

Forgotten *Scripts of India*


– A Journey Through Time



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– *A Journey* Through Time

A SCRIPT IS NOT JUST A MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION; IT
IS THE SOUL OF A CIVILIZATION, CARRYING ITS HISTORY,
WISDOM, AND IDENTITY



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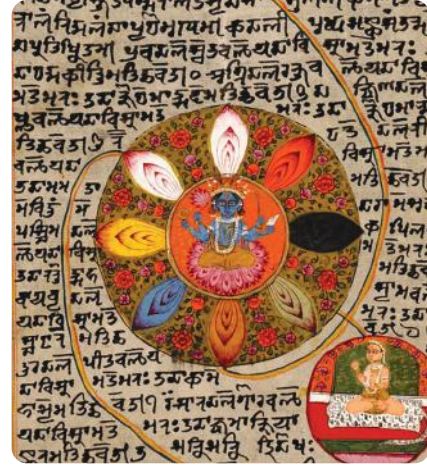
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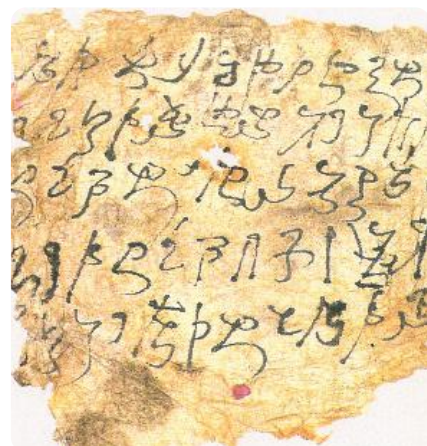
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Echoes of the Past

Unraveling the Origins and *Evolution of Indian Scripts*

CHAPTER 01

Introduction

- The Purpose of This Book
- The Importance of Scripts in Cultural Identity
- How and Why Scripts Disappear

01



Introduction

Writing is a mirror of a civilization's identity, knowledge, and culture, and it serves as more than just a communication tool. With scripts that have developed over thousands of years, the Indian subcontinent has one of the world's most extensive and varied writing traditions. Nevertheless, a lot of these scripts have become obscure because of changes in politics, technology, or culture.

The goal of this book or Documentation, "**Forgotten Scripts of India** – A Journey Through Time," is to examine these endangered and lost scripts and provide insight into their history, development, and importance. This book offers a visual and intellectual exploration of India's extensive but frequently disregarded script heritage through in-depth historical narratives, infographics, drawings, and typographic analyses.

The Purpose of This Book

Why This Book Matters

In a time when digital typefaces are the norm, Indian letters' rich history is gradually being lost. Many of these scripts are now dead or hardly known, having once been utilized in religious literature, royal decrees, and daily communication.

The *Purpose* of this book is Documenting *Forgotten Scripts – A guide to lost and endangered Indian scripts.*

- **Educate and Inspire Designers & Historians** – Assisting type designers, students, and researchers in exploring unique letterforms and styles.
- **To Emphasize Cultural Relevance of Scripts** – Comprehending scripts' influence on identity, tradition, and regional history.
- **Support Script Revival** – Encourage conservation and digital restoration of scripts.

Who This Book Is For

This book is aimed at students of design, typographers, historians, and teachers interested in India's rich diversity of writing systems.

By combining scholarly research and visual narrative skills, it presents advanced historical information in a readable and captivating format.

नमसु मारुते ऋषि
कस्मीरपरकभिति ~
दुभङ्ग पूजये नितुं

The first half *stanza of the Śāradāstotra* rendered in *Śāradā script*

**Raj Mudra
(Royal Seal)**

of Chhatrapati
Shivaji Maharaj
- **Modi script**



“प्रतपिचचंद्रलेखेव
वर्धनिष्णुर्वशिखवन्दति।
शाहसूजोः शिविस्यैषा मुद्रा
भद्राय राजते॥”

The Importance of Script in Cultural Identity.

Writing systems are more than just a means of communication; they are the foundation of cultural identity, heritage, and knowledge transmission. Throughout history,

scripts have played a crucial role in shaping civilizations, preserving traditions, and connecting generations. In India, where linguistic diversity is unparalleled, scripts have been central to religious, administrative, and artistic expressions. The loss or decline of a script often leads to the erosion of cultural identity, making script preservation vital for historical continuity.

1. Scripts as a Reflection of Culture Heritage

Each script carries the essence of the language, beliefs, and traditions of its people. From the sacred inscriptions of Sanskrit shlokas in Grantha to the elegant curves of Modi script used in royal Marathi correspondence, writing has always been deeply intertwined with identity.

Example

The Sharada script in Kashmir was once the medium of classical Sanskrit texts and local literature. As its use declined, it impacted the literary traditions of the region, leading to a loss of cultural knowledge.

3. Scripts as a Tool for Political and Social Identity

Scripts have been used historically to assert political authority, regional pride, and governance. Certain scripts were promoted by ruling dynasties to unify their territories, while others were suppressed by colonial and political forces.

Example

During British rule, Devanagari was favored for official records over Kaithi and Modi, leading to their decline. The loss of these scripts disconnected people from their historic bureaucratic and administrative traditions.

A timeline showing how different scripts were used in administration over centuries.

05



Indus Valley Civilization
c. 2600–1900 BCE

INDUS SCRIPT (UNDECIPHERED)

Possibly used for trade, seals, and administrative records.

Maurya Empire
c. 321–185 BCE

Brahmi & Kharosthi

Used in inscriptions by Aedicts, governance, and official communication.



Early Medieval Period
c. 600–1200 CE

Nagari, Grantha, Tamil-Brahmi, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam scripts

Regional kingdoms used their own scripts for tax records, land grants, and official inscriptions.



Gupta Empire
c. 319–550 CE

Gupta Brahmi

Standardized for royal decrees, legal documents, and administration.



Delhi Sultanate c. 1206–1526 BCE

Persian & Arabic

Persian became the official administrative language, used in royal decrees, revenue records, and legal documents.



Mughal Empire c. 1526–1857 CE

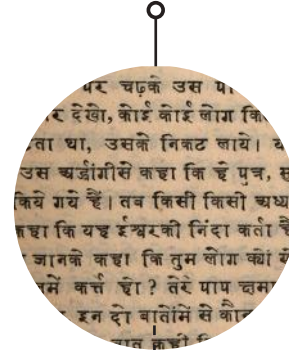
Persian With local scripts like **Modi** (Maratha administration) and **Kaithi** (Bihar, UP)

Imperial records, legal, and revenue documents.

Post-Independence India 1947–Present

Devanagari (Hindi), Roman (English), and regional scripts

official languages, with regional scripts used for state administration.



British Rule c. 1757–1947 CE

English (Roman script), Devanagari, Bengali, Urdu, Tamil, Telugu, and others for regional administration

English became the primary administrative language, but vernacular scripts were used for local governance.



4. The Connection Between Scripts and Art

Scripts are not just functional—they are artistic expressions. Indian calligraphy, temple inscriptions, and manuscript illustrations show how scripts were crafted with deep aesthetic and cultural significance. Some scripts were developed specifically for ornamental use in religious and royal manuscripts.

**Tibetan script,
Buddhist manuscript.**
(Prajnaparamita Sutra)



Yanai Mala: Tamil Grantha, Vatteluthu inscriptions, rock reliefs.

Example

The Grantha script was used for writing Sanskrit texts in South India with highly decorative flourishes, showcasing the artistic aspect of script design.

5. The Modern Revival of Forgotten Scripts

With the rise of digital typography, Unicode encoding, and type design, many forgotten scripts are being revived. Efforts by scholars, designers, and linguists are helping to preserve these writing systems, ensuring they remain accessible for future generations.

Example

The Modi script of Maharashtra is being revived through digital fonts and academic research, helping reconnect people with their historical documents.

ॐ ङ ग घ ङ
 ॠ ॡ ॢ ॣ ।
 ॥ ० १ २ ३ ४ ५
 ६ ७ ८ ९ ०
 १ २ ३ ४ ५
 ६ ७ ८ ९ ०
 १ २ ३ ४ ५
 ६ ७ ८ ९ ०
 १ २ ३ ४ ५
 ६ ७ ८ ९ ०
 १ २ ३ ४ ५
 ६ ७ ८ ९ ०

Modi script glyphs

Modi script characters in the kotem1 clip font.

Grantha—an ancient script woven with the wisdom of sages, a bridge between time, tradition, and timeless knowledge.

How and Why Scripts Disappear

Scripts are an essential part of a culture's identity, but many have disappeared over time. This happens for several reasons, including changes in rulers, languages, and technology. Let's explore the main reasons why scripts vanish:

01

Political Changes & Invasions



When new rulers take over a region, they often bring their own language and writing system. The old scripts may be banned or slowly replaced

Example:

The Persian-influenced Nastaliq script replaced many Indian scripts in Mughal-era documents.

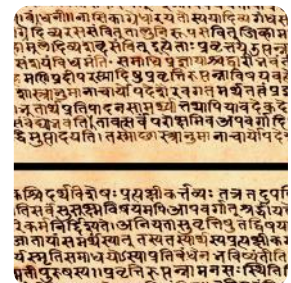
09

Evolution of Languages

Languages change over time, and so do the ways people write them. Some scripts become outdated as new, simpler ones emerge.

Example:

The Brahmi script evolved into many modern Indian scripts like Devanagari, Tamil, and Bengali, making the original script obsolete.



02

03

Shift to More Popular Scripts



People prefer using scripts that are widely understood and used for business, education, and communication. If a script is too complex or limited to a small group, it may fade away.

Example:

The Grantha script, once used for Sanskrit in South India, was replaced by Tamil and Devanagari.

With the invention of the printing press and later, computers, scripts that were not easily adaptable to printing and digital formats started disappearing.

Example:

Many ancient scripts, like Siddham, were not included in early printing technologies and became less common.



Colonial Influence & Standardization



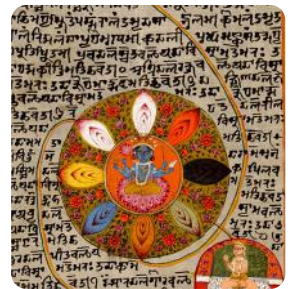
During British rule in India, English and standardized scripts like Devnanagari were promoted for administration and education. This led to the decline of regional scripts like Kaithi and Modi, which were once used for official documents.

Loss of Cultural Transmission

If a script is not taught in schools or used in religious or cultural texts, younger generations stop learning it. Over time the script gets forgotten.

Example:

The Sharada script, once widely used in Kashmir, declined as people switched to Devanagari and Urdu.



Can Scripts Be Revived?

Yes! Thanks to digital fonts, Unicode encoding, and renewed interest in ancient scripts, many lost scripts are making a comeback. Efforts by scholars, designers, and linguists are helping to preserve and revive India's forgotten scripts for future generations.

