



## Typography for Children

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### Savitribai Phule's life through Devanagari letter formation.

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#### **Abstract:**

This paper will briefly discuss the Devanagari letter formation through the human body and explore the different ways of Typography. This is an elective lettering and typography final project, which is totally done on the basis of what we like to do. Here we get to explore and have the freedom to work on the project in our own way. Typography is not just about letters but it's expressing through letters. It is a subject that has a lot of potential to be explored and tried out in different ways. As an Indian designer or typographer, we need to get the Devanagari letters at the forefront and glorify them. My whole final project is based on the Devanagari letter exploration and formation.

**Key words:** *Devanagari letters, formation, exploration, Dance, art forms, human body, Savitribai Phule.*

## 1. Introduction

Dance and typography are two different art forms. Dance is where we express through body and typography is where we express through letters. But the only common thing they both have is letters mold as per their characters and in dance, the human body is able to mold as they feel or want to express. The human body is designed in such a way that it can mold, stretch, bend, squeeze, etc. Contemporary is one of the dance styles I have been doing since childhood. This dance style has made me flexible enough, it's a style that connects the mind and the body through fluid dance movements. Taking all the learning of contemporary dance and Typography I thought of an idea where they both go hand in hand. We have seen a lot of visual formations through the human body but very less letter formations. English alphabets through the human body have been explored and artists have been doing it since centuries, but no one thinks about Devanagari letters. Being an Indian I have a special keenness toward Devanagari letters.



Figure 1: Roman script exploration (already done by others)

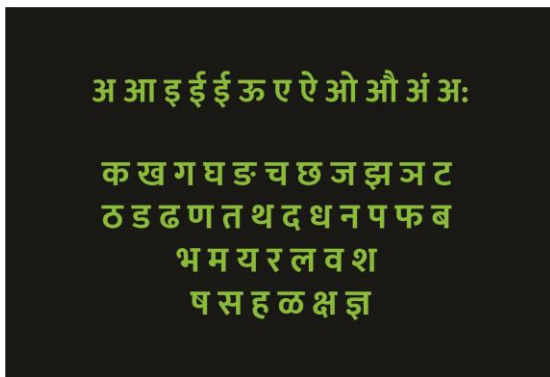


Figure 2: Devanagari Script

Devanagari is a script that is widely used in India. As Indians we have been learning Devanagari since childhood, it has a total of 48 letters. As the official language of India is Hindi in Devanagari script it is necessary to learn this script. Children in India are very familiar with their mother tongue so first they learn to speak and then also write in Devanagari. But today's generation is losing touch with their mother tongue and so with the script, that needs to be brought back to preserve our Indian languages and scripts.

Devanagari script is curvier and has more circular forms than the Roman script. The motion, strokes, angles, endings, flourishes, etc., were observed while doing the project. This project aims to first bring two different art forms together and second create the importance of Devanagari letters in the children's mind and design industry too. It is such a beautiful script, it made every person in the project bend and mold in different ways, when observed I found that it actually worked as an exercise too for them.

### 1.1 Why is 'Savitribai Phule' the main topic?

At the initial stage I just thought of making letters out of the human body. But this project needed a strong point to highlight these letters and bring Devanagari script to some heights.

**Devanagari script** was used to write the **Sanskrit**, Prākṛit, Hindi, Marathi, and Nepali languages, developed from the North Indian monumental script known as Gupta and ultimately from the Brāhmī alphabet. There is a very close relation between Marathi and Sanskrit language. Marathi is derived from Maharashtri, a Prakrit language. And Maharashtri was an offshoot of Vedic Sanskrit. So altogether, Marathi is derived of Vedic Sanskrit. So as Devanagari is written in Sanskrit and Sanskrit is very close to Marathi that's the reason it is more impactful and easy to portray the subject.

Language is culture and culture is language. It is a system of communication used by a particular country or culture. More use of vernacular languages will build bonds within our culture and understand the topic more clearly. Language is the most basic education we get from our childhood. When we talk about Marathi Language or education of girls in India the only name that comes to our mind is Savitribai Jyotirao Phule.

I know who Savitribai Phule was, but do today's generation, children know about her? She is such a personality & inspiration about whom everyone should know. One more aim of this project was to educate children about Savitribai Phule, her contribution to education in India and many more things.

This project is the journey of Savitribai Phule's life through Devanagari letters, the first Indian educated woman and the first Indian woman to become a teacher. She was the one who never studied from childhood, but after getting married to Jyotiba Phule she learned from him how to hold a pencil to how to read and write. She was supported by him immensely. There was a time in India where girl child was not allowed to learn or educate. Jyotirao, also known as 'Jyotiba Phule' was against this. On 1 January 1848 they began the first girl school in India at 'Bhide Wada' in Pune. Only 6 girls registered their names, it was a tough time. Savitribai used to teach them, so people used to throw garbage, stones, and what not on her. But she didn't step back. Other than this they carried much other social work in India and brought huge changes.

