tamil are all written with a dot above them. None of these consonants ever begin a word or a syllable. They only complete a syllable that begins with a vowel letter or a syllable letter.

The Vowels:

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>- Possible Memory Aids for the Shape of the Letter</u> <u>* also: additional points on the sound of the letter and how to form it</u>
அ	u as in up or uncle a short vowel	<p>* (Before ஃ ல் ன் this vowel is pronounced like the 'a' in 'at' or 'cat'.)</p> <p>- As to the form of the letter, begin with this shape:</p> <p>- Add wheels and it looks like a baby carriage:</p> <p>- This carriage belongs to uncle and is parked beside a wall:</p> 
ஆ	aw as in law a long vowel	<p>- As this is a long vowel think of the long arm of the law.</p> <p>- To remember the 'aw' sound, we will say that the baby carriage is for Lawnie.</p> <p>- Lawnie is the baby. After the baby carriage comes the 'b' of baby.</p> <p>- Make the bottom loop of the 'b' dip below the baseline on which the letter is drawn.</p>
இ	i as in spin a short vowel	<p>* (Before the consonants ற் ள் ழ் ண் and syllable letters formed from them, this vowel sound is modified and is pronounced as the 'oe' in 'oeuf'. These consonants are all formed by the tongue touching higher up in the mouth than we ever do in English. The same sound is found in the 'u' in 'put' as in 'Polly put the kettle on.')</p> <p>Some speakers also pronounce this œ sound before ற் and syllable letters formed from it.</p> <p>- As this is a short vowel, think of taking a 'short spin' in the car.</p> <p>- As there are 3 circles in the form of the letter, imagine the circles formed by a 'spinning' top.</p> <p>- Have two of the three circles dip below the baseline on which the letter is formed.</p>
ஈ	ee as in peek a long vowel not very common	<p>* (Before the consonants ற் ள் ழ் ண் and syllable letters formed from them, this vowel sound is modified and is pronounced as the 'oe' in 'oeuf'. These consonants are all formed by the tongue touching higher up in the mouth than we ever do in English. The same sound is found in the 'u' in 'put' as in 'Polly put the kettle on.')</p> <p>Some speakers also pronounce this œ sound before ற் and syllable letters formed from it.</p> <p>- As this is a long vowel, think of being curious about something and <u>longing</u> to take a peek.</p> <p>- As to the form of the letter, think of an owl in his roost by a tree. You have disturbed him during the daytime and he opens his eyes to take a peek.</p>
உ	oo as in toot a short vowel	<p>- As this is a short vowel, the train will give just a 'short' toot</p> <p>- And to make the shape of the letter, make that 2 toots</p> <p>- In some fonts the initial curl is closed and in some it is open</p> 
ஊ	ooh as in ooh la la! a long vowel	<p>* As this is a long vowel, add a few more 'o's to the 'ooh' of 'oooooh la la!'</p> <p>- As to the shape of the letter, imagine a swan floating on a stream.</p> <p>- A Eurasian swan with a large yellow patch on its bill is the 'Whooper' swan.</p> <p>What is on its back? It looks like a skunk. A skunk on a swan? Ooh la la! That's crazy!</p> <p>- In some fonts the initial curls of both symbols are closed and in some they are open.</p>
எ	e as in end or tent a short vowel	<p>* (Before the consonants ற் ள் ழ் ண் and syllable letters formed from them, this vowel sound is modified and is pronounced as the 'oe' in 'oeuf'. These consonants are all formed by the tongue touching higher up in the mouth than we ever do in English. The same sound is found in the 'u' in 'put' as in 'Polly put the kettle on.')</p> <p>Some speakers also pronounce this œ sound before ற் and syllable letters formed from it.</p> <p>- As this is a short vowel, think of the 'short' end of the stick</p> <p>- As to the form of the letter, it looks like a 't' in 'tent'.</p> <p>- In some fonts, the initial curl is closed and in some it is open.</p>

ஏ	é as in olé or thé a long vowel	<p>* (Before the consonants ற் ள் ழ் ண் and syllable letters formed from them, this vowel sound is modified and is pronounced as the 'oe' in 'oeuf'. These consonants are all formed by the tongue touching higher up in the mouth than we ever do in English. The same sound is found in the 'u' in 'put' as in 'Polly put the kettle on.')</p> <p>Some speakers also pronounce this œ sound before ஸ் and syllable letters formed from it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As it is a long, think of the long reach when you extend your arm and lift your hat and say 'olé'. - As to the form of the letter, it looks like a 't' as in 'thé'. - It also has an additional diagonal stroke as does 'e' with the French accent in thé. - In some fonts, the initial curl is closed and in some it is open. - Have the tail dip below the baseline on which the letter is formed.
ஐ	i as in high or Hiram not very common very slightly long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think of the upper part of the letter as Hiram's eyebrows. Hiram wears a monocle. - Of course, the wearing of a monocle is rather old fashioned, but so is the name Hiram. - The lower part of the letter is Hiram's moustache, also of an old-fashioned style with curls. - Have the moustache of the letter dip below the baseline on which the letter is drawn
ஒ	o as in phone a short vowel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As this is a short vowel, think of a short phone call. - As to the form of the letter, think of a phone on a little table. The phone is on the table and the cord is dangling below it, just like the bottom of the letter hangs below the baseline on which the letter is formed. 
ஔ	oa as in groan a long vowel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As this is a long vowel, think of a long phone call that makes you groan. - In your impatience you wind the dangling cord around your finger, which will be the tiny circle at the bottom of the letter. - In some fonts the initial curl is closed and in some it is open.
ஔ௭	ow as in down rare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - While on the phone, you look <u>down</u> and see a skunk. - Notice the long tail of the skunk in this letter.

