

# Typography Day 2014

## - Typography and Culture

### Lankan Arts In A Font

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**Abstract:** “Sampradha” is the inaugural English font blended with “Sinhala decorative patterns” which is being swept away from existence due to its remoteness from the self-promoting cutting edge technology. Sampradha which means “tradition” in Sinhala language, comes in with a mission to give a voice to the Sinhala traditional decorative patterns and to get its fair share of awareness. Hence, this paper concentrates on the process which created this decorative font and techniques that could be used promote it. This also explores into the subtle painstaking process which succeeded in striking a balance between legibility and Sri Lankan identity while blending it with straight lined English letters.

**Key words:** *Sampradha, Sinhala, traditional, decorative, patterns, inherent, blend, elements.*

#### INTRODUCTION

“Sinhala decorative patterns”, which is a subset of “Sinhala decorative arts”, has undoubtedly established its presence, as one of the few remarkable heritages of Sri Lanka. According to Binaragama (2008), this may be due to the legendary history it inherits and the undeniable originality it possesses. However, due to the limited resources on “Sinhala decorative patterns” (De Silva, 2009) and its inability to compete with modern patterns which self-promote them through cutting edge technology, “Sinhala decorative patterns”, which is a blend of elegance, authenticity and uniqueness, is being swept away from existence. This has called for a timely action. In other words, the status quo demands a medium which could take “Sinhala decorative patterns” to its target audience and thereby, create a robust dialog.

With this very purpose, “Sampradha” comes into limelight. Sampradha which means “tradition” in Sinhala language comes in with a mission to give a voice to the Sinhala traditional decorative patterns. To reach its target audience, “the traditional art lovers” or the ones who appreciate tradition, there should be a medium comprehensive to most. To address this issue, “Sampradha” uses English typography, which is recognized and

understood by almost everyone. At the same time, it promotes “Sinhala decorative patterns” through blending some of its unique elements with the English font.

## **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The paper will make an attempt to:

- i) Create a display font (“Sampradha”) which is a blend of English font and “Sinhala decorative patterns” and present it as a unique solution which would bring awareness to” Sinhala decorative patterns”
- ii) Striking a balance between legibility and Sri Lankan identity while blending it with straight lined English letters
- iii) Detail the subtle painstaking process which gave birth to this one of a kind decorative font
- iv) Suggest techniques that could be used promote it

## **SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS**

As the research is conducted by a graphic designing student, the scope of the research is limited to “Sinhala decorative arts” (in Sinhala “mostara”). Although the aforesaid phenomenon is visible not only in “Sinhala decorative arts” but also in “Sinhala decorative arts”, providing a solution which would cover both the aspects would be constrained by the limited time given to carry out the research and also, the lack of availability of resources. Researcher’s limited knowledge on “Sinhala decorative patterns” could be brought to attention as another limitation of this research.

