1   Introduction

The purpose of this document is to bring attention to the Gondi script. It provides a basic description of the writing system, a preliminary code chart and names list, character properties, and a few specimens. Additional research is required in order to determine the nature of usage and current status of the script.

2   Background

Gondi is a Brahmi-based script used for writing Gondi (ISO 639-3: gon), a Dravidian language spoken by 2.6 million people primarily in Madhya Pradesh, India, with some speakers in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The language is generally written in Devanagari and Telugu.

The Gondi script described here was designed by Munshi Mangal Singh Masaram of Balaghat district, Madhya Pradesh in 1928.[1] While letters of Gondi may resemble those of other scripts, it has no genetic relationship to any writing system.

The script is illustrated in several specimens. The Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) has in its collections a hand-drawn chart of Masaram's script from 1951 (see Figure 3). An excerpt from a photograph of a Gondi alphabet chart is given in a presentation produced by the National Folklore Support Centre (NFSC) and Jatan Trust (see Figure 4). It appears that a digitized font for Gondi has been created, but the present author has seen its glyphs only in a keyboard map corresponding to a non-Unicode Devanagari font (see Figure 5).

An analysis of the available specimens shows that the script has evolved since its creation in 1928. The glyphs shown in the NFSC presentation and in the Gondi keyboard map appear to represent a modern form of Gondi, while those shown in the CIIL chart represent either the original script or an intermediate stage. The present author has not yet seen a specimen of Masaram's original script from 1928, therefore, it is uncertain how much of the 1951 script differs from the 1928 original. The majority of changes are the shapes of certain glyphs. These differences may be attributed to simplification for ease of writing, eg. independent circles being joined as loops with a single stroke.

3   Writing System

Character Repertoire   The proposed Gondi script consists of 69 letters: 36 consonant letters, 10 vowel letters, 10 vowel signs, 3 various signs, and 10 digits. A preliminary code chart (Figure 1) and names list (Figure 2) are provided.

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[1] Ramakrishna et al. 1983: 136.

Basis for Glyph Shapes   The vowel letters and signs are based upon those shown in Masaram (1951); the consonant letters are based primarily upon glyphs shown in Mandavi (2008); the digits are based upon Mandavi (2008) with reference to Masaram (1951).

Character Names   Names for the characters are based upon those given in Masaram (1951), as shown in Figure 3. The proposed names follow the UCS convention for Brahmi-based Indic scripts.

Directionality   The script is written from left-to-right.

Structure   Each consonant letter possesses the inherent vowel *a*, which is presumably indicated by the horizontal line attached to a letter. The inherent vowel is silenced by removing the horizontal line or changed using vowel signs.

Virama   There is no explicit character for *virāma*. However, in order to produce conjuncts as shown in Figure 3, a VIRAMA character has been proposed for encoding.

Conjuncts   Gondi does not represent consonant conjuncts using complex ligatures. Conjuncts are written using half-forms of consonant letters, which are produced by removing the horizontal stroke at the right of each letter. There are four special exceptions: RA and three *akhaṇḍa* ligatures. Gondi RA exhibits contextual variation similar to that of Devanagari, ie. *repha* and *vattu*. Secondly, the conjuncts *kṣa*, *jña*, and *tra* are written using special ligatures and are not formed using half-forms of letters (see Section 5).

Vowel Signs   Each vowel letter has an accompanying sign. A sign for VOCALIC R is attested, but there is no corresponding letter. All vowel signs are written to the right of the consonant letter, joined to the horizontal stroke.

Nasalization   Nasalization is marked using ANUSVARA. It is written to the right of the accompanying letter.

Digits   A full set of digits are attested.

Punctuation   Latin punctuation is used (see Figure 3). Script-specific punctuation is not attested.