The Consonants:

- In the notations below, when there is mention of 'doubling', it means that the consonant is followed by a syllable letter of its same family.
- The sounds of the Tamil letters that are formed by touching the tongue to points higher up in the mouth than is done in English will be designated by capital letters.
- The consonants always have a dot above them. In pronouncing a word the dots are the pronunciation stops in the word.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<p><u>- Memory Aids for the Shape of the Letter</u> (or make up your own memory aids that work better for you)</p> <p><u>* also: additional points on the sound of the letter and how to form it</u></p>
ஃ	k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think of the words 'Frank's kite'. The 'F' of 'Frank' gives you the basic form of the letter, a fancy capital 'F'. The 'k' of 'kite' gives you the sound of the letter. The tail of the kite differentiates it from another letter that is similar in shape. - In some fonts the final curl touches the central line.
ங்	ng	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think of a hat that is hanging. The 'h' of 'hat' is the 'h' that is hanging in the middle of the letter.
஑	ch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think of the phrase, 'search for Frank'. The 'F' of 'Frank' gives you the form of the letter, a fancy capital 'F'. - The 'ch' of 'search' gives you the sound of the consonant. - The 's' of 'search' gives you the sound of the syllable letters formed from this consonant. (see next lesson)

ஞ்	gny not common	<p>* This sound is not found in English. The sound is close to the 'gn' in 'magnifico', close to the 'y' of 'canyon'.</p> <p>* When followed by 's' the combined sound is like a hard 'j'.</p> <p>- Think of 'Thalia's gown'. The 'Th' of 'Thalia' is the basic shape of the letter. The flowing lines before and after the 'Th' are the flowing lines of her gown.</p> <p>- In some fonts the initial circle is a slightly open curl.</p>
ட்	T	<p>* A hard 't'. An English 't' is softer. It is formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the upper teeth. This Tamil 't' is harder. It is formed by touching the tongue to the palette of the mouth, just above the ridge above the upper teeth.</p> <p>- The horizontal stroke is longer than the vertical stroke)</p> <p>- Think of T.L. C. for 'tender loving care'. The sound of the consonant is the 't' of 'tender' and the shape of the consonant is the 'L' of 'loving'.</p>
ண்	N	<p>* The 'hard n', a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of tongue curled back a bit and touching higher up in the mouth than is customary for an English 'n'.</p> <p>- Think of a double 'noose' of 'Twine'.</p> <p>- In some fonts the initial circle is a slightly open curl.</p>
த்	t, almost th	<p>* (as in the 'this' river)</p> <p>* a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue</p> <p>- Think of a 'Thomas, the monkey'. The 'Th' of 'Thomas' gives you the sound of the letter and its form is like a fancy 'Th' with a tail. The long tail will be the monkey's tail.</p>
ந்	ñ	<p>* An 'n' formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth. An English 'n' is formed by touching the tongue to the ridge in the mouth just above the teeth. The difference in the sound formed is very slight, almost indistinguishable.</p> <p>- Think of 'n' as in 'nh' meaning 'not at home'. The shape of the letter is like a small 'nh'.</p> <p>- It is found only at the beginning of a word or within a word, never at the end of a word.</p> <p>- When used within a word, it is almost always used in combination with a letter of the த் family. These letters are formed in the same place, the back of the upper teeth.</p>
ப்	p	<p>- As the letter with the sound of 'P' is shaped like a 'U', think of 'P.U.'</p> <p>(as we say when something smells bad).</p>
ம்	m	<p>- Think of 'm' for <u>m</u>oney'. Two kinds of money are L' (English pounds) and 'D' (dollars).</p>
ய்	y	<p>- Think of 'y' for 'yo-yo'. If you change the 'yo-yo' to a 'yu-yu', you have the shape of the letter, a small 'u' and larger 'u'.</p>
ர்	r	<p>* A soft 'r'. It is different from an English 'r'. It is formed by the tongue moving on the ridge just above the upper teeth. It is much more like a Quebec French 'r'.</p> <p>- For the shape, think of 'r & r', standing for rest & recreation. The letter looks like 2 'r's joined at the top. The 'r' of 'rest' gives you the sound of the consonant.</p>
ல்	l	<p>* A soft 'l', formed by touching the tongue to the ridge just above the upper teeth, like a typical English 'l'.</p> <p>- Think of 'l' for 'log'. In this letter there is a 'log' (the roll that begins the letter) to 'lug' (the 'u' shape of the rest of the letter).</p> <p>- In some fonts the letter begins with a slightly open curl.</p>
வ்	v	<p>- Think of 'v' for 'vat', a flat bottomed vat with a handle).</p> <p>- In some fonts, the initial circle is a slightly open curl.</p>

ழ ழ

* This is a deep hard 'l'. The English 'l' is a soft 'l', like the Tamil letter ஸ். This hard 'l' is formed by touching the tongue on the palate (roof of the mouth). The tongue is curved at the contact point. Some texts speak of the swishing sound, like an English 'sh' or 'zh' that can be made by swishing a little air through the contact point. However, in modern Tamil there is very little distinction, if any, in pronunciation, between the middle hard 'l' (ழ) and the deeper hard 'l' (ழ).

- Think of 'Low Down Deep'. The 'L' and 'D' of 'Low Down' give you the shape of the letter. 'Deep' will remind you of the fact that there is something underneath the 'LD'.

ள ள

* This is a hard 'l'. This type of 'l' does not exist in English. The tongue touches, not the ridge above the teeth, as for an English 'l', but rather the palate above the ridge.

- Think of an alleycat. The 'll' of 'alleycat' is a reminder for the sound of the letter, which is also shaped like a cat.

- In some fonts the initial circle is a slightly open curl.

ற ற

* A hard 't' - The tongue touches higher up than the touching point for an English 't'. It touches on the roof of the mouth (palate) rather than on the ridge above the upper teeth.

* In rare cases the sound may 'R'.

* For the sound of syllable letters formed from this consonant, see the following lessons.

- Think of 'Rita's monkey'. The 't' of 'Rita' gives you the sound of the consonant.

The 'm' of 'monkey' gives you the basic shape of the letter.

The tail of the merry monkey is the curling tail of the letter.

ன ன

* - A 'soft' n, like an English 'n', formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth.

