

SYNERGY SOOF LATIN TYPECRAFT



SOOF EMBROIDERY

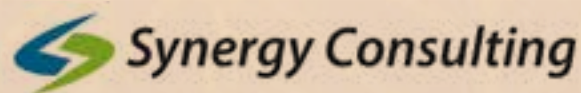
REGION: Mundra, Kutch

COMMUNITY: Meghwaad Maaru

YEAR: Workshop: 2019 | Font Release: 2020

IMPACT: Direct: 7 craftswomen | Indirect: 28 craftswomen

THIS PROJECT IS SUPPORTED BY



Collaborators

Rathore Paani ben, Hetal ben, Varsha ben, Charu Lata ben,
Manisha ben, Ramila ben, Amisha ben (Craftswomen)

Ishan Khosla, Roshel Chawla, Unnati Sharma (Designers)
Andreu Balius (Type Designer)



THE CRAFT OF SOOF EMBROIDERY: AN OVERVIEW

Region: Mundra, Kutch, Gujarat, India

The Meghawaad Maaru community is originally from Tharparkar in Sindh, Pakistan and came to India as refugees during the 1971 war between India and Pakistan.

The Meghwaad Maaru community of Kutch practises two embroidery styles— *Soof* and *Khaarek*. Their mothers and grandmothers would embroider small products such as *baagchi* (envelope bags), *theli* (multi-purpose bags) and *batwa* (small bags). The embroidery features an abundance of floral and leaf motifs. Animal, bird and figurative motifs seldom made an appearance. The only exception is the peacock motif for which the craftswomen had a particular fondness.

Soof is a fine, delicate embroidery with geometrical motifs and is used to create articles like garments, bedspreads, torans, etc. Soof embroidery is light, so even a heavily embroidered sari is easy to handle and wear.

The building blocks of the embroidery area *lath*, *soof* (triangles) and *leher* (wave). Craftswomen play with

these forms to create a huge variety of simple as well as complex geometric motifs. There is no outline or drawing done on the fabric to guide the craftswoman. Instead, the design is mentally conceptualised and calculated according to the design, the cloth size and count and rendered onto it by counting the warp and weft threads of the fabric.

The designs are formed with tessellated triangles called *soof* (*suf*). It is a counted thread embroidery with no outlines and drawings done on a white fabric to guide the craftswoman. The embroidery, done on the reverse side, is created by filling in areas using a satin stitch. When turned over, the front displays an embroidery that is so fine and precise that it is mistaken for machine embroidery.

Soof requires fabric that has a basket weave—the warp and weft have to be the same count. Patterns are created by counting the warp and weft threads that are used as the base grid. The embroidery is rendered on a horizontal and vertical grid. However, the most daring innovation was creating complex compositions

on diagonal grids. This is why when making letters, the diagonals such as the K, X, R etc., are the most complex and difficult to make.

Two ceremonial accessories, bakaani (long craft) and the vanjani (broad belt) were embroidered by the bride and worn by the groom on their wedding day. Embroidery was also done on the head covering words by women; red, green or yellow chundadi had small floral motifs sprinkled all over it.

The craftswomen embroider borders, *kurtas* and blouse pieces. They also enlarged their motif repertoire as they had more embroidery space to play with on these larger

products. This is how the elephant, camper, scorpion, sparrow and *dhingli* (milkmaid) motifs entered the universe of Soof embroidery.

The indicators of technical excellence in Soof embroidery are:

- Varied and complex compositions.
- Thin and sturdy stitches rendered so tightly that the maximum area of the mirrors is exposed.
- The base fabric underneath the embroidery does not show through.

Background text courtesy Shrujan.



