

Scripts shaping Visual Narratives of Cultural Exchange

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in the case of

Saurashtra Script – A fusion of cultures,
A research that visually identifies the exchange of cultures

following

Sorath – A display typeface for Saurashtra Script

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Abstract

Saurashtra is predominantly recognized as a region situated in the western part of India where the primary language spoken is Gujarati. However, it's worth noting that the Saurashtrian community, originating from the Saurashtra region of Gujarat, also speaks a language known as Saurashtra, which is prevalent in South India. Despite the centuries-long migration of the Saurashtrian community from their native Saurashtra region to present-day areas in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana in southern India, there are enduring cultural similarities.

This paper highlights the migration of indigenous Saurashtra people from their original homeland to the contemporary regions of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana in southern India. It explores how this cultural exchange is visually evident through the languages and scripts used. The research draws upon numerous manuscripts to gather evidence and identify the visual characteristics of relevant scripts, including Telugu, Tamil, Gujarati, and Saurashtra.

1. Introduction

The Saurashtra script, an abugida system, is employed by the Saurashtrians residing in Tamil Nadu for writing in the Saurashtra language. Although the script has its roots in the Brahmic tradition, its precise historical development remains unclear.

Over time, its usage has declined, with the Tamil and Latin scripts now being more commonly used for writing the same. 'Saurashtra' refers to both the region (in Gujarat) and the script (used by native Saurashtrians) and thus some context might be provided at places in the paper, wherever required in order to gain more clarification. The paper's title represents an evolving perspective on how a script can illustrate cultural interactions. It examines this concept through a detailed analysis of the Saurashtra script, offering justifications to support this notion. Additionally, the paper delves into the creation of a display typeface specifically for the Saurashtra script, which is discussed in the latter section of the document.

1.1.1 Key Terms

- **Letterform:** Letterforms are the individual characters within a script, and they are either naturally occurring or intentionally crafted in a specific manner. This specific style encompasses particular angles, curves, stroke styles, and other elements that combine to create a well-balanced character.
- **Typeface and Font:** A typeface is a family of font, an umbrella term under which all the fonts of the same family fall into.
- **Display typeface and Body typeface:** A display typeface is typically used for composing titles, headings, or subheadings in text. These typefaces are often, though not always, designed with a higher degree of stylization compared to a body typeface. Body typefaces, on the other hand, are intended for setting large blocks of text, where maintaining functional qualities such as legibility and readability takes precedence over purely aesthetic considerations.

1.1.2 Existing Research and Gaps

Dr. Vrajlal K. Sapovadia's paper (Sapovadia 2012) titled "Saurashtra: A Language, Region, Culture & Community" addresses a compilation of historical records, including the experiences of native Saurashtrians. The paper identifies a deficiency in discussions from a design perspective and a lack of emphasis on drawing concrete conclusions.

Dr. Sapovadia's paper contributes valuable insights to this research area and these insights have been incorporated wherever necessary.

1.1.3 Objective

The primary goal of this paper is to establish a cultural connection between various regions by examining the fundamental aspects of communication: language and script. Essentially, it aims to uncover how language and written symbols play a crucial role in revealing and linking the cultures of these regions. By studying these aspects, the paper seeks to highlight the common heritage, influences, and interactions that have occurred over time, offering insight into the complex relationship between culture and communication.

1.1.4 Constraints

The simplification of script usage has caused a loss of its authenticity, making it sometimes difficult to judge how the script is being used. In certain instances, compound letters and partial letters have been replaced by *Matras*. Moreover, there has been insufficient literary production in the Saurashtra script due to the omission of Saurashtra language and script from school curricula. This has resulted in limited knowledge among younger generations. Furthermore, the Saurashtra script has been gradually replaced by Tamil, Telugu, and Latin scripts in various contexts.

1.2.1 Region

"Saurashtra" is a geographical area situated in the semicircular region of Gujarat, which lies to the northwest of the Arabian Sea. Politically, "Saurashtra" encompasses seven districts: Porbandar, Junagadh, Amreli, Rajkot, and Surendranagar, bound by Bhavnagar on the East coast and Jamnagar/Dwarka on the west coast. This region has been known by various names throughout history, dating back to the time of the Mahabharata and the Vedic period when it was referred to as "Surastrene" or "Saraostus." In the 1st century CE Periplus of the Erythraean Sea, it is mentioned as "Surastrene."

This peninsula is also known as Kathiawar and shares its boundaries with the Kachchh region to the north, along with a coast on the Gulf of Kutch; while Saurashtra or Sorath forms its southern portion, and to the east lies the Gulf of Khambhat.

