# Experimental Typography

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# Mishti Devanagari

Subtitle: Experimental typography by taking inspiration from cultural reference

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**Abstract**:

Rising dominance of typography can be observed across the globe. It has profuse a wide range of media from print, digital to space design. Its usage has extended far beyond over just narrating information. Public domain typography is carrying out numerous possibilities on a global level.

Extending this observation and analysis with Indian context, experiments in making public domain typographic practice visually interesting and functional enough, is happening with mere possibilities. This further leads to set various limitations in creating volume for users to adapt, along with restricting modern perspective about scripts and their possible scope in visual aesthetic.

With existence of thousands of languages, India is bestowed with multiple scripts living together since ages. In order to experiment the interconnected relation of the script and to testify the functional outcome, the project Mishti Devanagari has initiated. The experiment is to design 'display letter structure' of Devanagari script by taking cultural reference of any other existing relative script. Bengali script was chosen to adapt & to explore further to innovate new letter structure possibilities of Devanagari script.

The characteristics of Bengali letterforms were infused with Devanagari script to arrive at multiple letter skeletons. The skeletons were then modified and developed in order to

utilize across multiple media. The display type character development has significant character explored by combining two scripts. The possibilities of results are multiple and could differ as per scripts. Such display type designed can be then utilized for multiple purpose such as editorial design, space design projects or merchandising etc. also can have numerous extensive possibilities for various design implementations.

*Key words: Devanagari script, Bengali script, Cultural reference, Letter structure development, Letter structure stylization*

## Introduction

A Script is any particular system of writing or the written means of human communication. Verbal communication preceded written scripts. It originated as a means of communicating spoken language to the masses. With the advent of community interactions through trade and travel, these scripts and languages diversified and evolved.

*"Language is the Dress of Thought"*
*-Samuel Johnson.*

If Language is the dress of Thought then a script is its Fashion, its style - and like fashion a script too have evolved and transformed into multiple styles and variations through various influences.
Each of these scripts has a unique character, leaving certain impressions on our mind. These characteristic forms and styles can be re-envisioned as a source of inspiration to create different forms. This paper is an experiment which aims to explore the nature of this and form new Display letter structures by fusing the characters and nature of two scripts together.

## 2. The purpose

### 2.1 Shift in perspective and explorations
Design is never static. It redefines itself with changing times and events. This fluidity manifests in all the various branches of design such as Lettering, Layout and Typography. Specifically, recent projects and studies in the field of Typography suggests that it is not restricted to being just a medium of communication anymore, but a visual design in and of

itself. Modern day designs are a proof of this as they are approaching their topic differently by not limiting it to specific media, scale or any industry.



Figure.1 Mood board for rising dominance of typography

## 2.2 Content is key

In order to stand out in the crowd, businesses and designers are conscious about what they want to say. 'What' defines everything for a business, from strategy to format to finally design. To extend their reach, especially in India, brands - both global and national are experimenting with regional scripts and languages more than ever before. No other country comes even close to matching India's linguistic diversity. To achieve this, within the context of an Indian market, this trend demands content generation in multiple languages, consequently requiring multiple scripts. Recent examples of ads and campaigns of a few brands, showcase how they have managed to strike the right chord with the target audience.

Exploration in non-Latin scripts is far less compared to Latin scripts. This is mainly due to the prevalence of Latin origin scripts in the international market and their global presence. However, as the times have evolved - even though we have limited resources to adapt from, a huge scope for content original and relevant to India has been created.

Figure.2 Indigo social media marketing



Figure.3 Zomato advertising campaign

## 3. Strategy

### 3.1 Analysis of character of the scripts

As discussed earlier, this experiment is about fusing the scripts together. The scripts as we see them today, have been birthed and grown with India since the ancient times. These have undergone many evolutionary changes to reach their final form. Tools used to first give them form, surface material on which they were written, their consequent cultural influence and usage have shaped our modern day scripts into what they are today.

We find similarity in most of the south Indian scripts. Traditionally they were inscribed on palm leaves using sytlus. Angular letters would have broken the leaves' surface so the final form of these scripts evolved into having continuous and rounder character shapes.