THE SOOF WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

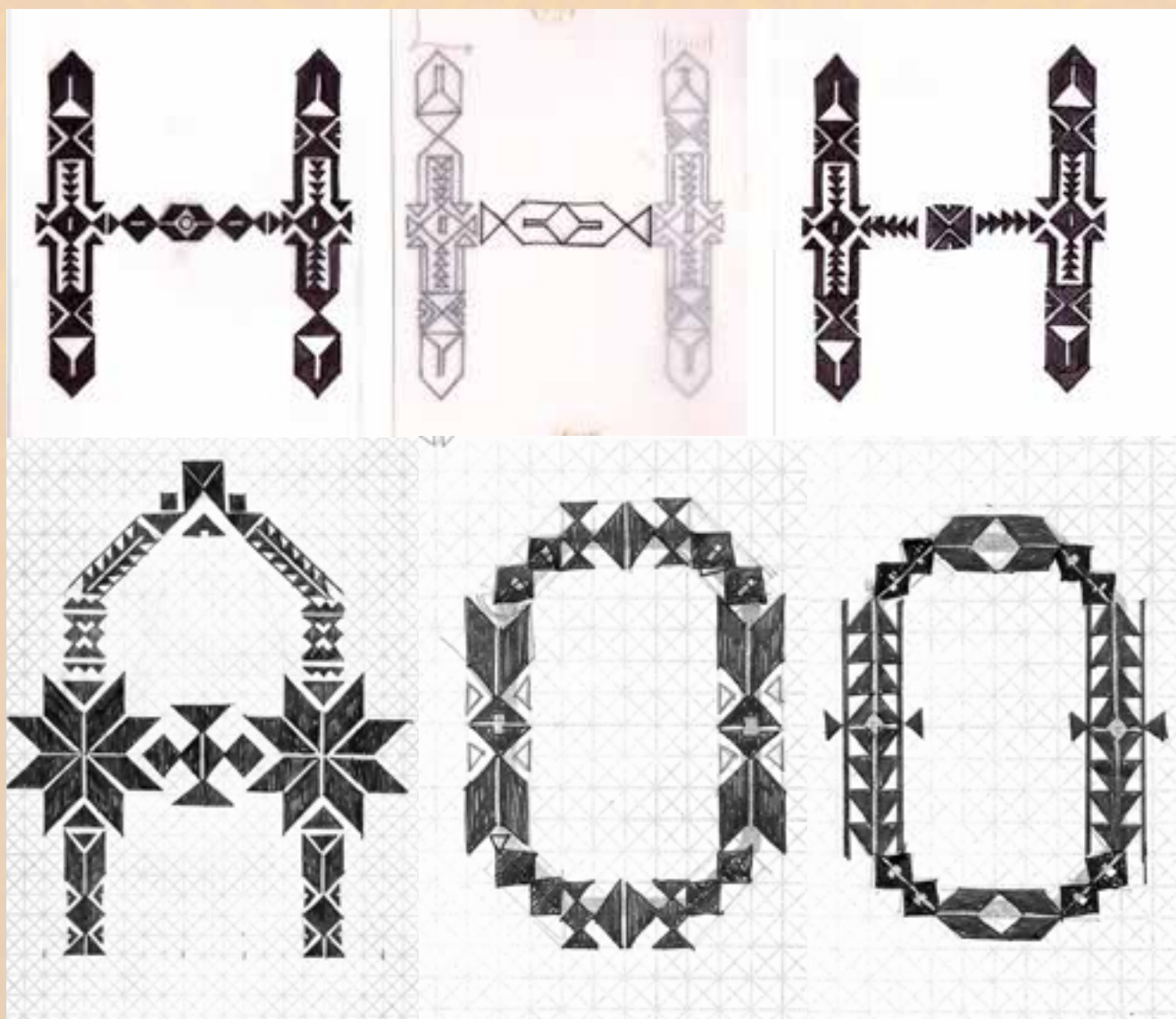
Pre-Workshop Prep Work at Studio

Before the workshop in Kutch the team, worked with sample sketches, hand-drawn and digital to understand the forms and motifs of soof embroidery. We worked with an array of letter design that we thought could be embroidered by the artisans. Our goal to create letters from before hand was to explore the relation between the latin letters and the motifs to incorporate the essence of the embroidery as well as make the letters legible. The challenge we had to surpass while working was the diagonal letters like K and X as soof is always embroidered on a horizontal and vertical grid.

Introducing Craftswomen to Design Methodologies to promote Independent Thinking

An important part of The Typecraft Initiative Mandate is to help in value addition of the craftspeople we work with by imparting basic design methodologies to help artisans to become authors of their own work, so that they can make innovative products relevant to the demands of today's fickle customer.

We started the workshop by giving the craftswomen a design exercise in which they would use paper cut-out into the various shapes of their embroidery to make letters. Interestingly, this is the same methodology





(but done in reverse) that we use in design schools to teach students to make fonts by understanding the lexicon of a particular craft.

Why letters?

Letters are alien to the everyday world of the women who embroider various plant and animal motifs. Giving them something out of context challenges them to really understand what sorts of new forms their embroideries can take. The women we worked with told us that they are usually given the designs to make and so they end up making but not applying their minds to think of new possibilities.

Breadth rather than Depth

Our workshops are meant to explore different ways an letter can be made, rather than to use one way and

render all letters. Working this way ensures no stone is unturned in terms of the various types of embroideries and techniques explored. For instance, the "R" by Paani ben has been done in a "traditional" technique where the embroidered thread is hidden within the cloth. Here Paani ben also explores the use of gaps in the letterform, which we term as a "*soof-setif*" as they look like a serified letter.

We also explored the embroideries in terms of base cloth, matka silk (larger designs) versus the organic and indigenous cotton, kala cotton for (smaller designs).

We worked with eight craftswomen: Rathore Paani ben, Hetal ben, Chare Lata ben, Amisha ben, Manisha ben, Varsha ben, Ramila ben and Gita ben.

THE CRAFTSWOMEN



Rathore Pani ben



Hetal ben



Varsha ben



Manisha ben



Ramila ben



Amisha ben



Charu Lata ben

ACTIVITY PLAN

Stages of the Project

Formulating the Brief and Craft Research

Craft research in terms of studying the background of the community, the craft, the various motifs, types of stitches and embroideries used.

Pre-Workshop I

Preparing letters and purchase of cloth before the workshop. This was sent to the craftswomen to embroider the initial letters on their own without our feedback.

Pre-Workshop II

Samples of embroidered letters sent by the women to us for examination and internal discussion on what seems to work and what doesn't. While we found their embroidered "sketches" interesting, we concluded that they were not doing justice to the grammar of Soof embroidery.

Preliminary Design Sketches:

We decided to work on sketches on paper at the studio based on the initial research of the craft conducted earlier. A look at how various elements would be used in various types of letters (straights (H), curves (S, O), diagonals (X), as well as straight-curve (P), diagonal-curve (R) and straight-diagonal (K) combinations)

Workshop Prep

Materials to be taken/kept ready, planning, co-ordination with the NGO, artisans etc. We also planned out the initial exercise to be given to the craftswomen

Workshop at Shrujan, Kutch (October 13-23, 2019):

Workshop with Meghwad Maaru craftswomen working in soof embroidery.

Design Methodology with Craftswomen

The artisans were given the exercise of creating letterforms from various soof elements — triangles, diamond forms and parallelograms. The craftswomen found the exercise challenging through thrilling. Hetal ben said that this is something unique for them. They are usually given cloth to embroider on and are usually the design is also given to them. Here, they have total freedom in which to make the forms. Since it is done with pieces of paper, they also got to try out various types and complexities of the letterforms. Our design team tried to challenge the craftswomen to use more than just one shape (triangle, diamond etc) to make the letter, and as the day progressed the women

made letters with more than one element.

Strategizing possible directions for the typeface based on various technical limitations and constraints of the craft. Insights based on research. Discussion on crafts workshops, expected.

At the workshop we experimented with various directions. For instance, with Paani ben, one of the older craftswomen, we explored different sorts of designs for the soof embroidery based lettering, which we are calling "Soof serifs".

We also explored the use of condensed letters, i.e., letters that are narrower in width, as they seem to be more in line with the proportions of soof embroidery.

We also experimented with the size and scale of the letters — we tried smaller letters to see if the soof embroidery would work better as soof tends to be small, unlike other embroideries like Rabari.

We also explored reducing the number of elements or increasing them.

Soof embroidery works best for vertical and horizontal shapes. In diagonals, soof often can be very tricky. We worked with the craftswomen to explore diagonals based on the soof flower design.

Also explored variations in terms of letters looking at beginnings, endings, thin-thick relationship, number of elements and the type of design of the elements being used in the "S".

Challenges.

Soof is a complex embroidery to work with because it is count based. This means for every motif, the shape and proportion is based on the base fabric used. The same design can appear drastically different if the base fabric has a different count and weave. If the cloth is too closely woven, the women find it hard to see the intersection of the warp and weft — where they insert the thread — in which case soof embroidery can't be done.

Analysis of Workshop: what letters are working and which are not, why? What fixes can be made on the computer versus through additional letters to be embroidered/made by the craftswomen.

