



Typography and Children  
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## Bagulbua— A Monstrous Approach to the Devanagari Script

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**Abstract:** Childhood is a broad term that is typically the phase between infancy and adulthood. It ranges so drastically that it is difficult to have one idea for childhood. Children are naturally attracted to fantasy and are high on creative power that lets them discover the world around them. Being fond of tales and metaphors, youngsters quickly lose themselves in fantasyland.

Children's literature in India consists of stories like Chandamama, Panchatantra, Jataka Tales and Champak. Sukumar Ray and Satyajit Ray have made great contributions with poems like Abol Tabol and films like Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne. But way before these avenues, oral tradition was widely popular before publishing existed. It is defined as a form of human communication where knowledge, art and ideas are transmitted and preserved orally from one generation to another.

The Bogeyman is a folklore creature used by parents that victimises trouble-making children owing to their general misbehaviour. Conceptually similar creatures are found in many communities around the world dubbed as Bubak, Buka, Bogu and Bua. In Maharashtra, it is popularly known as 'Bagulbua'. The Bagulbua font has been designed by taking textual and cinematic references from the mystical genre of children.

**Key words:** *Children, Monsters, Devanagari, Playful, Illustrative, Lettering.*

### 1. Introduction

Typographical choices must always be driven by purpose, subject, and the audience. Fonts can make readers feel a specific way, whether one is writing about science, history, or humanities. In religious scriptures, certain alphabets also feature intricate patterns that

make them look striking. It is necessary for a designer to leverage typography for both communication and impact.

Just like photographs, fonts can be used to evoke emotions. For instance, a clean, serif font would look formal whereas creative hand-drawn fonts look cheerful and light-hearted. Fortunately, there are fonts that cater to all sorts of audiences ranging from senior citizens, to avid readers and young children. Generally fonts for youngsters have a warm and friendly look. Studies show that fonts with a sizable x-height are easier to read for children. Even the letters ‘a’ and ‘g’ insist on being single-storied.



Figure 1: Playful fonts for children. Credits- hipfonts.com

Most of the narrative tries to speak to children in their own handwriting. Children start learning how to read, they begin recognising each character one by one, making it a slow, boring and a frustrating process. While badly designed fonts may even discourage children from reading, a font’s chunky style is ideal for grabbing attention. Children are attracted to details and textures, so they have something extra to look at. This paper looks at the diverse characters incorporated in the Devanagari script as a deliberate attempt to make meaningful communication.

## 2. The Concept of Childhood

Childhood is a broad term that is typically the phase between infancy and adulthood. Research from around the world indicates that the boundaries of childhood and adulthood both within and between different societies vary dramatically across times, cultures and class. They range so drastically that it is difficult to have one idea for childhood. Even to handle children with different backgrounds is complicated. The responsibility of parents

and teachers increases towards children because they are more social and are in that stage of development.

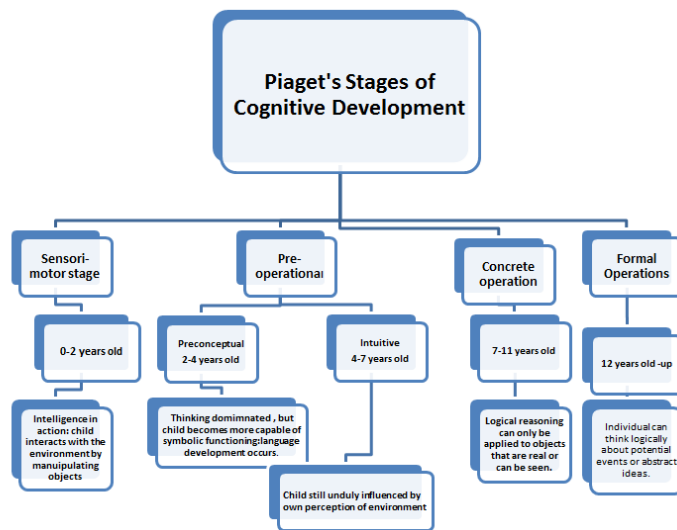


Figure 2: Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development. Credits- sociopsychology.net

In most cases, children have fewer responsibilities than adults. They don’t really have rules governing their daily lives, and are rarely disciplined except when it comes to wasting food. Even the physical and mental development of a person largely takes place in their childhood. The psychological development of children, however, is a more complex aspect. At this age a lot of children express their opinion. With this interaction comes cognitive development where language comes into picture and a child’s simple reasoning starts developing.

### 3. Child Behaviour

Observation is one of the most simple, yet effective methods of evaluating young children as they grow up. This includes understanding their temper tantrums, emotional outbursts and general bad behaviour for biological reasons like being hungry or tired. Such unpleasant responses may include issues related to learning challenges, not being able to describe their feelings or even changes in the environment.