1.2.2 Language and Script

While the inhabitants of the present-day Saurashtra region in Gujarat predominantly use Gujarati for both spoken and written communication, traces of a Kathiawari accent in their Gujarati dialect can still be noticed. This accent itself reflects the influence of one language on another.

For those who originally migrated to southern India, particularly in towns like Madurai, Paramakudi, Salem, Tanjore in Tamil Nadu, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, they have retained and continue to use the "Saurashtra" language. However, others have adopted either Tamil, Telugu, or Latin scripts for their communication. Historically, there have been limited initiatives to introduce the Saurashtra script in schools, resulting in a significant decline in its usage and a lack of substantial literary production in the Saurashtra script. Nevertheless, in recent times, efforts have emerged to revive the script by simplifying its usage, including the avoidance of joint or compound letters for better understanding of the visual form and usage.

2. Methods and Discussion

In order to approach the research, there were various different literature materials of the Saurashtra script studied, both the original use as well as simplified use in order to gain a deeper insight on the behaviour of each character set and finding similarities with other Dravidian scripts and at some instances, the Gujarati script.

The parameters used for studying a character of a particular character involved the use of the tool, angles of termination, curves, the variability of the stroke (linear or variable), the overall behaviour of the form and how texts of the script look altogether.

2.1 Comparison with Tamil Script

Basic Character set of the Saurashtra Script :

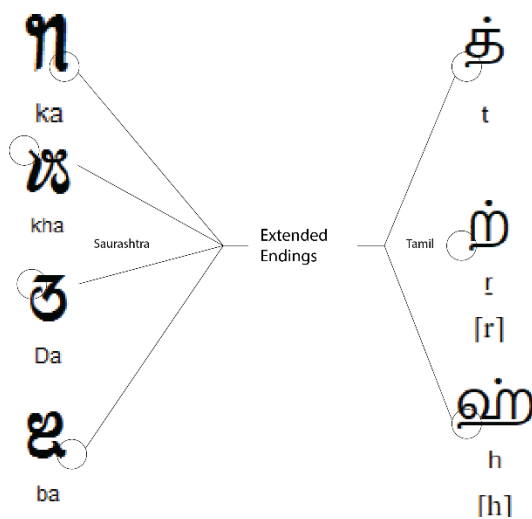
ક	કા	ગ	ગા	ઠ	ચ	ચા	જ	જા	ઠ
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṭa	cha	chha	ja	jha	ṭa
ઠ	ઠા	ડ	ડા	ના	તા	થા	દા	ધા	ના
Ta	Tha	Da	Dha	Na	ta	tha	da	dha	na
પ	પા	બ	બા	મ	યા	રા	લા	વા	શા
pa	pha	ba	bha	ma	ya	ra	la	va	sha
શ	સ	હ	લા	કશ	નહ	મહ	રહ	લહ	
Sha	sa	ha	La	kSha	nha	mha	rha	lha	

અ	આ	ઇ	ઈ	ઉ	ઊ	ૃ	ૄ	લુ	
a	aa	i	ii	u	uu	ṛ	ṛu	lu	
લુ	ૅ	ૈ	ૌ	૆	ે	ૈ	ૉ	૊	
luu	e	E	ai	o	O	au	am	aha	

ક	કા	કી	કી	કુ	કુ	ક્રુ	ક્રુ	ક્રુ	
ka	kaa	ki	kii	ku	kuu	kru	kruu	klu	
ક્રુ	કે	કૅ	કૌ	કો	કૉ	કૌ	કામ	કાહ	
kluu	ke	kE	kai	ko	kO	kau	kam	kah	
ક	હ	હા	નાસાઇઝેશન						
k	h	half ya	nasalization						

www.endangeredalphabets.net/alphabets/saurashtra/

Notice the little details of the characters when they are written, some of them are enlarged and shown below to ensure there is a similarity drawn with other scripts.



Observe the subtle extensions at the ends of certain characters, featuring curvilinear strokes on their adjoining sides. These extensions indicate the grip of the writing tool or a specific hand posture employed while writing the scripts. They offer insights into the writing habits, highlighting the striking similarities between both scripts. The angles not only inform us about how the tool was held during the writing of the characters, but in cases of high contrast stroke variation, this angle appears to remain consistent throughout. Conversely, characters with linear or inconsistent variability may imply difficulties in maintaining a consistent angle.