Next Steps

- * Vectorsization of the letters: Scanning of all letters. Cleaning and tracing the letters using design software.
- * Re-evaluating vectors by placing all letters next to each other and by forming words. Fixing the vectors.
- * Font Development stage (2-3 months)
- * Introducing digitized outlines into font editor cells (copy & paste outlines), shifting from Adobe Illustrator to Glyphs Font Editor.
- * Checking nodes and outlines, scaling and adapting where necessary.
- * Establishing vertical proportions in Font Info Tables
- * Defining complete character set.
- * Defining spacing for each glyph within the font.
- * Defining kerning pairs.
- * Defining metric classes and kerning classes.
- * Defining Open Type features
- * Defining description names in FontInfo Tables.
- * Generating font file for beta testing
- * Beta testing font (internally) (1 month)
- * Making printouts for checking glyphs and metrics.
- * Arrangements and corrections, where necessary
- * Generating font file for font distribution
- * Release of the typeface. (12/2020)
- * Promotion of Project: Hiring of professionals for documentation (budget permitting): articulation and promotion of the project (copy-writer, editor, photographer, videographer and digital marketing experts). Promotion via various social media and online channels as well as a printed brochure.

... * * * CURRENT STAGE OF PROJECT * * *

VECTORIZATION AND FONT DEVELOPMENT

We are currently in stages 6 and 7.

All embroideries have been scanned and vectorized at this stage. We are currently working to ensure consistency between different letters of the font family in terms of proportions, shapes and number of elements per letter.

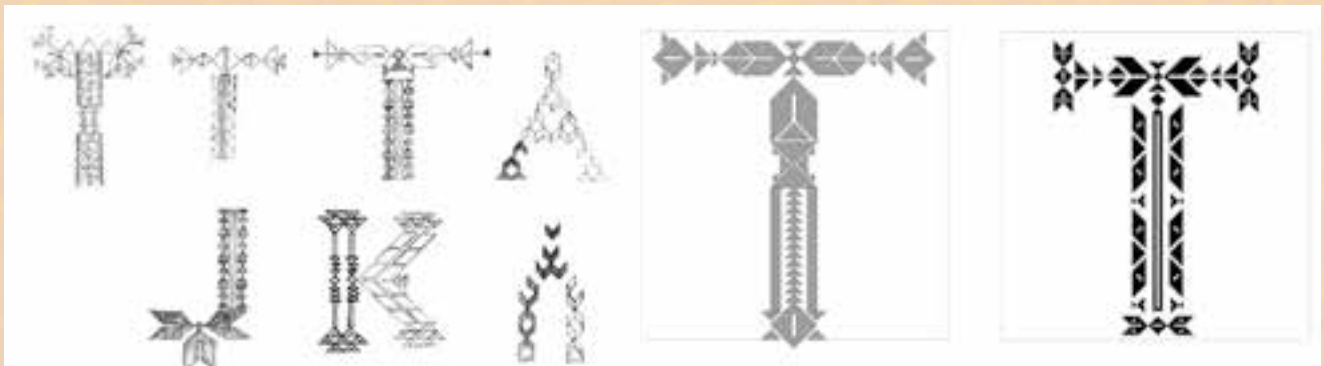
Once this is complete, the next step is to bring the letters into softwares like Glyphs where we would be testing the typeface functionality and make tweaks accordingly. Aspects such as kerning, proportions, thickness would be looked at.

The aim is to release the font by end 2020.



THE PROCESS

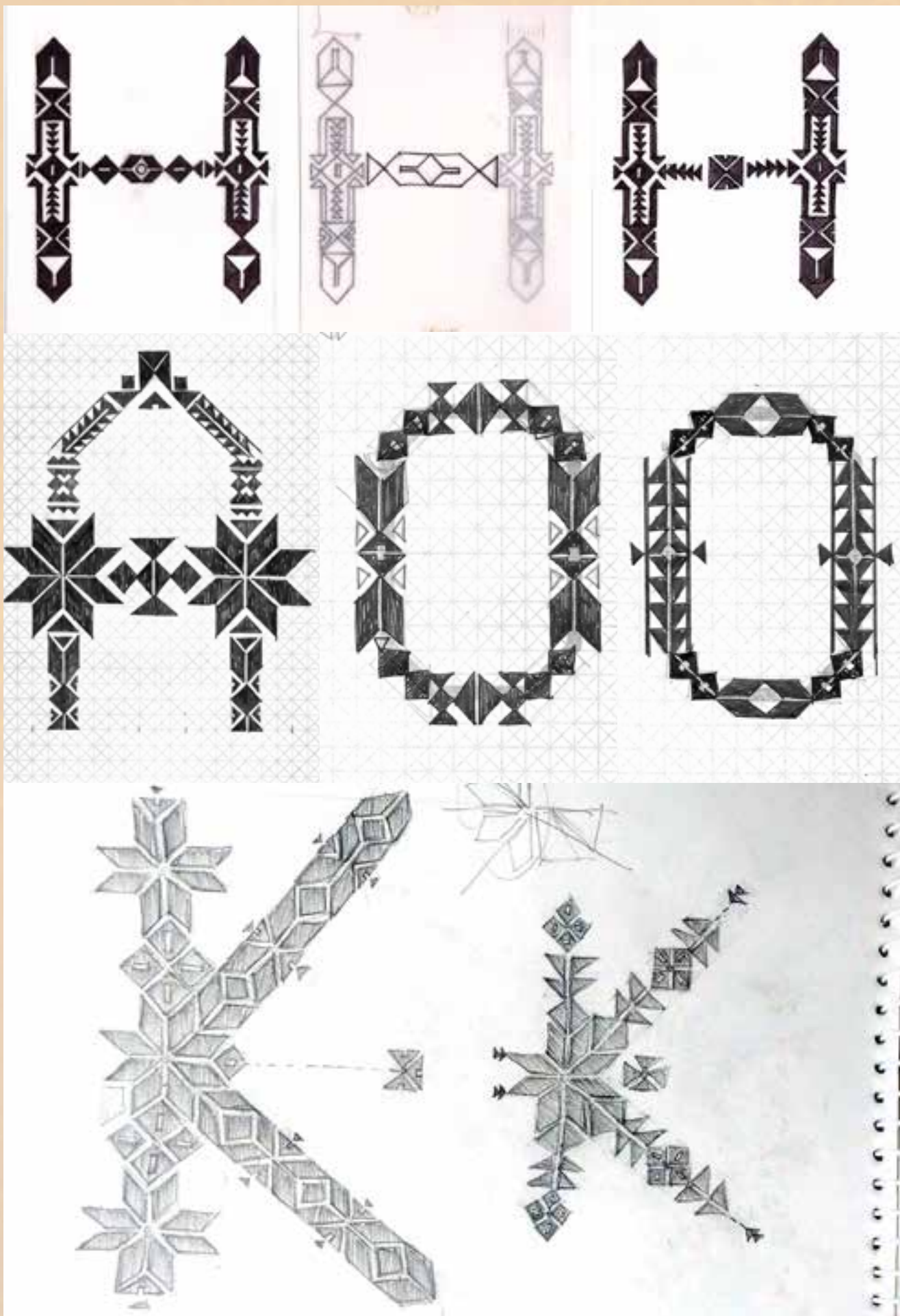
We started working with sample sketches to understand the forms and motifs of soof embroidery. We worked with an array of designs that we thought could be embroidered by the craftswomen.