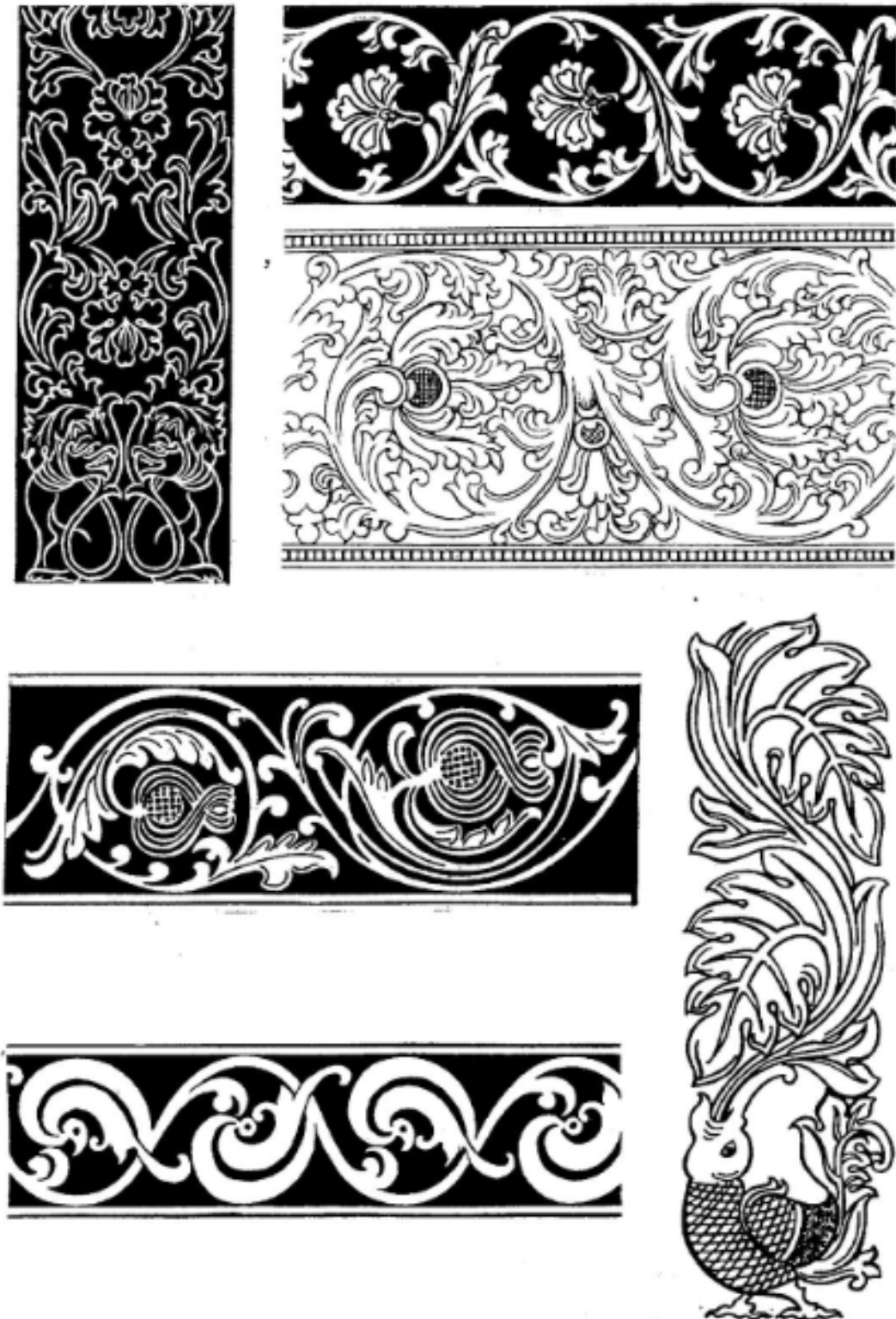
## **METHODOLOGY**

Creation of “Sampradha” consists of a series of strenuous meticulous tasks. Thus, for the ease of comprehension it could be arranged into five stages as follows:

### **1. Observation & Initial Creation**

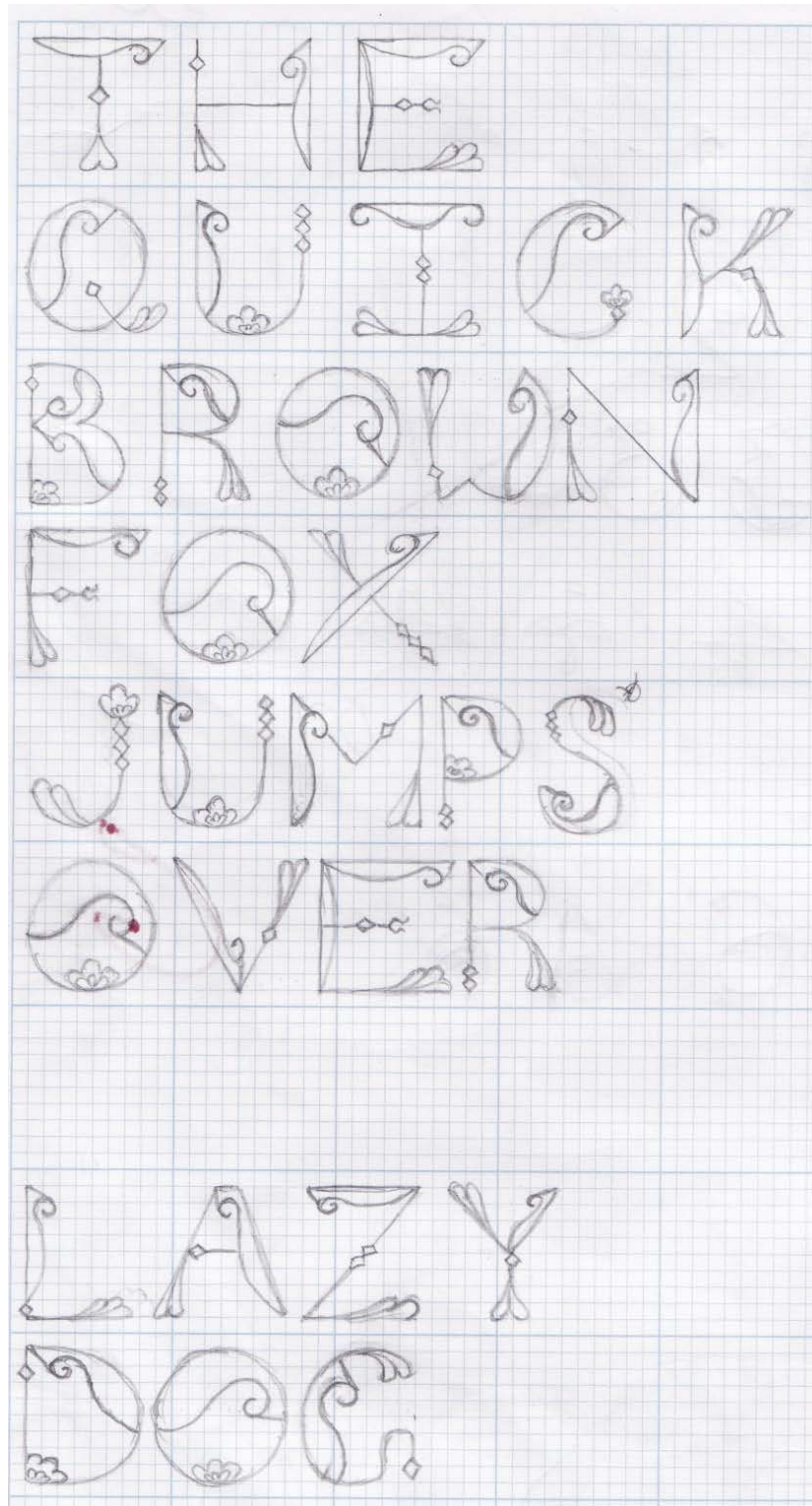
According to the initial observations of “Sinhala Decorative Patterns”, the author was able to create the initial version of “Sampradha” (refer Figure 2). However, the findings of a focus group which consisted of academic experts revealed that the initial version portrayed more of a Victorian identity rather than a Sri Lankan identity. This urged the need of further research into finding more unique Sri Lankan patterns.

Figure 1: A Specimen of Sinhala Decorative Patterns



Source: Sinhala Chithra Saha Mosthara Sampradhaya, Nimal De Silva.