The Origins of **Writing in India**

- Prehistoric Symbols and Rock Inscriptions
- The Indus Valley Script – A Mystery Yet to Be Deciphered
- Early Brahmi – The Root of Indian Scripts
- Ancient Writing Tools & Materials
- How Ancient Scripts Spread Across Asia

Prehistoric Symbols and Rock Inscriptions

Before the development of structured writing systems, early humans used symbols, carvings, and rock inscriptions to communicate. These primitive markings are considered the first steps toward writing and provide a glimpse into the thoughts, beliefs, and daily lives of pre-historic people.

Key Features of Prehistoric Symbols

Pictographs

Simple drawings representing objects (e.g., sun, animals).

Petroglyphs

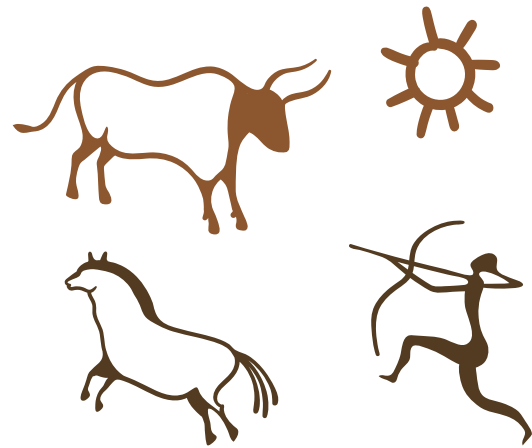
Carvings on rocks, used for storytelling or rituals.

Geometric Patterns

Circles, lines, and grids, possibly used for counting or calendars.



Rock Shelter Cave painting 30,000 BCE - Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh



Prehistoric petroglyphs from the Neolithic period. These rock carvings depict humans, animals, and symbolic patterns, showcasing early civilization.



Edakkal Caves-Kerala

The Indus Valley Script -A Mystery Yet to Be Deciphered

The Indus Valley Civilization (2600–1900 BCE) left behind thousands of seals and pottery pieces with mysterious symbols. These markings, found in Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, are considered one of India's oldest writing systems-but we still can't read them!



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Why is the Indus Script a Mystery?

No Rosetta Stone

Unlike Egyptian hieroglyphs, there's no bilingual inscription to decode it.

Short Texts

Most inscriptions have only 5–6 characters, making it hard to analyze.

Unknown Language

We don't know if it was Dravidian, Sanskrit, or something else.

Some believe the script represents an early form of writing, while others think it's just symbols with no actual linguistic meaning.



Early Brahmi

-The Root *of* Indian Scripts

Brahmi is considered the mother of all Indian scripts. It appeared around 3rd century BCE, during Emperor Ashoka's reign, and was used to write Sanskrit, Prakrit, and other languages.

Why is Brahmi Important?

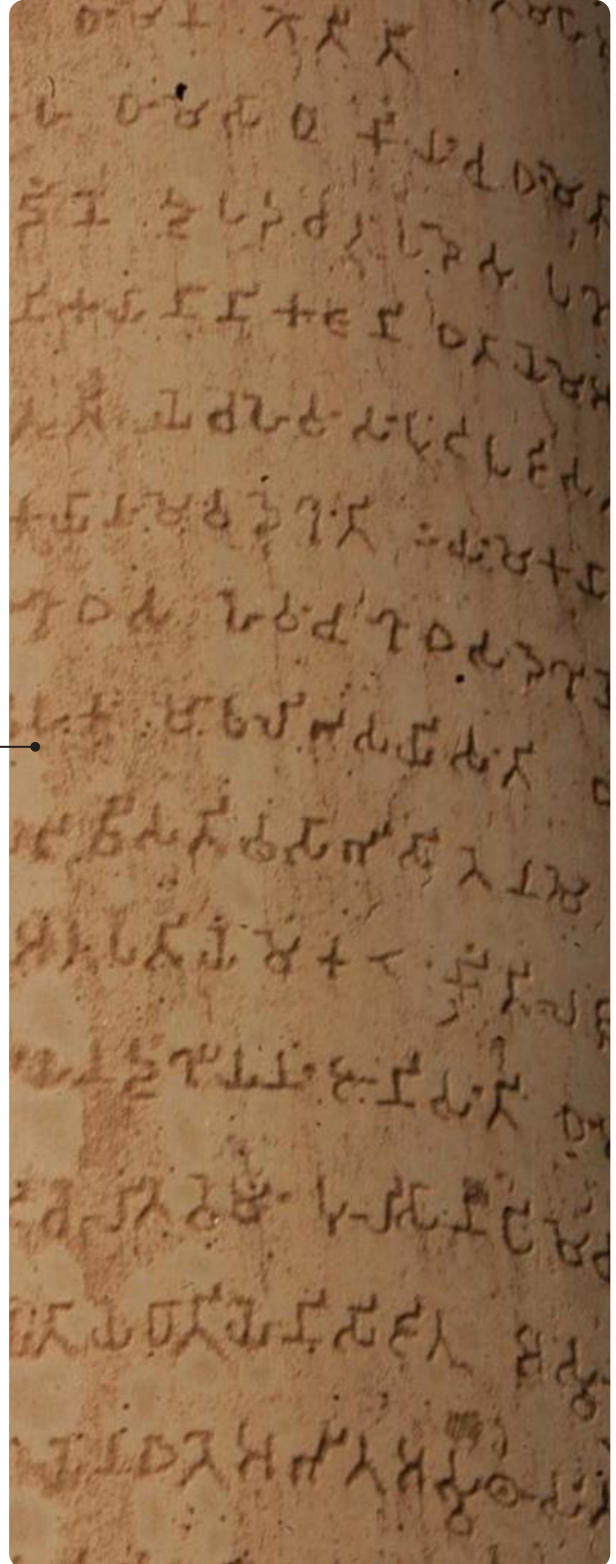
- Oldest Deciphered Script of India
 - Gave Birth to Modern Indian Scripts (like Devanagari, Tamil, and Bengali)
 - Spread Across Asia – Adapted into Tibetan, Thai, and Khmer scripts.
-

Example

The Ashokan Edicts (rock inscriptions by Emperor Ashoka) were written in Brahmi and found across India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

LANGUAGE IS THE ROAD MAP OF A CULTURE. IT TELLS YOU WHERE ITS PEOPLE COME FROM AND WHERE THEY ARE GOING.

- RITA MAE BROWN



Ancient Writing Tools & Materials

Before the invention of modern paper and ink, ancient civilizations used a variety of natural materials for writing. In India, different regions developed their own methods based on the available resources. These materials were crucial in preserving religious texts, royal decrees, and everyday records.

Types of Writing Materials in Ancient India

1. Palm Leaf Manuscripts

(Ola Leaves)



15

Used in

South India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand

Written with

A stylus (sharp tool)

How it worked

- Palm leaves were dried, polished, and cut into strips.
- Scribes used a stylus to engrave letters.
- Ink (made from charcoal and plant extracts) was applied to highlight the text.
- Leaves were stacked and tied together to form a book.

Example

Ancient Tamil and Sanskrit texts like the Tolkappiyam and Bhagavata Purana were preserved on palm leaves.

2. Birch Bark Manuscript

(Bhurjapatra)



Used in

Kashmir, North India, Tibet

Written with

Reed pen & ink

How it worked

- Made from the inner bark of the *Himalayan birch tree*.
- The surface was treated with natural oils to make it smooth.
- Used for writing religious and philosophical texts in Sanskrit.

Example

The Bakhshali Manuscript (India's oldest mathematical text)

3. Stone & Rock Inscriptions



Used in

Entire Indian subcontinent

Written with

Chisels & hammers

How it worked

- Used for royal decrees, religious teachings, and commemorations.
- Letters were carved into stone or painted on cave walls.

Example

Ashokan Edicts – Emperor Ashoka's messages of peace and Buddhism, carved on rocks across India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

4. Copper Plate Inscriptions



Used in

South India, Deccan, Bengal

Written with

Engraving tools

How it worked

- Text was etched onto thin sheets of copper.
- Used for land grants, royal decrees, and important records.
- Copper plates were durable, so many have survived today.

Example

The Sohgaoura copper plate inscription, the earliest known of its kind, 3rd century BCE

4. Cloth & Paper Scrolls



Example

- Jain Patashala (Religious Manuscript)

Used in

Gujarat, Rajasthan, Bengal

Written with

Handmade ink & brushes

How it worked

- Early paper was made from bamboo, jute, and cotton pulp.
- Scrolls were used for literature, trade records, and religious texts.

Types of Writing Materials in Ancient India



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1. Chisels & Hammers (For Stone & Rock Inscriptions)

Used for
Carving inscriptions on stone pillars, cave walls, and temple structures.

- Scribes used sharp chisels and hammers to engrave letters into rock.
- This technique was commonly used for royal edicts, religious teachings, and commemorations.

2. Stylus (For Palm Leaf Manuscripts)

Used for
Writing on dried palm leaves, a popular medium in South India.

- A metal or wooden stylus was used to scratch letters onto palm leaves.
- The engravings were then rubbed with ink or soot to make them visible.
- Palm-leaf manuscripts were tied together with a string to form books.



3. Reed Pens (For Birch Bark & Early Paper)

Used for
Writing on birch bark, handmade paper, and cloth.

- Made from hollow reeds or bamboo sticks with a sharp, tapered tip.
- Used with natural inks made from charcoal, minerals, or plant extracts.
- These pens were widely used in Kashmir, Bengal, and North India.

4. Ink & Brushes

(For Cloth Scrolls & Early Paper)

Used for

Painting scripts on fabric, early paper, and temple walls.

- Brushes made from animal hair or plant fibers were used to paint letters.
- Ink was made from charcoal, tree sap, and minerals.
- Often used in calligraphy and religious texts.