Hand-drawn explorations of various letters using soof motifs



Digital explorations of letters using soof motifs



DESIGN METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP WITH CRAFTSWOMEN

At the workshop we explored design techniques specific to Soof embroidery by using paper cut out in the fundamental shapes used in soof embroidery. Since embroidery is a time consuming process, the use of paper and glue is a quick way to explore different combinations of forms to make letters. The women also enjoyed this workshop as they recognized the

shapes from their own work. Additionally, they had never done something so interactive before. They said that it made them look at their own embroidery in new ways — which is precisely the aim of Typecraft. We then explored letter embroideries on kala cotton and silk matka cloth. We worked on different Soof motifs to create letters of multiple forms and style.



Craftswomen working with geometric shapes taken from soof embroidery to create letter forms.





Craftswomen embroidering letters given to them

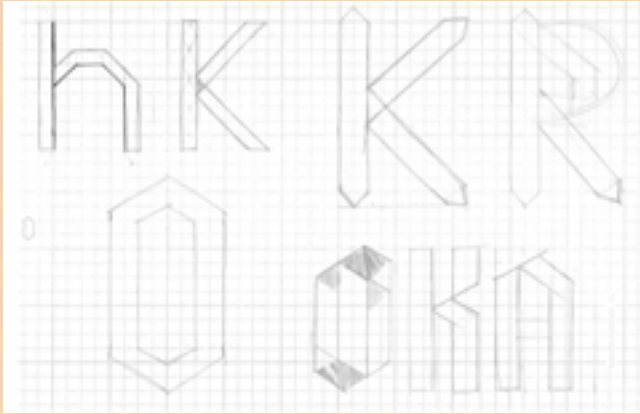
EXPLORING SOOF MOTIFS

Soof craftswomen cannot draw, hence letters were drawn for them at the back of the cloth as soof embroidery is done on the backside. We explored various letter size and thickness along with different styles of soof motifs while giving the artisan their creative freedom.

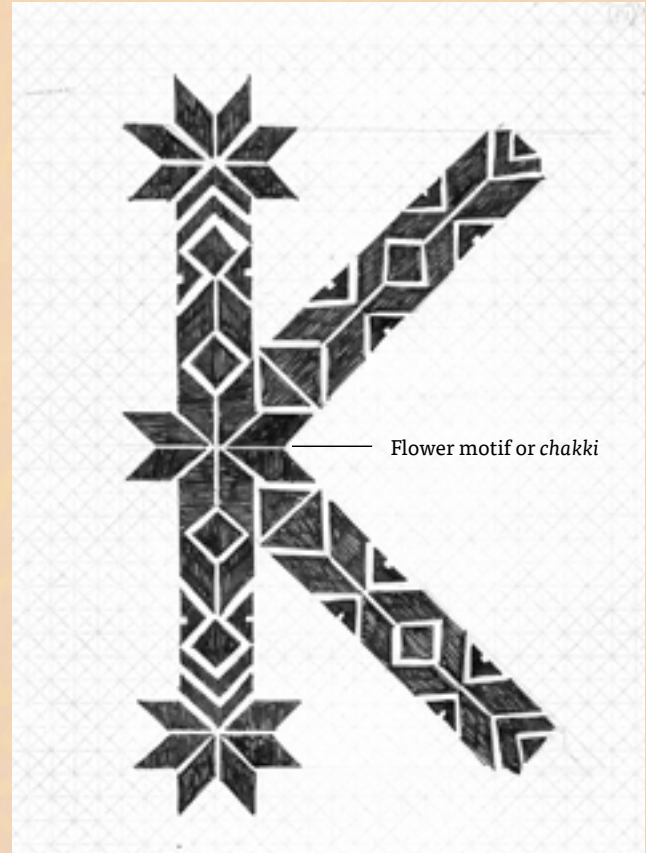
FLOWER MOTIF FOR DIAGONALS

Since soof is a count based embroidery, working with diagonals is tricky. We started exploring different Soof motifs that could help us solve this. We decided to use the flower shaped motif (*chakki*) at intersections. The letter-forms we drew for the artisans were chiseled from the edges to provide an angle for the motifs to fit in. We also asked the artisans to work with bolder and bigger motifs for different variations.

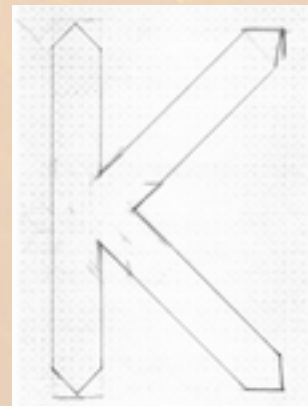
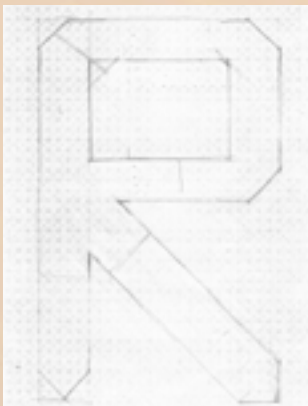
Along with that, we also explored various letter forms that could work with the embroidery.