Figure 2: Initial sketch of the typeface

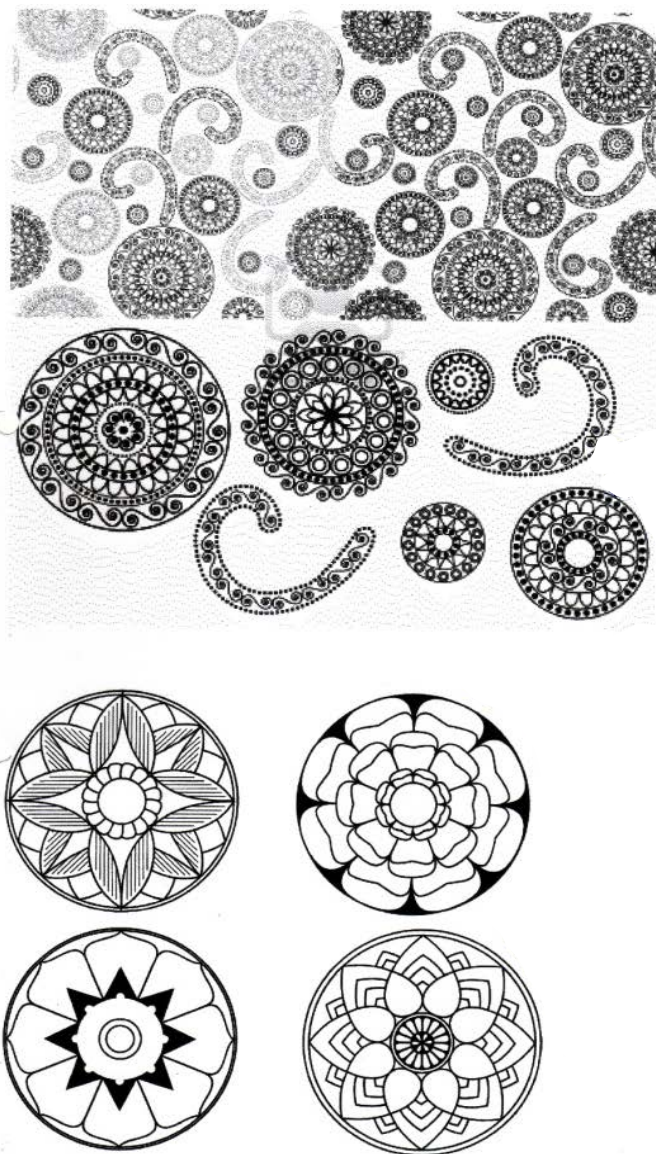


Source: Design by the author

## 2. Comparison & Dissection

The unique prominent elements that were commonly inherent to Sinhala traditional decorative patterns (refer Figure 3) were dissected after a thorough research which compared Sinhala traditional decorative patterns (from 2<sup>nd</sup> BC onwards) with two other styles, Indian decorative patterns (543 BC onwards) and Victorian decorative patterns (1815 onwards), which were presumed to be major influencers on Sinhala traditional decorative patterns. As a result, three main decorative elements commonly found in Sri Lankan traditional decorations were dissected.

Figure 3: Comparison of Indian traditional patterns with Sri Lankan traditional patterns



Even thou at a first glance these designs look similar, when you observe it more you can tell that the traditional Indian decorations have more details in it.

On the other hand traditional Sri Lankan decorations have simplicity in it.

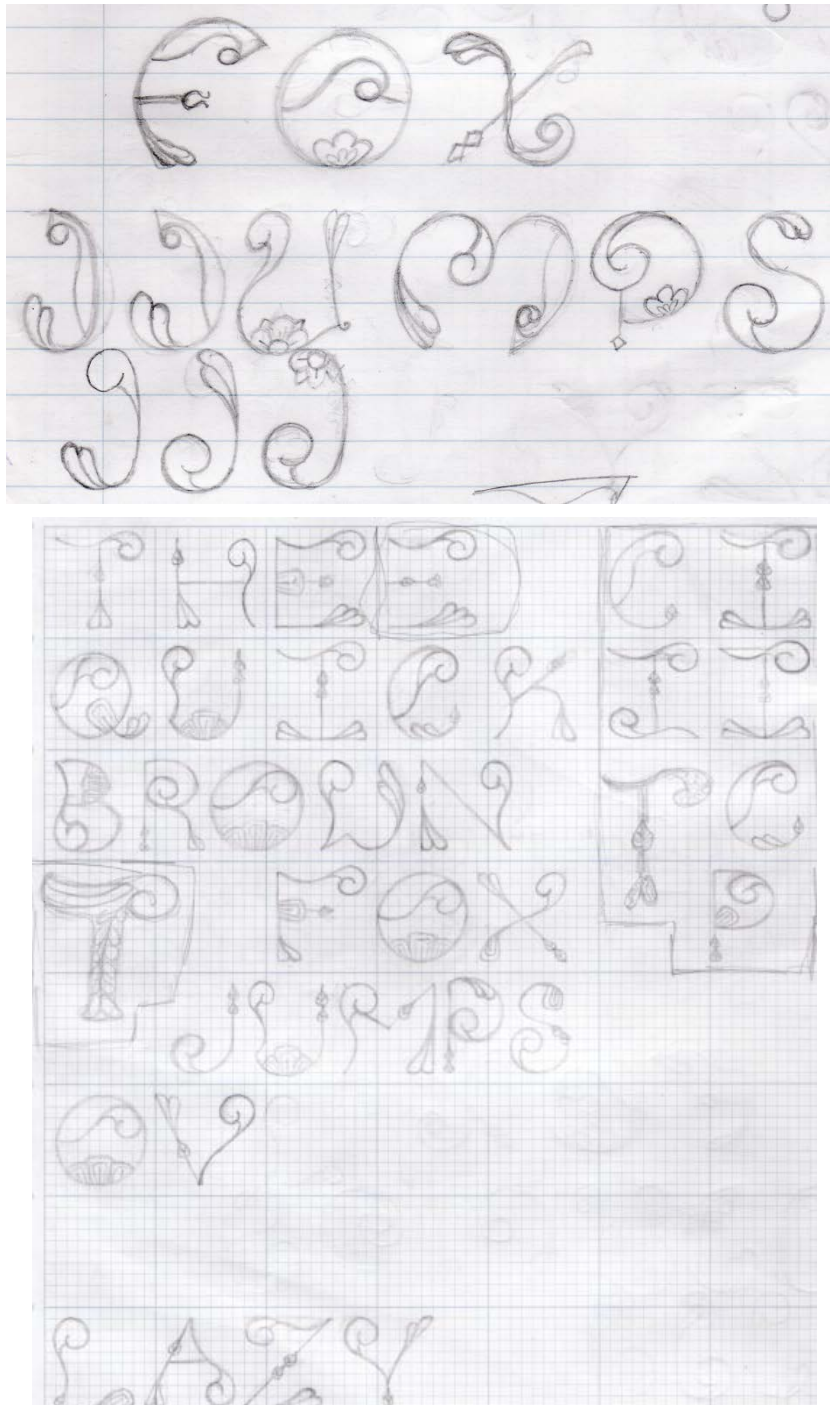
Source: Pattern and Ornament in the Arts of India, Henry Wilson & Chithra Saha Mosthara Sampradhaya, Nimal De Silva.



