

# Display Type Expressions:

## The Cultural underpinnings of the Scripts from two Royal Cities of India

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**Abstract:** Script has through the centuries been an expression and reflection of various cultural Epochs. Due to this heritage, we may today orient ourselves to experience the Aesthetic beauty and traditional identity weaved harmoniously in the multitude forms of any script. We could see this heritage in the varied forms of 'Environmental Type Design' display on shop signs from the old bazaars of two Royal cities of India -Hyderabad and Jaipur.

The old bazaars in Hyderabad and Jaipur have a rich bygone heritage that still mirrors in the respective scripts displayed on the signboards. In addition, these bazaars are major shopping destination for tourists. For this reason, most of the shop names are displayed in multilingual scripts. In the Jaipur old bazaars, we see the prominent expressions in DEVANAGARI script against Latin on the shop signs. Since late 16th century, Jaipur has been ruled by the Rajput dynasty. Since then, the Indo-Aryan language of Rajasthani (Devanagari script) has been in prominent use. Even today, this use over-shadows the use of Latin script on shop signs in old bazaars.

However, in Hyderabad a combined significance of Telugu as well as Latin scripts is observed with respect to the Type expressions. This is primarily after the princely state of Hyderabad (characteristic of the Nizam's rule) was merged in Independent India, and became the part of the first Linguistic State - Andhra Pradesh. Telugu became the official language and the use of regional language (Telugu) on signboards was made mandatory by the local state government.

In the words of J.H. Mason, "Type is like music in having its own beauty, and in being beautiful as an accompaniment and interpretation; and typography can be used to express a state of the soul, like the other arts and crafts." This paper subsumes the pertinent observation of Mason's within the Display Type expressions on shop signs in two very distinct as well as crucial scripts of India.

The analysis of these TYPE EXPRESSIONS has framed the following features of script under the research lens. They are as follows:

1. The Letterform (visual representation)
2. The Letter shape (visual style)
3. Symbolism (conventional trends of use, if any)

We could unfold two kinds of inheritance in the letterforms displayed on the shop signs from two traditionally rich and historically significant cities of India - Hyderabad and Jaipur. The first inheritance takes direct influence from the motif, cultural patterns etc. used in specific arts and crafts of the place - as a form of embellishment within the letterforms. The unit component parts are the direct semantic operators of either the crafts/arts of the city or the skilled detailing of the particular craft that the shop's product presents. This inheritance celebrates the cultural context of craft / social praxis / historical basis that directly guide the visual identity and representation of letterforms on shop signs.

The second inheritance again uses the traditional forms as mentioned above as the major operators that regulate not the semantics - but the visual syntax of the letterforms - their order and sequence. In this case, no context guides the visual identity and representations of letterforms.

*Key words: Environmental Typography and Culture, Letterforms, Display Typography, Indigenous Scripts, Outdoor Signage*

## 1. Introduction

Derived from a variety of language families, India has more than 21 official languages; each of which shares its own heritage and culture. While the Indo-European, Dravidian, Mon-Khmer, and Sino-Tibetan are the four major language families from which the languages have emerged, Indo-European and Dravidian languages are used by a majority of Indian population. Post Independent India, the states are divided on the basis of Language - referred as "Linguistic States". Languages of the Indo-European group are spoken mainly in northern and central regions and the Dravidian languages in the South India.

'Scripts' in India mirrors the cultural essence of letterforms. Different form of writing each script represents the origin of a script from the respective local context - where a particular language written in specific script defines the context.

While a close examination of the 'letterforms' here appears to be same, their purpose is to communicate something, which may or may not be the same. Similar observation by Kunz states that *"All typefaces serve fundamentally the same purpose: to communicate. The purpose behind the communication—for example, to inform, to entertain, or to persuade— is expressed, in part, by the typeface chosen. As the communication objectives change, so might the typeface"*.

In the current study, we touch upon the 'display expressions' and 'meaning representations' in Hindi - one of our official languages as well as the pinnacle of all Indo-European language origins. Among the Dravidian linguistic landscape of India, we present our insights about the 'display expressions' and trends of representation of either indigenous or collective identities displayed in 'Telugu' - the official language of the Andhra Pradesh state.

## 2. Analysis

As Part of analysis we have tried to deduce various roles of letterforms with the visual examples of shop sign from Jaipur and Hyderabad displayed below.