- Think of a 'noose' made with 'twine'. The form of the letter looks like a noose.

The 'T' of 'Twine' is the 'T' at the end of a letter.

- In some fonts the initial circle is a slightly open curl.

- There is also one letter in Tamil that represents a vowel sound followed by a consonant sound. It is rarely used nowadays.

Tamil **Sound**

Memory Aid for the Shape of the Letter.

ஃ ஃ
very rare

* Not a silent h, but aspirated, and thus close to the 'ch' of 'loch' (a lake in Scotland) or to the soft 'ch' of German (as in 'ich')

- Think of the 3 H's required for one to learn the truth about God. One must be honest, humble, and hungry (for truth).

- The 3 H's can represent the 3 dots of the letter and the basic sound of the letter.

Total letters for this lesson: 12 + 18 + 1 = 31

Lesson 2 - Tamil

Most of the letters of the Tamil alphabet represent syllables with a consonant sound followed by a vowel sound, rather than one simple sound. That is why there are so many letters. However, many are easy to learn because they are merely variations of the basic consonants. The 18 basic consonants of Tamil, without the dot above them, and with **‘nothing’** additional added, are pronounced with the sound ‘u’ as in ‘hut’, or ‘cut’, or ‘nuthin’. However if any of these syllable letters precede the consonants ண் ன் ற் or syllable letters formed from them, then the ‘uh’ sound is changed to a straight short ‘a’ as in ‘at’ or ‘hat’

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	(in the notations below, when there is mention of ‘doubling’ it means that the syllable letter follows its corresponding consonant, i.e. the consonant that has its same form plus a dot above it)
க	kuh guh or huh	- at the beginning of a word or within a word when doubled, or when following a ‘t’ or a ‘d’ sound - after ‘n’ or ‘ng’ sounds - when single within a word (some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint ‘g’ here, thus saying ghuh)
ங	nguh	- very rare
ச	suh or chuh	-at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word -when it is doubled or preceded by ‘t’ -or sometimes ‘juh’, when preceded by ‘gn’
ஞ	gnyuh	- This sound is not found in English. -with the ‘gn’ close to the ‘gn’ in ‘magnifico’, close to the ‘y’ of ‘canyon’
ட	Duh or Tuh	- To remember the shape and sound of the letter, think of an injured athlete on the ‘disability list’. The ‘d’ of ‘disability’ gives you the sound and the ‘L’ of ‘list’ gives you the shape. - when doubled
ண	Nuh	-with a more pronounced ‘n’ sound with tip of the tongue curled back and touching higher up in the mouth - This letter is never the first letter of a word.
த	tuh or thuh	- as in the ‘this’ (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) - with a ‘t’ formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue - with a soft ‘th’ (as in ‘though’ or ‘with’) when standing alone or after த் alone within a word
ந்	ñuh	- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth - often the first letter of a word, never the last letter of a word
ப	puh or buh	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a ‘d’ or a ‘t’ sound - in all other places
ம	muh	
ய	yuh	
ர	ruh	-with a soft ‘r’, formed by moving the tongue over the ridge above the teeth - some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as ‘tuh’

ல	luh	- with a soft 'l' , formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வ	vuh	
ழ	Łuh	- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ண and ழ .
ண	Luh	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
ற	Ruh	- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRuh'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRuh'.
ந	nuh	- formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth) (never the first letter of a word

In the next set of letters the vowel sound is 'aw' (aw). Oddly enough it is represented by adding the character of the letter ' ண '. I don't see a connection between the 'r' sound and the 'aw' sound. It might be frustrating, in studying a language, to come across things that don't seem to make sense. It is good to remember that there are lots of such examples in any language, including English.

As a memory aid to connect the shape with the sound, you might think of a straw in a glass. Make it a bendable straw and make it red. The 'aw' of straw is the reminder of the sound. The 'r' of red is the reminder that you add the letter with the sound of an 'r', and the mental picture of the straw and the side of the glass can serve as an additional reminder of the shape of that letter.

However, there are 3 exceptions to this pattern among the 18 letters in this set, the letters றா, றா, and ணா. There are alternate forms for these letters. In recent years, however, these exceptions are often dropped and these 3 letters are formed like the others in this set, with the ண character at the third component of the letter.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
கா	kaw or gaw or haw	- at the beginning of a word or within a word when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds - or single within a word (some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, saying 'ghaw')
நா	(ngaw)	- this letter is never used
சா	saw or chaw	- at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word - when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'jaw' - when preceded by 'gn'
ஞா	gnyaw	- a sound not found in English - the 'gn' of 'gnaw' is close to the 'gn' in 'magnifico' and close to the 'y' in 'canyon'
டா	Daw or Taw	-when doubled



Tamil

Sounds

ணா

or:



Naw

- a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth
- It is never the first letter of a word.

தா

taw

- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word)
- (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue)

or **thaw**

- with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after ட் alone within a word

நா

ñaw

- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth
- often the first letter of a word, never the last letter of a word

பா

paw

- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound
- or **baw** - in all other places

மா

maw

யா

yaw

ரா

raw

- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth
- Some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'taw'

லா

law

- with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth

வா

vaw

ழா

ḷaw

- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ணா and ழா .

ளா

Law

- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth

றா

or:



Raw

- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened
- rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrrr'
- When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRaw'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'Draw'.

ணா

or:



naw

- formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth
- never the first letter of a word

Total letters learned thus far: 31 (Lesson 1) + 36 (Lesson 2) = 67

Lesson 3 - Tamil

In this set of Tamil letters the 'ea' sound follows the consonants. To remember how to adjust the form of the consonant think of the word 'leap'. The 'ea' of **leap** gives you the sound. The mental picture of a man leaping from a cliff (up, over, and down to the bottom) will give you the shape that needs to be added to each consonant. The one exception is with ட ('d'). To remember it, think that 'd' is different, and rather like a dive into water (up and straight down). The vowel sound of this syllable consonant is 'ih' if it is the first syllable of the word and 'ea' if it comes later in the word. Also, if the vowel letter precedes the consonants ற் ண் ள் ழ் or vowel letters formed from them, then the vowel sound is adjusted from 'ea' to 'æ'. (as in the French word 'oeuf') Many Tamil speakers make the same adjustment before the consonant ட or syllable letters formed from it.