Drawing letters on grids for reference



The usage of the flower motif in letter K



Translation of letter from drawing to embroidery

SOOF SERIFS

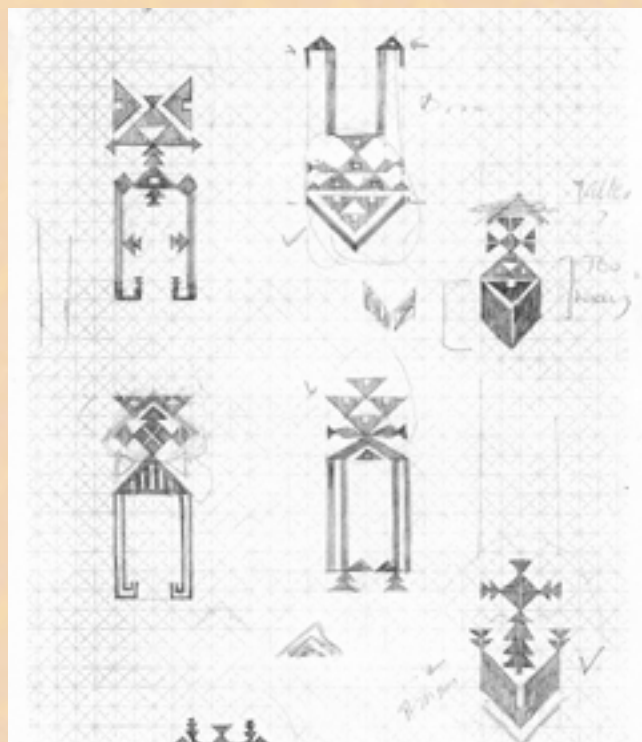
Inspired by the motifs embroidered by the craftswomen, we wanted to explore the idea of "Soof serifs". From geometric and sans-serif typefaces, we switched to serif typefaces to incorporate soof serifs which were basically derived from the Peacock motif used in traditional soof embroidery.

For these set of alphabets we decided to work with a smaller size and thickness of the alphabets for better efficiency. We used silk matka cloth for these embroideries.

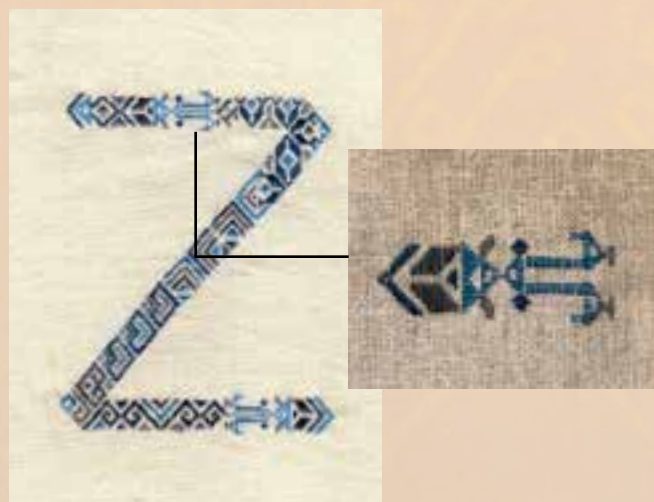


Soof serif

"Soof serif" derived from the embroidery of the letter R



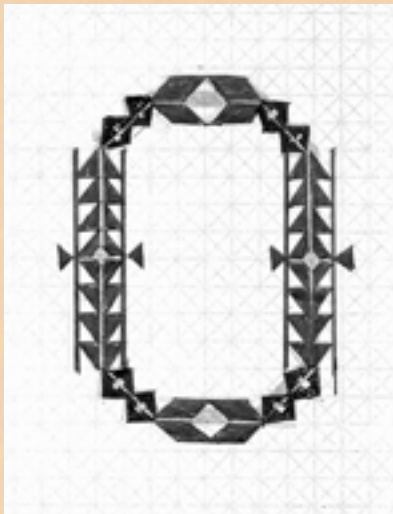
Exploration of Soof serifs on paper



Soof serifs embroidered by the craftswomen on letters Z and C

FURTHER EXPLORATION WITH EMBROIDERY

The craftswomen also worked with the initial exploratory designs created by us to understand the shape and size relation of Soof motifs and letter form. The variation in sizes of Soof motifs within the letters created an excellent opportunity for further explorations.

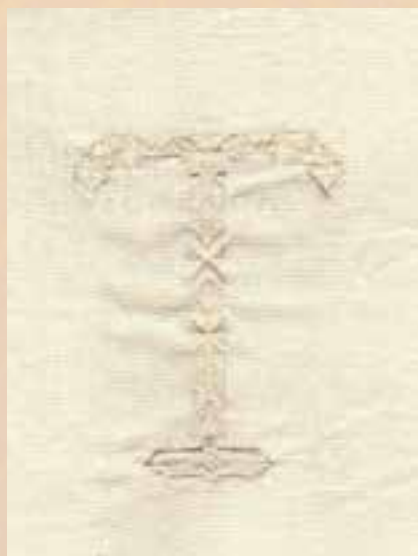


MOTIF SIZE VARIATIONS

The letter F has been embroidered using traditional soof motifs in a single stitch. The craftswoman experimented with size variations of the motifs around the letter form, giving the letter an organic yet a composed and balanced structure.



THE FINAL SET OF EMBROIDERIES



THE FINAL SET OF EMBROIDERIES



ABOUT TYPECRAFT

What is Typecraft

Typecraft has developed the world's first digital typeface from a craft or tribal art. This has been created by combining the traditional knowhow and knowledge systems of the craftswomen, along with design and digital technology. We work with a diverse range of craftswomen from various parts of India. Thus, each typeface is inspired from a craft or tribal art that belongs to a specific region, material, process and context.

The Typecraft Initiative develops digital applications, such as typefaces, both in vernacular Indian languages and in English — from India's contemporary crafts and tribal arts.

Although the end product is digital, the starting point is always a craft with its intrinsic processes, materials and making methods.

Why Typecraft

Livelihood. The goal of our organisation is to enable artisans to generate a sustained livelihood by first commissioning them to make the letters in their own crafts, and subsequently through royalty from sales of the digital output once the application is released into the market.

Skill Development. The initiative is meant as a way for craftspeople and tribal artists to think in new ways — in a world where they are no longer able to sustain themselves solely through traditional networks and systems.

The Value of Design. We use design methodologies in our workshops with craftspeople to encourage independent thinking and authorship. We endeavour for future craftspeople to not just be makers but also designers. Our workshops give craftspeople time to experiment and find their own voice which is usually never possible for craftspeople who usually get daily wages based on number of hours of commissioned work. We also expose the craftspeople to trends and developments in design around the world.

Literacy and Primary Education. Typecraft aims to come up with new and innovative applications for Indian crafts using design and technology, such as educational tools to make learning a more interactive and immersive experience for school children.

