The Typecraft Initiative is a self-initiated and self-funded project that aims to create a series of display typefaces, both in Latin and Indic scripts — out of ancient and traditional Indian crafts and tribal arts — that are still practiced today — as a means to generate sustained livelihood and income through royalty of sales of the font among tribal artists and craftspeople.

The initiative has been created to help promote, innovate, archive and celebrate these traditions of our country’s intangible heritage. We also hope to keep the tradition alive by promoting their usage as typefaces to be used for communication and learning aids.
BACKGROUND

The Typecraft Initiative aims to create — display typefaces from various crafts and tribal arts from each state of India. Each typeface is made from a craft or tribal art, that belongs to a specific region, material, process and context.

The Typecraft Project uses the principles of typography with the language of crafts and traditional patterns to create something that transcends time. It is not only a celebration of the craft but a manifestation of it in digital terms — which makes its use and application universal.

Craft is one avenue to connect with our ancestry and our traditional visual language which was rooted in India. Combining design with craft can make typography come alive with both meaning and form. It is uniquely Indian and yet speaks to a global world.

All the projects that have been a part of The Typecraft Initiative, thus far, — have been made in collaboration with women. "Sangam" lettering with Sajnu ben (Dhebarla Rabari); Mithila Typecraft with Mamta Jha (Madvhani); Chittara Typecraft with Radha Sullur (Devaru community) and Godna Typecraft with Ram Keli, Sunita and Sumitra (Gond tribe).

WHY THE TYPECRAFT INITIATIVE?

The mandate of The Typecraft Initiative is to raise funds for collaboration and involvement of diverse groups of tribal artists and craftspeople from India in creating typefaces based on their arts and crafts. Whether we make money or not, the craftperson always gets paid in advance. As a rule we never bargain with craftpeople. Funds raised from the sale of the typefaces is first used to cover all costs and then, initiate similar new projects with other tribal and craft artists groups. Ideally, we would like the artisans to also get some of the royalty from the sale of their typefaces.

This project is also meant to inspire, create awareness and generate further interest in the context, tradition, processes, meaning and history of the fast-changing lifestyles of the people we collaborate with.

"We believe that type design, as a means for communication, can further contribute to a more comprehensive dialogue within our globalized society. As a way to make language visible, typography and type design can help to transmit the most genuine expression of civilizations through the shapes of letters. It is not only about conveying a message, it is about visualizing culture itself. A way to reinforce identity and cultural values through the shapes we use when communicating through script. So, the power of type design should not be underestimated.

In this sense, The Typecraft Initiative is a project where Indian cultures largely related with art expression get some sort of exposure throughout Design. Type design as a craft where lead technology is strongly involved commits artists’ work that reflects the slow pace of tradition with the aim of producing typefaces that visualizes the richness of cultures from the world we live in." Andree Ballis, type designer and Partner, The Typecraft Initiative.

GOALS & CHALLENGES

The goal of the project — through the creation of typefaces based on various crafts or tribal arts of India — is to inspire, create awareness and generate further interest in the history, context, work and life of the people we collaborate with.

The goal is to not only to support some of the languishing crafts and arts but to also create a greater awareness about the beauty and vitality of these arts and the people who create them.

We also aim to create a framework through which local culture and identity are strengthened and cultivated in individual members of the community. And where people outside the community can learn from and respect the community’s value system and way of life.

THE PROJECT IS MEANT AS A WAY FOR CRAFTSTHEOPLE 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.

While they themselves are finding new ways — through new mediums and objects to make their work more commercially viable to new audiences — we believe as graphic designers, their skills are invaluable in creating a typographic archive of their work. This is not only an archive but something that can also be used in our digitally-driven lifestyles. The digital medium also allows for the ease of dissemination of the typeface to markets across the world. We hope our customers, through their purchase would not only learn more about these communities but also directly engage with them, and give more opportunities to them.

When working with craftspeople and tribal artists, it is important for us to understand their context — in terms of where they come from, their practices and beliefs and current social and economic situation and challenges. Most of the communities we work with come from an oral tradition. These typefaces are then, about exploring uncharted directions of transforming folkloric art and ritualistic craft from oral traditions into a digital typeface, used to create a written tradition.