Tamil

Sounds

கி

or: கி

kea

- at the beginning of a word or when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound
- or 'kih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word
- or **gea**
 - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds
- or **hea**
 - when it is single within a word
 - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'ghea'
 - With some fonts, the arch before the drop begins at the left of the letter rather than from the top.

நி

(ngea)

- this letter is never used

சு

or:

சு

sea

- at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word
- or 'sih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word
- or **chea**
 - when it is doubled or preceded by 't'
 - or sometimes 'jea', when preceded by 'gn'
- with some fonts, the arch before the drop begins at the left of the letter rather than from the top



ஞி

gnyea

- this sound is not found in English
- with the 'gn' close to the 'gn' in 'magnifico', close to the 'y' in 'canyon'
- or 'gnih' perhaps if it would be the first syllable of a word

டி

Dea

- or 'Dih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word)

or **Tea**

- when doubled

ணி

Nea

- a harder 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back and touching on the roof of the mouth
- never the first letter of a word

தி

or:

தி

thih, thea

- with some fonts, the arch before the drop begins at the left of the letter rather than from the top

- 'thih', with a 'th' as in the 'this', if it begins a word

- 'thea', with a 'th' as in the 'this' if it follows a த் within a word

(in both cases, form a 't' by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue)

thea

- with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after ழ alone within a word

நி

nea

- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth
- often the first letter of a word, never the last letter
- or 'nih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
பி	pea - at the beginning of a word, or when there is a doubling - or 'pih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word or bea - in all other places, except where there is a doubling, or when the letter follows a 't' or a 'd' sound
மி	mea - or 'mih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word
யி	yea - or 'yih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word
ரி	rea - with a soft 'r' formed by moving the tongue over the ridge above the teeth - or 'rih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of the word - some Tamil speakers pronounce this as 'tea' or if it is the first syllable of a word, perhaps 'tih'
லி	lea - with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth - or 'lih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of the word
வி	vea - or 'vih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word
ழி	Lea - The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ழி and ழி .
ளி	Lea - form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth - or 'Lih' perhaps, if it is the first syllable of a word
றி	Rea - the hard 'r, the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRea'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRea'.
னி	nea - formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

In this next set of Tamil letters the 'ea' sound is lengthened to 'ee'. To remember how to adjust the form of the consonant think of the shape of the plume on some quails. As quails are rather skittish, and scurry away when nervous of something, we will call our quail 'Skeet'. The 'ee' of **Skeet** represents the sound and the shape of the plume gives the shape that needs to be added to each consonant. As with the previous set of syllable letters, if the vowel letter precedes the consonants ற் ண் ள் ழ் or vowel letters formed from them, then the vowel sound is adjusted from 'ea' to 'æ' (as in the French word 'oeuf'). Many Tamil speakers make the same adjustment before the consonant ற் or syllable letters formed from it. In some fonts the plume is curled into a closed circle and in others it is a slightly open curl.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
கீ OR: கி	kee - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound or gee - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds or hea - when single within a word - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'ghee' -with some fonts, the plume begins at the left of the letter rather than on the top.

Tamil

Sounds

ங்

(ngee)

- this letter is never used

சீ

or:

சீ

see

- at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word

or **chee**

- especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't'

- or sometimes 'jee', when preceded by 'gn'

- with some fonts, the plume begins at the left of the letter rather on the top

ஞீ

gnyee

- this sound is not found in English

- with the 'gn' close to the 'gn' in 'magnifico', close to the 'y' of 'canyon'

டீ

Dee

or **Tee**

- when doubled

ணீ

Nee

- a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth

- It is never the first letter of a word.

தீ

or:

தீ

t:ee

- with some fonts, the plume begins at the left of the letter rather on the top.

- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a தீ within a word)

(a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue)

or **thee**

- with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after டீ alone within a word

நீ

ñee

- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth

- often the first letter of a word, never the last letter of a word

பீ

pee

- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound

or **bee**

- in all other places

மீ

mee

யீ

yee

ரீ

ree

- with a soft 'r', formed over the ridge of the teeth

- Some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'tee'

லீ

lee

- with a soft 'l' formed at the ridge of the teeth

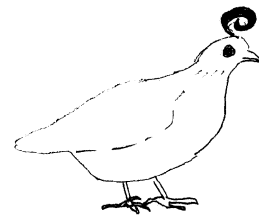
வீ

vee

ழீ

Lee

- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or 'zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ழீ and ழீ.



<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
ளி	Lee	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
ரி	Ree	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened- rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr'- When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRee'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRee'.
னி	nee	-formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth) (never the first letter of a word

Total letters learned thus far: 31 (Lesson 1) + 36 (Lesson 2) + 36 (Lesson 3) = 103

Lesson 4 - Tamil

In this set of Tamil letters it is the 'oo' that follows the consonant sound. Think of the word 'loop'. The 'oo' of 'loop' gives you the correct vowel sound. Most of these letters are formed by adding an additional loop to the letter. There are 5 exceptions. 4 of them have a straight line on the right hand side of the letter. To add the 'oo' sound, the straight line is extended downward. Think of each of these four exceptions as a stick in the mud. Someone that won't get caught up in the enthusiasm of others and go along with the others is sometimes called a 'stick in the mud'. Who are the four sticks? They are Vic, Yannick, Ping, and PoNG. The 5th exception is 'Ch' or 'S'. He too chafes at going along with the others.