### 3. Finding the right balance between curviness and straightness

Consequently, those three main decorative elements were blended with English letters (refer Figure 4), which also embraced a gentle curviness to represent an inherent element of Sri Lankan traditional arts and fonts.

Figure 4: Experimental sketches of characters

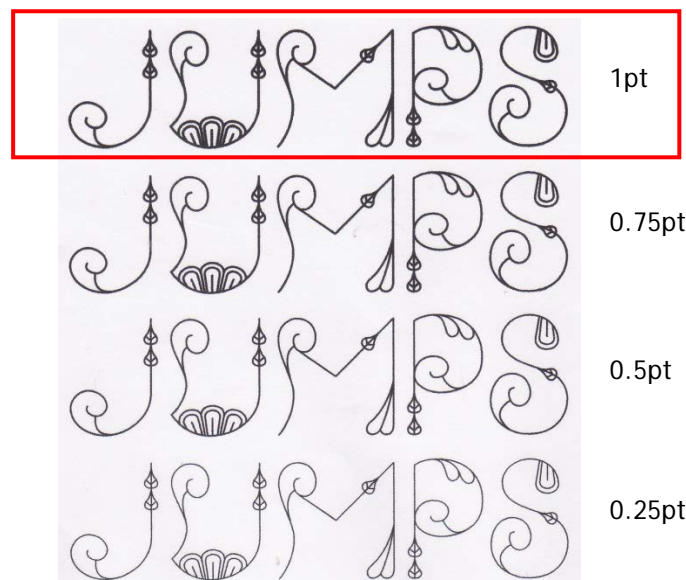


Source: Design by the author

#### 4. Deciding the thickness and reducing the elements to improve readability

The beauty of a font is futile without its legibility. Hence, the next challenge was to enhance the legibility of the font. As a result, some extra elements which made the letter look more complicated had to be removed. At the same time, to preserve the elegance of letter, the line thickness had to be adjusted. This made “Sampradha”, (refer Figure 5) a display font where people can easily use due to its readability and legibility.

