

WRITING THE SCRIPT



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Is the time right for a type renaissance in India?

Kohinoor Gujarati Bold, a new typeface in development by the Indian Type Foundry, India's first modern, design-focused digital type foundry.

Five years ago in September, typeface designer Peter Biřak got a last-minute invitation to a new world. Would he speak, an email asked, at India's first-ever design conference? He soon found himself wandering, dazed, through the streets of Goa, still empty in the last days of monsoon season. Inside the conference hall, though, an overflow crowd of hundreds of smart, critical designers peppered him with questions. Biřak recognized that he was witnessing the beginning of something significant.

All the same, when the conference's organizer, Rajesh Kejriwal, suggested that Biřak sell his fonts in India, he balked. "I was very reluctant," says Biřak, "but since I wanted to be polite I said I'd think about it." India had enormous potential: 1.1 billion people speaking and reading 400 languages, and an immense newspaper circulation that had quadrupled in the 1980s and 1990s. The top two Indian newspapers, both in Hindi, had circulations of 20 million each, compared with 2 million each for the top two newspapers in the United States.

But India's design landscape was relatively barren, with only a few professionally suitable typefaces for the nine major writing systems. To sell type in India, Biřak knew he would have to persuade a generation of publishers, designers, and readers that type could bring distinction, legibility, and beauty to their products. "There is little knowledge about typography, so we need to explain basic things," says Biřak. "Even graphic-design students don't really understand how typography is different from calligraphy."

Biřak might have dismissed such thoughts entirely had he not heard from Satya Rajpurohit, a young graduate of India's National Institute of Design. Rajpurohit had just returned to India after two years working in Europe, an unavoidable detour since India lacked any serious design apprenticeships.

Rajpurohit convinced Biřak to collaborate on a single typeface—a Devanagari, the Hindi script. Once they had finished, two years later, in 2009, Biřak and Rajpurohit decided it was time to launch

