DEVANAGARI TYPE IN VIRTUAL REALITY   DES 520
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As a Graphic Design graduate student from India, I am learning a lot about typography and its cultural importance. However, all the knowledge I have about history of typography is mainly based on typography in the West. For the Design Seminar this semester, I wish to broaden my knowledge in Devanagari typography by introducing it in the immersive, three-dimensional environment.

WHAT
What started as a study in anatomy of type has turned into a linguistic study. In comparison to latin glyphs, Devanagari is written from left to right and widely used in India and Nepal. It is part of a segmental writing system known as an abugida, or alphasyllabary where consonant-vowel sequences are written as a unit. In Devanagari, each unit is based on a consonant letter and the vowel notation comes second, whereas in the English language, vowels and consonants possess an equal status when written and there is no audial hierarchy.[1] My project explores Virtual Reality as a tool for the player to learn about the characteristics of Devanagari script just like Latin by crossing boundaries between letterforms and language.

WHY
Studies in typography have evolved from print-based to screen-based, from two-dimensional to three-dimensional. However, they haven't advanced much from static to dynamic or interactive except for exploration in kinetic typography in the recent years. Largely, these studies have been done with Latin type. The intention is to give the same attention to Indian typography as Latin typography has received in the last few decades, that started with print and web, and transcending into virtual space; to not only understand the possibilities and challenges with

Indian letterforms but also to educate the viewer about the language that is a huge part of the Indian culture. It is also to portray the capabilities of the virtual world to be a learning tool.

HOW
Indian streets are a home to typography in multiple languages that exist simultaneously. The VR environment borrows motifs and the colour palette from the Indian streetscape. Some of these motifs also form the architectural elements of the environment.
As you enter the environment, a gate-like structure welcomes you and showers lotuses (a popular element painted along with typography on the streets). The player is offered to a follow a path consisting of three platforms. The first one holds a set of Devanagari letterforms that are vowels. As you get closer to examine the letterform, an english word explaining the vowel pops up. Simultaneously, through sound you understand the pronunciation. The next platform holds the a set of consonants with the same interaction. Example - letterform with the sound 'cha', as you get closer the word 'change' pops in explaining 'cha as in change'.
The third platform shows the relationship between the consonant and the vowel and how that reflects in the letterform. As you move further, the player is given examples with a few words.
With more work, I envision this project to also include the study of anatomy of the letterforms along with the linguistics.

VIDEO

View the project here — https://vimeo.com/379304840

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[1] Jyni Ong, '*Hitesh Malaviya on the challenges of designing type for an Indian audience*', It's Nice That, 2018