



The Sacred and Typography

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Designing a Devanagari typeface for Sanskrit

A case study of Pravah

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The Pravah typeface is an outcome of a collaboration between late Prof. Mukund Gokhale and Ek Type. In this presentation we will talk about the visual, linguistic and technical aspects of this project, challenges of dealing with a large character set and our process of expanding and refining a typeface that aligns with the original designer's vision and intent.

Prof. Mukund Gokhale designed an exhaustive Devanagari typeface that would support a wide range of languages that use the Devanagari script including Vedic Sanskrit, and notations for Indian classical music. The process of designing this typeface was documented in a paper titled "An experiment on Devanagari type design system. Bharat Type Family" (Gokhale 2007). In it he describes this typeface as

"an experiment to understand the script, it's structure, writing system, native terminology of different guidelines and parts of the type, relation between phonetics and graphics, intricacies of design patterns, legibility, readability, psychological effects of form, shapes and patterns, color, texture, typographic requirements, cultural taste and traits."

In 2016, he entrusted Ek Type to continue the project by refining the design, broadening the range of weights, adding unicode support and bringing it in line with current technological standards.

This presentation is a walkthrough of our contributions to the development of Pravah, with particular focus on its visual aspects. We position the visual design of this typeface in relation to existing devanagari text typefaces and highlight the influence of classical

Balbodh calligraphy on its design. Further we articulate the design of complex conjuncts based on the traditional and compact vertical stacking style. Apart from this, we also speak about interpreting and implementing Gokhale's theories while designing heavier weights and the impact on weight on conjuncts and matra clusters. Additionally, we address the design of many devanagari signs, cantillation marks, nasalization marks and vedic accents which are an important feature of this typeface. And lastly, our learnings and insights from working closely on a font which was designed by a master type designer and our understanding of the details and theories that he left behind.

Keywords: *Vedic Sanskrit, Type Design Process, Traditional Devanagari, Vedic Accents*

॥ अथ दुर्गासूक्तम् ॥

ॐ जातवेदसे सुनवाम् सोमं मरातीयतो निदंहाति वेदं । स नः पर्षदति दुर्गाणि विश्वां नावेव सिन्धुं दुरिताऽत्यग्निः ॥१॥
तामग्निर्वर्णां तपसा ज्वलन्तीं वैरोचनीं कर्मफलेषु जुष्टाम् । दुर्गां देवीं शरणमहं प्रपद्ये सुतरंसि तरसे नमः ॥२॥
अग्ने त्वं पारया नव्यो अस्मान्स्वस्तिभिरति दुर्गाणि विश्वां । पृथ्वं पृथ्वी बंहुला न उर्वी भवां तोकाय तनयाय शंयोः ॥३॥
विश्वानि नो दुर्गहां जातवेदः सिन्धुन्न नावा दुरिताऽतिपर्षि । अग्ने अत्रिवन्मनसा गृणानोऽस्माकं बोध्यविता तनूनाम् ॥४॥
पृतना जितः सहमानमुग्रमग्निः हुवेम परमाथ्सधस्थात् । स नः पर्षदति दुर्गाणि विश्वा क्षामदेवो अति दुरितात्यग्निः ॥५॥
प्रलोषिं कृमीड्यो अध्वरेषु सनाच्च होता नव्यश्च सथ्सिं । स्वाध्वग्ने तनुवं पिप्रयस्वास्मभ्यं च सौभंगमायजस्व ॥६॥
गोभिर्जुष्टमयुजो निषिक्तन्तर्वेन्द्र विष्णोरनुसंचरेम । नाकस्य पृष्ठमभि संवसानो वैष्णवीं लोक इह मांदयन्ताम् ॥७॥

ॐ कात्यायनाय विद्महे कन्याकुमारिं धीमहि । तन्नो दुर्गिः प्रचोदयात् ॥

॥ इति दुर्गासूक्तम् ॥

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Text set in Pravah
Designed by
Prof. Mukund Gokhale
and Ek Type