



## **A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF MODI SCRIPT**

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
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**Abstract:** Modi was a major script for writing Marathi language from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is considered that in the reign of Mahadev Yadav and Ramdev Yadav, 1260-1309 Hemadpant (true name Hemadri Pandit) developed the script called Modi. As the printing of Modi script was difficult, the use of modi script was behind and the use of Balabodh (Devanagari) script was made universal by the British Government of Bombay Presidency in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century for the sake of convenience and uniformity with other administrative areas of Presidency. This paper describes comprehensive study of the script including history, periodical classification, beliefs regarding origin of the script, internal analogy among different alphabets and relationship of the script with other co-periodic south Asian scripts like; Nagari, Devnagari, Gujarati, Mahajani and Bengali scripts. This paper also presents a tabular comparison of alphabets of Modi script with these co-periodic south Asian scripts to clarify the origin and development of the script.

**Key words:** Script, Modi script, Marathi language.

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## Introduction:

Modi (मोडी in Devnagari script,  in Modi script) is a Brahmi-script based writing system used to write Marathi, an Indo Aryan language spoken in south-western and central India specifically in the state of Maharashtra. Modi had been the writing script of Marathi language right from 12<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Modi script was developed by Hemadpant (Real name- Hemadri Pandit), an administrator in the state of Mahadeo Yadav and Ramdev Yadav (1260-1309 CE), in the Yadav dynasty at Devgiri, Maharashtra.

Indian historian Rajwade describes the presence of modi script in Maharashtra in the period of 'Dnyaneshwari', the philosophical literature by Dnyaneshwar; saint and poet of 13<sup>th</sup> century.

## Periodical Classification of Modi Script:

The script is classified in four periods- Yadavkalin- the period of Yadav dynasty, Shivkalin- the period of Shivaji Raje Bhonsale, Peshavekalin- the period of Peshwa dynasty and Anglakalin- the British colonial period in India.

Yadavkalin fonts of Modi script were written prominently vertical in shape. In Shivkalin font of the script slight inclination towards right is observed. The cursive shapes and circular shapes and slightly spaced fonts were introduced in Modi script by Chitnis Balaji Aavji, an administrator in Shivaji's empire. Similarly in Peshwa period this script became more cursive, circular and calligraphic. In earlier two ages of script it was written by a flat-tip reed pen. In peshwa period it was written by ink brush. In 19<sup>th</sup> century with invention of fountain pen, Anglakalin modi in the British colonial period in India was also written with fountain pen.

Modi script writings styles, Mahadjipanti, Biwalakari and Ranadi are also famous for turning and cursive letters. Later, it is

believed that it has been circulated and spread to other parts of India.

## Origin of Modi script:

There are three different schools of thoughts regarding origin of the script. Few historians believe that Hemadri Pandit brought the script from Srilanka, while as per another belief; the script is a modified version of Mouryi-Brahmi script of the period of Ashoka. The third and broadly accepted belief is; the script is a modified version of Brahmi script and having a specialty of least lifting the hand of writer. Modi had been in use to write Marathi around 900 years. As Nastaliq (نستعلیق) script, the conventional script of Persian language is modified as Shikasta Nastaliq (شکستہ نستعلیق), Broken Nastaliq) for the sake of maintaining speed of writing in administrative affairs. Similarly Modi has also experienced many modifications and variations in last 2-3 centuries.

In 10<sup>th</sup> century Shikasta Nastaliq (شکستہ نستعلیق, Broken Nastaliq) came in existence as a modified version of Nastaliq (نستعلیق) script, the conventional script of Persian language. A 10<sup>th</sup> century inscription found in Shravanvelgola, Karnataka is written in 'modi' script and dates from 983 CE. Beside this the oldest available written modi article is of 1189 CE. The article letter is in the collections of Pune's India History Research Board. This fact denies the thought that, for administration purpose modi script is developed from devnagari as its broken version after observing development of 'shikasta-nastaliq' from 'nastaliq'. The meaning of term 'modi' is 'broken'.

Similarly neither any historical evidence is found about, nor does any historical study describe the contacts and communications between Srilanka and Yadav dynasty (1187 to 1318 CE) in the period of Mahadev Rao, Ramdev Rao and Harpaldev Rao Yadav; when modi script came in to existence. This fact again denies and corrects the belief regarding origin of modi script from Srilanka.