5. Metal Engraving Tools

(For Copper Plate Inscriptions)

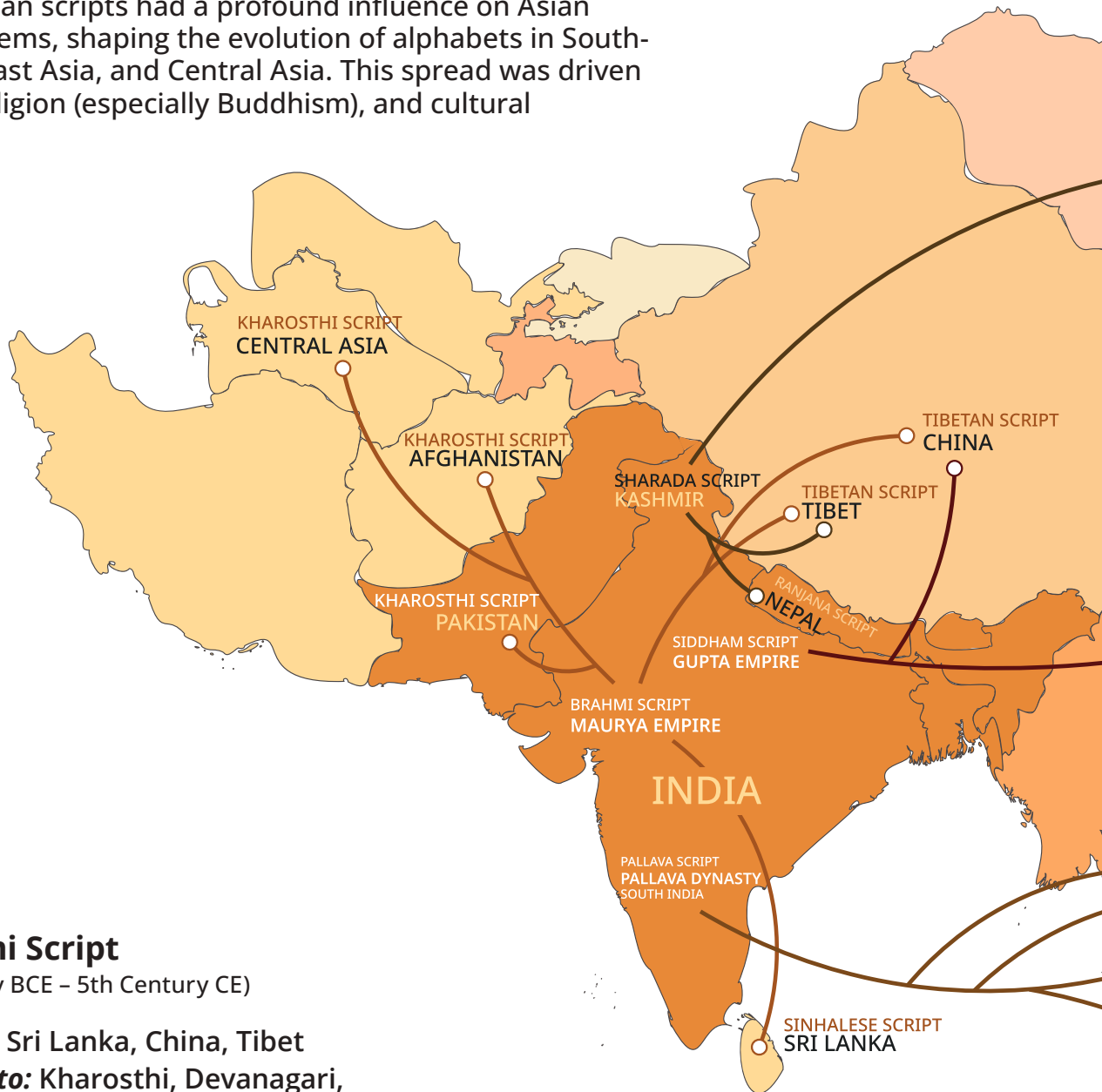
Used for

Etching legal documents and royal decrees on copper sheets.

- Sharp metal tools were used to engrave scripts onto thin copper plates.
- This technique was commonly used for royal edicts, religious teachings, and commemorations.

How *Ancient Scripts* Spread Across Asia

Ancient Indian scripts had a profound influence on Asian writing systems, shaping the evolution of alphabets in South-east Asia, East Asia, and Central Asia. This spread was driven by trade, religion (especially Buddhism), and cultural exchanges.



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1. Brahmi Script

(3rd Century BCE – 5th Century CE)

Spread To: Sri Lanka, China, Tibet

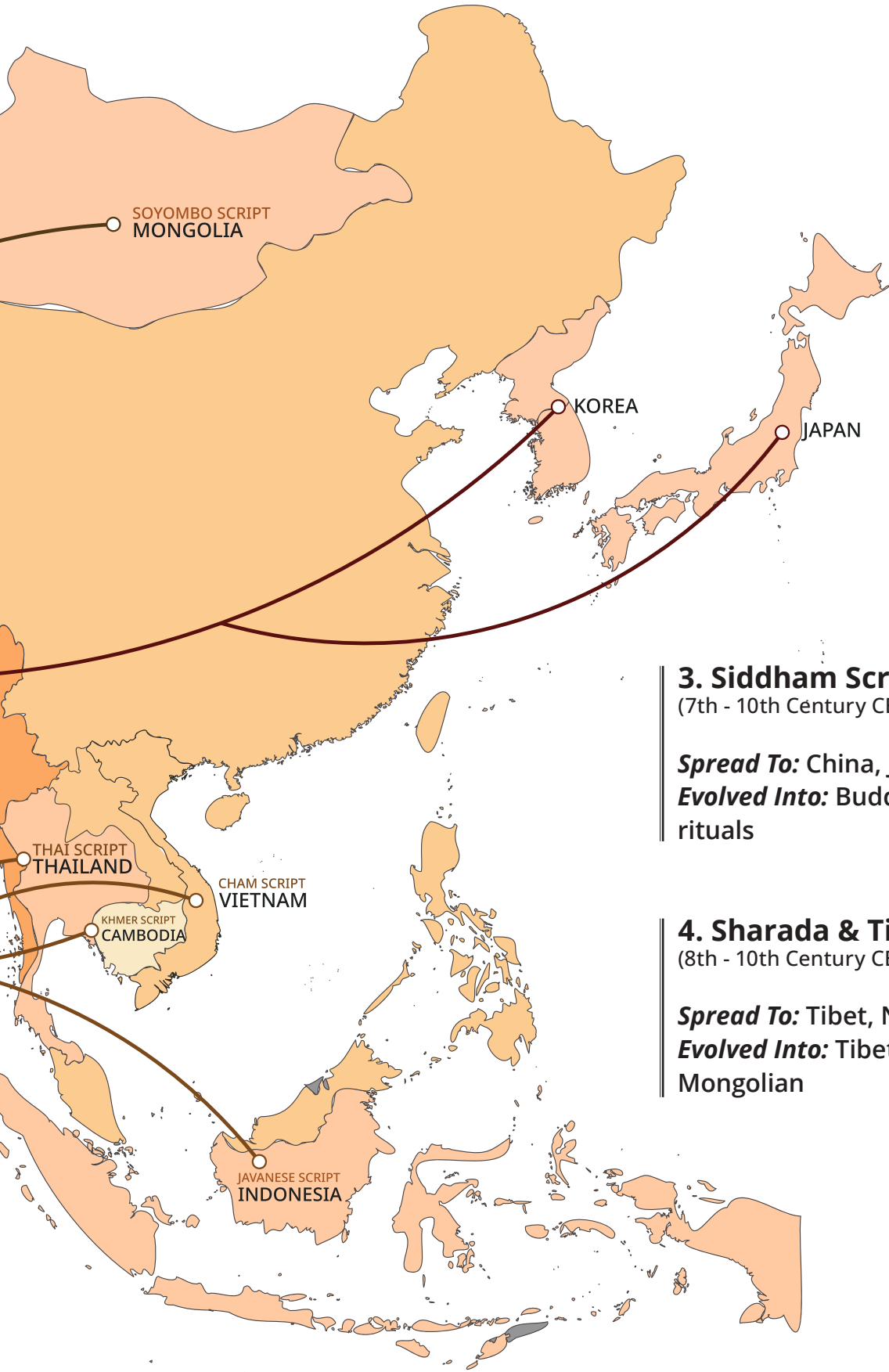
Evolved Into: Kharosthi, Devanagari, Tibetan

2. Pallava Script

(6th - 8th Century CE)

Spread To: Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia

Evolved Into: Khmer, Thai, Javanese



3. Siddham Script

(7th - 10th Century CE)

Spread To: China, Japan, Korea

Evolved Into: Buddhist texts & rituals

4. Sharada & Tibetan Scripts

(8th - 10th Century CE)

Spread To: Tibet, Nepal, Mongolia

Evolved Into: Tibetan, Ranjana, Mongolian

The Vanishing Letters

Exploring India's Forgotten Scripts and Their Stories

CHAPTER 03

The Forgotten Scripts Of India

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- Scripts of the Early Classical Era (3rd Century BCE – 4th Century CE)
- Medieval Indian Scripts (5th Century – 15th Century CE)
- Regional & Merchant Scripts
- Persian-Arabic Influence & Hybrid Scripts



Scripts Of The **Early Classica Era**

(3rd Century BCE – 4th Century CE)

The Early Classical Era saw the transition from symbols like the Indus Script to structured scripts like Brahmi and Kharosthi. Brahmi became the foundation of modern Indian scripts, while Kharosthi thrived in the north west before fading. These scripts shaped administration, religion, and cultural exchange in South Asia.





Example: Mohenjo-Daro depicts a bull with six symbols above it

Brahmi

The Mother Script of India

23

Brahmi, developed around the 3rd century BCE, is the earliest known script of India. It was widely used during Emperor Ashoka's reign (Mauryan Empire) and became the foundation for most modern Indian scripts. It was written from left to right, and its distinct letterforms evolved into Devanagari, Tamil, and Kannada.

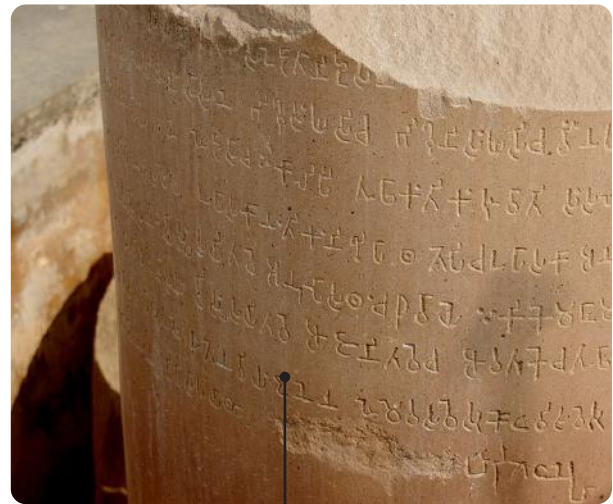


Example: Coin of Kanishka

Indus Script

The Undeciphered Script of the Harappans

The Indus Valley Civilization (2600–1900 BCE) is one of the world's oldest urban cultures. The Indus script, found on seals, pottery, and tablets, remains one of the biggest mysteries in linguistics. The script consists of pictographs and abstract symbols, with no known connections to any modern writing system.



Example: Minor Pillar Edict on the Sarnath pillar of Ashoka

Kharosthi Script

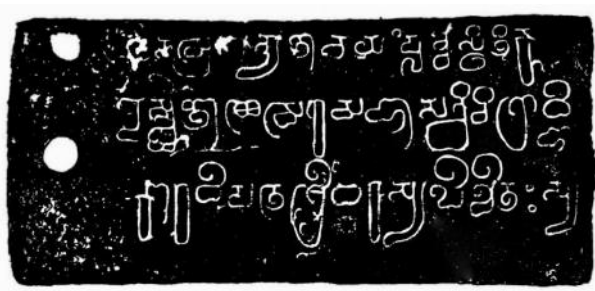
The Script of Gandhara

Kharosthi developed around 4th century BCE in the Gandhara region (modern-day Pakistan and Afghanistan). Unlike Brahmi, it was written right to left and influenced by Aramaic script due to Persian rule. It was used in Buddhist manuscripts and official inscriptions.