4   Character Properties

Character properties for Gondi are as follows:

```
11500;GONDI LETTER A;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11501;GONDI LETTER AA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11502;GONDI LETTER I;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11503;GONDI LETTER II;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11504;GONDI LETTER U;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11505;GONDI LETTER UU;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11506;GONDI LETTER E;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11507;GONDI LETTER AI;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11508;GONDI LETTER O;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11509;GONDI LETTER AU;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1150A;GONDI LETTER KA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1150B;GONDI LETTER KHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1150C;GONDI LETTER GA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1150D;GONDI LETTER GHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1150E;GONDI LETTER NGA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
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1150F;GONDI LETTER CA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11510;GONDI LETTER CHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11511;GONDI LETTER JA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11512;GONDI LETTER JHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11513;GONDI LETTER NYA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11514;GONDI LETTER TTA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11515;GONDI LETTER TTHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11516;GONDI LETTER DDA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11517;GONDI LETTER DDHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11518;GONDI LETTER NNA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11519;GONDI LETTER TA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1151A;GONDI LETTER THA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1151B;GONDI LETTER DA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1151C;GONDI LETTER DHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1151D;GONDI LETTER NA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1151E;GONDI LETTER PA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1151F;GONDI LETTER PHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11520;GONDI LETTER BA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11521;GONDI LETTER BHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11522;GONDI LETTER MA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11523;GONDI LETTER YA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11524;GONDI LETTER RA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11525;GONDI LETTER LA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11526;GONDI LETTER VA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11527;GONDI LETTER SHA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11528;GONDI LETTER SSA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11529;GONDI LETTER SA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1152A;GONDI LETTER HA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1152B;GONDI LETTER KSSA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1152C;GONDI LETTER TRA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
1152D;GONDI LETTER JNYA;Lo;0;L;;;;;N;;;;;
11530;GONDI VOWEL SIGN AA;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11531;GONDI VOWEL SIGN I;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11532;GONDI VOWEL SIGN II;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11533;GONDI VOWEL SIGN U;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11534;GONDI VOWEL SIGN UU;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11535;GONDI VOWEL SIGN E;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11536;GONDI VOWEL SIGN AI;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11537;GONDI VOWEL SIGN O;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11538;GONDI VOWEL SIGN AU;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11539;GONDI SIGN ANUSVARA;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
1153A;GONDI SIGN VISARGA;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
1153B;GONDI VOWEL SIGN VOCALIC R;Mn;0;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
1153C;GONDI SIGN VIRAMA;Mn;9;NSM;;;;;N;;;;;
11540;GONDI DIGIT ZERO;Nd;0;L;;0;0;0;N;;;;;
11541;GONDI DIGIT ONE;Nd;0;L;;1;1;1;N;;;;;
11542;GONDI DIGIT TWO;Nd;0;L;;2;2;2;N;;;;;
11543;GONDI DIGIT THREE;Nd;0;L;;3;3;3;N;;;;;
11544;GONDI DIGIT FOUR;Nd;0;L;;4;4;4;N;;;;;
11545;GONDI DIGIT FIVE;Nd;0;L;;5;5;5;N;;;;;
11546;GONDI DIGIT SIX;Nd;0;L;;6;6;6;N;;;;;
11547;GONDI DIGIT SEVEN;Nd;0;L;;7;7;7;N;;;;;
11548;GONDI DIGIT EIGHT;Nd;0;L;;8;8;8;N;;;;;
11549;GONDI DIGIT NINE;Nd;0;L;;9;9;9;N;;;;;
```

5 Issues

Encoding Ligatures as Atomic Characters   Three of the consonant letters proposed for encoding are ligatures: ᴋssᴀ, ᴊɴʏᴀ, and ᴛʀᴀ. As in other Indic scripts, these are *akhaṇḍa* ligatures. These would normally

be produced using ᴠɪʀᴀᴍᴀ and the ligature would be managed at the font level. Since Gondi does not have complex ligatures, it might be useful to encode these three ligatures as atomic characters.

6   References

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7   Acknowledgments

	1150	1151	1152	1153	1154
0	� 11500	11510	11520	11530	11540
1	11501	11511	11521	11531	11541
2	11502	11512	11522	11532	11542
3	11503	11513	11523	11533	11543
4	11504	11514	11524	11534	11544
5	11505	11515	11525	11535	11545
6	11506	11516	11526	11536	11546
7	11507	11517	11527	11537	11547
8	11508	11518	11528	11538	11548
9	11509	11519	11529	11539	11549
A	1150A	1151A	1152A	1153A	
B	1150B	1151B	1152B	1153B	
C	1150C	1151C	1152C	1153C	
D	1150D	1151D	1152D		
E	1150E	1151E			
F	1150F	1151F			