### Modi Vowels:

અ    ઘ    ઈ    ઉ    ઈ    ઈ    ઈ    ઈ    ઈ  
 a    ā    i    u    e    ai    o    au    am    aha

### Modi Consonants:

ક    ઘ    ગ    ઘ    ડ    ડ    ઢ    જ  
 ka    kha    ga    gha    ṇa    ca    cha    ja

જ    ઝ    ટ    ટ    ડ    ઢ    ણ    ત  
 jha    ṇa    ṭa    ṭha    ḍa    ḍha    ṇa    ta

ટ    ટ    ટ    જ    પ    પ    બ    બ  
 tha    da    dha    na    pa    pha    ba    bha

મ    ય    ર    લ    વ    ળ    ષ    ષ  
 ma    ya    ra    la    va    śa    ṣa    sa

હ    લ  
 ha    ḷa

### Consonant Vowel conjunctions:

ક    ક    કી    ક    કે    ક    ક    ક  
 ka    kā    ki    ku    ke    kai    ko    kau

ઘ    ઘ    ઘી    ઘ    ઘે    ઘ    ઘો    ઘ  
 gha    ghā    ghi    ghu    ghe    ghai    gho    ghau

ડ    ડ    ડી    ડ    ડે    ડ    ડો    ડ  
 ca    cā    ci    cu    ce    cai    co    cau

**Analogy in Modi alphabets:** Modi had been in use to write Marathi language about 800 to 900 years. Out of which most of the period modi was in manuscript version, because of which deep analogy developed among few letters or sometimes among a letter with another letter in conjunction. Although these analogies were tried to be removed with passage of time and with development of print version of the script,

but few analogies remained which still create ambiguity in the script. Few examples of such analogies are given here in four different groups:

Group 1.    મ    મ  
                  ma    ka

Group 2.    ઘ    ટ    ઘ    ઘ    ઈ  
                  ba    ha    da    pa    i

Group 3.    ટ    ટ  
                  thha    ta

Group 4.    જ    જ    જ  
                  ja    na    la

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**Relationship to Devanagari and other sister scripts:** Same as Devanagari, Modi script is based upon the model of Brahmi; it differs significantly in terms of letterforms, rendering behaviors, and orthography. The shapes of some consonants, vowels, and vowel signs are similar in both the scripts.

The actual differences are visible in the behaviors of these characters in certain environments, such as consonant-vowel combinations and in consonant conjunctions, which are standard features of Modi orthography.

Gujarati and Bangla were anciently written in Nagari/ Devnagari scripts but with passage of time and development of literature and society, two different local scripts for both the languages got developed from Devnagari.

Similarly ancient Marathi is a dialect of

Maharashtri- Prakrit; which was anciently written in Brahmi and then in Nagari/Devnagari scripts. A tabular comparison of 12 vowels and 31 consonants (total 43 alphabets) of Modi script with Devnagari, Gujarati, Bangla and Kannada scripts is studied here. Many similarities are observed among Devnagari, Gujarati (Mahajani), Bangla and Modi scripts. Out of these 43 letters 5 vowels and 8 consonants are unique in shape and do not show much

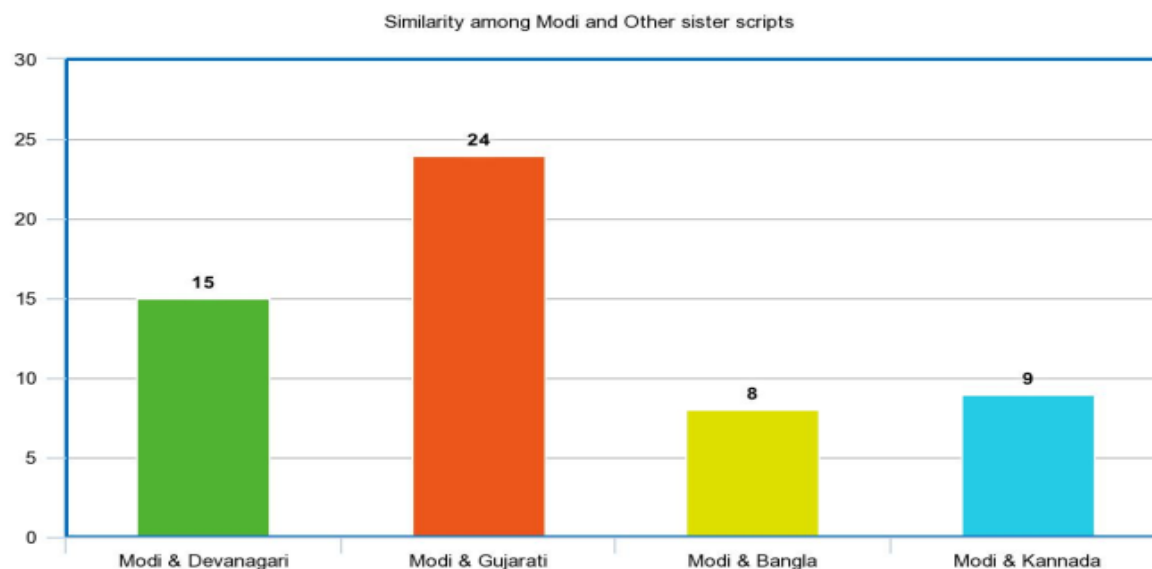
analogy with any above scripts. Out of remaining 30 alphabets 15 are of similar shapes in Devnagari and Modi, 24 show similarity among Gujarati/Mahajani and Modi, 8 show similarity among Bangla script and Modi and lastly 9 letters are similar among Kannada and Modi scripts. Especially 4 letters having sounds of *na*, *pa*, *ya* and *sa* are only analogous in Kannada and Modi scripts.