The roles are as follows:

1. Letterforms - as embellishments (in order to only attract)
2. Letterforms - as symbols (portraying rules / age-old conventions)
3. Letterforms - as material culture extension (signboard material and technology influence on the visual representation of letterforms).
4. Letterforms - as brand / commercial insignia as a whole

### 2.1. Pushpak Chhondhari



Figure.1 Pushpak Chhondhari Suiting-Shirting

**Shop name meaning:**

CHOONDHARI is another name for a traditional Chhundi/Dupatta with the traditionally hand-reproduced craft of Tie-n-Die of Rajasthan.

**Shop name source:**

Baandhani Chhondhariis are Rajasthan's age-old fashion signature - that has been very popular among the local garments and attires since last 5000 years. In Barmer, Rajasthan,

India, traditional alizarin and alizarin-indigo cotton *bandhani* (tie-dye) garments are produced and distributed to rural populations. The producers of these garments belong to the Khatri community, traditional Hindu dyers and weavers of cotton and silk, while the garments are purchased and worn by Sindhi Muslims and the Hindu Khumbhar women.



Figure 2. Dotted pattern of typical Bandhani of Rajasthan



Figure 3. Most popular Bandhani dotted pattern of Rajasthan

#### # Points of observations

Word: Pushpak "Choondhari"

Letterforms:

The signboard style has a traditional style of painting the letterforms. The inclinations of the letterforms seem to be adopted from the big letterforms that are painted on walls (wall paintings of slogans) with socially driven political slogans. But, in context of the form, the letters are delicate and smooth just like the material of a Baandhani cloth itself. The treatment of yellow dots inside the letterforms is a typical Bandhani pattern / designs (refer & observe Fig 2 & Fig 3 respectively). Color accumulation at the edge of cloth is reflected in the very neat & bright treatment of color over the edges of letterforms. The smartness comes in the combination of a crude, handwriting style adopted for the first word 'Pushpak' (Owner's name) against the more important and over-emphasized CHOONDHARI (the visual image of the actual Baandhani patterned Dupattas available at his shop).

### Letter-shape:

Writing 'Shri' before starting any work is believed to bring in fortune and good luck. The same practice can be observed here as well. However, the super imposing title makes it very difficult to distinguish. The signboard is symmetrically balanced with the mono-thick letterforms on either side of the signboard - the owner's name on the right and the merchandise sold - 'suiting-shirting' on the left side of the board. However, in the main title, there is a no consistency between the letterforms; as each of them is treated separately. The letterform '*chu*' has got a humanist treatment; while other letters in the heading - '*and*' and '*di*' have got rounded humanist and rational cuts respectively. The main title is designed to fit in the space provided with the unusual, thin and externally disconnected 'shirorekha' giving it a fragmented look. The main title is highlighted with the 'tie-and-die' like pattern with typical Jaipuri pink colored sciography which makes it stand out from the rest of the Labels. At the same time, the 'bandhani' pattern also indicates the things, shop deals in.

### Symbolism:

The shop name is depicted in warm Vermilion Red - a color that is very popular in textiles at JAIPUR. Also, this particular 'Red' has an auspicious meaning for the people of this city. It is the color of the sacred *ROLLI* -the sacred thread tied on wrists during certain festivities and customs that are practiced in here.

## 2.2. TEXTORIUM



Figure 4. Textorium Since 1967

Shop name source:

The main heading of the shop 'Textorium' is a combination of two words - 'textile' and 'emporium'. This coined name is appropriate, as this establishment specializes in artifacts and textile related products.

#### # Points of observations

**Word: "Textorium" Since 1967**

#### **Letterforms:**

The sharp cut edges of letterform portray the visual relationship with the marble stone slabs available and widely used across Jaipur. The even-gaps between the letterforms; and consideration of the mathematical centers for the letterforms - 'E' and 'X' represents the artist's naive approach. However, the consistency is maintained with the 'cut' treatment given to the letterforms. Unfortunately, it doesn't symbolize the 'goods' - textile material, available at the shop. The scaling of the inclined strokes of 'X' might be accidental. It is evident, as this sort of treatment is not done to other letterforms.