## 1.2 How do these letters depict her entire story?

Without her, the project would have no meaning to it. She is the star of the project. So the idea was to write a script and give a voiceover of myself. In short, make it like a short film that would make letters talk about Savitribai Phule. Showing a story in visual form is possible but making letters talk was a challenge.

Script was the first need for showing the story. It was written on the basis of research done at the first stage. There was this very old series of Savitribai Phule named 'Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule'. I studied and researched about it thoroughly. Story was written briefly and every letter was allotted a few parts of the story. 2 to 3 lines for each letter were enough. Making the story short and crisp was a task as there were 48 letters to be shown in one video.

Letter formation went through a lot of trial and errors. Contemporary poses and some Yoga asana were taken into consideration. Having a dance background helped me a lot in making letters. Double Kana needed people of the same height. Tried different ways to give the perfect curve to get the open counter of letters like अ, आ, इ, ई, उ, ऊ,... almost all the

Devanagari letters have this roundness. For matras of letters like ई, ऐ, ओ, औ hands were used. Few loops were made by hands and few had this circular cutout of paper. To make the process easier similar characteristics of letters were sorted out like (Group 1: अ, आ, उ, ऊ, ओ, औ, अं, अः ) (Group 2: इ, ई, उ, ऊ, ह, क्ष ) (Group 3: ए, ऐ) (Group 4: क, ब, व) (Group 5: ख, थ, य, र, श, स) (Group 6: ग) (Group 7: घ, छ, ध) (Group 8: च, ज, झ, ञ) (Group 9: ट, ठ, ड, द) (Group 10: ण, प, फ, ष) (Group 11: त, न, भ, म) (Group 12: ल, ळ). Total 8 people were required.



Figure 3: Contemporary Dance pose



Figure 4: Yoga Pose

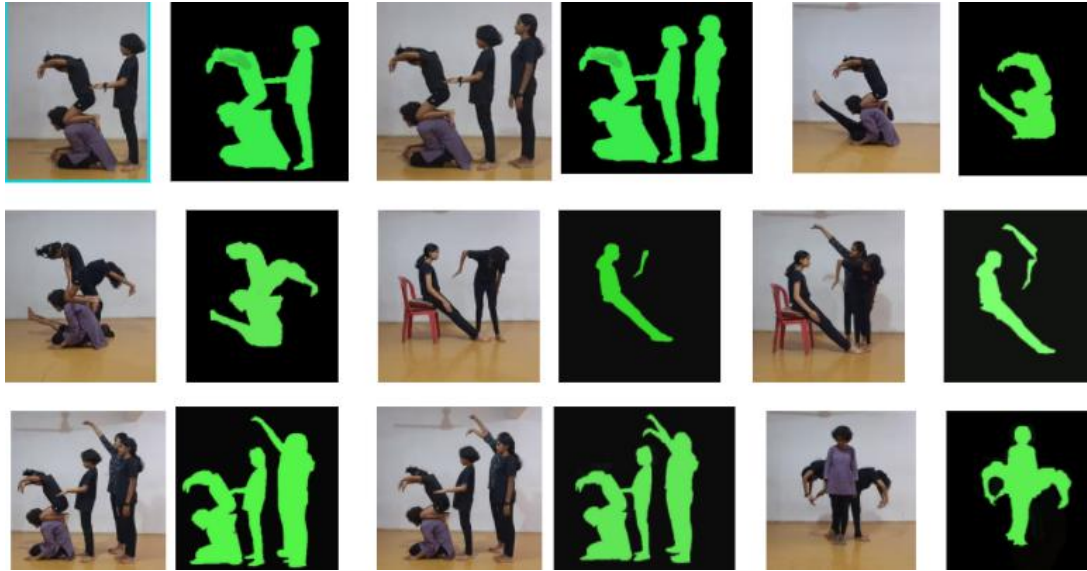


Figure 5: Initial Rough stage (colored it digitally to see its look and feel)

The important element of Devanagari is the **Shirorekha**, ‘Siro’ means something which is present in the upper part and ‘Rekha’ means line. It holds the letters and balances it. Here it depicts the red tila (bindi of Savitribai Phule). It’s her identity which we can see in those letters. Savitribai Phule was like a Shirorekha for women’s education. So the letters here are in Green color as green ‘saree’ is the identity of a married Marathi woman in India.



Figure 6: comparing letter with Savitribai Phule’s bindi & saree.

In between the formation of letters, the dance movements and acts were added so the parts of letters portrays the story through actions, movements & then come together to form a letter. Every letter has something to tell. As Savitribai Phule was growing in her story, letters were also growing and showing their own uniqueness by bending and molding.

People's faces were not visible, they were covered with green cloth, no expressions were seen, still the movements expressed every emotion of every situation of her life. And later these emotions combined and formed beautiful letters that depicts as the winning part of her life. This also shows the never ending bond between her and Script, Language, letters. Till the end of her life she kept doing social work. Devanagari script also supports many languages like Hindi, Boro, Nepali, Sherpa, Prakrit, Apabhramsha, Bhojpuri, Braj BHasha, Chhattisgarhi, Haryanvi, Magahi, Nagpuri, Rajasthani, Bhili, dogri, Kashmiri, Konkani, Sindhi, Nepal Bhasa, Mundari, and Santali. This project gave life to Devanagari letters, it made them speak, move, and stand tall as a character.