Medieval Indian Scripts

(5th Century – 15th Century CE)

Medieval Indian scripts (5th–15th century CE) evolved from Brahmi, leading to distinct regional scripts like Devanagari, Grantha, and Telugu-Kannada. These scripts played a crucial role in preserving religious, literary, and administrative texts. Their development influenced modern Indian writing systems, shaping linguistic and cultural identities.



Example: A Chera era Tamil Grantha script inscription (9th-century)

Grantha

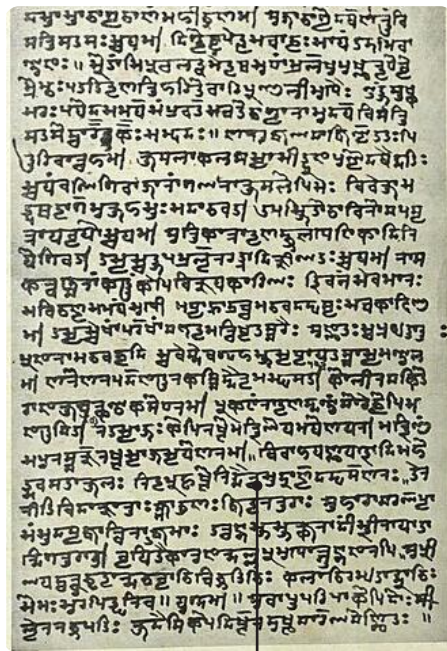
The Bridge Between
Sanskrit and Tamil

Grantha, meaning "book" in Sanskrit, was primarily used in Tamil Nadu to write Sanskrit texts. It played a crucial role in preserving Vedic literature and religious texts.

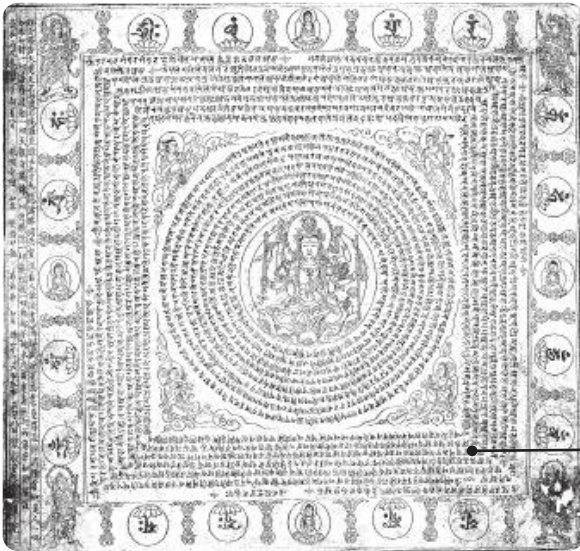
Sharada

The Sacred Script of Kashmir

The Sharada script flourished in Kashmir and parts of Punjab from the 8th to 12th century CE. It was primarily used to write Sanskrit texts, including legal documents and Hindu scriptures.



Example: The Rajatarangini (Chronicles of Kashmir)



Siddham Script

The Buddhist Monast Script

Siddham originated from Brahmi and was widely used for Buddhist texts. Even though it disappeared from India, it was preserved in Japan and China, where Buddhist monks still use it for chanting and calligraphy.

Example: Chinese Buddhism's dharani iconography with Siddham script in Sanskrit, Later Tang, 927 CE

Tankri (Takri) Script

The Himalayan Script

Tankri, or Takri, was used in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand for official and personal documents. It later evolved into Dogri and Chamba scripts.

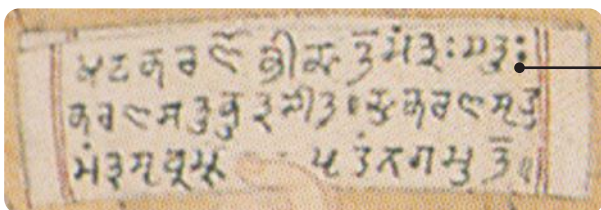
25

The Takri script evolved from Sharada between the 14th–18th centuries and was widely used in the Punjab Hill States for administration and literature. It served as the primary script for Western Pahari languages like Gaddi, Kishtwari, and Chambeali and was common in business records across Himachal Pradesh. After 1948, Takri was gradually replaced by Devanagari, especially post-independence.

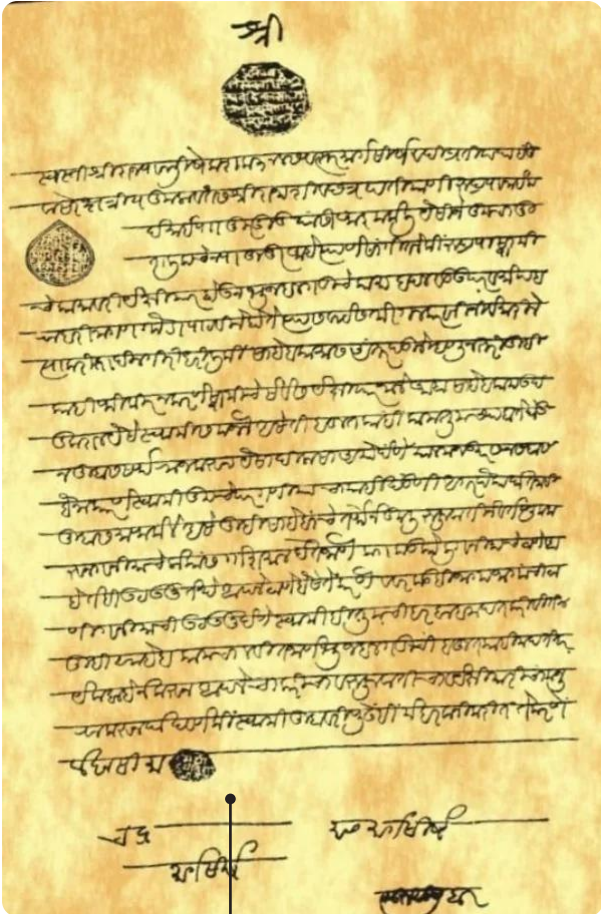
𑆗 𑆘 𑆙 𑆚 𑆛 𑆜 𑆝 𑆞 𑆟 𑆠 𑆡 𑆢 𑆣 𑆤 𑆥 𑆦 𑆧 𑆨 𑆩 𑆪 𑆫 𑆬 𑆭 𑆮 𑆯 𑆰 𑆱 𑆲 𑆳 𑆴 𑆵 𑆶 𑆷 𑆸 𑆹 𑆺 𑆻 𑆼 𑆽 𑆾 𑆿

𑆗 𑆘 𑆙 𑆚 𑆛 𑆜 𑆝 𑆞 𑆟 𑆠 𑆡 𑆢 𑆣 𑆤 𑆥 𑆦 𑆧 𑆨 𑆩 𑆪 𑆫 𑆬 𑆭 𑆮 𑆯 𑆰 𑆱 𑆲 𑆳 𑆴 𑆵 𑆶 𑆷 𑆸 𑆹 𑆺 𑆻 𑆼 𑆽 𑆾 𑆿

Alphabet of standardized Takri



Example: Enlargement of Sanskrit text in Takri



Example:
Maratha-era Modi script document.

Modi Script

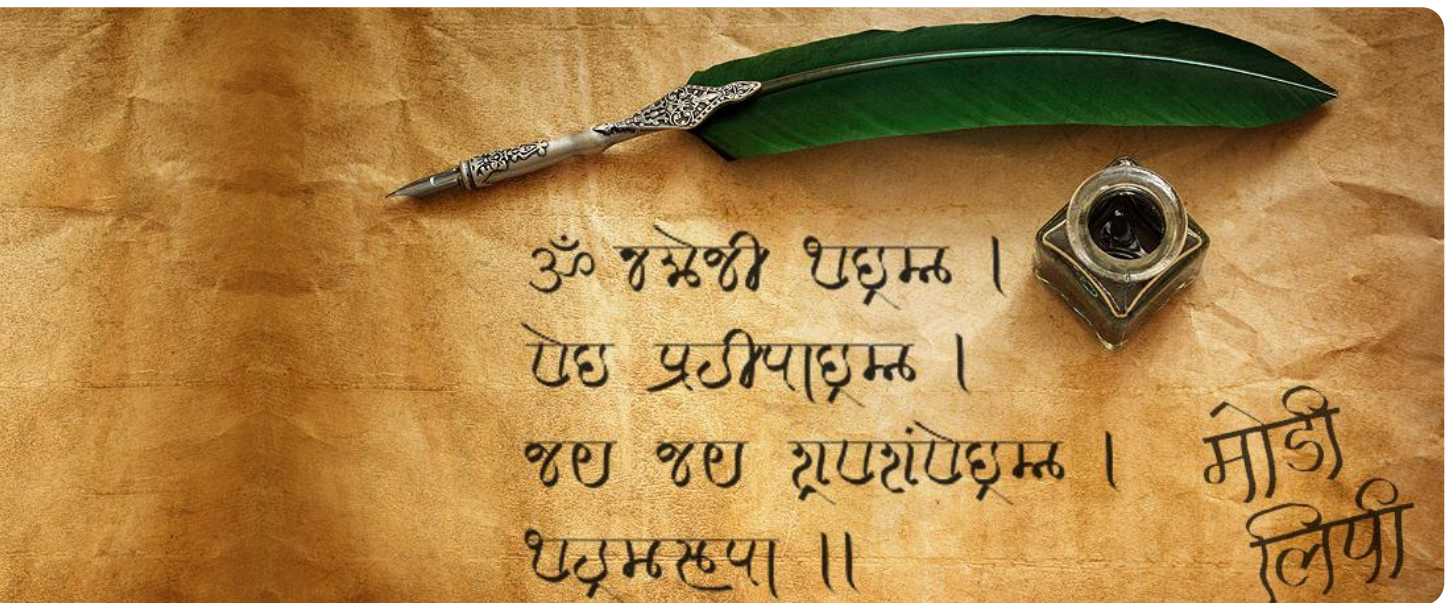
The Administrative Script of the Marathas

Modi (Marathi) is a historic script used for writing Marathi in Maharashtra, India. It coexisted with Devanagari until the 20th century when Balbodh Devanagari became the standard. Its origin remains debated.

The name "Modi" may come from the Marathi verb *mondne* (मोडणे), meaning "to bend or break," as it is believed to derive from broken Devanagari characters.

The Modi script's origin is debated, with some crediting Hemād pant in the 13th century for its creation or refinement, while others attribute it to Bā!ājī Avajī Chitnis, Shivaji Maharaj's secretary in the 17th century. Some believe Hemād pant brought it from Sri Lanka

The Modi script was used for swift writing in business and administration, primarily for accounts, credit notes (Hundis), and encrypted messages, as it was not widely understood.



