# **DSCI-6011-02**

# **FINAL PROJECT**

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**Handwritten Devanagari Script Recognition using Convolutional Neural Networks**

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**Abstract**

Handwritten script recognition is a challenging task with significant implications in various fields, including document analysis, language processing, and character recognition. In this paper, we present an approach for recognizing handwritten Devanagari script characters using convolutional neural networks (CNNs) and other machine learning models. We explore the effectiveness of different architectures and techniques in accurately identifying Devanagari characters. Our approach involves preprocessing techniques, feature extraction, model training, and evaluation on a publicly available dataset. Through extensive experimentation, we demonstrate the effectiveness of our proposed method compared to baseline models, showcasing promising results in Devanagari script recognition.

# **1 Introduction**

Handwritten Devanagari script recognition has garnered significant attention in recent years due to its applications in various fields such as document digitization, automatic translation, and language processing. This is a Character Recognition System which we developed for Devanagari Script. The learning model was trained on 92 thousand images (32x32 pixels) of 46 characters, digits 0 to 9 and consonants ka to gya. The optimal result, 92% accuracy, was obtained using the Extremely Randomized Decision Forest Classification algorithm.

What is Devanagari?

Devanagari is an Indic script and forms a basis for over 100 languages spoken in India and Nepal including Hindi, Marathi, Sanskrit, and Maithili. It consists of 47 primary alphabets, 14 vowels, 33 consonants, and 10 digits. In addition, the alphabets are modified when a vowel is added to a consonant. There is no capitalization of alphabets, unlike Latin languages. Recognizing handwritten Devanagari characters poses a significant challenge due to variations in writing styles, shapes, and sizes. Traditional methods for script recognition often involve handcrafted features and rule-based algorithms, which struggle to generalize across diverse handwriting styles. With recent advancements in deep learning, convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have shown remarkable success in various image recognition tasks, including handwritten character recognition.

Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have emerged as a powerful tool for pattern recognition tasks, including handwritten character recognition. CNNs are well-suited for this task due to their ability to automatically learn and extract features from raw input data, making them ideal for capturing the intricate patterns and structures present in handwritten Devanagari characters.

In this paper, we propose a novel approach for handwritten Devanagari script recognition using CNNs. Our method involves preprocessing the handwritten images to enhance features and reduce noise, followed by training a CNN model to classify the characters. We explored various CNN architectures, tuning hyperparameters, and augmentation techniques to improve the model's performance and generalization ability.

The contributions of this work include:

1. Development of a robust CNN-based model for handwritten Devanagari script recognition.

2. Investigation of preprocessing techniques to enhance the quality of input images.

3. Exploration of different CNN architectures and hyperparameter tuning for optimal performance.

4. Evaluation of the proposed approach on standard datasets, demonstrating its effectiveness compared to existing methods.

By leveraging the power of CNNs, our approach aims to provide an accurate and efficient solution for recognizing handwritten Devanagari characters, thereby facilitating advancements in document analysis, text recognition, and language processing tasks for languages written in the Devanagari script.

# **2 Related Work**

Handwritten Devanagari script recognition has been a topic of active research, with several approaches proposed in literature. These methods employ various techniques, including traditional machine learning algorithms and deep learning models, to address the challenges associated with recognizing handwritten characters in the Devanagari script.

1. Traditional Machine Learning Approaches:

Early methods for Devanagari script recognition often relied on handcrafted feature extraction techniques combined with classifiers such as Support Vector Machines (SVMs) and k-Nearest Neighbors (k-NN). Features like Histogram of Oriented Gradients (HOG), Zernike moments, and Hu moments were commonly used. While these methods showed promising results, they often struggled with capturing complex patterns and variations in handwritten characters.

2. Deep Learning Approaches:

With the advent of deep learning, Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) have become the de facto standard for handwritten character recognition tasks. Researchers have proposed various CNN architectures tailored specifically for Devanagari script recognition. These architectures often consist of multiple convolutional layers followed by pooling layers and fully connected layers. Some studies explored the use of recurrent neural networks (RNNs) or convolutional-recurrent architectures for sequence-based recognition tasks.

3. Data Augmentation and Preprocessing:

Data augmentation techniques, such as rotation, scaling, and translation, have been widely used to augment the training data and improve the model's robustness to variations in handwriting styles. Additionally, preprocessing steps like binarization, noise removal, and normalization have been employed to enhance the quality of input images and improve recognition accuracy.

4. Transfer Learning and Fine-Tuning:

Transfer learning, where pre-trained models are fine-tuned on Devanagari script datasets, has also been explored to leverage the knowledge learned from large datasets like ImageNet. By initializing CNN models with weights pre-trained on a large corpus of images, researchers have demonstrated improvements in convergence speed and recognition accuracy, especially when training data is limited.

5. Evaluation Datasets:

Various benchmark datasets have been established for evaluating the performance of Devanagari script recognition systems. These datasets contain a large number of handwritten samples of Devanagari characters collected from diverse sources. Commonly used datasets include the Devanagari Handwritten Character Dataset (DHCD), the Devanagari Character Recognition Dataset (DCR), and the IIT Bombay Devanagari Character Dataset.

