

Typography and Education

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Indian Sign Language Font

“HELPING HANDS”

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Abstract: This abstract aims to showcase a font on the Indian Sign Language (ISL), a font designed for the betterment and easy communication by and to the deaf population residing in India.

“Helping Hands” is a font designed by overlapping the English alphabets with the signs of the Indian Sign Language, thereby empowering the deaf in India for a better communication and also providing the ISL a better platform in a written medium. The main focus is to bridge the communication gap that is widely prevalent between the hearing impaired and the hearing abled people in India.

Secondarily, the font attempts to give the ISL its fair share of awareness. The paper focuses on the meticulous process carried out which ultimately succeeded to act as a communication bridge between the hearing impaired and the hearing abled people of the country.

Key words: *Indian Sign Language, Deaf culture, Accessibility, Awareness*

1. Introduction

I, as a student of Design, had only thought and written about the problems of individuals with hearing imparity. I never thought about what it might mean to be ‘Deaf’ but being with them made me realize a totally different world. An opportunity to intern at Atulyakala- a deaf design studio helped me understand the deaf community and the challenges faced by them at a deeper level. I learnt more about the deaf culture, its roots, its language and what deaf people have to say about living in a world without sound. Also, I learnt quite a lot about the language they used to communicate and the meaning of a world with gestures. After exploring ‘ISL’ with a deaf artist, I learnt more about visuals. Sign language according to me is the purest form of visuals and I totally

believe it is a very new and exciting area for any visual designer to explore and work on. Working around with the deaf made me realize that the primary gap is of communication between the hearing impaired and the hearing abled. Hence, it becomes necessary to learn about deaf culture so that people can understand the nature of talking and learning with the help of which they can communicate to people who have hearing imparities. Being a design student and fascinated by the signs I thought of bringing Indian Sign language into the daily typography.

INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE

India has the largest Deaf population in the world. It has been estimated that there are several million hearing impaired in India. Perhaps "one of every five people who are deaf in the world, live in India" making it the country with the largest number of Deaf, and perhaps also the largest number of Sign language users. But still ISL is in its rudimentary stage of development. The Deaf communities of India are still struggling for ISL to gain the status of sign language as a minority language.

Considering why ISL is important for the Indian society- Society has a responsibility towards the welfare of all the people in it. Towards this end, it is imperative that those who are in positions of authority and the hearing populace are concerned about meeting the needs of the Deaf community. Just like public information and signboards are written in all languages to make it accessible to people of all linguistic backgrounds, there has to be provision of special services to enable the Deaf community to understand these public messages too. For this, it becomes highly inevitable for the common crowd to learn and understand the language the hearing impaired communicate in- The Indian Sign Language.

Hence, the easiest way to help the hearing abled people or commonly, the non deaf community of India to learn the ISL is to make it visual and amalgamate it with the normal type (Roman letters) for easy understanding and quick learning. 'Helping hands' font - comes with a mission to give voice to deaf people through a great amalgamation of visual Indian sign language and the daily roman alphabets. Thus, this font developed focuses on the importance of sign language in the public life and makes it easier to. Sign Language brings quality and accessibility in Deaf education. I aim to encourage research and training in various aspects of the Indian sign language on it's own.

The main purpose of this "HELPING HANDS FONT" -

- i) Create a font on Indian Sign language with an English font, which is recognized and understood by almost everyone.
- ii) Also present it as a unique solution for both hearing impaired and hearing abled, which brings awareness to the Indian Sign Language.
- iii) Suggesting a typography booklet, which will be a medium to communicate amongst deaf people and hearing people.
- iv) Typography which will help in bringing deaf children to learn Indian sign language which brings quality, and accessibility in Deaf education.

Enabling deafness with dignity and equality, and a society where deaf people have equal opportunities to participate in all walks of life and equal access for deaf people in every area of their lives. Enhancing the quality of life, promoting social and cultural awareness and barrier free communication for the Deaf is what this font aims to accomplish.