अ आ इ ई उ ऊ
 ए ऐ ओ औ
 अं अः
 क ङ ग घ ङ
 य ष ण ह ञ
 ट ठ ड ढ ङ
 ण थ द ध ण
 प ष्ट व ष ञ
 य ण ठ ढ श
 ष स ह ङ

Kaithi Script

The Commoners' Script of North India

Kaithi, also known as Kayathi, Kayasthi, or Kayastani, is a Brahmic script used in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Jharkhand. It was primarily employed for legal, administrative, and private records. The script adapted to several Indo-Aryan languages, including Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Hindustani.

The name Kaithi comes from "Kayastha," a group historically linked to writing and administration. They served in royal courts and British colonial offices, maintaining records and legal documents, which led to the script being named after them.

Kaithi, used since the 16th century, was the official script of Bihar's law courts in the 1880s and widely used across North India. It was neutral, used by both Hindus and Muslims, but declined as Devanagari gained prominence. Though once common in legal and administrative records, Bihar courts now struggle to read old Kaithi documents.

Kaithi had three variants: Bhojpuri (most legible), Magahi (midway between Bhojpuri and Tirhuti), and Tirhuti (most elegant, used in Maithili-speaking regions).

Example:

Bhojpuri story written in *Kaithi script* by Babu Rama Smaran Lal in 1898

Specimen of Machine-printed book in Kaithi script (vowels top three rows, consonants below)

एक बहनी के दू देठा नहै । ओ में से खोटा अपने वाप से कहैस को
 ए वाप हमने वध्या के जवन भाँ अखवाव हो पवन हम के दा, एही पन वधवा
 दूनों देठन के आपन वन वीठ देहैस । वहुण दिन वा वीगे पावठ को खोटा देठा
 कुठ आपन वन वठीन के कठनों दून देस के निऊठ जाँठ औन आपन वन पयाव
 याँठ में उठा पुठा उठठस । जव कुठ ओकन वन ओना जाँठ पव ओह देस में
 वहुण काँठ पठठ, ओ उ हावा के मोहाण होवे जाँठ । पव जे जा के ओह देस के
 एक अहन के नहवश्रा के पास पहुँचयठ । जे अहनी ओ के अपने घेण में चुनन यवावे
 के वासगे मेण देहैस । ओकन ई दसा हो जाँठ को जवन सुशानशा मुसी प्याण
 नहैठो जेही जो ओ के मिठण गो जे ओही से आपन पेठ मुसी से गनन ठेकन रहे
 वा ओ के नेव देण नहैठ । जव ओ के येण गनन गो जे अपने मन में कहैस को
 नेपवा वीकनिस मजहुँतिस हमने वाप के वीठेँ पिकने प्याए के वहुण हव वीठक
 वय जाँठ ओ हम नुप्यन मनन हई । हम यठव अपने वाप जिहाँ जाव ओ कहव को
 ए वाप हम गोहने ओओ ओ दसठ के पाप करठो, एह ठाएक नश्यो को भव. हम के
 नेव गोहन देठा कहै । अपने वीकनिस मजहुँतिस में से हम के समुह के नुप्या ।
 ईहै कह के जे उठठ ओ अपने वाप जिहाँ आँठ । जव दूनै नहैठ पवै ओकन वाप ओ के
 देपठस । ओ के दनह गनठ, दठठ के जाँठ, ओकने गठे ठाँठ ओ ओ के युमठस । पव
 देठोओ अपने वाप से कहैस को ए वाप हम गोहने हणून ओ दसठ के पाप
 करठो, भव गोहन देठा कहवै ठाएक नश्यो । ठेकन वधवा अपने वीकनन से कहैस
 को जवन अषा से अषा कपडा हो पवन ठिशा के ओन के पहिनावन जा । ओ उन
 के हाव में भौठो ओ पैन में धूना पहिनावा ओ सब केहु बाधा प्याण जाई ओ
 मुसी करेँ, कोहै से को ई लमान देठा मन के खेन जोअठ है. देवाए के खेन
 निठठ है । एही पन सब केहु मुसी कने ठाँठ ॥



Example:
Folios 2a and 2b of the *Candrālamkāra*
in *Bhaiksuki* (from Dimitrov 2010)

Bhaikshuki

The Forgotten Monastic Script

Bhaikshuki, a Brahmic script from 11th–15th century India, was primarily used for Buddhist texts in Bengal and eastern regions. Named after Bhikshu (monk), it was closely linked to Buddhist monastic communities.

Used alongside Gaudi and Siddham scripts, Bhaikshuki appeared in palm-leaf manuscripts and inscriptions, preserving Buddhist teachings. It declined with the rise of Devanagari and Bengali scripts.

Structurally, it had syllabic characters, vowel diacritics, and conjunct consonants, resembling early Bengali but without a continuous headline (shirorekha). An example is the Buddha Gan O Doha, documenting Buddhist chants.



Example:
A statue of Buddha from Gaya, Bihar
with a *Bhaiksuki* inscription (enlarged)
on the under side of the base.



Regional & Merchant Scripts

India's linguistic diversity gave rise to many scripts, some shaping modern languages and others used for trade. Goykanadi (Halekannada) was an early Kannada script used in inscriptions, while Vatteluttu laid the foundation for Malayalam. Kolezhuthu & Malayanma were Kerala's lesser-known scripts for local documentation. Ahom served as the royal script of Assam but declined over time. Sylheti Nagari was used in Sylhet for religious and literary texts. Khudabadi & Mahajani were merchant scripts crucial for trade in Sindh and Punjab.



Goykanadi (Halekannada)

The Early Kannada Script

Goykanadi or Kandavi was a Brahmic script used in Goa to write Konkani and sometimes Marathi. It was also used by Saraswat and Daivajna traders, along with Modi script, for accounting.

Goykanadi, used in Goa since the Kadamba era, declined after the 17th century. Unlike Old Kannada, it featured a distinctive horizontal bar like Nagari scripts and likely evolved from the Kadamba script.

The Goa Inquisition banned local-language books, leading to the widespread destruction of Konkani, Marathi, and Sanskrit texts, including valuable non-religious works. Many Kandavi manuscripts were lost, though some Hindu epic transliterations survive in Portuguese museums. A 15th-century petition by Ravala Śetī bears the earliest known Kandavi inscription.

Example:
Folio from the Manuscript
'Flos Santorum' of 1607

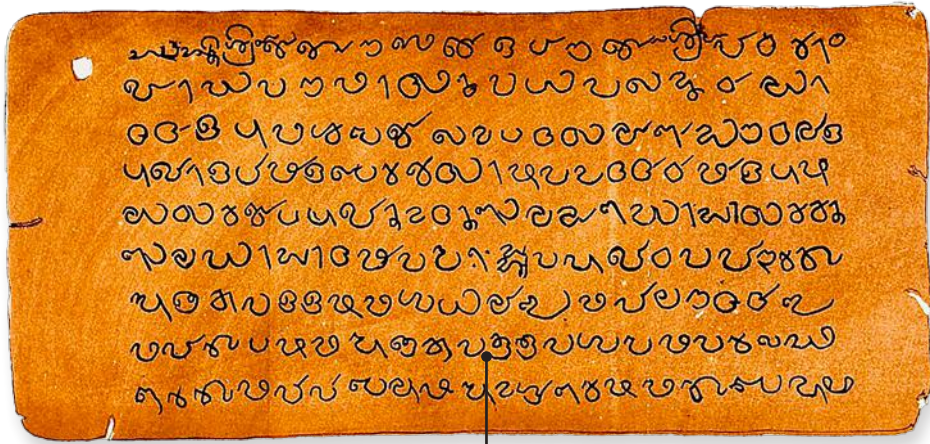
Vatteluttu

The Ancestral Script of Malayalam

Vatteluttu was a cursive Brahmi-derived script used in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Sri Lanka for writing Tamil and Malayalam. It was patronized by the Pallava, Pandya, and Chera rulers and belonged to the Southern Brahmi group. Closely related to the Tamil script, it lacked the virama and was written from left to right.

The term Vatteluttu has three proposed etymologies: Vatte + eluttu ('rounded script'), Vata + eluttu ('northern script'), and Vette + eluttu ('chiseled script'). It was also called "Tekken-Malayalam" (Southern Malayalam) and "Nana-mona," the latter derived from the way script-learning began with words like "namostu."

Vatteluttu evolved from late Tamil-Brahmi around the 4th-5th century AD, with early inscriptions found in Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. By the 7th-8th centuries, it became distinct from Tamil-Brahmi and was widely used across Tamil Nadu and Kerala, patronized by Pallava, Pandya, and Chera rulers. From the 7th century, Pallava-Grantha gradually replaced it in Tamil Nadu, with Tamil script taking over by the 11th century. However, in Kerala, Vatteluttu persisted longer, evolving and influencing early Malayalam inscriptions until the 4th century.



Example:
An 11th-century Vatteluttu inscription granting land to Jewish merchant Joseph Rabban, highlighting the Jewish presence in Kodungallur.

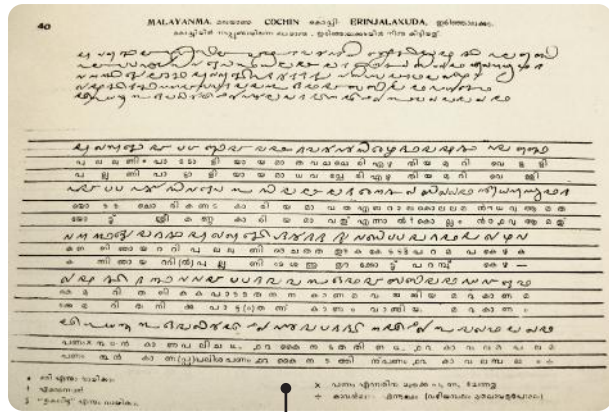
Kolezhuthu & Malayanma

Kerala's Lesser-Known Scripts

Kolezhuthu and Malayanma were regional variants of the Vatteluttu script used in different parts of Kerala. Kolezhuthu was popular among common people, while Malayanma was used by rulers and scholars.

Kolezhuthu: Used by non-Brahmin communities for writing Malayalam.

Malayanma: Official script of the Travancore kingdom before Malayalam script became standard.



Example: *Malayanma. Cochin Erinjalakuda*", from *Pracina Kerala Lipikal*, by El E Ravivarmma, 1971.

Ahom Script

The Royal Script of Assam

The Ahom script, likely derived from Old Mon or Old Burmese, was adopted by the Ahom people before migrating to the Brahmaputra Valley in the 13th century. The script evolved over centuries, showing similarities to the Lik Tai script (1407 Ming dynasty scroll), which shares features with Burmese. Scholar Peter T. Daniels suggests the Lik Tai script was derived from Burmese rather than Lik Tho Ngok.

The Ahom script was used for official records, including coins minted during Subinphaa's reign (1281–1293 AD), and manuscripts (Buranjis) written on agarwood paper. By the 17th century, Assamese replaced Ahom as the primary language.

