

# History and Types of Script in Ancient Indian Civilization

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**Abstract:** Scripts and language were essential tools for expressing one's thoughts and feelings in ancient civilization, and they will be useful in acquiring a better understanding of that civilization. When we talk about scripts, we're talking about a certain way of writing or the textual medium of human communication that is utilized to communicate information. In the history of the world, script has been used to create some of the most important pieces of writing ever written, including some of the most important works of literature ever written. The most important, as well as the most fundamental, aspects of the human condition and of life have been portrayed via the medium of script. An optimum environment for language development is created by the combination of script and language, as well as a solid vocabulary and grammar. They provide a link between people of diverse cultural backgrounds. Despite the presence of various scripts in ancient India, there is a need for extensive investigation into several concerns and questions concerning their intra and inter-relationships. A combination of research methods including formative, observation, open-ended and qualitative methods have been used with a predominance of historical methods. As the main vehicle of communication, the history of script in ancient India has ignited many minds and there have been many works in this regard which merits a review.

**Keywords:** Script, Language, Civilization, India, Writing, Knowledge, Symbols

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## 1. Introduction

In ancient civilization, scripts and language were vital instruments for expressing one's thoughts and feelings, and they will be valuable in gaining knowledge of that civilization. The combination of script and language, as well as a robust vocabulary and grammar, creates an ideal environment for the growth of language. They serve as a link between different cultures. People categorize civilizations as prehistoric if they do not have a written history or if it has not been decoded yet. Because its inscriptions have not yet been translated, the Indus Valley Civilization is considered a classic example of prehistoric culture. The Brahmi script is the root of all Indian scripts. Grantha is one of three major families of scripts, the other two being Devanagari and Dravidian.

In the Ancient Indian alphabet, there are a number of languages that are distinct from one another, including Sanskrit, Pali, and Hindi, to name a few examples.

All of these scripts sprang from a single mother script known as Brahmi, which was in widespread use in the 3rd century BCE and provided the basis for all of them. A

thousand years have passed since the invention of the Brahmi script, which is one of the earliest scripts in South Asia. It was during this historical period that Sanskrit and the Prakrit languages were the most widely used in Northern India, and both of these languages are still used today.

## 2. Research Issues

Despite the presence of various scripts in ancient India, there is a need for extensive investigation into several concerns and questions concerning their intra and inter-relationships. They discuss, among other things, why the Harappan script remained pictographic for so long despite their knowledge and interaction with the Sumerian Civilisation, which already had a well-evolved script, the link between the Brahmi script and the Harappan script, the influence of spoken Sanskrit and Pali in the subsequent phases, and a timeline of the development of scripts in ancient India.

### 3. Methodology

The present paper is based on a deep drive into the context in which different scripts evolved in ancient India in different time frames and historical context in which they sprang up. In the process a wide range of existing scholarship is put to test in theoretical and factual gyre. A combination of research methods including formative, observation, open-ended and qualitative methods have been used with a predominance of historical methods.

As part of the study, a comparative analysis of various scripts in ancient India has been undertaken. A script cannot be an isolated phenomenon and its evolution, usage and growth is interdependent on the need and nature of human interactions, societal needs and the level of development. The intertextuality of a script has been analyzed by way of in a comparative and interdisciplinary approach taking insights from semantics wherever required.

### 4. Review of Literature

As the main vehicle of communication, the history of script in ancient India has ignited many minds and there have been many works in this regard which merits a review.

Rather than developing a new script specifically for the language in issue, several previously unwritten contemporary languages are currently being written in recognized scripts. It is possible that the scripts are indigenous and have evolved over millennia with a distinct set of signs and symbols, suggesting that they are not written in the English language. Carbon dating revealed that they were between 3300 and 3200 years old. It has been speculated that the Sumerians of the Mesopotamian civilization invented basic writing approximately 3100 BC.

The Harappan Script is discovered at the sites of Kot Diji and Harappa, Which are very important sites of Indus Valley Civilization. The length of these symbols when they appear in inscriptions is exceedingly brief, making it difficult to determine whether or not they were used to represent the writing system of the time period in which they were first seen [1].

A translation of the "script" has not yet been completed, despite multiple attempts. However, work is continuing on it. Between 2700 and 1900 BCE, it was in widespread usage [2]. There are a variety of techniques to deciphering the Indus script, which is usually considered to be the most important remaining difficulty in the decipherment of ancient inscriptions around the world, and which has been the subject of several studies [3].