Figure 5: Experimenting line thickness using a word

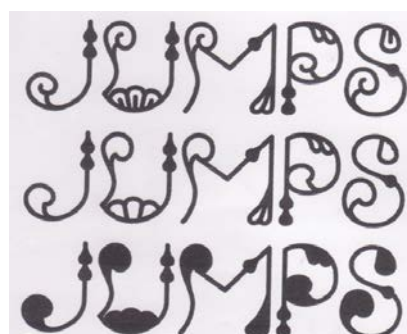


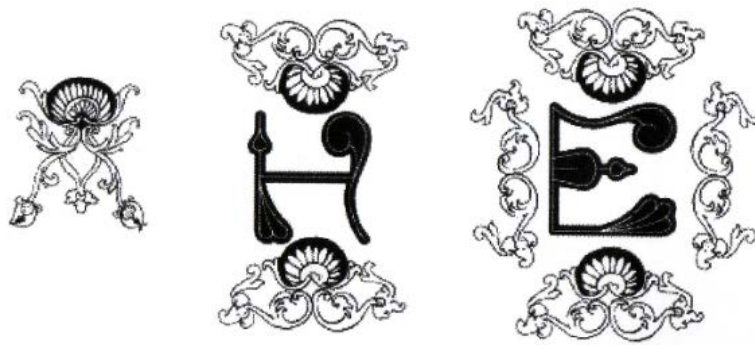
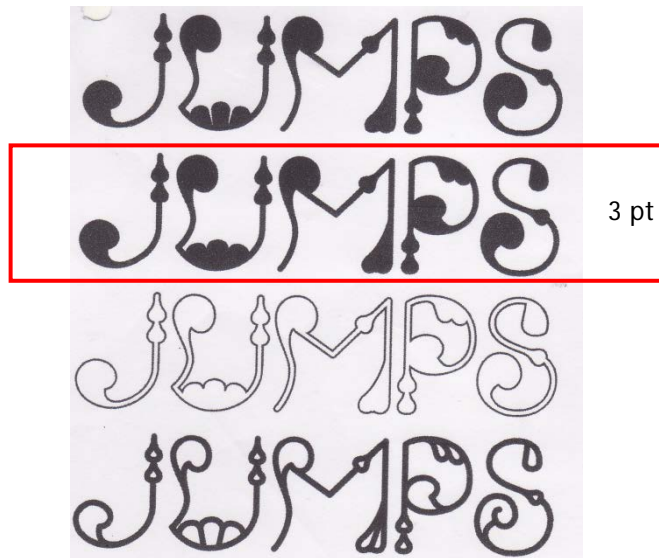
Source: Design by the author

#### 5. Creating the drop caps

To promote or to give more attention to Sri Lankan traditional decorations, a drop cap version of this is also added (refer Figure 6). This will not only educate people but also give them more options when choosing the font.