Extending Value and Application of Crafts. Globally,

technology is revolutionising the way education is experienced, consumed and purchased. Internet access has improved, along with user interfaces and the content and services provided in online environments.

The manner in which education is delivered has remained broadly the same for hundreds of years. Technology is changing that through edtech. Edtech applies digital technology to deliver a new form of learning architecture. Additional embedding of a handicraft in edtech tools not only humanises the tool but in this case helps to sustain and empower talented women artisans.

Mission

Our mission is to work with crafts to create tools for change. Rather than focus on decorative “static” objects that have been made ad nauseam (cushion covers, graphics for mugs and such souvenirs), we believe in creating a “living product” from India's living craft traditions.

This initiative began as a means to help promote, innovate, archive and celebrate the traditions of our country's intangible heritage. We also hope to keep these traditions alive by promoting their usage as typefaces to be used for communication and learning aids. The typefaces are meant to inspire, create awareness and generate further interest in the art, history, context, and life of the people and the communities we work with.

To date, all the Typecraft projects have been conducted in collaboration with craftswomen. Women are the gatekeepers of the home in villages and small towns across India. Their empowerment also ensures benefit to their children, the family and community.

How does Typecraft work

The process of Typecraft is complex and it changes according to the craft and the material. Each craft has a certain visual lexicon that must be deciphered and then transformed to the language of, and follow the rules of, type design but at the same time be in sync with the constraints of the craft and material.

The goal is to get craftswomen to think independently and without much instruction initially and then to facilitate them where necessary. Sometimes it is very challenging for the artisans to think independently

and/or the craft/material is restrictive—in which case, the design team has to intervene. The amount of interference varies from project to project.

Typecraft uses design and technology as a catalyst to transform a craft to create functional and non-decorative products, such as typefaces and educational applications. It extends the value and meaning of the craft as the font made from a craft doesn't become an end in itself—but a start of a new creation, an active tool and an enabler.

The advantage about this sort of methodology is that we can be material and geography agnostic. Our methodologies can be scaled up to any craft anywhere in the country (and the world).

Typecraft isn't just about the creation of letters and a typeface, moreover, it is about imparting a way of thinking and exposing craftswomen to rethink of their crafts and motifs and patterns anew, by applying them

to letters—something that is alien to their iconography and craft lexicon. When encountered to work in an independent way and out of the context they are so familiar in working, they begin to think as authors and designers.

Final Outcome

The final outcome of all Typecraft projects is to create a functional digital typeface (font). The font is a tool that can be used by anyone anywhere in the world.

Additionally, we hope that the craftswomen we work with benefit from the workshops and can start thinking about designing their own products from the crafts they are already so skilled at.

Our endeavour is also to use the Typecrafted letters into tools for literacy and education—both as digital tools as well as educational and activity books.

WORKING TYPEFACES

GODNA

Ram Keli, Sumitra, Sunita | Godna (Art of tattooing) by the Gond Tribe Surguja, Jamgala District, Chhattisgarh

CHITTARA

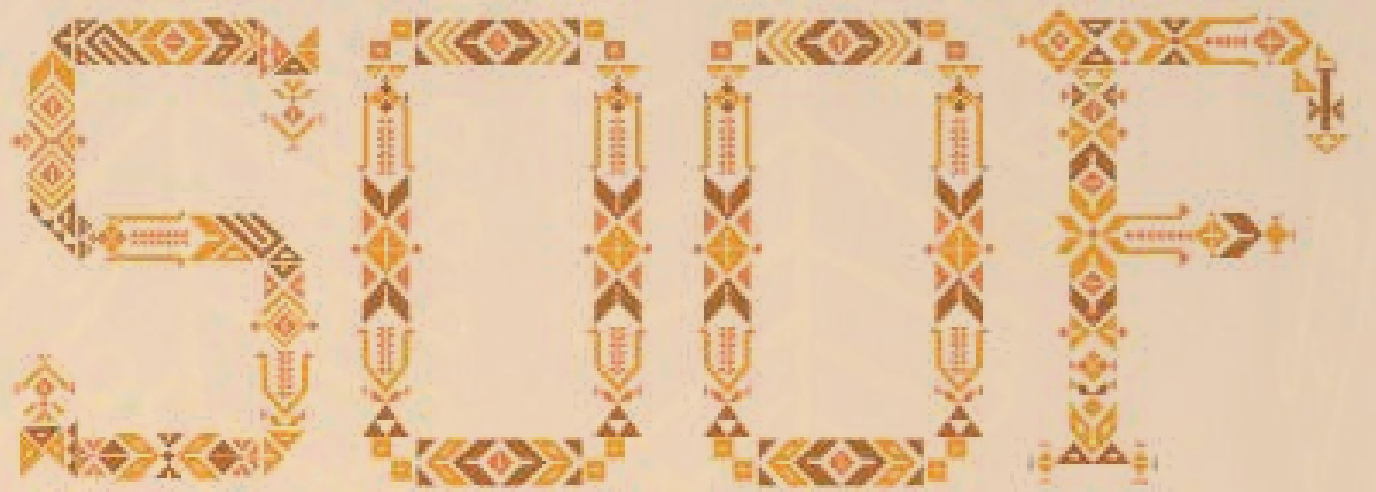
Radha Sullur | Chittara Folk Art by the Deewaru community, Sagar District, Karnataka

UPCOMING TYPEFACES

RABARIT

Balli ben, Jeni ben, Seju ben, Parma ben, Dawal ben | Dhebaria Rabari embroidery and applique Kutch by Dhebaria Rabari community, Sumrasar Shiekh, Kutch, Gujarat | Powered by Synergy Consulting Inc.

UPCOMING TYPEFACES



Rathore Paani ben, Hetal ben, Varsha ben, Charu Lata ben, Manisha ben, Ramila ben, Amisha ben | Soof embroidery, by Meghwaad Maaru community, Kutch, Gujarat | Powered by Synergy Consulting Inc.