Figure 3: Credits- parenting.firstcry.com

A child's behaviour may be considered as a problem if it doesn't match the expectations of the family that are wanted and approved. By observing children, one understands the physical, emotional, social, intellectual and moral importance of child development. Research also suggests that lack of social skills can lead to loneliness and depression from an early age. Music, dance, exploring new places, or even listening to stories can aid to uplift a child's state of mind.

#### 4. Children's Literature

Children are naturally attracted to fantasy and are high on creative power that lets them discover the world they live in. Being fond of tales and metaphors, youngsters quickly lose themselves in fantasyland. They see the world with bright eyes and with the power of their imagination, their ability to turn a piece of cardboard into a pirate ship, or a fork into a rocket is prodigious. Literature majorly consists of stories, books or poems that inform or entertain the audience. It also aims at children with moral and religious messages. While genres can range from adventure, magical realism and humour, they remain in tune to the child's imagination. The categories and genres of children's literature can be found below in table 1.

Category	Genre
Picture books	Text and illustration
Poetry and verse	Condensed language
Folklore and fairytales	Traditional stories, myths, legends, nursery rhymes, oral tradition

Fantasy	Imaginary world, imaginary creatures, imaginary events
Science fiction	What might occur in the future
Realistic fiction	‘What if’ stories
Historical fiction	Could have happened
Non-fiction	Real world facts, explanation of a concept

Table 1: Genres in children’s books

#### 4.1 Around the World

The Jungle Book, Peter Pan, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Goldilocks and Matilda are some popular stories from around the world. Picture-puzzle activity books such as ‘Where’s Wally?’ have also received global acclamation. Alice in Wonderland is one fine example published in 1865 and considered to be the first English masterpiece written for youngsters.

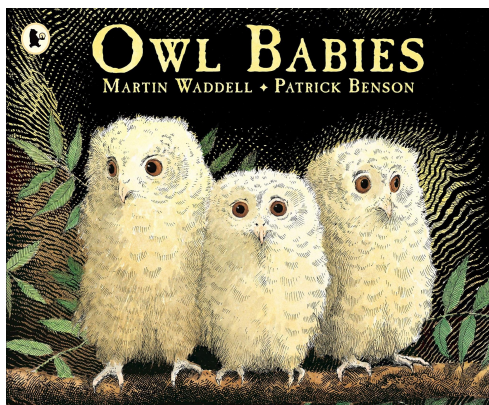


Figure 4: Owl Babies, 1992

Children’s books such as There’s an Ouch in My Pouch, Jampires, Doing the Animal BOP, Owl Babies and Two Frogs have been memorable published works. Children’s cartoons, defined as a form of two-dimensional illustrated visual art, include the most popular Tom and Jerry, Mr. Bean, Winnie the Pooh, Powerpuff Girls and Popeye. These animations also have a handful of thoughtful messages to convey.

## 4.2 In India

Children's literature in India consists of stories like Chandamama, Panchatantra, Jataka Tales, Champak and stories of Akbar and Birbal. Sukumar Ray and Satyajit Ray, too, have made great contributions with poems like Abol Tabol and films like Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne.

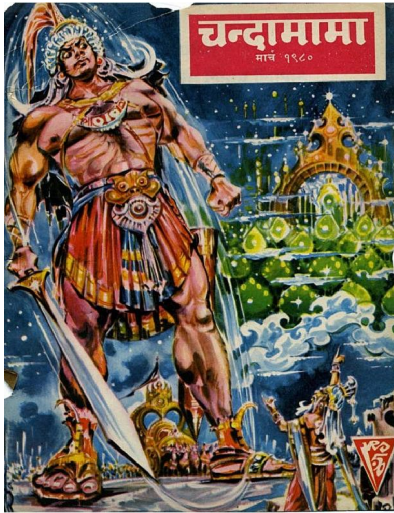


Figure 5: Credits- gorest.co.in

But way before these avenues, oral tradition was widely popular before publishing existed. It is defined as a form of human communication where knowledge, art and ideas are transmitted and preserved orally from one generation to another. Folktales, chants, proses, proverbs, riddles, epics, myths, charms are all part of the oral tradition domain.



Figure 6: Oral Storytelling. Credits- youthkiawaaz.com

## 5. The Bogeyman

Verbal stories can also be used to frighten children. One such instance would be that of the Bogeyman monster. The Bogeyman is a folklore creature used by parents that victimises trouble-making children owing to their general misbehaviour. He is widely regarded as a personification for evil spirit and extreme fear; and is said to abduct these children at night to teach them a lesson, without causing them harm. But in extreme cases, the Bogeyman is known to eat them up.



Figure 7: Representation of the Bogeyman. Credits- listverse.com

Conceptually similar creatures can be found in many communities around the world dubbed as Boeman, Bubak, Buka, Bogu and Bua. There are so many types of Bogeyman that one doesn't know exactly how many there are. In Maharashtra, the Marathi-language speakers use the term 'Bagulbua' for the same purpose.