The 'oo' sound of all of these syllable letters can be formed as in English, blowing gently through a circle made by the lips. However, when it is the last letter of a word, the vowel sound is unlike any English vowel. It is between the French 'peu' and the French, 'pu'. We will represent this sound with the symbol, ö. Listen carefully to Tamil speakers or recordings to get this sound. As it only occurs when the 'oo' syllable is the final syllable, I have not listed it in all of the phonetics for this lesson.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
கூ	koo, kö - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound or goo, gö - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds or hoo - when single within a word - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'ghoo'
ஙூ	(ngoo) - this letter is never used
சூ	soo, sö - at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word or choo, chö - especially, when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'joo', when preceded by 'gn'
ஞூ	(gnyoo) - this letter is never used
தூ	Doo, Dö or Too, Tö -when doubled
னூ	Noo, Nö - a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word.
தூ	thoo, thö - with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) or thoo, thö - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after த் alone within a word
நூ	ñoo - formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth - often the first letter of a word, never the last letter
பூ	poo, pö - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound or boo, bö - in all other places
மூ	moo
யூ	yoo, yö
ரூ	roo, rö - with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth - some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'too'

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
ல	loo, lö - with a soft 'l' with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வ	voo, vö
ழ	Loo, Lö - The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ழ and ழ.
ழ	Loo, Lö - form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
ற	Roo, Rö - the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRoo'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRoo'.
ன	noo - formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

In this next set of Tamil letters the 'oo' is lengthened to 'ooo'. These syllable letters of set 6 are much less common than their shorter cousins of set 5. In most cases they are formed by a further lengthening of the 'loop'. The 'stick in the mud' letters, Vic, Yannick, Ping, and PoNG, simply curl around their stick.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
ழ	kooo - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound or gooo - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds or hooo - when single within a word) (some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'ghooo' - with some fonts there is an additional small loop on the right side of the letter.
ழ	(ngooo) - this letter is never used
ழ	sooo - at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word or chooo - when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'jooo', when preceded by 'gn' - with some fonts the final loop curls underneath the letter rather than going up the left side
ழ	(gnyooo) - this letter is never used
ழ	Dooo or Tooo - when doubled - with some fonts the final curl is slightly open
ழ	Nooo - a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word.

Tamil Sounds

தூ	tuooo or thooo	- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after த் alone within a word
நூ	ñooo	- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth - often the first letter of a word, never the last letter of a word
பூ	puoo or buoo	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound - in all other places
மூ	muoo	- with some fonts the final curl is slightly open
யூ	yuoo	
ரூ	ruoo	- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth - some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'tooo'
லூ	luoo	- with a soft 'l' with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வூ	vuoo	
ழூ	ḷuoo	- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ழூ and ழு.
ழூ	Loo	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
றூ	Ro	- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRoo'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRoo'.
னூ	nooo	- formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

Total letters learned thus far: 31 (Lesson 1) + 36 (Lesson 2) + 36 (Lesson 3) + 36 (Lesson 4) = 139

Lesson 5 - Tamil

In this set of Tamil letters it is the short 'e' sound (as in met, pen, send) that follows the consonant sound. However, the additional symbol to make the sound comes before the consonant symbol rather than after it. It rather looks like a snail. We will call the snail 'Ted'. 'Snail' gives you for the form of this symbol and 'Ted' will give you the sound of the symbol. (Textbooks may give the sound 'ai' as the vowel sound of these syllable letters, but today Tamil speakers are not pronouncing it in this way, but rather as 'eh') In some fonts the initial curve of the snail is slightly open. It does seem odd that the character is for a sound that follows the consonant but that it is placed before the consonant. However that is just the way that it is. As with the corresponding vowel, which is எ, the vowel sound in these syllable letters is changed from 'eh' to 'æ' when it comes before the consonants ற் ண் ள் ழ், or syllable letters formed from them. Many Tamil speakers make the same adjustment before the consonant ட் or syllable letters formed from it.

Tamil

Sounds (in the notations below, when there is mention of 'doubling' it means that the syllable letter follows its corresponding consonant (i.e. the consonant that has its same form plus a dot above it))

கெ	keh or geh or heh	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds - when single within a word) (some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'gheh')
நெ	ngeh	- this letter is never used
செ	seh or cheh	- at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word - especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'jeh', when preceded by 'gn'
ஞெ	gnyeh	- this letter is never used
டெ	Deh or Teh	- when doubled
ணெ	Neh	- a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word.
தெ	t:eh or theh	- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after த் alone within a word
நெ	ñeh	- formed by touching tongue to the lower edge of the upper teeth - often the first letter of a word, never the last letter of a word
பெ	peh or beh	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound - in all other places
மெ	meh	
யெ	yeh	

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
ரெ	reh	- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth - some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'teh'
லெ	leh	- with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வெ	veh	
ழெ	Łeh	- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ளெ and ழெ.
ளெ	Leh	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
றெ	Reh	- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TReh'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DReh'.
னெ	neh	- formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

In the next set of letters it is the vowel sound 'é' that follows the consonant. It is a long vowel. Think of the French painter Cézanne. The 'é' of 'Cézanne' gives you the correct vowel sound and the capital 'C' of 'Cézanne' gives you the form of the character that comes before the consonant letter to indicate the 'é' vowel sound. Again, it seems odd that the character for a sound that follows the consonant sound would come before it, but that's just the way that it is. As with the corresponding vowel, which is ஏ, the vowel sound in these syllable letters is changed from 'eh' to 'œ' (held a little longer) when it comes before the consonants ற் ண் ள் ழ், or syllable letters formed from them. Many Tamil speakers make the same adjustment before the consonant ட் or syllable letters formed from it.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
கே	ké or gé or hé	- at the beginning of a word or within a word when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds - when single within a word - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'ghé'
ஙே	(ngé)	- this letter is never used
சே	sé or ché	- at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word - especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'jé', when preceded by 'gn'
ஞே	gnyé	- this sound is not found in English - close to the 'gn' in 'magnifico', close to the 'y' in 'canyon'
டே	Dé or Té	- when doubled