Ganga ba, Pawan ba, Mancha ba, Chandu ba, Daksha ba | Pakko embroidery by Sodha Rajput community, Kutch, Gujarat



LETTERFORMS



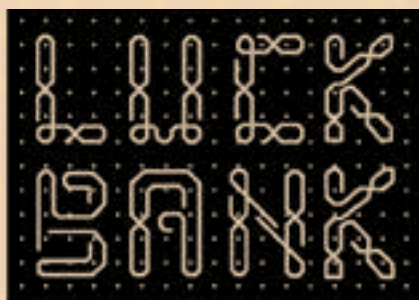
Sajnu ben | Dhebaria Rabari Embroidery by the Rabari community, Kukadsar, Kutch | Year: October 2011



Mamta Jha | Mithila Folk Painting, Mithila, Bihar | Year:



Apam (Hao Crafts), Black Pottery, Ukhrul District, Manipur | Year: October 2013



Kolam typography, Tamil Nadu | Year:



Embroideries from Kutch, Gujarat (l to r: Soof, Dhebaria Rabari, Jat Gharasia, Ahir and Kharek) | Year: 2018

APPLICATIONS

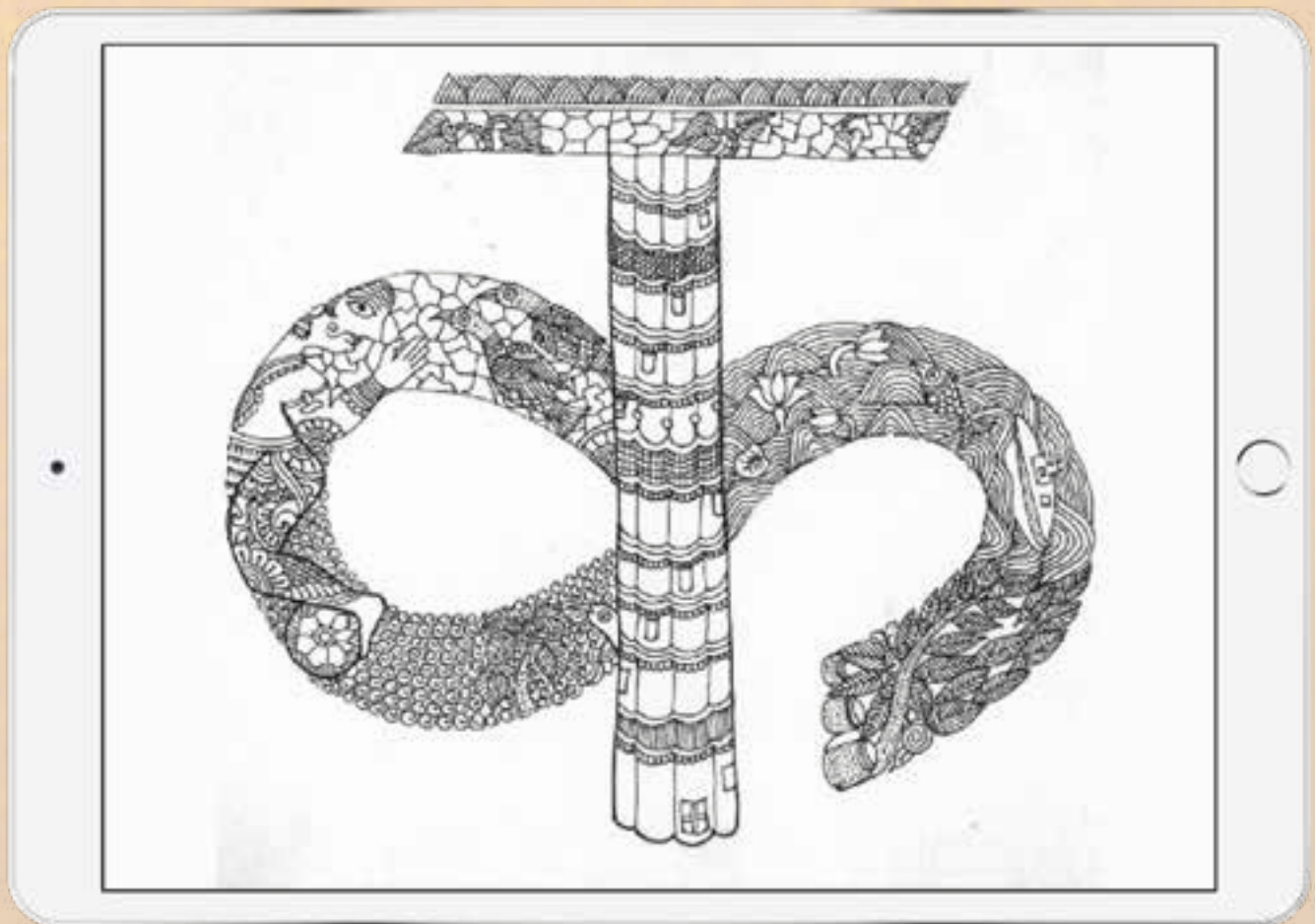
EDTECH: TOOLS FOR LEARNING

EMPOWERING CRAFTSWOMEN THROUGH THE CREATION OF INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL DIGITAL APPS FOR CHILDREN