Figure.4 Tamil Manuscripts

Devanagari the script typically observed in manuscripts, has sharp and angular character style. It was typically written using the tool named Boru which gave character to earlier writings.
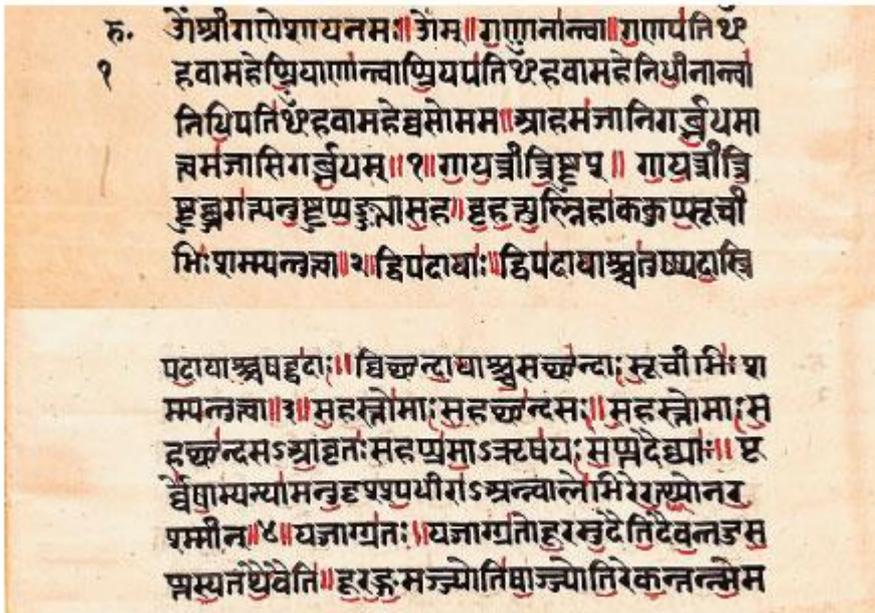


Figure.5 Devanagari Manuscripts

A typical Chinese script has a high contrast of thick and thin lines. The strokes are drawn on a smooth surface by holding a round brush perpendicular to the surface. The strokes are controlled by changing the pressure on the brush. This same influence can be observed particularly in the north eastern scripts of India.

## 3.2 Why Mishti Devanagari?

As the title hints this endeavor is about experimenting with the Devanagari and Bengali scripts. I have been aware of the Devanagari script since I first started learning to communicate in the scriptural form. I believe it is always a good idea to start off with something you have roots in. It makes it more personal. And with time, I got exposed to the visual forms of many other scripts. One of the many - Bengali, has always fascinated me with its grace and beauty. Both these scripts - Devanagari and Bengali, are used as scripts for multiple languages and their dialects. Considering the statistics of their probable usage, content generation by considering both the scripts has huge scope.

## 3.3 Evolution of both the scripts

Both these scripts fall under the Abugida writing system, where consonants and vowels are all written as a unit: each unit is based on the consonant letter. Vowels need to be written down as well, but are secondary. Bramhi is considered as a mother of all the modern Indian scripts we see today. Political and social situation lead to diversification and independent evolution of the scripts.
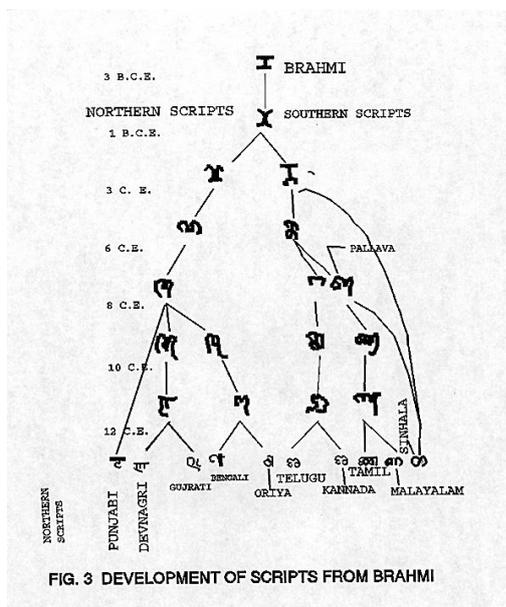


Figure.6 Evolution of the scripts

### 3.4 Decoding the Bengali characters

With detailed study of the Bengali script, the following characteristics were deduced to be the base into which the Devanagari letter structure skeleton could be adapted.

