

Comparative Study of Characteristic Features of Devanagari and Modi Script

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Like an era witnesses various ages of a human, that not only grows, but evolves and also deteriorates, it may be looked in the same eyes, that a language is being born, evolved and becoming extinct or dead in a span of comparatively surprising tenure of its survival. While sometimes a language may seem to be far aged, experienced and lived, it's script might not survive into the race of uniformity and preference.

One such dead script of an existing language Marathi, is *Modi* [मोडी], script. *Modi* is an exceptional example of a segmented script. It particularly established its relation to the language by the means of administrative and official use. It was primarily used to write Marathi, and secondarily also to write Konkani, Hindi and Gujarati languages. In his Book **आपलीमोडीलिपीभाग १** Rajeyadav has tried to explain it :

A brief description of the script can be an inevitable process to unfold the leaflets of the history of Marathi language and the state of Maharashtra, wherein the script was born and given an identity so surreal that it evokes both, curiosity and generosity through the curves it makes, along with the misfortune of the script to be knocked out of its motherland, if not completely; then being partially abandoned. (7)

ETYMOLOGY

Modi [मोडी,] in its literal sense in *Marathi* means [मोडणे] or, [to bend] which makes an understandable explanation to call it as a cursive script to write Marathi because *Modi* script shows similar character features as Devanagari script.

M. Kulkarni in his book 'तुम्हीचमोडीशिका' states that, "The origin of the script was a revolutionary move in the early eras in the name of short-hand to write Marathi. The innovation in the *Devanagari* script by breaking characters was useful in administrative outlook so as to write a pile of copies of the same document without the need of lifting the pen to refill ink." (10)

DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE AND SCRIPT IN INDIA

Before foreign invasions took over India and the languages begun to build in our own land, it is noted that there was a wide use of Sanskrit language in religious institutions to recite holy scripts such as The Ramayana, or Bhagwad Geeta; as well as in various administrative and local bodies. But with time, the mother language Sanskrit enfolded a daughter language, which was easier to grasp and use. There were adapted a number of Prakrit languages in the Indian subcontinent by the locals who surprisingly invented them by adding and manipulating words according to their convenience and thus, this idiolect was subjected. The language found on Ashoka pillars or on the Stupas, along with some major literature widespread the script over the geographical boundaries of the Indian subcontinent, some other Prakrit languages were *Magadhi*, *Awadhi*, *Gandhari*, *Balhika*; while *Maharashtri Prakrit* was used by the locals to communicate in the present day Maharashtra and Karnataka, the western states of India. Dialect of *Marahatti* [मरहट्टी] refined as Marathi in the later years.

The *Modi* script was an end result of evolution of the *Brahmi* script, initially used to write Sanskrit, turning out next into the *Nagari* script, with the help of which the Prakrit languages were written. Thereafter evolved *Modi* scripts to be able to write the *Maharashtri Prakrit* in its later years of survival which was followed by Marhatti or Marathi.

The picture of the journey of Marathi language and Modi script in a chronological way would look something like this:

Language	Sanskrit	Pali	Maharashtri Prakrit	Marathi
Script	Brahmi	Nagari	Modi	Devanagari

CHARACTERISTIC COMPARISON BETWEEN MODI AND DEVANAGARI SCRIPT

The Modi characters include a set of vowels and consonants of the Indian languages, about identical to Devanagari script which is being used in the modern days. These characters are segmental, where the units of consonant and vowel sounds are written as a singular unit. The script is written from left to right, as many other Indian languages. A blend from Devanagari and Nagari script that produced cursive letters of Modi are written under a single head-line [शिरोरेखा], so as to minimize the need to uplift the pen to refill ink in it, and save time. The script does not use any punctuation marks whereas in Devanagari script, words are segregated under individual head-line with distinct marks of identification of expression and pauses, or completion of sentences. The characters of Modi script were drawn with including strokes, that might be arcs, curves, of different width and height, horizontal, vertical, loops, caves, arbitrary

lines and most importantly, were cursive. The style used to write Modi was crafted in such a manner so as to comprehend the social and cultural background of the era in the script. There are evidences of various styles used to write the same script. Whereas we find a uniformity in Devanagari script, there were fewer curves and the writing structure allowed the differentiation of words with the help of individual head stroke. The numerals written in Devanagari and Modi are identical and do not mark changes. The distinct feature of Modi script lies in the use of *eekear* and *ukaar* [the use of /l/ and /u/], as in Modi, there is no long stress on these vowels. Both the scripts have a wide use of the phoneme /l/ [ळ] which is produced by obstruction of air passage with the tip of the tongue. While the Modi alphabet consisted of 36 consonants and 10 vowels, Devanagari script has a structure of 36 consonants and 16 initial vowels in the alphabet.

