

## Opposing Views on the Origin of Nasalised Plosive Sounds in the Sinhalese Language

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The contemporary Sinhalese language possesses five unique consonant sounds known as Nasalised Plosives alias Pre-nasal Stops. They are [ḡ], [ḥ], [ḍ], [ḍ̃], [ḃ] represented respectively by the graphemes ශ, ඡ, ඞ, ට, ඹ in the standard alphabet. Linguists and traditional grammarians hold opposing views about their realisation as individual sounds. Linguists, i.e. phoneticians who consider their articulatory features and distribution argue them to be individual sounds. Their standpoint is that they should be included in the alphabet since they are of solid phonemic value. Traditional grammarians who merely consider their origin and historical change oppose this view arguing them to be sound combinations. This study intends to present a synopsis of these opposing views commenting on both synchronic and diachronic aspects of these sounds. Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources on nasalised stops. These included both traditional grammatical commentaries and findings of spectrographic analyses of speech sounds. It is observed from the analysis of data, that most of the Sinhalese words in contemporary speech containing these sounds are results of gradual sound change of Sanskrit, Pali and Tamil words. During an early stage of the evolution of the Sinhalese language, these sounds have been pronounced as combinations of nasals and their corresponding voiced plosives. However in contemporary speech they have evolved to be individual sounds that cause semantic distinctions. Thus, they are phonemes in the contemporary Sinhalese language and it is justifiable to be included in the standard alphabet.

**Key words:** nasalised stops, individual sounds, phonemic value, phoneticians, traditional grammarians

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