1. Structure and forms: Solid, heavy structure
2. Stroke and Angles: Sharp contrast in strokes, detailing at the end of the stroke
3. Proportions: Taller and tapering letter structure

## 4. The methodology

### 4.1 Form replacement method

The Form was taken as the inspiration to derive new letter structures. Some of the unique forms were selected out of the Bengali script to explore and adapt.

অ আ ই ঈ উ ঊ ঋ এ ঐ ও ঔ
ক খ গ ঘ ঙ চ ছ জ ঝ ঞ
ট ঠ ড ঢ ণ ত থ দ ধ ন প
ফ ব ভ ম য র ল শ ষ স হ

Figure.7 Bengali letters

### 4.1.a Fusion of forms

The selected forms were fused with the Devanagari letters to create a new version of the Devanagari letter structure. The resulting form was then stylized and simplified to attain legibility and visual balance.

Figure.8 Fusion of forms

### 4.1.b Visual probabilities

Multiple probabilities for single letter structure were explored. Few were not legible, few had problem in visual aesthetics. The best of the forms were chosen as a base structure of other letters to be explored.

### 4.1.c. The exceptions

Some of the structures did not fall in line with the strict guides and rules. These are the exceptions that often prove the law. However these few letters were tweaked and adapted in such a way that they matched the characteristics of the new script family.



Figure.9 Visual probabilities and exceptions

### 4.1.d. Family explorations

With the help of standardized base structures, the entire letter structure of the script family was explored. The style was then extended and adapted to similarly grouped

letters. To maintain visual balance, these forms were repeated and tweaked as per the Devanagari letter structure.



Figure.10 Letter structure family explorations



Figure.11 Letter structure family exploration

Similarly following letter structures were discovered.

Figure.12 Letter skeleton explorations

**4.2.a. Fusion of forms with stylization**

The route follows a process similar to route 1. The exploration in this route is extended further with a layer of stylization over the skeleton structure created for the new script.



Figure.13 Fusion of forms with stylization

अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ए ऐ ओ औ अं अः
क ख ग घ ङ च छ ज झ ञ ट ठ ड
ढ ण त थ द ध न य फ ब भ म य
र ल क व श ष स ह द ड ज्ञ

Figure.14 Letter structure family exploration

## 4.3. Stroke style as an inspiration

Both Bengali and Devanagari script follow similar stroke angle yet the structure gives distinct identity to both the scripts. Bengali script has more angular and graceful stroke compared to Devanagari. Taking the same character ahead. Letter structures were explored.

Figure.15 Stroke style

### 4.3.a. Style 1

Continuing the above process for letter structure discovery - the character of stroke was infused and maintained in the entire family.