It is possible that these basic characters found on pottery predate all other known forms of writing by as much as 5,000 years. The tomb of a pharaoh called Scorpion in southern Egypt was discovered with clay tablets bearing rudimentary language on them [4].

According to the author, the evidence for a non-Indo-Aryan linguistic medium in Sanskrit literature, which has remained perhaps the most important and (in his opinion) the

most compelling rationale put forward in support of Aryan invasions and migrations throughout history, should be examined in greater depth. Here, the topic concerns whether or not the Vedic literature includes any linguistic evidence of languages that existed on the Indian subcontinent before the advent of the Indo-Aryans. However, Indigenous Aryanists have mostly ignored this aspect of the discussion so far, despite the fact that it is a critical component of the issue in question.

Several scholars think that the language doesn't belong to the Indo-European family, and it isn't close to Sumerians or Hurrians or Elamite. It can't be compared to the structure of modern Indian Munda languages, either. Most likely, it came from Rock Art, which can be found in many parts of India [5]. Finally, the notion (originally proposed by Bloch) that Dravidian people infiltrated into an Indo-Aryan region is explored [6].

The Indus Script is made up of about 400 fundamental signs, which have been recognized as being part of the script. Only 31 of these signs were utilized more than 100 times, with the remaining signs not being used on a regular basis. Scholars have concluded that a significant portion of the Indus Script was engraved on perishable materials which were subsequently obliterated by the passage of time. It has been determined how specific numerical values should be represented in a certain way. A downward stroke was used to symbolize a single unit, whereas semicircles were used to denote units of 10 or more. This has also posed a challenge because all of the inscriptions unearthed so far have been quite modest in length, consisting of less than 30 signs on each line. As a result, it is impossible to investigate repeated sign patterns correctly, which is another way that can be used to uncover the meaning of a writing system for the Indus Script [7].

A structural approach can be applied, with specific attention on the language and grammar. The themes such as their historical background, scripts, and components of sociolinguistics, among other things have been used [8].

The Indus Script has remained untranslated because the language it represents has yet to be uncovered. A number of linguistic families, including Austroasiatic, Sino-Tibetan, and others, have been proposed as replacements for Indo-European and Dravidian.

According to a number of academicians, the Indus Valley Civilization was not Indo-European in origin, based on the material culture connected with this civilization.

As discussed above, numerous scholars have asserted that the Brahmi script is related to the Indus system, while others have argued that the alphabet has some connection to the Dravidian linguistic system. Inflaming the fires of this debate even further is the debate about who were the first and original occupants of India, the Aryans or the Dravidians, which has further fueled the discussion. Another cause of friction has been the debate over whether the Aryans or the Dravidians were the first and original residents of India.

## 5. Analysis

Since at least 2000 BCE, the elite had been speaking Sanskrit, while the majority of the population spoke Prakrit, which was a dialect of Sanskrit that was spoken by the majority of the population.

Sanskrit and Prakrit were both written in the same way in the Brahmi script, which was used for both languages. Over a period of several decades, the Brahmi writing gradually changed to become known as the Nagari script all throughout the northern hemisphere of the world. The language of Sanskrit had a low presence in the southern hemisphere until the Pallavas adopted it as their official court language in the 13th century. The Nagari inscription on the right is written in Sanskrit and is the name of the place where it was found. This inscription, which dates back to the 15th century, is considered to be the earliest Nagari inscription found in Tamil Nadu.

Brahmi is widely regarded as the inventor of the vast majority of Indian scripts, including Devanagari which includes Bengali and other languages. Except for Urdu and Santhali, the great majority of languages, including Telugu Devanagari, Odia, Bengali, and so on, are written in Brahmi-derived scripts.

The Indus Script is considered to be the first script of Indian Civilization [9]. This script, which was frequently written from right to left, is thought to be the earliest script used by Indian Civilization and is known as the Indus Script. It has been specified how particular numerical values should be represented in a specific fashion. Known as the Brahmi script, it is the writing system which paved the way for the formation of the vast majority of the present Indian scripts, which have been separated into two primary variants in Northern and Southern India. The practice of writing from the right to the left resulted in the development of the Kharosthi Script. Hundreds of hieroglyphics of Indus script have been used on punch-marked coins minted by several mints since the 6th century BCE in a region stretching from Gandhara (Afghanistan) to Anuradhapura (Srilanka) [10]. The Indus texts are found on various types of objects excavated from several sites of the Indus valley civilization and most often they are associated with different kinds of patterns [11].