Serial number	Letter and sound	Modi script	Devnagari script	Gujarati/ Mahajani script	Bangla script	Kannada script
1	a	a	अ	અ	অ	ಅ
2	ā	A	आ	આ	আ	ಆ
3	i	I	इ	ઇ	ই	ಇ
4	ī	Ī	ई	ઈ	ই	ಈ
5	u	U	उ	ઉ	উ	ಉ
6	ū	U	ऊ	ઊ	ঊ	ಊ
7	e	e	ए	એ	এ	ಎ
8	ai	E	ऐ	ઐ	এই	ಐ
9	o	ao	ओ	ઓ	ও	ಒ
10	au	AO	औ	ઔ	ঔ	ಔ
11	am	a,	अं	અં	অম	ಅಂ
12	aha	a:	अः	અ:	অহ	ಅঃ
13	ka	k	क	ક	ক	ಕ
14	kha	;	ख	ખ	খ	ಖ
15	ga	g/	ग	ગ	গ	ಗ
16	gha	G/	घ	ઘ	ঘ	ಘ
17	cha	c	च	ચ	চ	ಚ
18	chha	C	छ	છ	ছ	ಛ
19	ja	j	ज	જ	জ	ಜ
20	jha	z	झ	ઝ	ঝ	ಝ
21	ta	[	ट	ટ	ট	ಟ
22	tha	]	ठ	ઠ	ঠ	ಠ
23	da	`	ड	ડ	ড	ಡ
24	dha	Ɔ	ढ	ढ	ঢ	ಢ
25	na	᳚	ण	ણ	ণ	ಣ
26	ṭa	t	त	ત	ত	ತ

27	<u>tha</u>	ਥ	थ	थ	थ	ਥ
28	<u>da</u>	d	द	द	द	द
29	<u>dha</u>	ਥ	ध	ध	ध	ਥ
30	<u>na</u>	n	न	न	न	ਨ
31	<u>pa</u>	p	प	प	प	ਪ
32	<u>pha</u>	f	फ	फ	फ	ਫ
33	<u>ba</u>	b	ब	ब	ब	ਬ
34	<u>bha</u>	□	भ	भ	भ	ਭ
35	<u>ma</u>	m	म	म	म	ਮ
36	<u>ya</u>	y	य	य	य	ਯ
37	<u>ra</u>	r	र	र	र	ਰ
38	<u>la</u>	l	ल	ल	ल	ਲ
39	<u>va</u>	v	व	व	व	ਵ
40	<u>sha</u>	□	श	श	श	ਸ਼
41	<u>ha</u>	h	ह	ह	ह	ਹ
42	<u>Sa</u>	s	स	स	स	ਸ
43	<u>sha</u>	ष	ष	ष	ष	ਸ਼

A direct comparison among Modi script and Brahmi script is also done and it is found that 13 alphabets of modi script show direct analogy with Brahmi symbols of same

sound. Out of which more than 5 letters of modi script do not coincide with Devnagari script.



Serial	Modi	Brahmi	Letter/
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no	script	script	sound
1	s	𑀲	Sa
2	c	𑀺	Cha
3	p	𑀻	Pa
4	r	𑀼	Ra
5	t	𑀽	Ta
6	g	𑀾	Ga
7	]	𑀿	Tha
8	G	𑁀	Gha

### Conclusion:

The earlier work on modi script contains various theories regarding the origin of modi writing including some fanciful suggestions such as “Paishachi” was written in Modi. However knowing that the legend of Gunadhyay and Kanubhuti Vetel attached to Brihtkatha belongs to 2<sup>nd</sup> century, while Modi is strictly written below the line unlike any other scripts of 2<sup>nd</sup> century such as Brahmi or Kharoshti.

The modi script is a modified version

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9	v	𑁁	Va
10	h	𑁂	Ha
11	[	𑁃	Ta
12	□	𑁄	Dha
13	□	𑁅	Sha

of Brahmi script and having a specialty of least lifting the hand of writer like conventional Persian script Nastaliq (نستعلیق) and modified Persian script Shikasta Nastaliq (شکست ا نستعلیق, Broken Nastaliq). Modi had been in use to write Marathi around 900 years. On the basis of known inscriptions it is justified to assume that the Modi was developed before 12th century. The 10<sup>th</sup> century inscription found in Shravanvelgola, Karnataka is written in ‘modi’ script and dates from 983 CE.

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