



Typography, Sensitivity and Fineness'

<http://www.typoday.in>

Simulating the appearance of painted and digital display type on shop signs in India

Nanki Nath, Department of Design (DoD), Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati, India,
nanki.nath@iitg.ernet.in

Ravi Poovaiah, Industrial Design Centre (IDC), Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, India,
ravi@iitb.ac.in

Abstract: Display typography offers opportunities to simulate type in printed as well as digitally produced letterforms. The beauty of painted letterforms signifies painter's skill and craftsmanship. While, the digital fonts with simulations are representative of the modern day versatile characters. Street markets in India depict three-dimensional simulations in the letterforms of shop names. This paper explores the affinities and distinctions between digital and traditional display type simulations over a selected small group of 12 shop signs from six cities of India; with 2 shop signs selected from each city. This paper showcases only four examples of such signs from two culturally similar cities of India. The analysis suggests techniques for simulating the appearance of traditional letterforms in paint as well as mechanically constructed fonts of the digital world. We represent the detailed extraction of elements and arrangements that construct the simulations in letterforms and bring forth new insights into the transitions of the letterforms from the conventional (painted) to contemporary (digital) mediums of display used on shop signs.

Key words: *Sensitivity and Fineness, Display type simulations, Dimensional typography, 3D simulated type, hand-painted type, digital type, shop signs, cities, marketplaces, India*

1. Introduction

Typography continues to be one of designers' main tools of communication, regardless of medium. The introduction of the digital medium has not lessened the importance of this role and has in fact increased the reliance on typography to communicate in a clear and straightforward manner (Yee, 2004). The three dimensional aspect in typography involves the art, science and meaning of the structure as well as the style of letterforms either

hand-painted or digitally produced. There have been varied research studies in the area of 3D movement and rhythm in type. Instances of three-dimensional typographical awareness have popped up on the root level, in type design itself. Type designers nowadays refer to an effort called Dimensional typography (Lanham, 2001). Our world is in three dimensions the day we open our eyes as an infant. This world of shapes makes three-dimensional objects in reality, like people, spaces, products etc. Likewise, words represent a collective unit of shapes in order to structure the thought that they stand for or the meaning they infer as a unit of visual communication in design. The drawn or crafted shapes in three-dimensions constructs an expression of letterform that imbibes a certain quality, in terms of the sensitivity of the use of visual principles, as well as fineness inculcated by the skill and craft of designing the letterforms. This paper analyzes this mode of sensitivity and fineness applied in the three-dimensional hand-painted as well as digitally produced letterforms. The analysis doesn't reveal any single formula for pigment selections as per the painter's style or the pixel distributions that create different simulations within the digital display type. But, the detailed extraction of elements and arrangements that construct the simulations in letterforms offer insights into the transitions of the letterforms from the conventional (painted) to contemporary (digital) mediums of display used on shop signs.

2. Display Typography and simulations on shop signs

2.1 Introduction

Display typography as a visual tool attracts attention, creates a distinction, evokes a mood and finally builds a visual hierarchy between separate words or separate chunks of words (Halley, 2006). From a typographic point of view, words wearing the costume of display type include the visual representational aspects of letterforms. Man started writing and drawing many centuries ago with Indus writing or the technically more appropriate Sarasvati¹ writing in 2600-1900 B.C. (Kak, 1993). The shapes of the letterforms present expressions and may be regarded as reflections of the traditionally acquired acumen of visual forms, symbols and abstract images created by the artists or sign painters belonging to different cities in India (Nath, 2014). Or in other words, letterforms as shapes may be considered as arbitrary. Perhaps, it is because of this pictorial and abstract quality of letterforms, that they enjoy the status of being fundamental units of display typography.

¹ The language is the well known holy ancient Indian Indo-European language of Vedic Sanskrit, the 'Latin of India'. The texts give innumerable information on the world view of the Indus empire's state leaders, on the social life, religion, international conflicts, warfare, economy, linguistics etc. But the greatest sensation is that the texts show the Indus age as the legendary Vedic age with king Rama as its empire's founder (Hasenpflug, 2006)

Their display includes various elements and unique arrangement of those on the face of a shop's sign. Such arrangements create a layer on the signs that communicates distinctively to the onlookers / viewers.

2.2 3D Display Type Simulations

In Display Typography, color and type are the two most distinct features. In this paper, the elements of color and type together formulate different kinds of expressive movements or simulations that aid in the creation of following form-content relationships through typographic three-dimensional simulations in hand-painted / crafted or digitally produced display letterforms of shop names as follows:

1. The product or brand value augmentation
2. The indigenous identities or marks explored by a sign painter
3. The aesthetic appeal or letterforms as traditionally driven or contemporary artifacts representing the rich visual culture and heritage of India
4. Lastly, the futuristic notions in the letterforms as digital codes of communication.