The only limitation that this font faces is that it's only a font developed for learning purpose and not as a font that is used for reading and writing like the ones used in daily life. It's a font designed keeping in mind a very special purpose i.e. to enable awareness amongst the crowd about the Indian Sign Language, a language used by the widely prevalent deaf population in the country and also accomplishing the task of erasing the line between the hearing enabled and the hearing impaired population of the country formed due to a communication gap.

PROCESS

It's a fact that sign language is basically just gestures and signs- hands held in different positions indicating different letters or words, which makes the Indian Sign Language primarily a language of visuals. Hence, I started with clicking photographs of hands gestures so as to get the exact appearance and form of what a sign looks like. A photographer called Pintoo, a hearing impaired photographer helped me out with the gestures and signs.

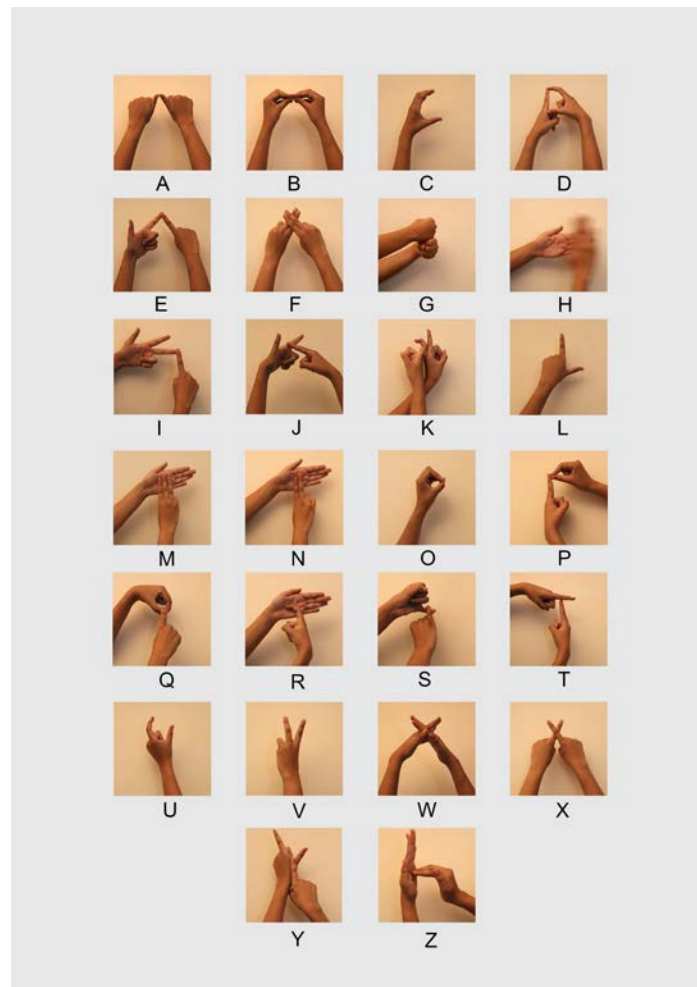


Figure 1- Photographs Hand Gestures

The photographs I clicked served as a reference for the sketches I made next of the gestures and signs. Exploring slowly, the sketches of the signs and then bringing them to a minimal line form for easy grasping and understanding to the layman was the next step in the process of developing Helping Hands. When I was satisfied with the form the sketches came up to, I worked on them digitally using different software and refined them. Below is a photograph of how the sketches looked initially.