To help innovate the art form into new meanings and uses — this is because most of these crafts had a functional aspect which has been lost over the years as they become commercial objects sold mainly for decora-


tional purposes. By making these crafts into typefaces, which are used to communicate — we are reinstating a functional value to these crafts.

The typefaces are like an archive of this craft as many of the traditional cultures as assimilating into mainstream Indian culture and are thus losing their ancient knowledge and knowhow of their craft traditions. Through the creation and use of the typefaces we are keeping the knowledge of the tradition.

We believe the our crafts have the power to enrich and teach us. We also believe in the ability of digital technologies to take craft to another level and another experience beyond what's currently possible. Craft + Tech = Craftech. We are exploring projects such as typefaces, apps, games, e-commerce website etc, that combine craft and technology. This can then be used as learning aids or edutainment tools across villages in the country. The aim being to not only promote and celebrate the craft and the people behind them but also create new ways of engagement between them and a larger audience interested in them but not able to access them directly for whatever reason.

The over-arching idea for each new typecraft, is, to challenge both the craftperson and ourselves as designers. The aim is to be able to engage and work with a number of forms of craft and tribal art from all parts of the country — that are made with varying materials for different purposes and a diverse set of meanings associated with the craft or tribal art.
WORKING TYPEFACES

GODNA
Ram Keli, Sumitra, Sunita I Godna (Art of tattooing) by the Gond Tribe, Surguja, Jamgala District, Chattisgarh

CHITTARA
Radha Sullur I Chittara Folk Art by the Deeveru community, Sagar District, Karnataka

LETTERFORMS

SANGAM
Sajnu ben I Debaria Rabari Embroidery by the Rabari community, Kukadsar, Kachchh

MADHUBANI
Marnita Jha I Mithila Folk Painting, Mithila, Bihar

SAMAANATA
Apam (Hao Crafts), Black Pottery, Ukhrul District, Manipur
CHALLENGES:

1. Functional Challenges: we face several challenges when working in the field with craftspeople and tribal artists — such as traveling and living in rural areas, getting used to the local conditions and sometimes, linguistic challenges. Additionally, working with these communities that are many times illiterate and almost always, have not worked with typefaces poses its own challenges. Any assistance from your organization in this regard would be very helpful.

2. Design Challenges: while designing the typeface we face numerous challenges such as how to ensure that the letters are legible and practical to use but yet imbibe the original sense of beauty and vitality that the craftspeople created. There is also the challenge of getting a fairly consistent set of letters and yet maintaining the “handmade” quality of the letters. The digitization of the physical artworks by the artisan into a vector artwork is a major task taking months to do.

3. Technical Challenges: we also face various difficulties in terms of converting letterforms into a working typeface due to the complexity of the letterforms and the nodes they contain are much more in number than in the case of a non-display typeface. Sometimes we have to simplify the letters or reduce the number of letters that can actually be a part of the finished font due to the limitations of technology.

In each case, working with a new group of craftspeople or tribal artists — means addressing different needs and challenges. Challenges such as explaining the rationale of this project to the community, the challenge of documenting an oral tradition that is usually left undocumented and open to interpretation, the difficulty of working with crafts in different mediums that each have their own pace and scale of how they are rendered. Then there is the technical challenge of transforming an age-old art form into a functional digital typeface that contains vital aspects from the original art or craft. The digital medium has been also chosen as it allows for the ease of dissemination of the typeface to markets across the world.

Then there is the challenge of disseminating information about this initiative to a broader audience and getting them to support the initiative through their purchase of the typeface.

We hope our customers, through their purchase, would not only learn more about these communities but also directly engage with them.

WHY INVEST IN THIS INITIATIVE?

- The Typcraft Initiative in the Gujarati script aims to involve communities of women engaged in embroidery from Kachchh. Communities such as Ahir, Rabari, Sodha Rajput etc., would be involved in the creation of the letterforms.

- The short-term benefit can be seen as providing employment for these women during the course of the project.