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
ணை	Né	- a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word
தே	tié or thé	- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after ட் alone within a word
நே	ñé	- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth - never the last letter of a word
பே	pé or bé	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound - in all other places
மே	mé	
யே	yé	
ரே	ré	- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth Some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'té'
லே	lé	- with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வே	vé	
ழே	Łé	- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between னே and ழே.
ளே	Lé	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
றே	Ré	- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrrr' - when doubled, the pronunciation is 'Tré', after an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRé'.
னே	né	- formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

*Total letters learned thus far: 31 (Lesson 1) + 36 (Lesson 2) + 36 (Lesson 3) + 36 (Lesson 4)
+ 36 (Lesson 5) = 175*

Lesson 6 - Tamil

In this set of Tamil letters it is the 'o' (as in code) sound that follows the consonant sound. Each letter is composed of three separate characters. The first character is like a 'snail'. In Tamil this symbol is called a **கொம்பு** (kōmboo), which means 'horn' as in the horns of an animal. The third character is the letter **ர** (with an 'r' sound). As with the syllable letters with the 'aw' sound, there are 3 exceptions. They are the Tamil letters **நொ**, **றொ** and **னொ**. There are alternate forms for these letters. In recent years, however, these exceptions are often dropped and these letters are formed like the other of this set with the **ர** character as a third symbol. As a memory aid for this letter, think of a rose on the back of the snail, and thus the phrase, 'the snail totes a rose'. The form of the 'snail' gives you the form of the character that comes before the consonant. The 'r' of 'rose' gives you the character that comes after the consonant. The 'o' of 'tote' and of 'rose' give you the 'o' sound of the letter.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
கொ	kô or gô or hô	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled, or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds - when single in the middle of a word - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g', thus saying 'ghô'
நொ	(ngô)	- this letter is never used
சொ	sô or chô	- at the beginning of a word or when single within a word - especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'jô', when preceded by 'gn'
ஞொ	(gnyô)	- this letter is never used
டொ	Dô or Tô	- when doubled
னொ or:	Nô	- a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word.
தொ	ṭô or thô	- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after ந் alone within a word
நொ	ñô	- formed by touching tongue to the lower edge of the upper teeth - often the first letter of a word, never the last letter or a word
பொ	pô or bô	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound - in all other places
மொ	mô	
யொ	yô	
ரொ	rô	- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth - Some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'tô'



<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
லொ	lô	- with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வொ	vô	
ழொ	ḷô	- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ளொ and ழொ.
ளொ	Lô	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
றொ or:	Rô	- the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRô'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRô'.
னொ or:	nô	- formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

In this set of Tamil letters it is the 'oa' (as in boat, but longer) sound that follows the consonant sound. Each letter is composed of three separate characters. The first character is like a capital 'C'. The third character is the letter ர ('r' sound). As with the syllable letters with the 'aw' sound and the 'ô', there are 3 exceptions. They are ழொ, றொ and னொ. In recent years, however, these exceptions are often dropped and these letters are formed like the other of this set with ர as a third symbol. As a memory aid for this letter, think of the 'road to California' or the 'California road'. The capital 'C' of California gives you the first character. The 'r' or 'road' gives you the third character. The 'oa' of 'road' gives you the 'oa' sound of the letter.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
கொ or goa or hoa	koa	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds - when single in the middle of a word - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' here, thus saying 'ghoa'
ஙொ	(ngoa)	- this letter is never used
சொ or choa	soa	- at the beginning of a word or single in the middle of a word - especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'joa', when preceded by 'gn'
ஞொ	(gnyoa)	- this letter is never used
டொ or Toa	Doa	- when doubled

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
ணோ or:	Noa	- a more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word.
தோ	ṭoa or thoa	- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after ந் alone within a word
நோ	ṇoa	- formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth - never the last letter of a word
போ	poa or boa	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound - in all other places
மோ	moa	
யோ	yoa	
ரோ	roa	- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth - Some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'toa'
லோ	loa	- with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வோ	voa	
ழோ	ḷoa	- The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between ணோ and ழோ.
ளோ	Loa	- form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
றோ or:	Roa	- the hard 'r, the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRoa'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRoa'.
னோ or:	noa	(formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth) (never the first letter of a word)

Total: 31 (Lesson 1) + 36 (Lesson 2) + 36 (Lesson 3) + 36 (Lesson 4) + 36 (Lesson 5) + 36 (Lesson 6) = 211

Lesson 7 - Tamil

In this set of Tamil letters it is the 'i' (as in high) sound that follows the consonant sound. The 'i' sound is indicated by an additional character, but that character comes before the consonant rather than after it. As a memory aid, think of a spiral wire. The 'i' sound of 'spiral' and of 'wire' give you the sound of the letter. The picture of the spiral wire gives you the shape of the letter. In some fonts the spiral wire is a slightly open curl. There are 4 exceptions to this pattern, although in recent years, these exceptions are sometimes dropped and these letters are formed just like the others of this set, with the spiral wire symbol. The 4 exceptions are 'Nii', 'Lii', 'Lii', and 'nii'. Each of these has a backward capital 's' adjoined to the consonant rather than the spiral wire. When these syllable letters come in the first syllable of a word, the vowel sound is pronounced as the 'i' in 'kite' or 'hide'. This vowel sound will be represented by 'ii', to differentiate it from the short 'i' of 'sit' or 'lid'. However if these syllable letters come later in a word, and especially in the last syllable of a word, the vowel is usually pronounced 'é' as in 'they', with an faint y sound accompanying the vowel sound (making the sound of a **தை** just very slightly different from the sound of **கை**. To differentiate the two sounds in phonetics, this vowel sound will be represented by 'eiy' (the 'ei' of 'weigh' or 'sleigh' + y). Some of these letters are never found at the beginning of the word, and in such cases, the phonetics will only indicate the 'eiy' sound.