LIGATURES OF MODI AND DEVANAGARI SCRIPTS

1. *Similar looking Consonants in Modi and Devanagari.*

The cursive form of Devanagari script, also called Modi, shows a few characters that do not show a lot of changes while they are drawn, and thus are also easily recognized as individual consonants when written in the continuous script of Modi. On having a minute glance on these phonemes, it suffices the concept of curves in lettering. While in the letters /ta/ and /bha/ it may be noted that the outer stroke stretches to the top, and is then dropped. And in the letters /chha/ and /dha/, the fallen stroke is not seen, unlike in Devanagari script.

Modi	ग	घ	छ	ण	त
Devanagari	ग	घ	छ	ण	त
	ga	gha	chha	na	ta

Modi	ध	भ	म	श	ष
Devanagari	ध	भ	म	श	ष
	dha	bha	ma	sa	sa

2. *Similar looking consonants in Modi:*

There is a lot of similarity in the characters within the same script. These similarities might create inter-change of characters out of ambiguous balance while writing continuously. The phoneme /jha/ shows the similar left stroke as *Devanagari* but is bent as it joins the standing stroke. The head arc of /tha/ when drawn above the head stroke, it becomes /kha/. The

phoneme /ja/ and /na/ look almost similar, but on taking a close look, it is found that the initial gap in the left arc of /na/ is to be filled with ink, to differentiate the two.

Devanagari	क	झ	ख	थ	ज	न
Modi	𑂔	𑂕	𑂖	𑂗	𑂘	𑂙
	ka	jha	kha	tha	ja	na

Similarly, /ta/ and /tha/ can be bifurcated with the appearance of a dot in the open arc of /tha/, whereas /ra/ can be identified with the direction of the arc [positioning towards right in /ta/ and towards left in /ra/]. There are two loops in /ma/ but only one, in /bha/.

Devanagari	ट	ठ	र	भ	म
Modi	𑂚	𑂛	𑂜	𑂝	𑂞
	ta	tha	ra	bha	ma

The following letters are drawn in a single pattern, with slight changes in their curves. These are drawn from the left, and if closely observed, the changes in these letters occur after the first curve. While a tiny loop has been given in /da/, the second curve of /ba/ falls straight towards right, adjoining the falling stroke. We do not find any falling strokes in /ha/ and /pa/, although it turns out easier to recognize /pa/ as it looks alike the English phoneme /w/.

Devanagari	द	ब	ह	प
Modi	𑂟	𑂠	𑂡	𑂢
	da	ba	ha	pa

3. Concept of eekar, ukar and aakar in Devanagari and Modi scripts:




It is known that unlike *Devanagari* script, *Modi* does not follow the stress on /e/ and /u/. Instead, only one vowel dimension or mark is used to write both, /e/ and /u/ sounds.

Devanagari	इ/ई	उ/ऊ
Modi	𑂣	𑂤
	/i/	/u/

The first and foremost characteristic feature of the *Modi* alphabet is the use of loops. While asserting /a:/ in the *Modi* characters, some of them follow the Devanagari rule of adding an extra falling stroke, whereas others use loops in writing.

In the following letters, it is to be noted that the formation of both these letters is directed towards the same sound /a:/ but written contrastive.

The dimension of /a:/ in *Devanagari* is uniform for all the morphs and creates about no confusion while writing them.

Devanagari	आ	का	शा
Modi			
	/a:/	/ka/	/sha/

4. Similar structure of dimensions [matra] of vowel sounds in Devanagari and Modi:

Following table shows the formation of a letter along with its dimensions, as a comparative approach, with the ligature R [र]. It is seen that in both the scripts, the dimension of the sound/e/ is the same. Adding another dimension on the previous one makes it the sound of /æ/. The similar performance is shown in /o/ and /ɔ:/. Whereas in 'ra' or /a:/ it can be seen that a standing additional stroke has been given in both the scripts. The pattern of a standing stroke has been repeated in the later sounds of /o/ and /ɔ:/.

Devanagari	र	रा	रि/री	रु/रू	रे	रै	रो	रौ
Modi								

THE DOWNFALL OF MODI

The British Colonial rule in India was the 'falling action' taken against the script. It was decided in the year 1920 that both the scripts would be held official to write Marathi for administrative and non administrative purposes. The continuous oscillation between Devanagari and Modi scripts of the then Government in the Independent India led to decisions based on non evident and argumentative conclusions and thus, the Balbodh style of Devanagari script was adapted. The last official document written in Modi was of the year 1959. However, it was being taught in schools of Maharashtra in the later years in primary classes. But the Education

Report of Central Provinces, in the year 1981 concluded that it was difficult for students to adapt both the script types. Hence, Modi was bid adieu after creating a vast history of about seven hundred years. If there were points to conclude the overlapping of Devanagari over Modi, it would reason to the use of continuous script creating confusion. The need to find varied characters to avoid inter mixing of similar looking characters, and to form uniformity in the official uses. Even after years of practice, convenience took over tradition, alike many other features of our culture that we don't often talk about.

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