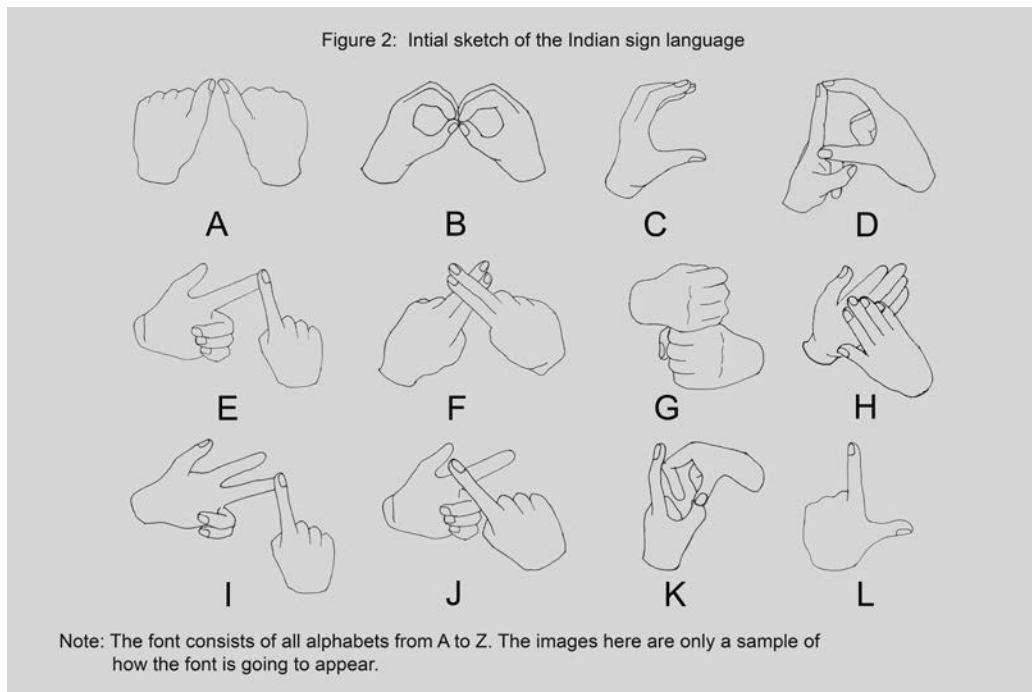


Figure 2- Initial Sketches

After photographing and sketching, the most difficult part was to understand and process how to amalgamate the two languages. The font to be created was to be well understood and easily legible to both the communities- the deaf and the normal people. Hence came the overlapping of the signs to the normal English alphabets, which is understood by almost everyone. I used a san serif font as the base and used the sketches in line forms and overlapped the both in a way that both- the hand gestures and the English alphabets can be read at the same time. The languages were so overlapped that it could overcome the communication gap between the hearing abled and hearing impaired and making it easier for the common people to learn sign language and to bring awareness about the difficulty of the communication in the deaf culture.