Tamil

Sounds

கை	kii, keiy - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound or gii, geiy - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds or hii, heiy - when single in the middle of a word (some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g' thus saying 'ghii')
கை	(ngii) - this letter is never used
சை	sii, seiy - at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word) or chii, cheiy - especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't', or sometimes 'jii', when preceded by 'gn'
கை	gnyii, gneiy - this sound is not found in English - the 'gn' of 'gni' close to the 'gn' in 'magnifico', close to the 'y' in 'canyon'
டை	Deiy or Teiy - when doubled
கை கை or:	Neiy - more pronounced 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back, and touching the roof of the mouth - it is never the first letter of a word.
தை	tii, teiy - with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) or thii, theiy - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after த alone within a word
நை	ñii, ñeiy - formed by touching tongue to the upper teeth - often the first letter of a word, never the last letter of a word
பை	pii, peiy - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound or bii, beiy - in all other places
மை	mii, meiy
யை	yeiy
ரை	reiy - with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge of the teeth - some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'tii'

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
லை or: லை	leiy - with a soft 'l' formed with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வை	vii, veiy
ழை	Leiy - The tongue touches on the roof of the mouth, bent at the point of contact. Some texts speak of the swishing sound of an English 'sh' or zh' to be mixed with the 'l' sound. In modern Tamil there is very little distinction in pronunciation between னை and ழை.
ளை or: னை	Leiy - form an 'l' by touching the tongue to the roof of the mouth instead of the ridge above the teeth
றை	Reiyi - the hard 'r', the tongue is not touching, the mouth is tightened - rather like the English 'r' in a dog's growl 'rrrrr' - When doubled, the pronunciation is 'TRii'. After an 'n' sound, it is pronounced 'DRii'.
னை or: னை	neiy - formed by touching the tongue to the ridge above the teeth - never the first letter of a word

In this set of Tamil letters it is the 'ow' (as in down) sound that follows the consonant sound. Each letter is composed of three separate characters. The first character is like a snail. The third character is the letter ன ('L' sound). It looks like a skunk. To remember this letter, remember the phrase, 'the snail's knows how but the skunk not now'. The 'ow' of 'how' and of 'now' give you the sound of the letter. The snail is the first of the three characters of the letter, and the skunk is the third of the three.

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>
கௌ or கௌ or ஹௌ	kow - at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 't' or a 'd' sound or gow - after 'n' or 'ng' sounds or how - when single within a word - some Tamil speakers pronounce a faint 'g', thus saying 'ghow'
௪ௌ	(ngow) - this letter is never used
சௌ	sow -at the beginning of a word or when single in the middle of a word or chow - especially when it is doubled or preceded by 't' - or sometimes 'jow', when preceded by 'gn'
ஞௌ	(gnyow) - this letter is never used
டௌ	Dow - this letter is seldom used or Tow - when doubled

<u>Tamil</u>	<u>Sounds</u>	
ணௌ	Now	- a harder 'n' sound with tip of the tongue curled back and touching higher up in the mouth - This letter is never the first letter of a word
தௌ	t^how or thow	- with a 'th' as in the 'this' (when it begins a word, or follows a த் within a word) (a 't' formed by touching the back of the teeth with the tongue) - with a soft 'th' (as in 'though' or 'with') when standing alone or after ட் alone within a word
நௌ	ñow	- formed by touching tongue to the lower edge of the upper teeth - never the last letter of a word - this letter is seldom used
பௌ	pow or bow	- at the beginning of a word or within a word, when doubled or when following a 'd' or a 't' sound - in all other places
மௌ	mow	
யௌ	yow	
ரௌ	row	- with a soft 'r', formed by moving the tongue over the ridge above the teeth - some Tamil speakers often pronounce this as 'tow'
லௌ	low	- with a soft 'l' with the tongue at the ridge of the teeth
வௌ	vow	
ழௌ	(Low)	- this letter is never used
ளௌ	(Low)	(this letter is never used)
றௌ	(Row)	(this letter is never used)
னௌ	(now)	(this letter is never used)

Total letters learned thus far: 31 (Lesson 1) + 36 (Lesson 2) + 36 (Lesson 3) + 36 (Lesson 4) + 36 (Lesson 5) + 36 (Lesson 6) + 36 (Lesson 7) = 247

Lesson 8 - Tamil

In addition to the letters of the Tamil alphabet, there are 6 letters from other languages of India that are used sometimes in writing Tamil. In textbooks these letters are sometimes referred to as 'Grantham' letters or as 'Sanskrit' letters. They are used mostly in words that have been imported into Tamil from other languages. In recent years though, these letters have been used less and less. They are often replaced now with Tamil letters that approximate their sound. The pronunciation of many words has changed slightly as Tamil letters have been substituted for Grantham letters.

As with Tamil consonants, most of these letters can be used with variations representing the vowel sounds that go with them.

<u>Letter</u>	<u>Sound</u>	<u>Possible Memory Aids</u> (you may wish to make up your own that work better for you)
ஜ்	j as in Jack	Begin with the monocle and the eyebrows, as with 'i'. So far he looks like Hiram, but it is Jack. There is no moustache, but there is something round in his mouth. Is it a cigar? Smoking's not good. Jack doesn't smoke. It is a stick of celery filled with jam. The 'j' of 'Jack' and of 'jam' is the sound of this letter.

The formation of syllable letters from this consonant follows the patterns of the Tamil consonants. However the loops of the 'oo' and 'ooo' sounds are different from the loops of the Tamil consonants.

ஜு	juh	ஜா	jaw
ஜி	jih, jea	ஜீ	jee
ஜு	joo	ஜூ	jooo
ஜெ	jeh	ஜே	jé
ஜொ	jô	ஜோ	joa
ஜை	jii	ஜௌ	jow

ஸ்	ss as in Stan	There is the 's' sound in a Tamil letter (ஸ), but whether it is pronounced 's' or 'sh' has to be learned word by word. Some words use this Sanskrit letter to denote the 's' sound, particularly words borrowed from other languages. The form of this letter is like the Tamil letter ஸ ('l'). Think of the zany phrase, 'Stan the slug, log n lug.' The 's' of 'Stan' is the sound of the letter. It begins with the log and ends with the 'u' of 'lug' but in between there is the shape of a small 'n'. That is the 'n' of 'log n lug.' (in some books the form of this letter is rather like a ஸ ('v') and then a 'u' shape.
or: ஸ்		

The formation of syllable letters from this consonant follows the patterns of the Tamil consonants. However the loops of the 'oo' and 'ooo' sounds are different from the loops of the Tamil consonants.