The analysis doesn't reveal any single formula for pigment selections as per the painter's style or the pixel distributions that create different simulations within the digital display type. But, the detailed extraction of elements and arrangements that construct the simulations in letterforms offer insights into the transitions of the letterforms from the conventional (painted) to contemporary (digital) mediums of display used on shop signs.

2.3 Three dimensional simulated effects in Display Type of shop signs

Broadly, of all the 12 shop signs from six cities of India analyzed in this paper, we could observe that the three dimensional aspects of type are occur prominently form based elements of a display type specimen; with color synonymous with one kind of form based element. These elements presenting a range of dimensional effects in the shop signs are as follows:

1. Inner or outer lines of letterforms (in the form of patterns, textures, colored planes or divisions, bars etc.)
2. Drop-shadows (three dimensional outward or inward extruded effect)
3. Stroke endings (that signify a particular type style or customized shape designed by the painter or the maker of these signs).
4. Oriented texts and Counter spaces (shape explorations in negative spaces)
5. Expressive letterform(s) (iconic, symbolic or an indices)

3. Analysis and Insights

Briefly, we have put forth a series of six shop identifications from marketplaces in each city under the analytical lens to extract the elements that showcase simulations in the display letterforms. These signs belong to the cities of Bengaluru, Chennai, Fatehpur Sikri, Hyderabad, Jaipur and Mumbai. Devanagari, Dravidian and the Latin display letterforms in various display texts of these signs, showcase different nuances of the artists' skill and craftsmanship in more traditionally driven shop name identifications. In addition, few other display letterforms exemplify the contemporary appeal, visual monotony, a prominent minimalistic/futuristic visual language as well as a template cultural trend as part of modern day digital display type with three-dimensional simulations.

3.1 Bengaluru shop signs

3.1.1 Introduction to the city of Bengaluru

Founded by Kempa Gowda² in 1537 and famously entitled as the 'City of Gardens', Bengaluru, is presently an emerging gateway to IT and electronics industries on national as well as international fronts. The twentieth century Bengaluru is known to be Asia's fastest developing international urban space (Dittrich, 2007). On one hand, Bengaluru imbibes a mythicized past; and on the other hand it was also known to be the pensioners' paradise³. There was also an aspiration for a neoteric future, 'a Singapore in Bangalore' especially since the 1990s (Gopalan, 2010).

3.1.2 Three dimensional simulations in Bengaluru shop signs

1. Hand-painted pattern-based inner lines and outlined simulated letterforms

The illustrated shop sign represents a local business of wholesale distributors of Fancy sarees in Avenue Road, a well-known marketplace for traditional items, products and lifestyle brands that bring forth the 'indigenous' in context of the Dravidian choice of colors, type style and arrangements of elements. Here, in Fig. 1. we can see that the promotional punch of '70/110/130/160/950' include simulations in two elements. First is the horizontal inner line traversing and connecting the numeric forms in a visual chain of harmony. This simulation has an underlying semiosis of the traditional line patterns seen as glittering borders that adorn the local fancy sarees generally in

² Also referred to as *Modern Bengaluru* / '*gandu bhoomi*', '*Land of Heros*' (History of Bangalore, Bangalore Guide, 2005; Department of IT and Biotechnology, 2006).

³ Bangalore, once a pensioner's paradise, transformed into a hub of public sector companies and brought in umpteen scientific institutes soon after Independence. Still later, it began to attract major electronic manufacturing firms (Siraj, M.A., THE HINDU, 2012).

Bengaluru. The outline to the hand-painted, bulky letterforms in a complimentary hue of orange (against the opposite bright blue of the letterforms) creates a balanced simulation that visually provides the letterforms with a fineness in terms of more emphasis, outer-depth, legibility as well as continuity that connote the flowing and continuous patterned borders on these sarees. The sensitivity here can be a good inclusion of the black heavy weight of the letterforms that counter-balance the thin outlines as well as decorative inner pattern line. The image appears in the type due to the continuous simulation, a movement that makes the display text legible, attractive, readable as well as traditionally driven.



Figure.1 Prime Distributors, Avenue Road, Bengaluru

2. Digital pattern-based inner lines and outlined simulated letterforms

The illustrated shop sign represents a contemporary context of a very famous modern garment branded showroom located in the posh commercial street of Bengaluru. Here, in Fig. 2. we can see that the letterforms are designed with symbolic stars; that visually creates a customized display type style. This approach also connotes the meaningful image of the very brand 'FOREVER NEW' as a name identification in context of modern commercial branding. The star symbol imbibes an inbuilt, arbitrary meaning in order to create an image for the modern brands available in the shop. The linear arrangement of repetitive symbolic stars creates a sensitive pattern giving a modular, even, uniform as well as a finesse in terms of the character shape in order to augment the legibility of the big display letters.