Figure 5. Scaling on the strokes of 'X'

#### **Letter-shape:**

The mix of hand-cut letterforms of the main title text - 'Textorium' with constructed 'ARIAL' font for its sub-title - 'since 1967', makes it a one-of-a-kind combination. The angular cuts on 'O' and 'M' are a direct representation of the kangooraas typical of boundary walls of Forts of Jaipur. The red color marble letterforms on light brown color background give it a very regal look as this color takes direct cue from the old forts of Jaipur.



Figure 6. Kangooraas of Old Jaipur Fort walls



Figure 7. Absolute depiction of Kangooraa in letterform 'O'

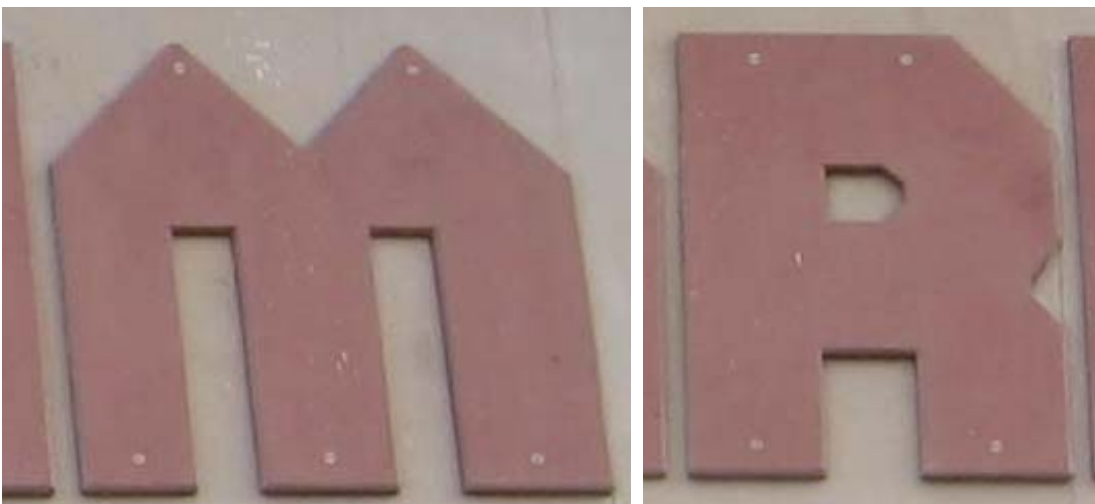


Figure 8. Depiction of Kangooraa in letterform 'M' and 'R'

### Symbolism:

On Kangooraas (see the top edge shape in *fig.6* above, used by the royal armies - their soldiers used to hide behind the kangooraas during war times) - the little whole within the letter 'O' in the shop's name is the direct Kangoora shape depicted (see *fig.7,8*). Every Kangoora has a small hole - through which the hidden soldiers used to peep through towards the distant enemies and contemplate the shoot-out action likewise. As a synecdoche - part of the whole (the whole is the letter's shape).

### 2.3. Jawahar Patang House



Figure 9. Jawahar Patang House

#### # Points of observations

Word: "Jawahar" Patang House

#### Letterforms:

The main title is in red color, sub-title in blue color while the phone number is in white color on black background. The 'Slab-like' terminal endings of 'ja' and 'Va' give it a more imposing and distinctive appearance. However, the same visual language is not followed for the rest of the letterforms - 'ha' and 'ra'. The hierarchy is brought out by the usage of color and size of the letterforms. The yellow color adornment at the top and black color patches on either edges of the signboard, giving the illusion of holding the 'spar' in place, exhibits the skill of the artist.



### Lettershape:

The simplicity of this display board lies in the positioning of the display board, the usage of primary colors in combination with white breathing space around the Labels. The arrangement of the Primary Title in the arc style and the 'Kite' shape of the board give it a unique identity. The 'Shirorekha' of the title is aligned with the line of the spars making the letterform in harmony with the signboard. Increased weight of the Title is used to increase the salience. The phone number is cleverly placed on the 'tail' of the kite shaped board and is treated in black color to distinguish it with the rest of the board.