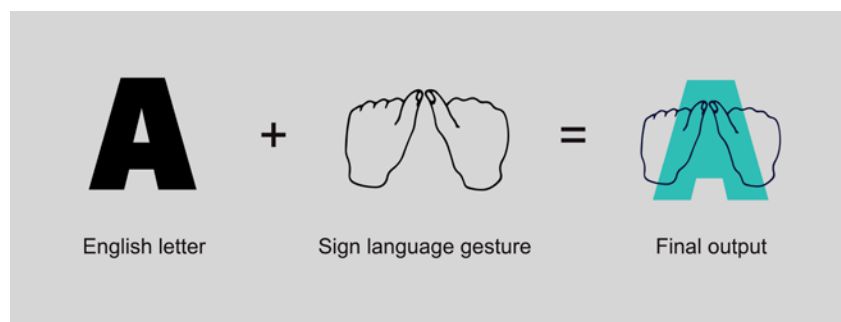


Figure 3- Development of font

HELPING HANDS - INDIAN SIGN LANGUAGE TYPOGRAPHY

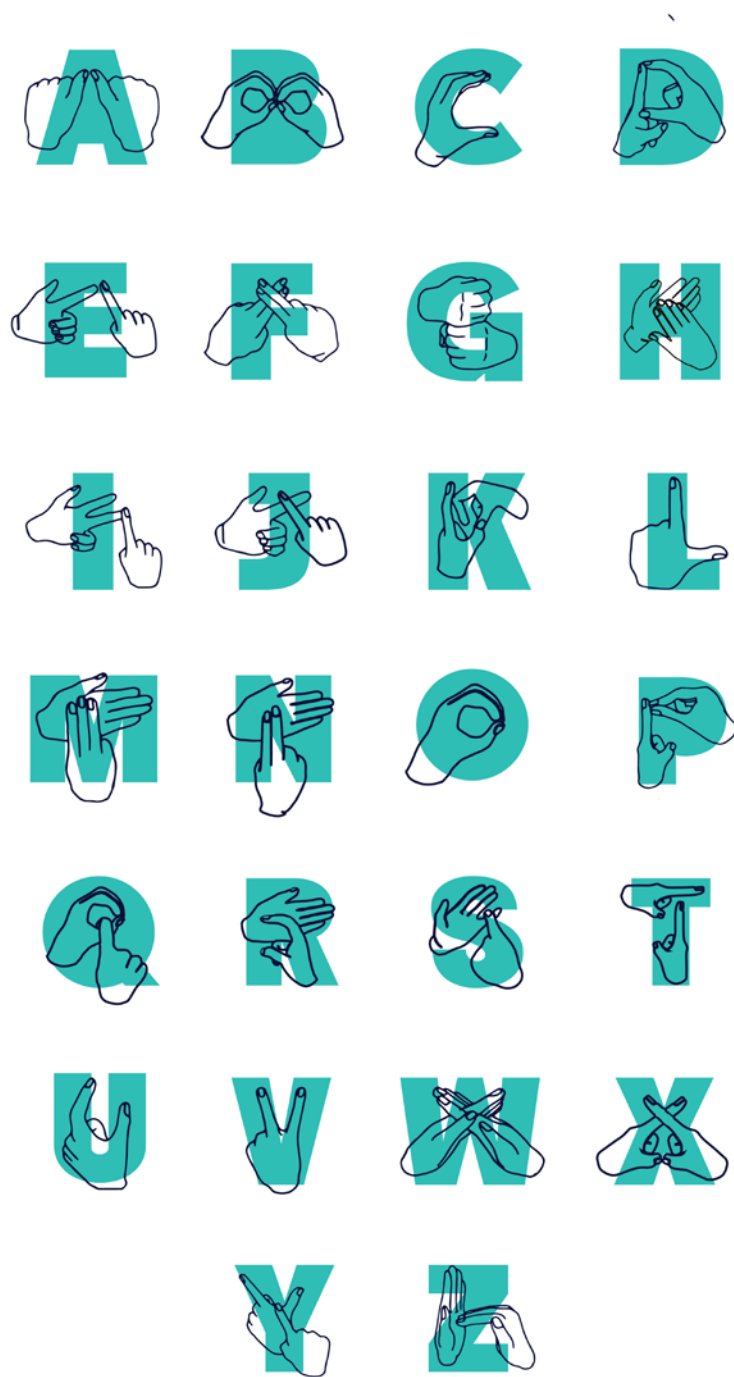


Figure 4 - Final development of font

6. Conclusions

“Helping hands” is a Indian sign language font blended with English font. In other words, “Helping hands” is not only a font used for oral and written communication but also gives us insights of the deaf culture. Understanding the deaf, their world, their difficulties and their ways of living and trying to make it a better world for them, where there is no fear of being laid back due to their inabilities. The font truly aims to bring the equality of the deaf in the society. Also, it aims to put an end to the straggle of the Indian Sign Language to gain an importance in India and the world at large. Visually documenting the ISL in the form of a font.

The society is being divided on terms of imparities and abilities only due to the lack of communication and I hope to solve it through this font designed solely for the betterment of the deaf population residing in India. I hope for a society without any barriers for the hearing impaired and make them feel a wholesome part of the Indian society with better communication and accessibility to the common man.



Acknowledgement (if any)

Guidelines referenced from **Atulyakala** “Deaf Design Studio”

<http://www.atulyakalaindia.com/>

References

Atulyakala - <http://www.atulyakalaindia.com>

Deaf Enabled Foundation- <http://www.def.org.in/index.php>

THANK
YOU