

Title of the Paper:

Living with Lipi.

Keywords:

Diversity, Indian language scripts, culture, Aryan roots, Dravidian roots, defunct scripts, living scripts, interplay of Indian alphabets, speaking alphabets, Lipi, innovative application, typographic language, new visual grammar, Indian culture, culture-driven design, aesthetic amalgamation, never-before used Indian theme, new idiom for interior decoration.

Abstract of the Paper:

Enchanted by the beauty and the diversity of Indian language scripts, I started my journey of finding their roots in our culture. I travelled far and wide across the country, taking in the amazing sights and sounds of India that is actually a country of 23 countries.

The Aryan roots were naturally found in the far corners of the Northern, Western and Eastern parts of the country, and the Dravidian roots down South. Along the way, I imbibed stone inscriptions, palm etchings and writings on parchment.

This search also led me to the now-defunct scripts of Bramhi, Pali and Modi , but the visual impact of these remained firmly etched in my memory. Then came the study of the 10 living Indian scripts and their myriad expressions in day to day life.

The confluence of the Aryan and Dravidian scripts, and the inter-relationship between the defunct and the living languages of India created a whole new visual grammar in my mind.

The letter-forms of the elegant North Indian languages and those of the vibrant South Indian languages started doing a raasa-kriya in the core of my being, and from there emerged a thousand lotus petals, one leading to the other in harmonious sequence. I first put them down as scribbles, refining them with time. And finally, the best among them chose themselves. The chosen ones were then put on paper as a series of paintings that emerged from the interplay of Indian alphabets. Thus was born a series of speaking alphabets, or Lipi as I call them. (*Lipi - The Mark of Finess, The exhibition on beauty of Indian alphabets held in October 2009 at Nehru Centre.*)

Then I started looking for an innovative application of this new typographic language born out of Indian culture, and I found a willing partner **Brinda Sampat**, Principal architect and managing Director at Somaya and Kalappa Consultants. She was looking for a new idiom for interior decoration, and she felt my style suited her expectations. A style that could easily adapt itself to the facade of the hotel, to the reception area, to the lobby, to the long corridors on all the 8 floors, to each of the 70 well-appointed rooms.

My typographic language then found varied expressions in the many facets of interior decor: tables, teapots, glass panels, walls, signages, paintings, the works. Thus giving the guest a chance to live with an aesthetic amalgamation of typography and Indian culture. Right from the moment the guest stepped into the hotel till he or she stepped out. Every single step of the way. Thus creating a unique opportunity of **Living with Lipi**.

Marina Correa, an eminent architecture design critic, has this to say in her review ' Different Strokes for Different Folks':

'Architect firm Somaya & Kalappa turned Indian ethnicity on its head to create a fine balance between culture-driven design and its contemporary idiom.

Often unseen and little-known to most Indians, the myriad and beautifully-formed Indian ethnic scripts are the fulcrum of design at the Fern Residency at The Acres Hotel in Chembur, Mumbai.

A fine balance has been struck between lucidly and subtly showcasing calligraphic scripts throughout the hotel's public and private spaces. For instance, a large mural at the lobby lounge is a pastiche of Indian manuscripts interwoven with mythological imaginary as are the graceful and elegant strokes of inscribed Tamil lettering on a nearby coffee table. A more lucid interpretation can be seen in the works of art that adorn individual rooms with a description below explaining the antecedents of each script.

Since the site was not in the heart of the city, the design firm needed to focus on an inward-looking, strong and intriguing concept; also they were keen to work on a never-before used Indian theme.'

"Inspired by the artwork of Ashok Parab and our interest in Indian scripts, we decided to amplify his work through varying mediums: paintings, film on glass, motifs on furniture and so on", says Nandini Somaya Sampat, project architect.

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