(L : High contrast charcters of Saurashtra Script, endangeredalphabets.net/alphabets/sourashtra/
 R : Linear characters of Saurashtra script, Saurashtra Bodhano, 1900)

2.2 Comparison with Gujarati script



When we closely examine the characteristics of each character in the Saurashtra script, we notice a remarkable resemblance to its Gujarati counterpart. Both scripts exhibit a harmonious alignment of curves, including loops and smaller elements like those found in 'gha' and 'kha.' From a phonetic perspective, the letters share the same pronunciation.

However, an intriguing distinction lies in the way the strokes end. In Saurashtra, characters like 'ta' and 'tha' conclude their strokes to the left from the user's point of view, whereas in Gujarati, they end on the right with slight extensions, representing a unique parameter that sets them apart.

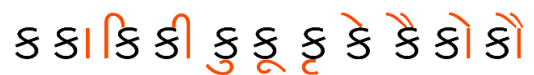
2.3 Usage of Matras



(Matras of Saurashtra Script)



(Matras of Tamil Script)



(Matras of Consonant 'k' of Gujarati script)

Regarding Matras, the Saurashtra script exhibits a pattern similar to the Tamil script, even though the actual letterforms may vary in their character representation. However, the way Matras are applied over a root character remains consistent.

In Gujarati, Matras are added as extensions over the root character, giving them a distinct appearance from the base character. In contrast, in Tamil and Saurashtra, Matras themselves function as glyphs and can be placed over or beside the root glyph.

As for the character 'ee' in Matra, it appears quite similar in all three scripts. Its application involves extending it over the root character, a common feature shared by these scripts.



(‘ee’ in Tamil, Saurashtra and Gujarati respectively)

3. Result and observations

3.1 Writing Habits and Script Similarities:

The subtle extensions found at the ends of specific characters in both Saurashtra and Gujarati scripts suggest a shared writing style or tool grip. This indicates that there might be commonalities in the way these scripts were traditionally written.

3.2 Angle Consistency

When examining the angles within characters, it becomes apparent that in instances of high contrast stroke variation, the writing angle remains relatively uniform. Conversely, characters with linear or inconsistent variability in stroke angles may imply challenges in maintaining a consistent writing angle.

3.3 Phonetic and Visual Resemblance

The Saurashtra and Gujarati scripts demonstrate remarkable phonetic and visual similarities. They share comparable curves, loops, and smaller elements in characters, reinforcing their close linguistic and scriptural ties.

3.4 Distinct Stroke Endings

An intriguing contrast between Saurashtra and Gujarati scripts lies in the direction of stroke endings, such as in characters like 'ta' and 'tha.' In Saurashtra, these strokes conclude on the left from the user's perspective, while in Gujarati, they extend to the right. This distinction serves as a unique parameter that differentiates the two scripts.

3.5 Matra Application

In the case of Matras, the Saurashtra script mirrors the pattern seen in the Tamil script, especially in how Matras are applied over root characters. However, the actual letterforms may differ. This suggests a potential influence or shared tradition in Matra usage.

3.6 Matras as Glyphs

Gujarati script employs Matras as extensions over root characters, giving them a distinct appearance. In contrast, Tamil and Saurashtra scripts treat Matras as standalone glyphs that can be placed over or beside root glyphs. This disparity in Matra presentation is noteworthy.

3.7 Uniformity of 'ee'

The 'ee' character in Matra appears consistently similar across all three scripts. It is employed by extending it over the root character, demonstrating a common feature in their script design and phonetic representation.

In analyzing the Saurashtra and Gujarati scripts, it becomes evident that they share commonalities in writing habits and phonetics, featuring similar curves and characters. However, a distinct parameter lies in the direction of stroke endings, with Saurashtra favoring leftward conclusions and Gujarati rightward extensions. In the case of Matras, Saurashtra exhibits a pattern akin to Tamil, emphasizing shared practices in Matra application. While Gujarati distinguishes itself by using Matras as extensions, Tamil and Saurashtra treat Matras as standalone glyphs. A consistent feature across all three scripts is the 'ee' character in Matra, extended over root characters. This study illuminates both the parallels and unique characteristics in these scripts, contributing to our understanding of their cultural and linguistic connections.

Result Statement: This comparative analysis highlights the cultural and linguistic ties between the Saurashtra and Gujarati scripts and Saurashtra and Tamil scripts while emphasizing distinct script characteristics, particularly in stroke endings and Matra application.

4. Conclusion

In our thorough examination of the Saurashtra, Tamil and Gujarati scripts, we've explored how they're related and what makes them unique. We found that they share some writing patterns and sounds, which suggests they have a common origin. They also look similar in some ways, with similar curves and shapes in their letters.