Rooted in the Brahmi script, which spread via trade routes, Ahom shares ties with other Lik scripts used for Khamti, Phake, Aiton, and Tai Nuea languages. Though no longer in daily use, it retains cultural and religious significance, with a printed font developed in 1920 for the first Ahom-Assamese-English Dictionary.



Example: *Coin of Ahom king Sunyatpha in Ahomscript*
 Obverse: "In the name of the glorious Pha-Tu-ching, I offer prayer."
 Reverse: "Siunyatpha became king in the 21st year of the 15th Taosinga cycle."

Sylheti Nagri

The Script of Sylhet

Sylheti Nagri, also known as Nagri, is an Indic script derived from Kaithi, historically used in eastern Sylhet, Bengal, and Assam for documenting poetry (puthis). By the 20th century, it declined in favor of Eastern Nagari, though printing presses existed until the 1970s, and a Unicode font was created in the 2000s.

The script, primarily transcribed in Middle Bengali, had strong Sylheti phonological influences and provided a simpler, more precise representation than the Bengali script. It played a significant role in Sylhet's literary culture and is now being revived as a cultural identity marker.

Its origins are debated—some link it to Muslims in Sylhet for Islamic education in the 15th century, others to Afghan rule, and some to Hindu Nagar Brahmins who later converted to Islam. It was also possibly influenced by Buddhist Bhikkhus from Nepal. Manuscripts include Rag Namah, Shonabhaner Puthi, and the earliest known Talib Husan (1549).

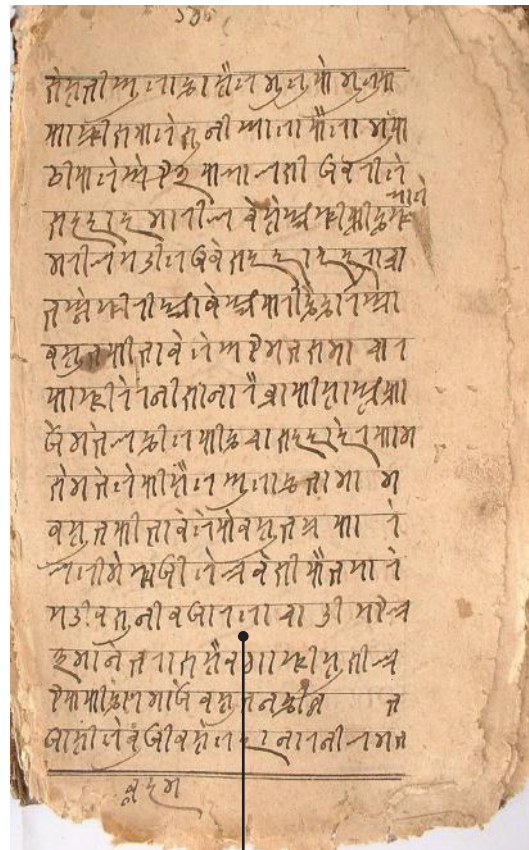
Khudabadi & Mahajani

The Merchant Scripts of Sindh & Punjab

Khudabadi (Devden):

Khudabadi is a historic Sindhi script, primarily used by some Sindhi Hindus. Originating from Khudabad, Sindh, it was widely adopted by traders for secret record-keeping. Rooted in Brahmi, it resembles Indic scripts but differs in angularity.

During British rule, multiple scripts coexisted for Sindhi. In 1868, Khudabadi was briefly standardized but declined post-1947, with Perso-Arabic becoming dominant. Modern Khudabadi, an abugida written left to right, includes 37 consonants, 10 vowels, and diacritics. While Perso-Arabic is prevalent, India recognizes both Khudabadi and Devanagari.



Example:

Sample page from the ballad Shoddador Boean by Pir Azmot Ali, written in Sylheti Nagari script.

Mahajani:

Mahajani is a Landā mercantile script used historically in northern India for accounting in Marwari, Hindi, and Punjabi. Derived from Landa scripts, it lacks conjunct forms, has optional vowels, and includes financial symbols. Once widely taught in merchant schools, it is now obsolete but was vital for trade records.



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Example:
Cover page of a book written in Standard Sindhi (Khudabadi)

३३

पहिले भाग

नाममहाजनी	नाममहाजनी	नाममहाजनी	नाममहाजनी
केदारनाथ	केदारनाथ	दुरगाशंकर	दुरगाशंकर
खैरलोलल	खैरलोलल	प्यारेलाल	प्यारेलाल
गोपीनाथ	गोपीनाथ	प्रतापचंद	प्रतापचंद
धनश्यामदास	धनश्यामदास	बुलकाकीदास	बुलकाकीदास
जानकचंद	जानकचंद	भीरुलाल	भीरुलाल
चिंजीलाल	चिंजीलाल	मुन्नालाल	मुन्नालाल
छोतरामल	छोतरामल	मोहनलाल	मोहनलाल
जमनाथ	जमनाथ	वकसीराम	वकसीराम
कुंभल	कुंभल	रतुसालराम	रतुसालराम
देवचंद	देवचंद	सीकचंद	सीकचंद
दंडीमल	दंडीमल	रतनचंद	रतनचंद
हुगारमल	हुगारमल	मानकचंद	मानकचंद
ताराचंद	ताराचंद	बनारसीदास	बनारसीदास
धमनलाल	धमनलाल	ज्वालपरराव	ज्वालपरराव
रतुचंद	रतुचंद	सनेहरलाल	सनेहरलाल
गंगाधर	गंगाधर	ठाकुरदास	ठाकुरदास
निहालसिंह	निहालसिंह	इसूरीप्रसाद	इसूरीप्रसाद
घासीराम	घासीराम	उत्तमचंद	उत्तमचंद
चेतराम	चेतराम	हीरालाल	हीरालाल
झूलचंद	झूलचंद	सरवमीचंद	सरवमीचंद
ताबूल	ताबूल	शत्रुमल	शत्रुमल
पिरसूचलाल	पिरसूचलाल	बजीरसिंह	बजीरसिंह
किशोरिलाल	किशोरिलाल	केराचंद	केराचंद

Example:
Personal names written in Mahajani, Devanagari, and Arabic scripts

Persian-Arabic Influence & Hybrid Scripts

The Persian-Arabic script influenced many regional languages, leading to the development of hybrid scripts that blended Indic and Arabic writing systems. These scripts emerged due to cultural exchanges, trade, and religious influence

Rekhta Script

The Early Urdu-Devanagari Blend

Rekhta was an early form of Hindustani, evolving in both Perso-Arabic and Nagari scripts, and is considered a precursor to Modern Urdu and Hindi. It was a highly Persianized poetic register, used by poets like Amir Khusrau, Mir, and Ghalib.

The term Rekhta, meaning "scattered" or "mixed," referred to poetry blending Persian and Hindavi within verses. By the 18th century, it became the literary language of the Mughal court but later gave way to Urdu and Hindi. The first Urdu ghazal, "Zehal-e-Miskin," by Amir Khusrau, showcased this fusion of Braj Bhasha and Persian.

ریختہ کے تم ہی اُستاد نہیں ہو غالب
کہتے ہیں اگلے زمانے میں کوئی میر بھی تھا

TRANSLATION

YOU ARE NOT THE ONLY MASTER OF THE REKHTA, GHALIB. THEY SAY THAT IN THE PAST THERE WAS ALSO A MIR.

Arabi-Malayalam

The Arabic Adaptation of Malayalam

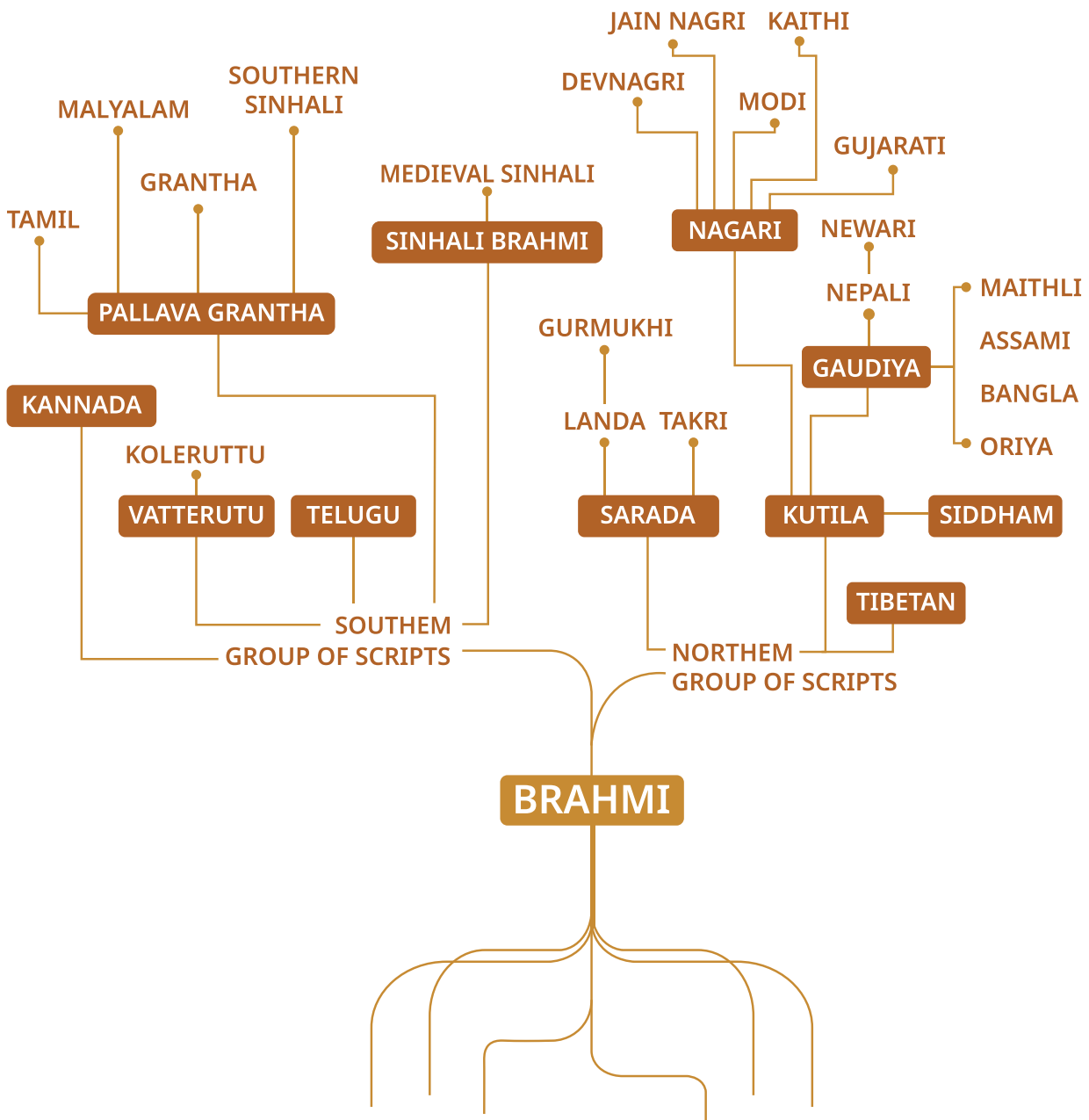
Arabi-Malayalam is a hybrid script where Malayalam words are written using Arabic script with added letters for native sounds. It emerged in Kerala as Muslims learned Arabic for Quranic recitation but needed a script for local use. Early works include Muhiyuddin Mala (1607) by Qazi Muhammad and Kappapattu, with later contributions from Moinkutty Vaidyar. The script was used for poetry, religious texts, letters, and newspapers, with Salahul Ikhwan (1901) as the first. Over 2,500 books exist in Arabi-Malayalam, reflecting a rich literary heritage.