### 2.4. L.K.Jewelers



Figure 10. L.k. Jewelrs

### # Points of observations

Word: "L.K.Jewelers"

### Letterforms:

The decorative terminal endings of the letterforms including the 'shirorekha' act as an element of embellishment. This visual representation of decoration in the display of letterforms creates a unique signature for 'L.K.Jewelers' as a jewelry shop. Each letterform displays a direct relationship with the 'paisley' motif and even represents the kind of decorative jewelry available at the shop. However, it can be observed that the name of the shop - 'L', 'K' 'Jewelers' is written in English and not in Hindi, illustrating the western influence. The inclined black color letterforms separate it from the rest of the title and connote the values we associate with informal.



Figure 11. Paisley Motif

**Letter shape:**

Visual affinity with Parsi motifs and Paisley designs give the letter-shape a symbolic significance. The shop is well known for Gem and Pearl jewelry - the designs characteristic of the Paisley motifs - each letterform depicts a motif / an element of traditional paisley motifs. The style is living visual reminiscent of the bygone era of those delicate, meticulous and highly skilled craft impressions in textiles and jewelry. Oriental style, with varying stroke widths to make asymmetrical letterforms is characteristic of Decorative letterform expressions in Devanagari. The uniformity of the vertical strokes depicts artist's contribution of stylization in order to expressively depict the feel of the kind of jewelry that the shop sells. The 3d effect given to the title makes it to stand out from the rest of the shops in the vicinity.

**Symbolism:**

The shop name is depicted in vibrant colors - very typical Jaipuri art and its culture. The letterform depicts a paisley motif. Paisley is a droplet-shaped vegetable motif of Kashmir origin. It is a fertility symbol based on the new shoot of a 'DATE PALM'. The motif is most well known for its use on Kashmiri shawls. The paisley motif was often used in Indian block printing.

## 2.5. Grahasti



Figure 12. Grahasti Store

### Shop name meaning:

GRAHASTHI is another name for an Indian House wife, who generally takes care of the household and home management as part of the local culture. This businessman has named his SHOP as "GRAHASTHI to attract the housewives as he sells steel utilities etc., which are mostly used in the Indian Kitchen.

Unlike the commonly seen red color in most of the signboards; this board has yellow color huge LATIN letterforms with a black outline & with a fabric like graphic for the background typically crafted with paints on a steel sheet.

### # Points of observations

#### Word: "Grahasti" Store

This signboard has given a very casual approach to the shop without at least having a visual presentation of the type of business/ products. The inclinations of the letterforms depict the free and easy style of writing. The yellow colored letterforms with black outline are commonly seen on Comic books, targeting the attraction of children. However, the consistency in the terminal endings and the stroke joineries maintained throughout the label of the shop unifies it.

The upright "STORE" script also is more formal. The mismatched Telugu script written on the left side of the English title gives an opinion as it's only forcibly inserted to satisfy the local municipality rule of having the Telugu Script as mandatory.

## 2.6. Abhay Vastra Bhandar



Figure 13. Abhay Vastra Bhandar

### # Points of observations

Word: "Abhay Vastra" Bhandar

This 'sign-board' was painted in the year 1969 when painter (artist name not known) from Zingadia Arts of Sholapur, Maharashtra visited Hyderabad. It has not been re-painted since then. This was the artist's first board executed in the city for RS. 350/-

As it is a tourist destination for national and international tourists, the main script is written in LATIN. The shop name is written in Telugu and Devnagri script as well, balancing the composition. I think, the 3D effect observed in these scripts have been given to compensate with the weight of owner's name and phone number written at the bottom of the board. The board is symmetrically balanced with Telugu & Hindi scripts at the top and proprietors name and telephone number at the bottom. Urdu script was avoided as the owners belong to JAIN community; I guess. Replacing the 'SHOP' with 'Bhandar' - and minimum usage of black color are the other factors that give me an image of the owner representing Jain's Culture.

Red is the dominating color, which was used to grab visitor' attention. Text height of the first character of each word - A and V is increased for the same reason. 3d effect is given to all the words on the board except the proprietor's name. May be, they didn't want to highlight the owners name.