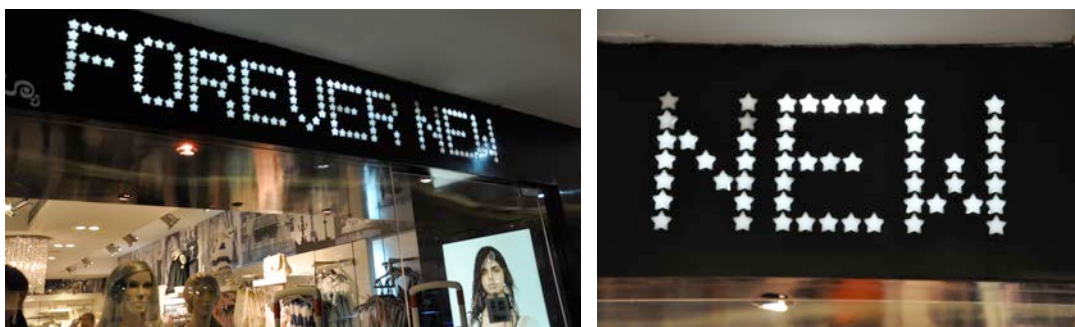


Figure. 2 Forever New, inside Mantri Mall, Commercial street, Bengaluru

3.1.2 Three dimensional simulations in Chennai shop signs

Singara Chennai, 'Beautiful Chennai' as popularly known, imbibes the traditional beauty of the city plan, architecture, history, dense population and the green content sustained at its best in the northern city along with the tech savvy IT identity of the southern corridor that forms the salient feature of this city as a cosmopolitan metropolis. Chennai is like an organic entity, constantly changing in form and function. This change is a result of both history and geography (Muthiah, 2008). Chennai is quite the melting pot of the conservative and orthodox with the contemporary and the futuristic (Moorjani, 2012). The color analysis of all the four quadrants in shop signs reveals a similar view of Chennai as Moorjani has explained in the book review of 'Tamarind City' by Bishwanath Ghosh released in New Delhi in 2012.

1. Hand-painted pattern-based inner lines and simulated 3D drop-shadows

The illustrated shop sign represents a local restaurant business identity in the simulated shop name on a locally driven sign in the oldest marketplaces of old (southern) Chennai. Here, in Fig. 3. we can see that use of bi-color vignette in the letterforms is a sensitivity that has a deeper indigenous political context behind the display. A trademark flagship of a famous political party in Chennai, the color band is a continuous symbolic simulation. The second simulation that augments the first symbolic simulation of the colored band; is the dimensional drop-shadow. The clarity in the skill of the artists' flat brush over a thick iron sheet panel represents the fineness in the beautifully designed letterforms; shaped up in the color opposites of red-green; along with a symbolic value ingrained in the red-black horizontal band simulation in the characters of the local Dravidian script. The sensitivity of concept depiction gets evenly balanced with the visual structural division through color, size, horizontal inlines as well as three dimensional drop shadows given to the display letterforms.



Figure. 3 Jey Ambur Chicken Biryani, Thirvelluvar street market, South Chennai

2. Digital bilingual display with oriented movement as a simulation

The illustrated shop sign represents a local snacks business identity in the

simulated shop name; but here depicted in a retro-cum modern treatment of the display type as well as color use that compliments its identity of a niche, fun loving fast food option for youngsters residing in the East Chennai area. This depicts a happy brand identity, as the name means to bring in the happiness in the experience of having the local delicacies. Hence, this sensitivity can be seen in form of a metaphoric shape that emerges in the sliced curve and cinematic, perspectival treatment given to the top-line of the letterforms. The finesse appears in the symmetric display effect given to the name depictions in Latin along with Dravidian letters. The perspective is not the only approach to simulate the meaning and image of the word. The negative spaces / counters of both script letterforms have been visually converged in and compromised with in order to give more horizontal stress to the characters and the word chain overall. Another visual technique of kerning or letter spaces being tight here, helps create a vertical uplift of the edges of corner most letterforms in order to simulate the overall shape that represents the curve of a smile, symbolic of the word 'happy'.