آ	ا	آ	ا	ا	ا	ا	ا
آ	آ	آ	آ	آ	آ	آ	آ
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س
ک	چ	ج	ت	پ	ی	ش	س

Example:
Arabic Malayalam alphabet

The *Family Tree* of Indian Scripts

The Brahmi script is the mother of many Indian and Southeast Asian scripts, evolving into diverse writing systems over centuries. This script tree visually represents its transformation into major Northern and Southern script families, shaping the rich linguistic heritage of the region.





**Letters are the footprints of
knowledge, and scripts are
the bridges to civilization.**

Inspired by the legacy of Brahmi and its evolution
into Indic scripts.

Reving The **Silent Voices**

Preservation, Modern Applications,
and the Future of Ancient Scripts

CHAPTER 04

Forgotten Scripts **in Modern Design & Typography**

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- The Role of Ancient Scripts in Contemporary Typography
- The Revival of Modi, Sharada, and Grantha Scripts in Design
- How Ancient Scripts Inspire Modern Typefaces

Example:

Inap, September 1986. Nepal Bhasa/
Newari newspaper. The masthead of
the paper uses the Ranjana script, with
the actual text – body and headings –
in Devanagari.



Example:

Ek Type's profile Maithili Shingre's profile
Jaini (Devanagari font) based on 1503 AD

गोअरिहंताणं । णमोसिद्धाणं । णमोआइरिया
ड्झायाणं । णमोलोएसवसाहूणं । ए । पञ्च
सवपावप्पणास णो! मंगल । च
हवड्मंगलम णमोअ हंत
द्धाणं । णमोआ इरियाणं । गोअ
णमोलोएसवसाहूणं । एसोपञ्चणमोर गोस
सणो! मंगलाणं च सव्वेसिं पढमं हवड्मंगलम

FORGOTTEN SCRIPTS OF INDIA



Forgotten scripts like Brahmi, Grantha, and Modi are making a comeback in modern design, influencing typography, branding, and digital media. They add cultural depth, inspire new typefaces, and blend historical aesthetics with contemporary trends. Designers are digitizing and adapting these scripts for experimental layouts, motion graphics, and accessible typography, bridging heritage with innovation.

The *Role of Ancient Scripts* in Contemporary Typography

Typography is an evolving art form that bridges history and modernity reflecting cultural influences across time. Ancient scripts, which once served as primary communication tools for civilizations, continue to shape contemporary typography in profound ways. From aesthetics and structural integrity to cultural preservation and digital adaptation, the influence of historical letterforms remains integral to modern type design

1. *Aesthetic Influence and Design Inspiration*

Ancient scripts provide a vast reservoir of inspiration for modern type designers. Calligraphic nuances from scripts like Brahmi, Devanagari, and Grantha influence contemporary fonts with their intricate ligatures, varying stroke thicknesses, and organic letterforms. Designers often study these scripts to create new typefaces that balance tradition with modern usability

2. *Structural Integrity and Functionality*

Ancient scripts provide a vast reservoir of inspiration for modern type designers. Calligraphic nuances from scripts like Brahmi, Devanagari, and Grantha influence contemporary fonts with their intricate ligatures, varying stroke thicknesses, and organic letterforms. Designers often study these scripts to create new typefaces that balance tradition with modern usability



3. Digital Adaptation and Unicode Integration

The rise of digital typography and global communication necessitates the integration of ancient scripts into modern technology. Unicode standardization has allowed designers to digitize historical scripts, enabling their use in digital media, UI/UX design, and web typography. This transition not only preserves the scripts but also fosters cross-cultural communication by making them accessible worldwide.

4. Cultural Preservation and Revival

Typography plays a crucial role in preserving linguistic heritage. Many ancient scripts that were on the brink of extinction, such as Ol Chiki (used for the Santali language) and Modi script, are being revived through digital typography. Modern type foundries and researchers are actively reconstructing these scripts, integrating them into digital platforms to ensure their survival in the digital era.

Modern Branding and Identity

Ancient scripts also play a role in contemporary branding and design identity. Many brands incorporate letterforms inspired by ancient scripts to establish cultural authenticity and heritage. This is particularly evident in logos, packaging, and event branding where historical aesthetics are blended with modern design principles.



The *Revival of Modi, Sharada, and Grantha Scripts in Design*

Ancient scripts like Modi, Sharada, and Grantha hold immense historical and cultural significance but faced near-extinction due to modernization and colonial influences. Today, their revival in design is bridging the gap between tradition and contemporary visual communication.

Modi Script: A Digital Comeback

Once the administrative script of the Maratha Empire, Modi is being revived through digitized fonts and calligraphy-based branding. Modern type designers are reconstructing Modi for contemporary use, making it accessible for signage, publications, and digital media.

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Sharada Script: From Heritage to Modern Typography

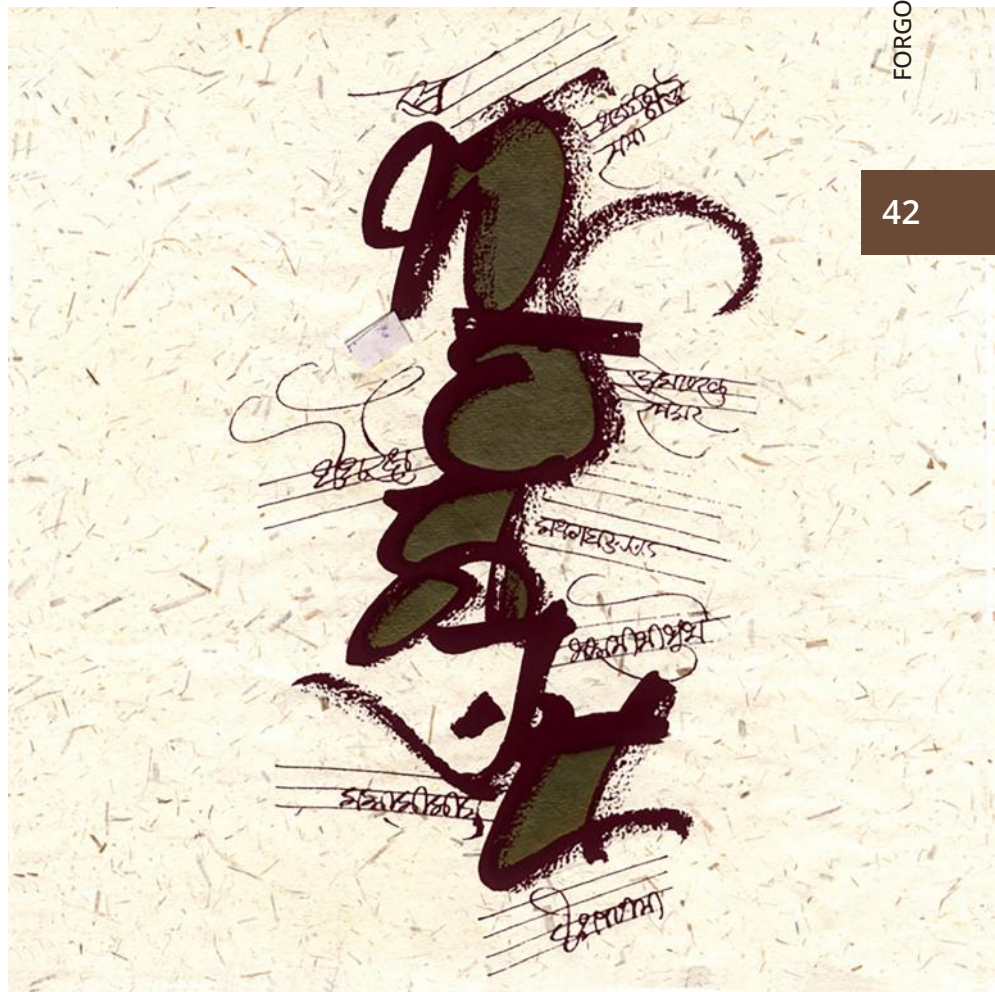
Sharada, an ancient script of Kashmir, is experiencing a resurgence through academic research and typeface development. Unicode standardization has enabled designers to integrate it into digital interfaces, fostering its use in cultural and educational projects.

Grantha Script: Aesthetic Fusion in Contemporary Design

Grantha, historically used for Sanskrit texts in South India, is being embraced in typography, calligraphy, and branding. Its distinctive letterforms inspire modern fonts, blending heritage with innovation in book design, event branding, and visual storytelling.

How *Ancient Scripts* Inspire Modern Typefaces

Ancient scripts serve as a foundation for modern typeface design, influencing letterforms, calligraphy, and multiscrypt typography. Their structural aesthetics inspire contemporary fonts, blending tradition with modern readability. Digital revivals of scripts like Modi and Grantha ensure their cultural preservation while expanding creative possibilities. By integrating historical elements, designers create typefaces that honor heritage while embracing innovation.