## 2.7. G.Pentaiiah Metal Merchant



Figure 14. G.Pentaiiah Metal Merchant

### # Points of observations

Word: "G.Pentaiiah" Metal Merchants

Medium contrast angled strokes with serif's for Title in Latin and Traditionally Heavy Bottom Letterforms in Telugu are the decorative details of this sign board. The serifs increase the legibility and are used as ornamentation. Usage of Illustrations to communicate the household metal utensils sold in the shop creates a unique visual identity to this shop. This usage of a visual form to communicate shows the skill, time and effort devoted by the artist and facilitates even the illiterates to interpret the items sold in the shop. The signboard is Centre Aligned with Huge Latin Letterforms at the top and Telugu script at the bottom. The visual hierarchy between the titles and the rest of the content is achieved with the sciography effect given to the titles. Though both the titles are in same color, the huge Latin letterforms are painted in light red color, where as, the smaller Telugu script is painted in deep-red color, there by matching their weights visually.

## 2.8. Gayatri's



Figure 15. Gayatri's Exclusive Saree House

### # Points of observations

#### Word: "Gayatri's" Exclusive Saree House

Using Ganapathi adornment at the beginning of signboard is believed to bring in 'good luck' to the business and also bring in a unique visual identity / representation for the brand. Swoosh beneath the letterforms for Titles not only gives them a unique identity but also unifies the board on the whole. The shop deals with dress materials and sarees for women. While the bowl of 'G' with outer concave curve forming the part of the trunk of an elephant depicts the artist's perception of form, the kink at the upper terminal end of 'G' appearing a part of tusk mirrors his/her careful execution of the visual. This is symmetrically balanced with Latin title on one half and the Telugu title on the other half of the Sign Board; the artist has also integrated 'Ganapathi' look-like feel in the Telugu script.

The casual handwritten Latin script in combination with 'paper cut style Telugu letterforms' forms a one-of-a-kind combination. The uneven thickness of Telugu script depicts artist's stylization of Letterforms. The thin red color stroke of Latin Script Title is stabilized with heavy, but slightly small blue color Telugu Title.

### 3. Insights

This study has left us a feeling of great fun learning and also knocked about a few serious concerns and immediate reforms in the approach of visual presentations.

A study and understanding of this kind is very useful to decipher the changing trends prevailing / emerging in the society. Both these Royal Cities of India - Jaipur and

Hyderabad are having a very contrast approach towards traditions. The shop sign boards of Jaipur are representing their cultures to the core: textually, visually and expressing almost every possible way of local traditions. For instance, a shop selling 'Traditional Chunnis' is rightly named 'Choondhari' and the letterforms with red color are adorned with yellow colored dots, which is also communicating the same. These considerations are reducing the boundaries between Typographic image and Visual Image. Typography here isn't just about letterforms; it is a mode of expressing other semiotic means such as color, texture, three- dimensionality, and movement. As opposed to the ubiquitous computer generated fonts, they, in a way are celebrating the traditional crafts and culture.

In Contrast, Hyderabad, linguistically falls under Telugu Speaking region was Governed by Urdu speaking Muslim rulers for more than 400 years before Independence. After it got merged into Republic of India, most of the Government correspondences are predominantly in English; it has a mixed culture. In Jaipur, you can see a depiction of their culture in one form or the other on their signboards, while in Hyderabad it is given way for the emerging trends. One may blame Computers, email, the Internet, Globalization, Mobile Devices, low cost travel, etc., But change is inevitable especially if we have concerns about preserving & promoting the culture, and reflecting the nativity in visual images to the world.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The Typography is deeply rooted into our culture and is unique to every language. So for us! However, two distinct influences on display typography can be found in these two princely states of India - Jaipur and Hyderabad. In Jaipur, the usage of traditional embellishments can be found.

Unfortunately, in Hyderabad, in view of effective expression/communication; the signboards have almost no connection with the visual identity that these signs intend to create or to the products traded by the shops. Impact of Industrialization throughout the 20th century, the major influences of Globalization- Computers, Internet, etc., with computer generated vinyl prints, Laser cut radium stickers, Metal letterforms, Neon signs, has made the artist lose their craftsmanship of making a sign board.

In our Opinion, we are forced to believe that the signboards in here are only written for the sake of writing, and mostly using the trends, colors, designs or fonts that are

irrelevant for the niche market. While major reason, we feel could be the globalization, which has let the people see various designs etc., which may be very good but are not suitable for their respective markets. This do not just ignores the visual presentation of the type of business, but also is making the craftsmen and the businessmen ignore the local traditions, trends etc.,

There may be varying influences on the shop display boards, but this research paper helps understand the cultural connection with respect to Display Typography.

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