Figure. 4 Happy, local snacks shop in a small residential area in East Chennai

4. Summary of Insights

In painted letterforms of the name words, the various nuances of applying the paint inside and around the letterforms are full of irregularities that may be a reflection of a painter's skill alone or a subtle meaning behind a product/service-oriented trade. Our hand-writing changes over time with subtle variations in the form, style and the depth in the ink that gives each hand-written letterform a distinct character. Likewise, the irregularities in the simulations of the display type in the shop sign examples discussed in this paper have illustrated such characteristics in the form, style and depth based nuances created by the artists' brush. There is transformation in the fineness of the forms and styles. The evolving fineness presents different levels of sensitivity towards the visual styles and designs of the display text. In contrast, modern digital display letterforms include more deliberate and tuned regularities; making them more clear and precise in terms of legibility. Though we

showcase here only four examples of signs from culturally similar cities of India; the final presentation will reveal all the detailed views of traditional and digital letterforms in a range of display simulations; originally belonging to culturally contrasting cities as well - for instance, Jaipur and Mumbai.

6. Conclusions

This paper tries to redefine the meaning of sensitivity and fineness in relation to display type expressions on commercial shop signs of India. The multi-directional choice of the cities and their respective marketplaces; from where these signs have been accumulated show affinities and differences in terms of emerging from-content relationships processed mainly in the textual simulations as part of visual display design of a shop signs. In order to understand the core of visual cultural display and meaning-making processes involved as part of sign craft in India, this paper modestly initiates a style of analytical overview over few known and other unknown influencing factors that bring forth the indigenous in the type expressions in the vivid strokes forming different scripts depicting display texts on shop signs in India.

Acknowledgement

I express my deep gratitude towards my guide, Prof. Ravi Poovaiah as well as my Prof. G.V. Sreekumar for supporting and encouraging to pen down this study as a research paper. I am deeply thankful to all the shop owners of different street bazaars in selected cities of India, the shop signboards of whom have been the visual sense data to extract elements, understand their structural arrangements and emerging simulations in the characters. I express my gratitude towards my Design Department colleagues and our Head of Department, Dr. Debkumar Chakrabarti to be considerate and supportive in my writing time as important part of the larger doctoral studies.

References

Yee, J. (2004) Relearning Typography: Introducing a Cross-Disciplinary Typographic Framework. In Proceedings of Futureground Design Research Society Conference, Melbourne, Australia.

Lanham, Richard A. (2001) What's Next for Text? *Education, Communication & Information*. US: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Limited, Accessed December 2014, from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/routledge/1463631X.html> or <http://www.open.ac.uk/eci>

Haley et. al. (2006) *Typography Referenced*. [Online PDF] UK: Rockport Publishers. Available at <<http://www.slideshare.net/hazlinaishazainalabidin1/typography-referenced-by-allan-haley-2012>> [Accessed 17 December 2014]

Kak, S.C. (1993) The structure of the Rigveda, *Indian Journal of the History of Science*, 28, 71-79. Available at <<http://www.ece.lsu.edu/kak/writ.pdf>> [Accessed 27 February 2014]

Nath, N. (2014) Indigenous Identities: Hand-painted Letterforms in India. In contributory Publications of Department of Design, IIT Guwahati. *Design For All Institute of India newsletter*. Vol. 9 (8).

Hasenpflug, R. (2006). *The Inscriptions of the Indus Civilization*. Germany: BoD Deutschland.

Dittrich, C. (2007) Bangalore: Globalization and Fragmentation in India's High-Tech Capital. *ASIEN* 103, 45-58. Available at <http://www.asienkunde.de/content/zeitschrift_asien/archiv/pdf/A103_Dittrich.pdf> [Accessed 14 March, 2014]

Gopalan, K. (2010) Torn in Two: The Tale of Two Bangalores Competing Discourses of Globalization and Localization in India's Informational City" Dharna: Bhavan's International Journal of Business, Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 83, July-December 2010. Available at <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2349006> [Accessed 12 August, 2014]

"About Bangalore - History" Department of IT and Biotechnology. (2006) Government of Karnataka. Available at <<http://www.bangaloreit.in/html/aboutbng/history.htm>> [Accessed January 2015]

Moorjani, M. (2012) Tamarind and Turmeric THE HINDU. *Books section*. Available at "The Hindu" online <<http://www.thehindu.com/books/tamarind-and-turmeric/article3472757.ece>> Accessed 16 May 2014)

Muthiah, S. (2008) *A 400 year Record of the First City of Modern India: The Land, The People and Their Governors, Vol. I*. Contribute article; published for the Chennai Chapter of Association of British Scholars. Royapettah, Chennai: Palaniappa Brothers.

Ghosh, B. (2012) *Tamarind City*. New Delhi: Tranquebar Press.