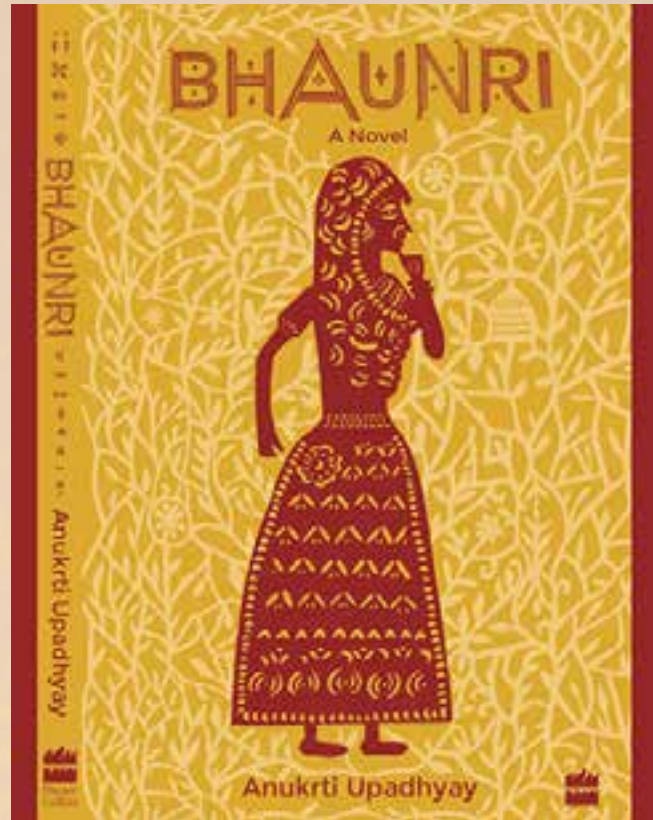
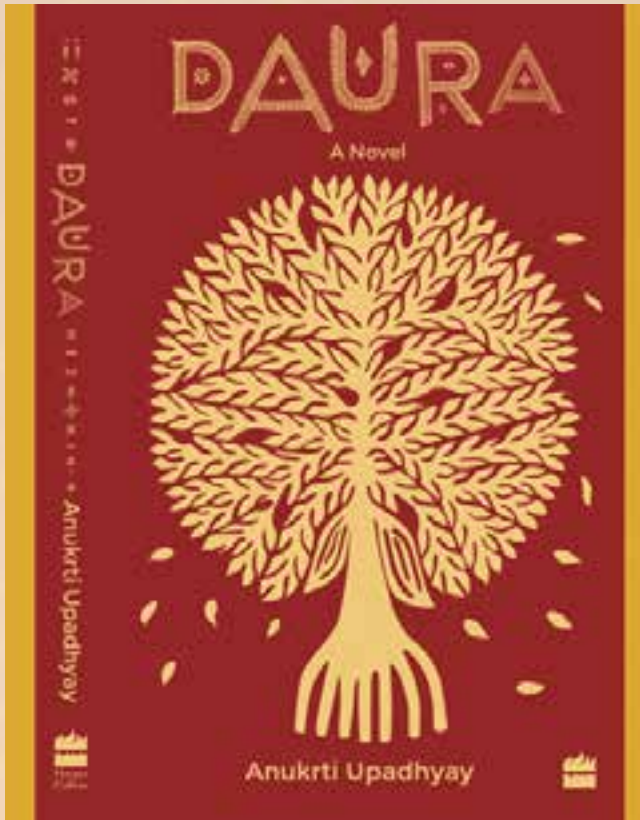
The concept here is to create an alphabet in Devanagari script in the Hindi language, made from Indian crafts (in this case Mithila from Madhubani district in northern Bihar). This alphabet will be used as a part of an educational app for primary school children.

Connect: the letter ~ alphabet ~ words ~ sentences ~ stories ~ folklore and local narratives (visual and textual)

How can children at different age groups interact with this font in different manners to make connections between the above, and to also be able to connect to the visual and verbal. The idea is also to sensitise children at an early age to Indian crafts, heritage and authorship.



BOOK COVER DESIGN



Example of Book Covers using Godna, done for Harper Collins.

ON-SCREEN APPLICATIONS



A designer using the Godna typeface to create an animation on the computer

SIGNAGE



BRANDING FOR THE ARTS



BWTIC using Godna typeface for posters for the National Theatre Wales

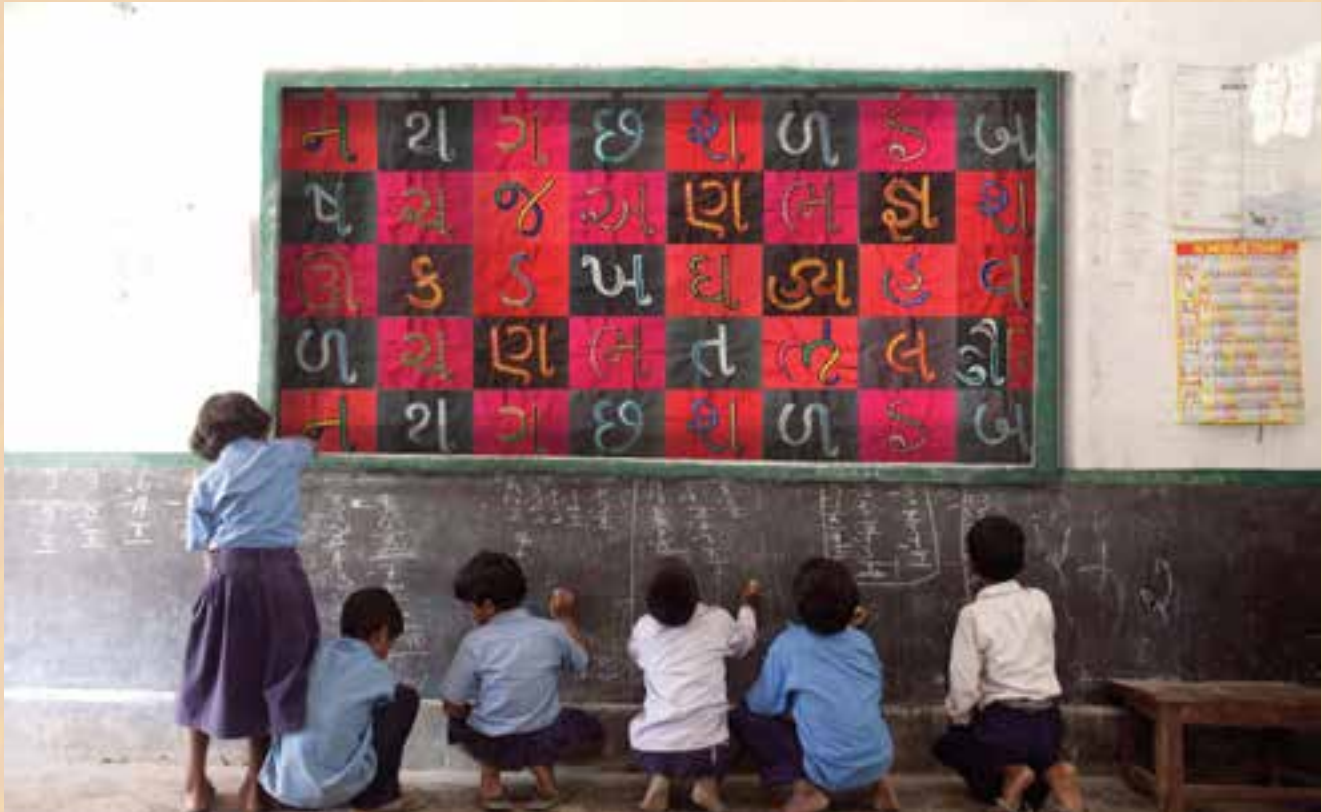
POSTER DESIGN



Posters made using Godna Typeface

ALPHABET QUILTS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL

The concept here is to create alphabets using Indian Scripts, made from Indian crafts (in this case from Pakko embroidery). The alphabets will be used as a learning aid and an activity book for primary school children. The idea is also to sensitise children at an early age to Indian crafts, heritage and authorship.



THANK YOU

THE
TYPE
CRAFT
INITIATIVE

www.typecraftinitiative.org

www.instagram.com/thetypecraftinitiative