## 2. Process of set-up and Technicals

The process includes material like UV lights to make the letters and the entire video look more beautiful. They are the lights that make neon colors pop up and shine in black out. I played with hiding things and making it visible with the help of UV light, the most fun part but at the same time a very technical part. The main stage includes setting the black room, lights, and camera with the help of my team. Green neon clothes were worn for the letter formation. As I started shooting I got used to how UV light works and its tricks, how black can be used smartly to hide things, how we can use a circular cut out to give the round part in a few letters, and many more things. It was challenging enough to maintain the character of the letter.



Figure 7: Final Setup and letter formation



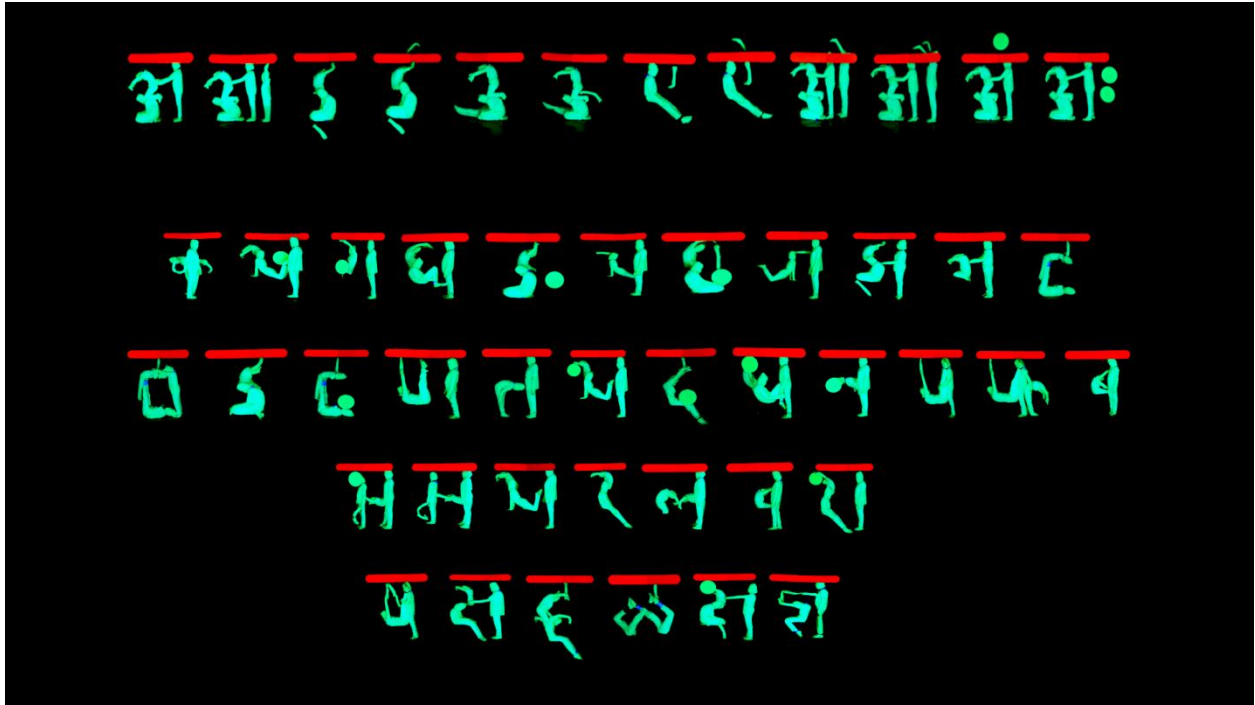


Figure 8: Final Devanagari letters

**FULL VIDEO LINK:** <https://youtu.be/E7ctIXl-P8I>

### 3. Conclusion

Consistency is the key and that worked. As a designer we need to keep experimenting and go beyond imagination that is where new ideas take birth. This is not just an exploration but a step towards taking typography especially Devanagari script at greater heights. We should not limit typography to just a few mediums. Type can have its own language and way of expressing. The step by step joining of every part of the letters introduces and differentiates the terms like kaana, matra, Velanti, the changing curves of the letters and highlights the characteristic of every letterform.

In this fast developing world we also need to glorify our Indian Scripts by exploring and experimenting in it. This is how Devanagari script will reach today's generation and encourages them to learn it and pass it on. This is an informative and experimental project which takes the story of Savitribai Phule ahead. The hidden, less spoken contribution of her for education and much more social work in India will open up. These Devanagari letters gave a new birth to Savitribai Jyotirao Phule in today's world.

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## References

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Background music of the video (Classical Instrumental Fusion B.Sivaramakrishna Rao) [https://youtu.be/TXSb\\_OIMNQg](https://youtu.be/TXSb_OIMNQg)

Anatomy of Devanagari letters (Research) <https://www.dsource.in/resource/history-devanagari-letterforms/anatomy-letters>