## 6. Designing for Children

To design for children is to design with responsibility. Designing for the younger audience can be a lot of fun as the designer gets to play with a lot of whimsical elements or even get inspired by child art, that is otherwise out of bounds on more serious projects. The scope of opening one's mind to informal possibilities is high in order to liven things up, but having fun is the main criteria. The moodboard must express fun, excitement and vibrance.



Figure 8: Drawing inspiration from Child art. Credits- demilked.com

Though the fonts used should be speaking children's language, it shouldn't impact readability. Customised display fonts seemed to be falling short in story books and educational material. Though there are plenty of Latin fonts available, Devanagari fonts have still not found a place in children's literature that cater to the Marathi-reading audience.

## 7. Mythical Influence

As a vibrant Devanagari font for the youth, Bagulbua has been designed by taking textual and cinematic references from the mystical genre of children. Child-friendly horror films like Ghostbusters, Casper, Coraline, The Addams Family and iconic characters such as Frankenstein, the Egyptian Mummy and HIM the devil have majorly contributed to the making of the Bagulbua family.



Figure 9: The Addams Family, 1992. Credits- imdb.com



## 8. Evolution of Bagulbua

Creating non-repetitive designs serves the purpose of uniqueness. The font demands having a flowing rhythm within the letter to carefully balance all graphic elements. Each alphabet had to be drawn diligently to attain steadiness. The Va is an excellent example of how many iterations can be done to one alphabet using only a few subtle elements.

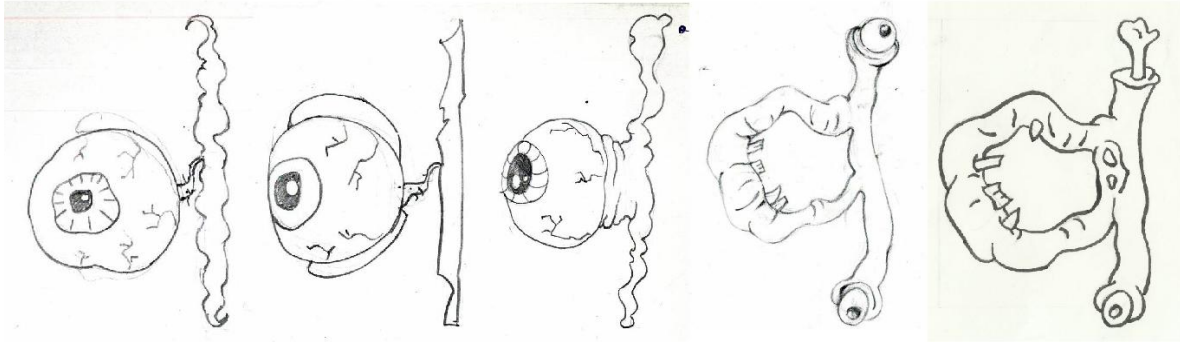


Figure 10: Evolution of the alphabet Va.

## 9. The Bagulbua Kingdom

Taking into account that children are generally easily distracted and the fact that their attention cannot be held for too long if things get monotonous, every Bagulbua character that has been designed has a character of its own. Bua cunningly looks and acts evil. As its perception ranges drastically from culture to culture; some alphabets may be spooky, while others are un-frightening in nature. Along with the structure, colour too, is a designer's best friend when it comes to designing for children. Multicoloured characters best suited the diverse alphabet styles.



Figure 11: Colour trials incorporating a mix of flashy and subtle colours.

Bagulbua does not have any specific appearance which leads to each character having poles apart elements such as sharp claws, rotten smiles, devilish horns, popping eyeballs,

dripping blood, graceful tentacles, wagging tongues, tapering noses, fastened stitches, together with icky slime. Though monstrous, Bagulbua incorporates a handful of human characteristics such as moving slowly, screaming, smiling and having rebellious weapons like claws, horns and fangs. These features were incorporated in alphabets, numerals as well as special characters, seen in Figure 12.



Figure 12: The Bagulbua Family.

## 10. Conclusion

Designing for children is a re-iterative process that may take months, or even years to achieve excellence. The potential of exploring the children genre is immeasurable as the font takes inspiration from child behaviour, myths, stories and everyday life. There are plenty of designers and illustrators contributing towards the group of young adults in order to foresee a promising future. This project makes an effort to fabricate child-friendly alphabets with further applying them across various mediums.



Figure 13: Toy train application.



Figure 14: Bagulbua slippers.

## Acknowledgement

A big thank you to Prof. Manasi Keni and Prof. Vinay Saynekar for their expert advice, enthusiasm and motivation throughout this project.

Special thank you to Dr. Santosh Kshirsagar (Dean, Sir J. J. Institute of Applied Art) and Prof. Shubhanand Jog for all their love and support.

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