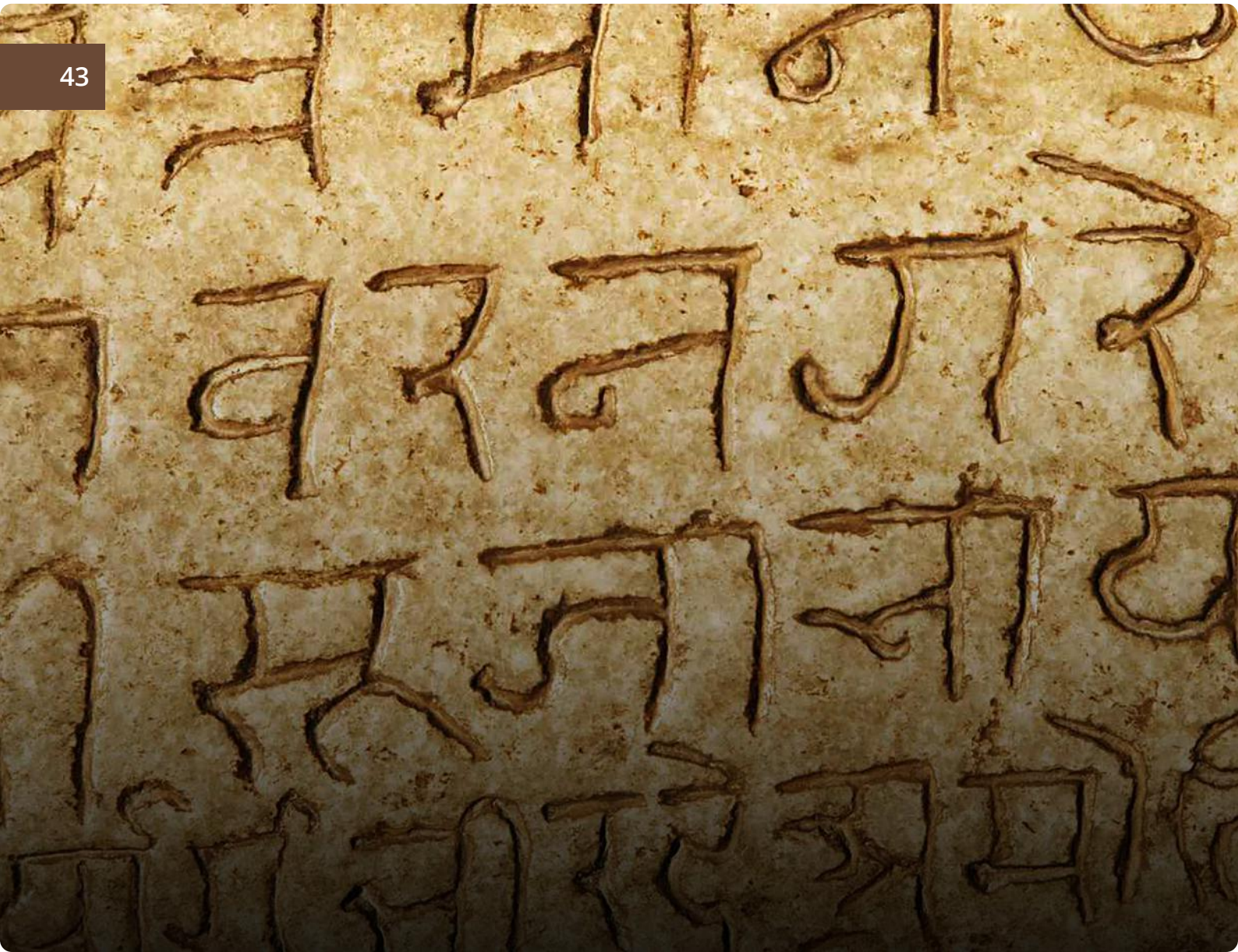


Artist : Achyut Palav's
Calligraphy Art (Modi Script)

Challenges & Future

Script Preservation

- Why These Scripts Disappeared?
- The Role of Epigraphy & Archaeology in Rediscovering Scripts
- Organizations & Projects Working on Script Revitalization



Why These *Scripts Disappeared?*

The disappearance of many Indian scripts can be attributed to political upheavals, colonial policies, and social shifts. The rise and fall of empires led to the dominance of certain languages, while others were sidelined. British rule, with its emphasis on English and standardized scripts like Devanagari, further marginalized regional scripts. Additionally, socio-cultural changes, including oral traditions replacing written records, contributed to their decline.

The Role of *Epigraphy & Archaeology* in Rediscovering Scripts

Digitalization and AI are revolutionizing script conservation by preserving and decoding ancient texts with advanced technology. High-resolution scanning, OCR (Optical Character Recognition), and AI-driven translation tools help restore and analyze lost scripts. Machine learning models assist in pattern recognition, aiding in the decipherment of undeciphered scripts like the Indus script. These technologies ensure the longevity and accessibility of ancient scripts for future generations.

Organizations & Projects Working On Script Revitalization

National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM)

People's Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI)

Endangered Alphabets Project

Digital & Open-Source Initiatives

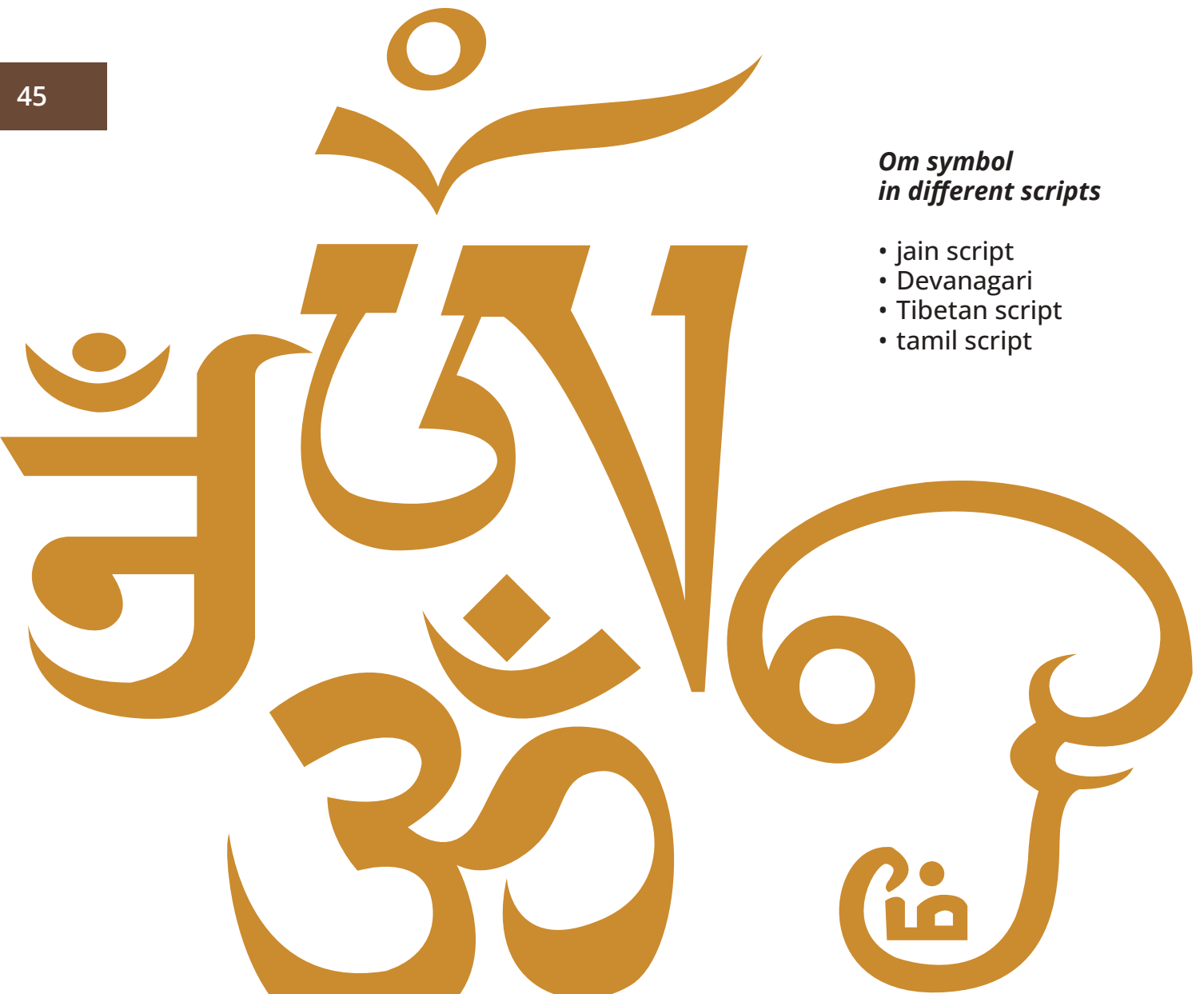
Individual Script Revival Efforts

Conclusion & Final Reflections

Forgotten scripts are key to India's cultural heritage, preserving history and identity. Their revival connects us to the past and enriches future generations.

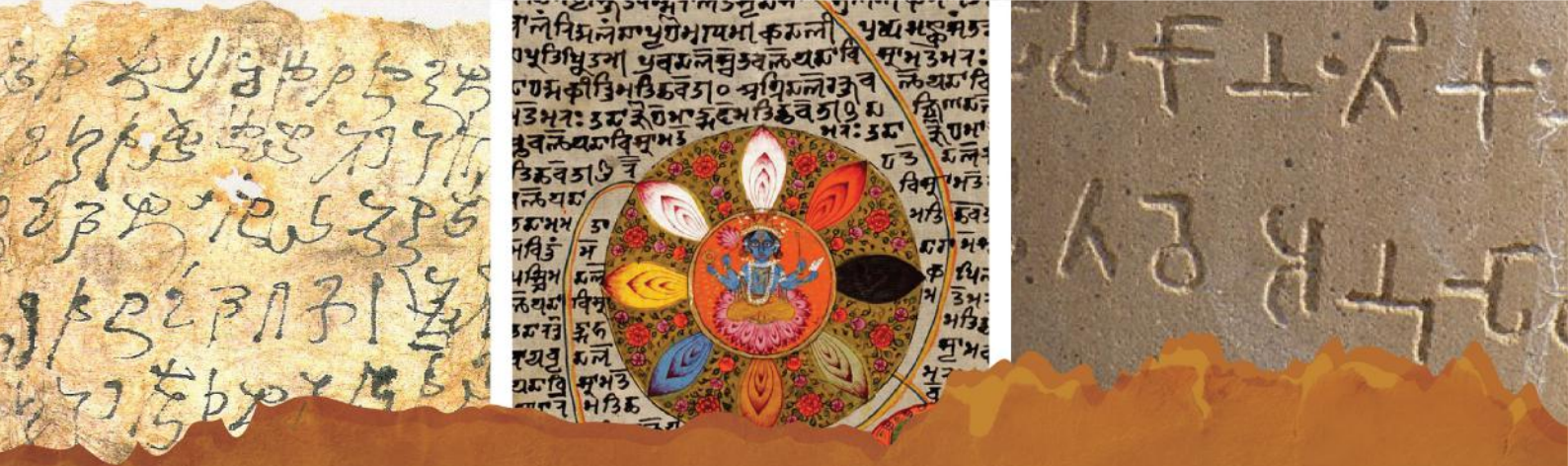
Designers can modernize scripts, educators can integrate them into learning, and historians can document and analyze them. Collaboration can drive awareness and preservation.

Future possibilities include digital fonts, AR/VR experiences, AI for decipherment, and community-driven initiatives. Reviving these scripts through design, education, and technology ensures they remain a vital part of India's legacy.



Om symbol in different scripts

- jain script
- Devanagari
- Tibetan script
- tamil script



Forgotten *Scripts of India*

– A Journey Through Time

This book explores India's forgotten scripts, tracing their origins, evolution, and eventual decline due to political, social, and cultural shifts. It delves into their structures, historical significance, and modern revival in design and typography. Through illustrations, infographics, and case studies, it highlights efforts in preservation, including the role of archaeology, digitalization, and AI in script conservation.