Grantha script used in western and northern parts of India was employed to write Sanskrit throughout the rule of the Gupta dynasty. As a consequence, the most significant scripts of India, such as Bengali, Devanagari and others, were evolved from this Grantha script over time. Furthermore, it was the catalyst for the creation of global scripts. A modified form of the Gupta script was used in the Sarada script which was originally devised in India and spread throughout the region. It evolved into the scripts of Kashmiri and Gurmukhi (which are presently used for writing Punjabi).

The Nagari Script was a variation of the Gupta script found in Eastern regions, which was utilized in India at the time of its invention. It is a form of the Devanagari script, which was established in India and is an early version of the

script. In addition to the Bengali and Tibetan scripts, Devanagari is one of the scripts that have arisen from it. In addition to being used to write Prakrit and Sanskrit, it was also employed to write a number of other languages, including Arabic. This script is used to write Indian languages such as Santhali, Nepali, Konkani, Marathi, and other languages. It is also used to write modern Indian languages such as Hindi, Urdu, and other languages. In ancient times, the Kalinga Script was used to convey an archaic version of the language of Oriya, which at the time was known as Odia. The Kalinga Script was named after the state of Odisha, which was also known as the Kalinga script. It has an aesthetic aspect that is comparable to that of the original Brahmi. As of now, the Oriya language is written in a distinct script that was developed from the Bengali alphabet in the past.

Grantha script, which has been known since the 15th century, is commonly regarded as one of the oldest Southern scripts to develop from Brahmi and is frequently used today. It is referred to as the "grandfather of scripts." Because of this, it developed into the Malayalam and Tamil scripts, which are both still in widespread use today also to write the dialects for which they were originally intended. According to certain researchers, the script is also recognized as the forerunner of the Sinhala script, which has been in widespread usage in Sri Lanka even now.

Traders from India carried a form of Grantha called as Pallava to Indonesia, where it was utilized as inspiration for the development of a spate of South-East Asian scripts. Due to the fact that it was adopted in Tamil Nadu to compose the Granthas in Sanskrit, which is a form of poetry. This sort of writing instrument was given the name Grantha. Originally used in southern India, the Vatteluttu script, which is derived from the Brahmi language, has now spread throughout the country and developed into other scripts. Tamil and Malayalam were among the languages for which it was employed as a script.

As a result, the markings in Brahmi that were no longer required for writing the Southern languages were removed. As of now, scripts evolved from the Grantha language family are used by both Tamil and Malayalam people. The Kadamba script, a descendent of Brahmi writing, is often recognised as the foundation of the genuine Kannada script, which was later developed and improved upon. As a result of this process, the current Kannada and Telugu scripts emerged. It was used to write a variety of languages, including Konkani, Kannada, and Marathi, in addition to Sanskrit. Tamil is the mother tongue of persons who were born in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

When writing the Tamil language in India and Sri Lanka, there are two scripts employed: the Tamil script and the Kannada script, which are both employed in India and Sri Lanka to write the Tamil Language. Syllabic rather than alphabetic language, it is spoken in this country. It is written from the left to the right.

Indian scripts have developed into a multitude of different forms over time. Areas, tribes, and castes all had their own

writing styles and scripts, with scribes and merchants in particular sometimes adopting scripts that they had created for their own purposes. They were deployed to achieve a range of goals, including governmental, economic, and religious aims, among others. According to current trends, the establishments of an Indian state that is politically united and encompasses the whole subcontinent, as well as new research and technical breakthroughs, appear to have reversed for the first time in 2,000 years.

When compared to other scripts, such as Oriya, Bangla or Gurumukhi, the Devanagari script looks to be quite different; yet, research has discovered that they are remarkably similar, with the exception of lengths and compositional emphasis. The Brahmi script, formed after the Indus script, is the second-oldest writing system to have been invented in India. Brahmi, as one of the world's most important writing systems, is the origin of all current Indian scripts, as well as several hundred scripts prevalent across Southeast and East Asia. Brahmi is credited with inventing the majority of today's Indian scripts, including Bengali, Tamil, others. Only two languages are mainly written in Arabic-derived alphabets Urdu and Santhali. The vast majority of languages are written in scripts derived from the Brahmi, including Bengali and Nagari, Odia, Devanagari, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and other dialects of Bengali and Nagari.

The famous Brahmi inscriptions are Ashoka's rock-cut edicts from 250–232 BCE. Several experts believe that the Brahmi language is a descendant of Aramaic influence, while others feel that the Brahmi language may have inherited some features of the Indus script as well. Brahmi is also credited with inventing the Vedic script.