ஸு	ssuh	ஸா	ssaw
ஸி	ssih, ssea	ஸீ	ssee
ஸு	ssoo	ஸூ	ssooo
ஸெ	sseh	ஸே	ssé
ஸொ	ssô	ஸோ	ssoa
ஸை	ssii	ஸௌ	ssow

Letter **Sound** **Possible Memory Aids** (you may wish to make up your own that work better for you)

ஷ் **sh** as in shrimp There is also the 'sh' sound in the Tamil letter ஸ் , but whether it is pronounced as 'sh' or 's' has to be learned word by word. Some words use this Sanskrit letter to denote the 'sh' sound, particularly in words borrowed from other languages. The formation of the letter begins like the Tamil letter வ (‘v’). It finishes up with a fancy written ‘S’. To remember this, think of ‘half of a vat of saltwater shrimp.’ The ‘sh’ of ‘shrimp’ gives you the sound of the letter. ‘Half a vat’ gives you the first part of the letter and the ‘S’ of ‘saltwater’ gives you the final part of the letter.

The formation of syllable letters from this consonant follows the patterns of the Tamil consonants. However the loops of the ‘oo’ and ‘ooo’ sounds are different from the loops of the Tamil consonants.

ஷ்	shuh	ஷா	shaw
ஷி	shih, shea	ஷீ	shee
ஷு	shoo	ஷூ	shooo
ஷெ	sheh ஷே	ஷே	shé
ஷொ	shô	ஷொ	shoa
ஷௌ	shii	ஷௌ	show

ஹ் **h** as in Harry - Syllable letters formed from the Tamil consonant ஹ் often begin with an ‘h’ sound if they are within a word, but always with a ‘k’ sound when they begin a word. How then, would you introduce a foreign word that begins with an ‘h’ sound into Tamil. This letter has been used for that purpose. It is actually not a consonant that can stand on its own in Tamil, but it is like a consonant in that a series of syllable letters are derived from it.
- Those that prefer to use Tamil letters will substitute the Tamil letter ஸ் in the place of this letter, but the sounds are really not the same. As to the form of the letter, once again it begins like the வ (‘v’), so think of the ‘vat’ once again. Whose vat is it? It belongs to Harry. Harry is the vat man. The ‘rr’ in ‘Harry’ gives us the final part of the letter which is like the letter ற் (‘R’). The ‘H’ of ‘Harry’ gives us the sound of the letter. The ‘m’ of ‘vat man’ is a second clue for the final part of the letter which looks like an ‘m’ with a tail.

The formation of the various syllable letters from this letter follow the patterns of the Tamil consonants. However the loops of the ‘oo’ and ‘ooo’ sounds are different from the loops of the Tamil consonants.

ஹ்	huh	ஹா	haw
ஹி	hih, hea	ஹீ	hee
ஹு	hoo	ஹூ	hooo
ஹெ	heh	ஹே	hé
ஹொ	hô	ஹொ	hoa
ஹௌ	hii	ஹௌ	how

Letter **Sound** **Possible Memory Aids** (you may wish to make up your own that work better for you)

சஷ் **tcha** as in watch a bit
or **ksha** as in rickshaw

Think of this phrase: Watch for a rickshaw for Sally. The 'tch' of 'watch' and the 'ksh' of 'rickshaw' give you the sounds of the letter. The 'for' and the 'S' of 'For Sally' give you the shape of the letter.

The formation of syllable letters from this consonant follows the patterns of the Tamil consonants. However the loops of the 'oo' and 'ooo' sounds are different from the loops of the Tamil consonants.

சஷ்	tchuh	சஷா	tchaw
சஷி	tchih, tchea	சஷீ	tchee
சஷு	tchoo	சஷூ	tchooo
சேஷ்	tch eh	சேஷ்	tché
சேஷா	tchô	சேஷா	tchoa
சைஷ்	tchii	சைஷ்	tchow

ஸ்ரீ **sree** as in a slurred yes siree!
or **shree** as in shriek

- This letter is actually a syllable letter. The consonant on its own is not used in Tamil. You will notice the vowel 'ee' in the pronunciation of the letter and in its shape. This is the only form of this letter that is used in Tamil
- Although the 's' and 'r' sounds are not difficult to combine, we don't do it in English and so there is not a handy word in English to illustrate the sound of this letter. A slurred Yes Siree! is about the closest there is to it. Simply combine the two letters 's' and 'r' and add the 'ee' of 'meet'.
- As to the form of the letter, think of the phrase, 'Yes Siree!, that's a thin piece of meat on that plate'. The 'sree' of the slurred 'Siree' gives you the sound. The 'thin piece' will give the first part of the letter which is like the letter ('p') but drawn thinner than usual. The 'm' of 'meat' will give you the second part of the letter that looks like a small 'm'. The 'plate' gives you the shape of the final part of the letter.

Combo Words

There are some syllable letters whose sound will vary depending on whether it is the first syllable of a word, or appears later in the word. Thus, with கூ , 'kuh' is for the first syllable of a word, and 'huh' is for a syllable within a word. Likewise, with பூ , 'puh' is for the first syllable of a word, and 'buh' is for a syllable within a word. However, if a Tamil word is a combo word, combining two words that can stand separately, then the initial கூ , remains a 'kuh' even if it is now within a word. The initial பூ , remains a 'puh' even if it now within word, unless the first of the two words in the combinations ends in ம் or ன். This would apply for all of the syllable letters in these two families, such as கி, கு, கோ, கா, பீ, பூ, பொ, பை, பெ, etc.