Figure.16 Fusion of forms
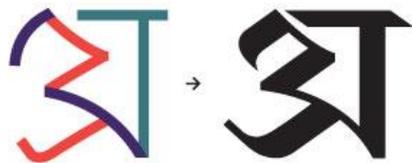


Figure.17 Stylized structure details
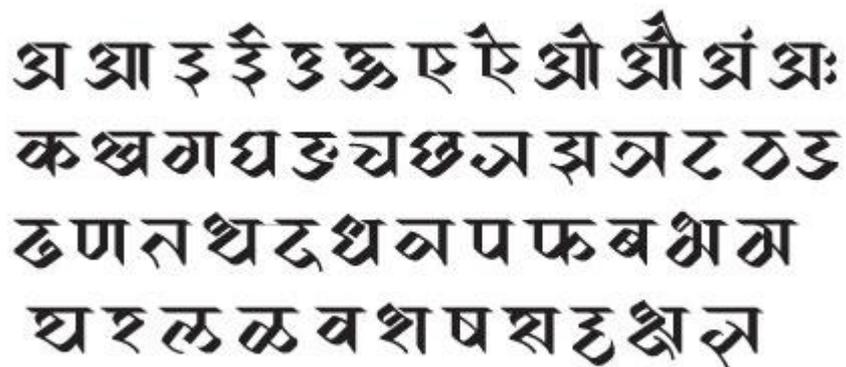


Figure.18 Stylized structure family exploration

### 4.3.a. Style 2

Figure.19 Stroke inspiration for stylized letter structure family exploration



Figure.20 Stylized structure family exploration

## 5. Conclusion

The forms derived may have a neutral character or can have a strong association with the inspired script.

The neutral forms can be developed further for font creation. Font creation will enable the flexibility of associating the form with the required mood than inspired script.
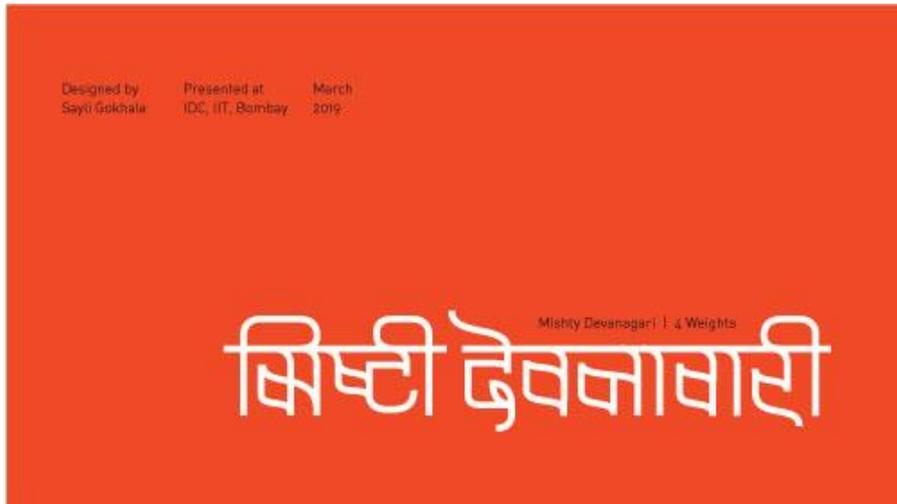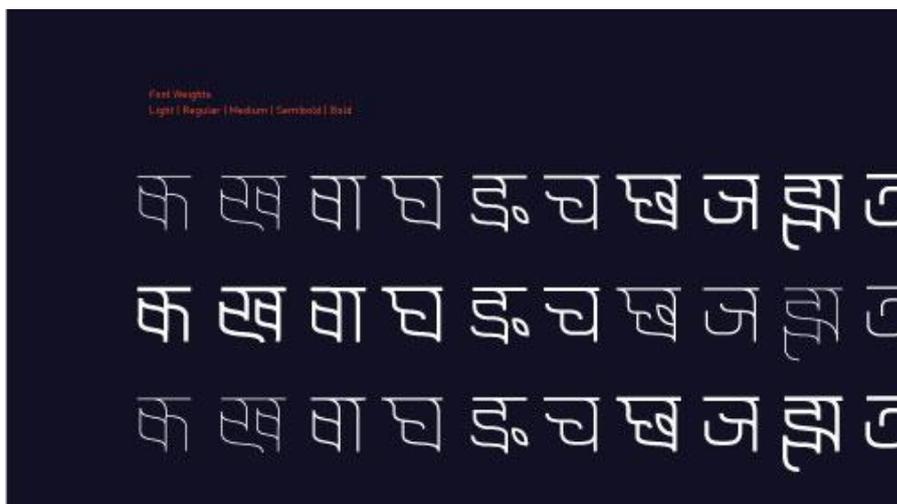
Figure.21 Font poster