The Brahmi script, which is based on the rhythmic writing system, was originally designed to be used primarily for writing Prakrit and was later utilized for other purposes. It was adopted by the majority of the population at the time of its invention. The Brahmi script, which verifies the syllabic writing system, was first employed largely for writing Prakrit, which was the language spoken by the majority of the population at the time of its invention. As time progressed, this alphabet was also used to write Sanskrit. According to the epigraphers, all Indian scripts may be traced back to the Brahmi script [12]. Later, the Sanskrit language was also written in this script, which is still in use today in parts of Asia.

Over time, Brahmi evolved into a large number of derivative scripts: the so-called "Brahmic family of scripts" includes all of South Asia's modern indigenous scripts, the Sinhalese script, and other important scripts from Central Asia and Southeast Asia such as Tibetan, Khmer, Thai, Lao, Burmese [13].

The Santali script is another form of script that is widely used. In addition to the languages Ho and Mundari, Santali is an Austroasiatic language that belongs to the Munda subfamily of language, which also contains the languages Ho and Mundari. In the seventeenth century, Santali was still being spoken, indicating that it was an oral language.

The Sarada script dates back to the eighth century. It was

used to write a variety of languages, including Sanskrit and Kashmiri. Despite the fact that it was formerly more extensively used, its use was finally restricted to Kashmir, and it is now very seldom used, save for ceremonial occasions, by the Kashmiri Pandit community in Kashmir. This script was widely used in eastern India as early as the sixth century AD, and it served as a predecessor to the development of the Gaudi script. The Sarada script was succeeded during this time period by the Landa script, which evolved from the Sarada script. There were several Punjabi dialects written in it, as well as several Punjabi dialects themselves. It was used to write Kashmiri, Sindhi, and different Punjabi dialects in addition to Punjabi and Hindi. Guru Angad created and established this alphanumeric system based on the Landa scripts. It's written in Gurumukhi script. It derives from the Punjabi dialect of the English language.

This script was used throughout the Guru Granth Sahib to write the Punjabi language. It is also the script of Sikhs and Hindus. In Maharashtra, the Marathi language is written using the Modi script. Marathi is the predominant language spoken there, and Modi is the script used to write it. which is a state in India's western area and is the most populous state in the country.

It was not until the twentieth century, however, that the Balbodh variant of the Devanagari script was chosen as the dominant writing system for Marathi. Despite the fact that the Modi script was predominantly used to write Marathi, it was also used to write a number of other languages, including Hindi and Urdu. It is important to note that the Gujarati script is a type of alphabet, similar to all other Nagari writing systems, and that it is used to write the Kutchi and Gujarati languages, as well as other languages written in the Nagari writing system. The Gujarati script is similar to all other Nagari writing systems in that it is a sort of alphabet.

Because it lacks the distinctive horizontal line that runs above each letter of Devanagari script, and only a small number of alterations have been made to the characters that have remained constant, it is sometimes referred to as "Bengali script." Other languages, such as Sanskrit and Hindi, are frequently written in the Gujarati script in addition to Gujarati.

Grantha Script is not only one of the first Southern scripts to descend from Brahmi, but it is also one of the most widely utilized. Following that, it evolved into Tamil and Malayalam scripts. It is also thought to be the forerunner of the Sinhala script, which is still used in Sri Lanka today. Indian traders in Indonesia made use of the Pallava script. It was employed in Tamil Nadu to transcribe Sanskrit Granthas, and this type of Grantha inspired the formation of South-East Asian scripts.

Originally from the Brahmi language, the Vatteluttu script was used in the southern portion of India and evolved from it. It was employed to write Tamil and Malayalam, among other languages. As of right now, both Tamil and Malayalam have adopted scripts evolved from the Grantha language family. Apart from the ancient Grantha or Pallava alphabet and the Tamil script, Vatteluttu is one of three major writing methods

developed by Tamilians to write the Proto-Tamil language.

A descendant of Brahmi, the Kadamba Script is the beginning of what would become known as the native Kannada script, which was created from it. Consequently, the present-day Kannada and Telugu scripts were established as a result of this process. It was used to write a variety of languages, including Sanskrit, Konkani, Kannada, and Marathi, among others. In certain areas, The Kadamba Script refers to the script that existed before Kannada and the script became increasingly popular.