This study helps us better understand how culture, language, and writing are connected. It shows us how these scripts have changed over time because of interactions between different cultures and important events in history. It's a reminder that writing isn't just about communication; it's a way to preserve history, culture, and identity.

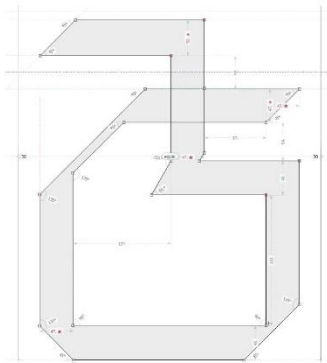
Studies like this one are important because they help us uncover the stories hidden in languages and the writing systems that express them. Ultimately, they help us appreciate the connections between cultures through the written word, showing how powerful scripts are as cultural treasures

References

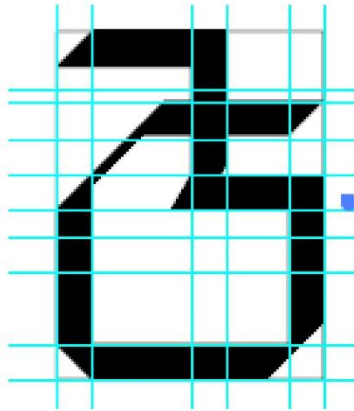
Sapovadia, Dr. Vrajlal K. 2012. *Saurashtra : A Language, Region, Culture & Community*. Jaipur. Accessed November 2022. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2033685>.

Paul John, Vijaysinh Parmar (2016). [*"Gujaratis who settled in Madurai centuries ago brought with them a unique language – Times of India"*](#). The Times of India. Retrieved 15 April 2018.

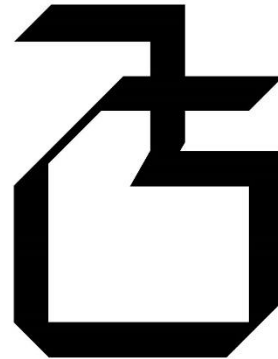
Process



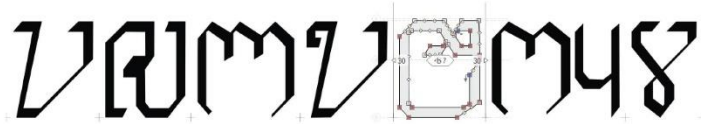
Construction of a letterform with its measurements, a snippet from FontLab



Grid followed in constructing a glyph

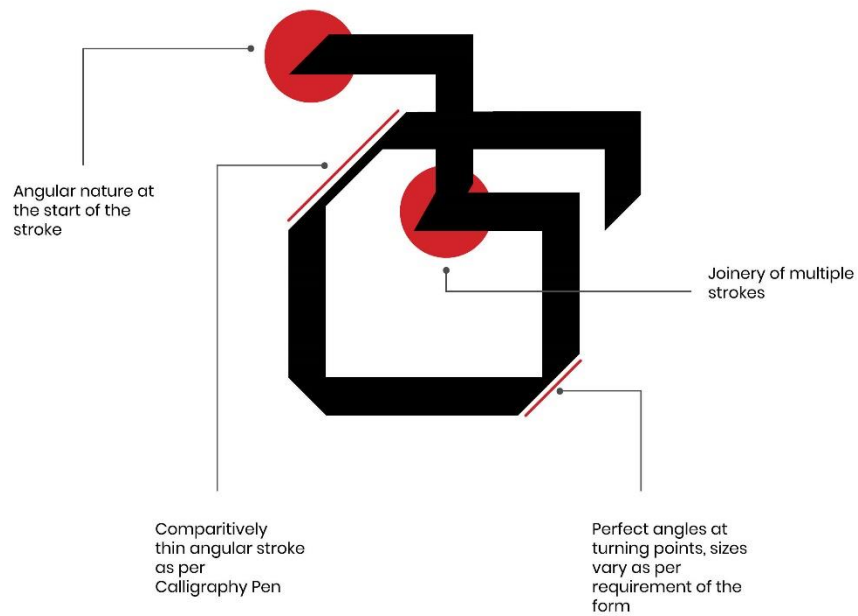


Final refined glyph generated on Vector Software



A snippet from metrics tab to adjust the kerning for paragraphs

Type Anatomy



Angular nature at the start of the stroke

Joinery of multiple strokes

Comparatively thin angular stroke as per Calligraphy Pen

Perfect angles at turning points, sizes vary as per requirement of the form