Figure 6: Experimenting line thickness & the development of the drop caps





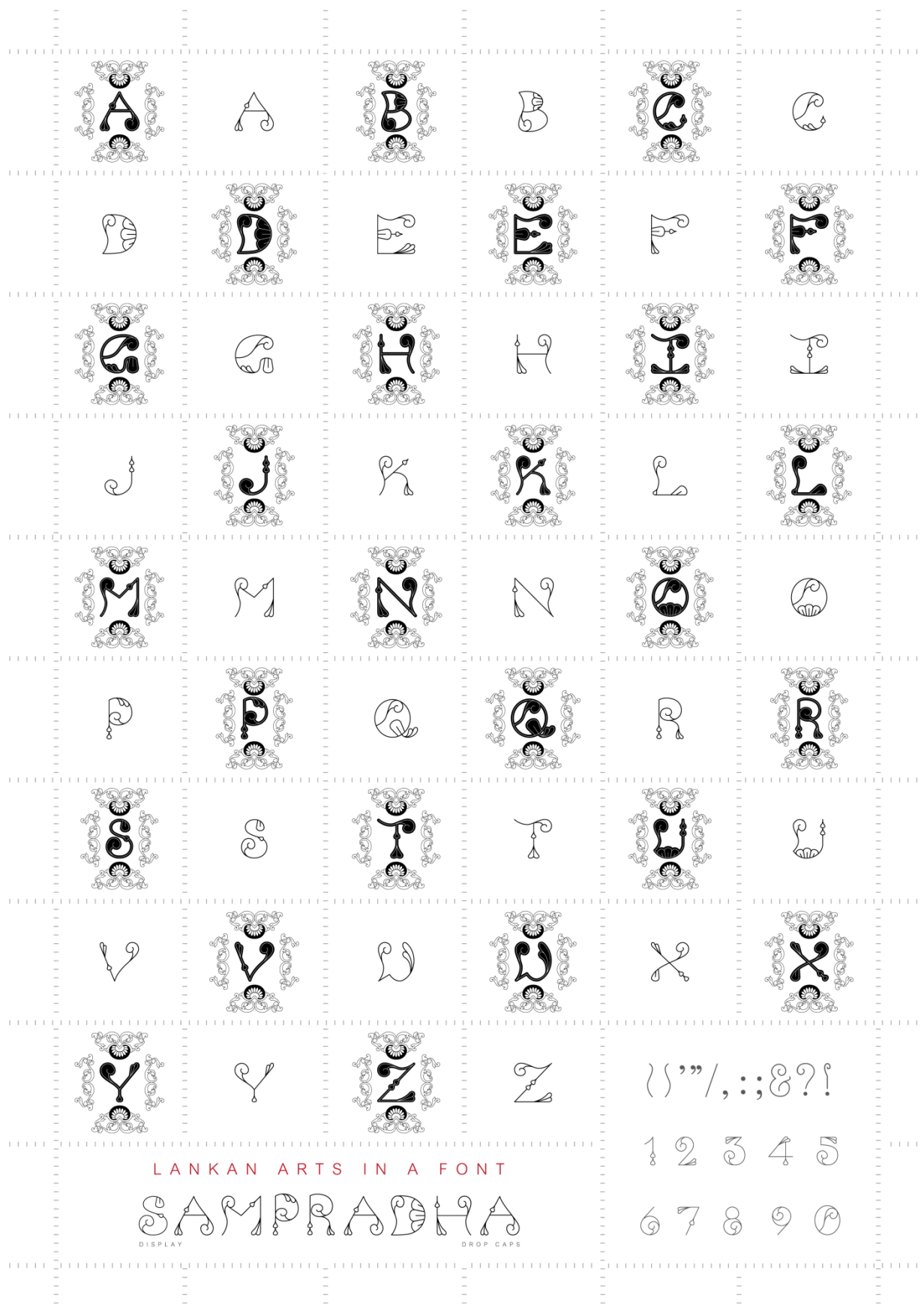
Source: Design by the author

## OBSERVATIONS / RESULTS

Consequently the entire herculean effort boiled down into a display version and a drop cap version of "Sampradha" (refer Figure 7).

Figure 7: Sampradha type specimen poster





Source: Design by the author

## Techniques to promote

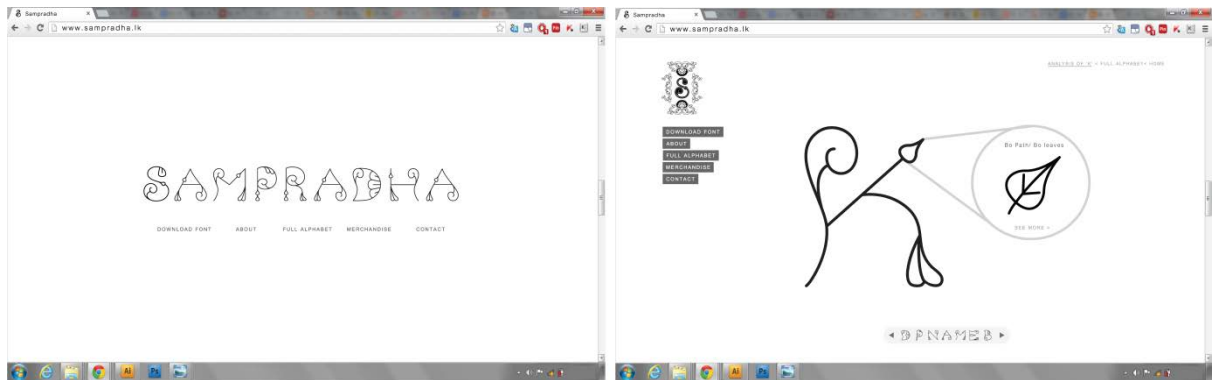
“Sampradha” gains awareness through tactfully designed promotional posters (refer Figure 8). Also the moment a traditional arts lover sights this font, through promotional posters, he will not only understand it but also be memorized by the unique design elements. Thus he will be further enticed to search about it. To address that, the simple but amazing website, [www.sampradha.lk](http://www.sampradha.lk) comes in handy (refer Figure 9). The website intends to promote the font through making it available for download and gives further details about the decorations by dissecting the font and giving informational links. Promotional materials such as tattoos, carvings and bags (refer Figure 10) pave way for more associations with Sampradha’s target audience.

Figure 8: Sampradha promotional posters



Source: Design by the author

Figure 9: Sampradha website



Source: Design by the author

Figure 10: Sampradha Promotional materials



Source: Design by the author

## CONCLUSION

“Samphadha”, the inaugural English font blended with “Sinhala decorative patterns” which is a subset of “Sinhala Decorative Arts”. In other words, “Sampradha” is not a mere font. But it is a font that tells us a whole story of a legendary culture & tradition. Indeed it is “Lankan arts in a font”.

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