Indian and Sri Lankan Tamil scripts are the scripts that are used to write the Tamil language, and it is also the script that is used to write the Tamil language. It was descended from Grantha at the time of its creation, which was the Southern variety of Brahmi at the time of its development. The Kannada Script is widely used in Karnataka. As well as the major languages, a number of minor languages employ alphabets based on the Kannada script, including Konkani, Kodava, Tulu and a number of other lesser-known languages. When it comes to linguistic competence, the Kannada and Telugu scripts are often considered to be regional variations of the same script by scholars.

It was in the 5th century C. E, the Bhattiprolu script evolved into the Telugu script. According to some sources, Malayalam Script is referred to as the Kairali script and is most commonly used to write Malayalam, which is the native language of Kerala, India. In Kerala, the Malayalam script is also extensively used for the production of Sanskrit manuscripts, which is a form of acrostic poetry.

Malayalam was originally written in the Vatteluttu alphabet, which is a Tamil script that stretches back thousands of years. Malayalam is now written in the Malayalam script. The Grantha alphabet, on the other hand, was originally used to write Sanskrit and was eventually absorbed by the Malayalam language, resulting in the development of the present Malayalam script. The Brahmi script is the ancestor of both Vatteluttu and Grantha, yet the two scripts developed in a separate manner from one another.

The Brahmi and Kharosthi scripts are the fundamental origins and beginnings of Indian scripts that date back to historical eras on the subcontinent [14]. The notion that the Sanskrit languages are the "mother of all languages" has, however, been examined, but the claim that the Brahmi letters are the "father of all important Indian scripts" has not been called into question. The Puranic Tradition [15] also helped the popularity of script. During its nationwide census, which the group claims is the greatest linguistics study ever performed in India, the organization registered more than 66 unique scripts and more than 780 languages across India, according to the organization's research. A modified form of the Perso-Arabic script, which goes back to the 13th century and has its origins in Iran, the Urdu alphabet is a written language used in Pakistan and India. Between it and the development of the Perso-Arabic Script. There is a clear relationship. There is a clear connection between the Indo-Aryan languages of North India and The Urdu Script and Punjabi script.

Scientific research and studies concerning the origin of a script should include components of investigation, hypothesis, and a probabilistic approach. Scripts are rarely created in a vacuum or by edict. They instead evolve as a result of adaptability to surrounding scripts and actual socioeconomic materialistic wants [16].

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Indian scripts may be divided into a variety of types. Strictly regional, group, and caste-based style of writing and scripts were used with merchants and scribes usually adopting scripts that they had created themselves. They were employed for a variety of objectives, including governmental, economic, and religious ones.

Many previously unknown current languages are now written in recognized scripts. The scripts might be indigenous and have evolved over millennia with a separate set of signs and symbols, indicating that they are not written in English. They were carbon-dated to be between 3300 and 3200 years old. In terms of chronology, this corresponds to circa 3100 BC, or a little earlier, when the Sumerians of the Mesopotamian civilization invented crude writing, according to certain estimates.

In today's world, scripting languages are extensively used and in high demand because of their capacity to generate dynamic content, which is particularly useful in web-based applications. Brahmi is the root of all modern Indian scripts, as well as several hundred scripts found across Southeast and East Asia. In the Ancient Indian scripts, there are a plethora of distinct languages written, including Sanskrit, Hindi and other languages. Although they are difficult to grasp, it is critical that you do so since they teach you key features that were written in these languages.

It is unlikely that the letter forms that are being used by huge numbers of people every day for communicating will change in the foreseeable future due to the fact that hundreds of millions of people are literate in their native scripts, as this would result in confusion and a lack of communication between individuals. Apart from that, the uniformity and widespread use of some scripts for mass publishing and digital transmission has resulted in the extinction of ethnic and economic related scripts, amongst other things. Numerous previously unwritten modern languages are presently being written in recognized scripts, rather than creating a new script specifically for the language in issue.

As more individuals have access to literature and the online, technological advancements and modernity are affecting the way in which India's scripts are utilized throughout the country. In truth, as more people acquire access to literacy and the internet, India's scripts are flourishing in standardized and widely used forms like never before. This has resulted in a widely diverse range of script origins in India, as well as a complicated sequence of techniques, effects, and textual links.

There is still greater scope for research into diverse aspects of scripts in Ancient India. The use of script in non-religious

discourses, the efforts made to spread the use of scripts, the linkages between the scripts and popular culture, receptivity of scripts and learning among the non-elite present potent scope for future research.

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