By building upon the insights and methodologies proposed in these previous works, our approach aims to contribute to the advancement of handwritten Devanagari script recognition, offering improved accuracy, efficiency, and robustness in character recognition tasks.

# **3 Proposed Approach**

Our proposed approach for handwritten Devanagari script recognition consists of the following key steps:

**3.1 Preprocessing:**

We preprocess the input images to enhance contrast, remove noise, and standardize the size of the characters. Preprocessing techniques include thresholding, noise reduction, and resizing.

**3.2 Feature Extraction:**

We extract features from the preprocessed images to represent the unique characteristics of Devanagari characters. Feature extraction methods include histogram of oriented gradients (HOG), scale-invariant feature transform (SIFT), and local binary patterns (LBP).

**3.3 Model Selection and Training:**

In our model selection and training phase, we investigate a range of machine learning algorithms, encompassing convolutional neural networks (CNNs), KNeighborsClassifier, ExtraTreeClassifier, DecisionTreeClassifier, and decision trees. These models are trained utilizing a labeled dataset containing handwritten Devanagari characters. Through this exploration, we aim to identify the most suitable algorithm for accurately recognizing Devanagari characters. Our approach involves rigorous training and evaluation of each model to assess its performance and suitability for the task at hand. By leveraging diverse machine learning techniques, we strive to determine the optimal model that can effectively classify handwritten Devanagari characters. This process entails thorough experimentation and comparison to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of each algorithm in handling the complexities of Devanagari script recognition.

**3.4 Evaluation:**

We evaluate the performance of our models on a separate test dataset using metrics such as accuracy, precision, recall, and F1-score. We compare the performance of our proposed approach with baseline models to assess its effectiveness in recognizing handwritten Devanagari characters. To evaluate the performance of our proposed Convolutional Neural Network (CNN) model for handwritten Devanagari script recognition, we employed accuracy as the primary evaluation metric. Accuracy measures the proportion of correctly classified characters over the total number of characters in the test dataset. Higher accuracy indicates better performance in recognizing Devanagari characters.

**4 Results**

Our experimental findings underscore the effectiveness of our proposed methodology in accurately recognizing handwritten Devanagari characters. In comparison to traditional machine learning models, CNN-based architectures consistently outshine, boasting superior accuracy and resilience to handwriting style variations. Notably, among the CNN models evaluated, the CNN architecture and the Extremely Randomized Decision Forest Classification Algorithm, comprising 256 trees, yield outstanding results, surpassing a remarkable accuracy threshold of over 90% on the test dataset. This remarkable performance highlights the robustness and efficacy of our approach in handling the complexities inherent in Devanagari script recognition tasks. Moreover, our methodology demonstrates enhanced generalization capabilities when compared to baseline models, suggesting its suitability for real-world applications where diverse handwriting styles may be encountered. These results not only validate the efficacy of CNN-based approaches but also underscore the potential of our proposed methodology to address real-world challenges in character recognition tasks.

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**5 Comparison to Baselines**

We In our comparative analysis against baseline models—encompassing convolutional neural networks (CNNs), KNeighborsClassifier, ExtraTreeClassifier, DecisionTreeClassifier, and decision trees—conducted on the same test dataset, our proposed approach consistently demonstrates superior performance across a spectrum of evaluation metrics. This comprehensive assessment reaffirms the efficacy of deep learning-based methodologies in tackling the intricacies of handwritten script recognition tasks. Specifically, the CNN-based models exhibit a notable advantage, achieving significantly higher accuracy rates while showcasing remarkable resilience to various challenges such as noise interference and diverse handwriting styles. This robust performance underscores the pivotal role of convolutional neural networks in effectively discerning and interpreting the nuances of Devanagari script, thereby positioning them as formidable tools for practical deployment in real-world scenarios. Such findings not only highlight the technical prowess of CNNs but also signal their potential for transformative impact across domains reliant on accurate character recognition.

**6 Analysis and Discussion**

Our analysis of Devanagari script recognition techniques reveals valuable insights. Preprocessing methods like contrast enhancement and noise reduction boost model performance by improving input image quality. Feature extraction techniques, such as HOG and SIFT, effectively capture key characteristics of Devanagari characters, facilitating discriminative feature learning. The dominance of CNN-based architectures highlights the significance of hierarchical feature learning and convolutional operations in handling intricate visual patterns typical of handwritten scripts. These findings underscore the importance of robust preprocessing and feature extraction in enhancing recognition accuracy. Moreover, they emphasize the effectiveness of deep learning approaches in tackling complex script recognition tasks. Overall, our study provides a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of various techniques and architectures in Devanagari script recognition, offering valuable insights for future research and application development in this domain.

# **7 Conclusions**

In this paper, we have presented an approach for recognizing handwritten Devanagari script characters using convolutional neural networks and other machine learning models. Through comprehensive experimentation, we have demonstrated the effectiveness of our proposed method in accurately identifying Devanagari characters, achieving high accuracy rates on a test dataset. Our approach outperforms baseline models and exhibits robustness to variations in handwriting styles, indicating its potential for practical applications in document analysis, text recognition, and language processing. Future work may involve exploring additional data augmentation techniques, model assembling strategies, and domain adaptation methods to further improve the performance and generalization capabilities of the proposed approach.

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