Figure 1: Proposed code chart for Gondi

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Vowel letters

11500	ᴎ	GONDI LETTER A
11501	ᴎ	GONDI LETTER AA
11502	ᴌ	GONDI LETTER I
11503	ᴌ	GONDI LETTER II
11504	ᴘ	GONDI LETTER U
11505	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER UU
11506	⊥	GONDI LETTER E
11507	ᴨ	GONDI LETTER AI
11508	ᴎ	GONDI LETTER O
11509	ᴎ	GONDI LETTER AU

Consonant letters

1150A	ᴑ	GONDI LETTER KA
1150B	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER KHA
1150C	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER GA
1150D	ᴇ	GONDI LETTER GHA
1150E	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER NGA
1150F	ᴐ	GONDI LETTER CA
11510	ᴣ	GONDI LETTER CHA
11511	ᴑ	GONDI LETTER JA
11512	ᴍ	GONDI LETTER JHA
11513	ᴪ	GONDI LETTER NYA
11514	ᴜ	GONDI LETTER TTA
11515	ᴛ	GONDI LETTER TTHA
11516	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER DDA
11517	ᴨ	GONDI LETTER DDHA
11518	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER NNA
11519	ᴜ	GONDI LETTER TA
1151A	ᴪ	GONDI LETTER THA
1151B	ᴣ	GONDI LETTER DA
1151C	ᴣ	GONDI LETTER DHA
1151D	ᴙ	GONDI LETTER NA
1151E	ᴨ	GONDI LETTER PA
1151F	ᴨ	GONDI LETTER PHA
11520	ᴘ	GONDI LETTER BA
11521	ᴜ	GONDI LETTER BHA
11522	ᴪ	GONDI LETTER MA
11523	ᴖ	GONDI LETTER YA
11524	()	GONDI LETTER RA
11525	ᴨ	GONDI LETTER LA
11526	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER VA
11527	ᴋ	GONDI LETTER SHA
11528	ᴑ	GONDI LETTER SSA
11529	ᴤ	GONDI LETTER SA
1152A	ᴞ	GONDI LETTER HA
1152B	ᴫ	GONDI LETTER KSSA
1152C	ᴣ	GONDI LETTER TRA
1152D	ᴫ	GONDI LETTER JNYA

Dependent vowel signs

11530	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN AA
11531	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN I
11532	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN II
11533	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN U
11534	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN UU
11535	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN E
11536	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN AI
11537	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN O
11538	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN AU

Various signs

11539	○	GONDI SIGN ANUSVARA
1153A	○	GONDI SIGN VISARGA
1153B	○	GONDI VOWEL SIGN VOCALIC R
1153C	○	GONDI SIGN VIRAMA

Digits

11540	O	GONDI DIGIT ZERO
11541	L	GONDI DIGIT ONE
11542	U	GONDI DIGIT TWO
11543	∩	GONDI DIGIT THREE
11544	ᴚ	GONDI DIGIT FOUR
11545	ᴤ	GONDI DIGIT FIVE
11546	ᴤ	GONDI DIGIT SIX
11547	J	GONDI DIGIT SEVEN
11548	ᴣ	GONDI DIGIT EIGHT
11549	ᴤ	GONDI DIGIT NINE