Figure.22 Font poster


Figure.23 Font poster

A strong association with inspired script enables the form to be utilized where cultural stories are involved. One of the strongest applications can be publication media design. With the rise of translatory books and publication, there is a lot of content originating in a single language getting translated to multiple languages and media.
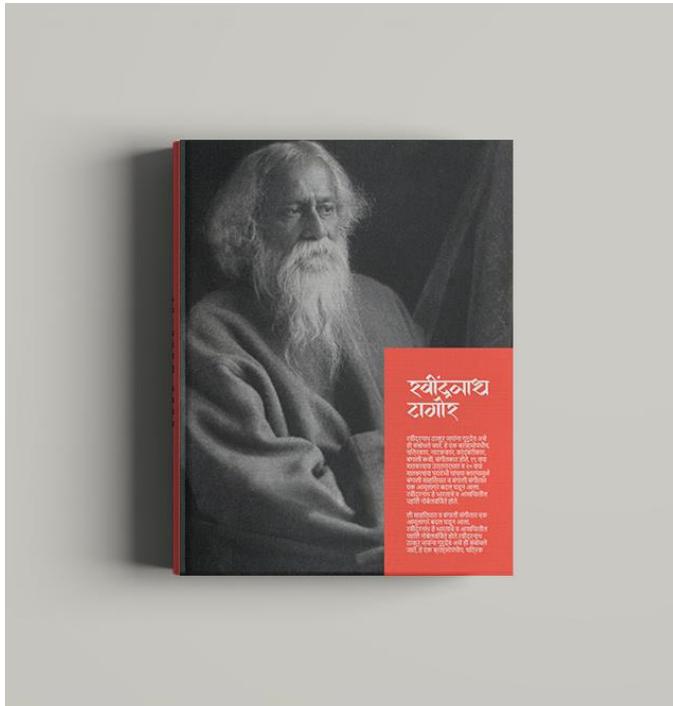


Figure.24 Editorial design



Figure.25 Editorial design

Rising dominance of regional stories on national and international platform can be observed in the entertainment and media industries. Titles crafted with fonts or lettering which captures the essence of that particular region and its aesthetic personality enhances viewership having a powerful impact on the mind of audiences.



Figure.26 Movie title design : Parineeta

Indian art is widely appreciated across the globe. The art exhibitions and e-commerce sites have helped propagate these local art and crafts and they have gone on to achieve widespread acclaim. Just like the art in itself, Typography with a rich regional touch can help in effective promotion and flourishing of such art. It will help to in giving the artworks a ring of authenticity, local cultural essence and their own distinct personality.

Figure.27 Art exhibition promotion standee

In order to maintain consistency, multilingual branding is a new trend that we observe. This experiment of fusing characters of two scripts will definitely help to bring out the essence.

## 6. Future and vision

The method used can be adapted to multiple scripts and used to create many such multilingual forms of lettering and typefaces. We are limited only by our own creativity and how far we can push ourselves. If everything around us is inspiration, why a script can't be?

Figure.27 Other script exploration

## 7. Overview

While researching about the Bengali script, I got to know a little about culture and history associated with it. It encouraged me to dig deeper into it and know more. India has a rich legacy of art, culture and literature. However, in a lot of cases these art forms lack organized and planned documentation. Such experiments can help to rejuvenate the interest in our rich heritage and create a special interest and respect for our cultural diversity. A record of our diverse and intricate art forms built for future generations will enable us to preserve our very own script, culture and language and revive what has been lost.

Discovering aesthetically rich and legible forms was not easy due to the complexity involved in the scripts. It required the perfect balance of technical and aesthetic beauty. In a funny dichotomy - with our life and our tools going digital, I was made aware of the magic of human hand and brain in the design. Aesthetic flexibility gives life to the design and truly gives it that extra edge that makes it beautiful.

Last but not the least, this project taught me to look for functional design solutions. A project that in this case helps preserve and propagate old scripts by reinventing its use in the modern world. To find ways to apply the art to modern culture and forma happy perfect meeting of both worlds. Every aspect of design has meaning and purpose to it. We can enhance the beauty and longevity of art through it. Art is said to be eternal. Design is the perfect tool to prove that true.

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