Figure 2: Proposed names list for Gondi

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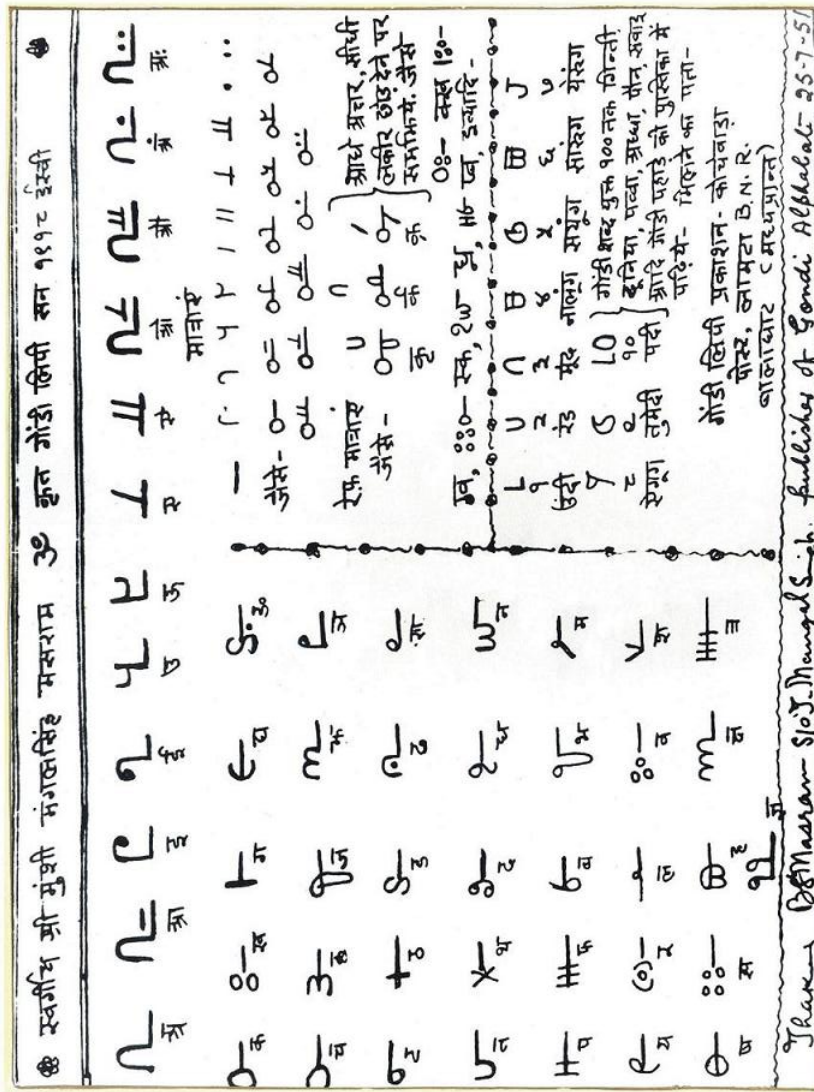
Figure 3: (Masaram 1951).
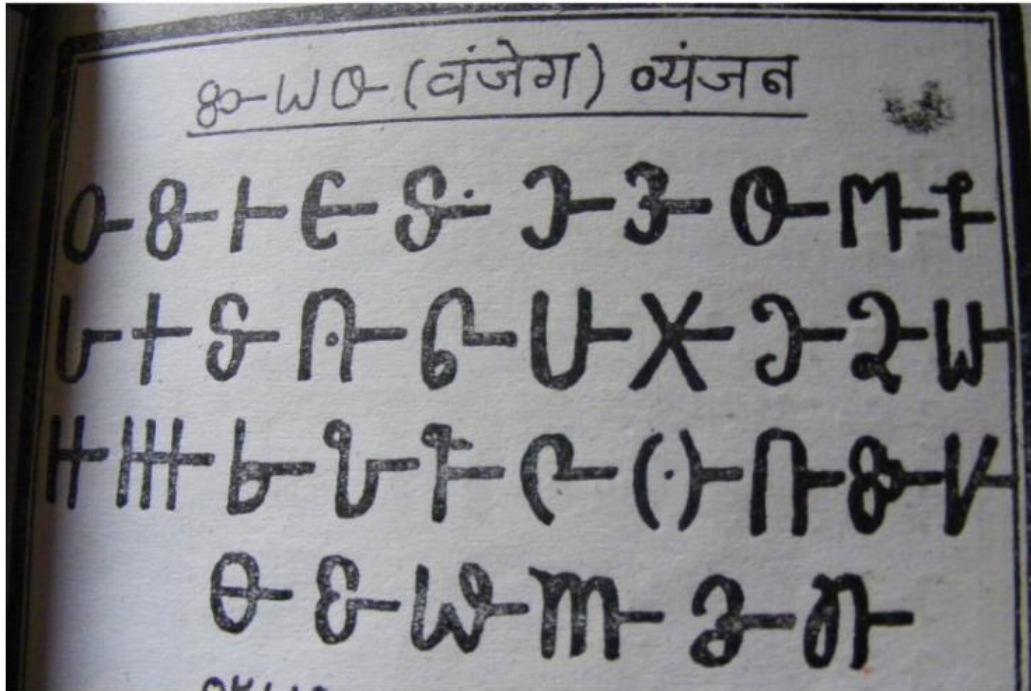
Figure 4: (from National Folklore Support Center and Jatan Trust: 13).

Figure 5: (from Mandavi 2008).