- However, we are keen on a longer-term benefit to these women and their communities which can be done in several ways. Firstly, through the creation of type-kits which can be physical letters of the Gujarati script embroidered by women from these communities — which can be used to teach Gujarati to their children but also sold in schools throughout the state.

- Secondly, the digital version of the typeface can be promoted for purchase and use by schools, colleges, the state government for use on official signage such as train stations, buildings etc. In this way, a short-term investment can lead to a product that can be sold to a large audience in a longer-term basis versus just selling one product. There is more scope for creating interest, awareness and involvement in Gujaratis in and outside of Kachchh. Additionally, artisans could potentially continue to earn from this project in the years to come via royalties on the sale of the typefaces.

- The typeface, which is created by combining traditional knowhow and knowledge systems of the women, along with design and digital technology is the first of its kind in the world.

- The font has value not only because of it is a functional resource in education but moreover because it is also archiving Indian crafts, many of which are sadly on the decline.

- Ultimately, these embroideries are a part of a living intangible cultural heritage that must be supported in new and innovative means to help sustain the livelihood and way of life of the artisans lest we lose this heritage forever.
What we are hoping from the funding and support of these projects is the following:

* Our energies can be better used to create more such typefaces and ensure that a good amount of the royalties from the sale of the typefaces can go back to the artisans who have made the typefaces. Currently, we put in our own capital to cover the costs of the artisans, the travel, stay etc. The sale of the typeface is used to help offset our own expenses and we are not able to fund future artisan initiatives.

* Promotion of the initiative in as many forums as possible to get more people to use the typefaces and also to create greater interest, understanding and participation of these people with artisan communities. Colleges, local governments etc., should especially invest into the typefaces made by local communities.

* As far as funding is concerned, we are interested in our costs getting covered so that we are able to do more projects with the same or new artisan groups. We are not interested in profits because all the profits are then reused for new initiatives with artisans.

* Documentation, Research. Can your organization help us with existing documentation and research on the various embroideries and communities that are involved with these embroideries that we can use to create a report and to promote the project online and eventually, funds permitting as a small book. Of course, all images and content provided will be duly credited.

* We face several challenges when working in the field with craftspeople and tribal artists — such as traveling and living in rural areas, getting used to the local conditions and sometimes, linguistic challenges. Additionally, working with these communities that are many times illiterate and almost always, haven’t worked with typefaces poses its own challenges. Any assistance from your organization in this regard would be very helpful.

In terms of actual expenses and time invested for instance the Godna Typecraft: we spent about Rs. 60,000 in fees, travel and board and lodging for the three artisans. Additionally we worked on the project over a course of 1.5 years with a total studio cost of approximately Rs. 3.5 lakhs.

For a project such as Gujarati, we can easily expect these costs to be higher due to the fact that the number of glyphs (unique characters) are much higher in number than in a Latin script.

There are several ways in which we can work together. These are some examples of ways in which we can work but they are not the only ways in which we can collaborate.

1. Equal Partnership: this means investing time and monetary resources or in-kind resources that match the number of resources we are investing into the project. In this case we would be each stakeholders of the final outcomes of the typeface. This means that incomes, expenses are equally shared and both of us agree to set aside a certain percentage of the income towards royalties for the artists once our costs are covered.

2. One-time investment of time and/or monetary resources. In this case, your organization can offer expertise, human resources, or other types of support for a duration of the project and in return, we can agree to offer various incentives such as naming the typeface after your organization, promoting your organization, volunteering our time or giving more projects to your organization. Again, some amount of royalty for the craftspeople will need to be set-aside, and perhaps your organization can match the amount we set aside.

What is important in any model is that we should not just pay the artisans royalty but help them in solving some of their core needs which could be getting online and showing/selling their work on social media or learning a few important English words etc.
We are very mindful of the fact that this is a collaboration and the work done via engagement with craftspeople or tribal artists is not to be done as an implementation of our design. It is a co-creation where some guidelines are provided by us but the work is done through their expertise.

When working with craftspeople and tribal artists, in general, it is important to firstly, treat them with respect and as equal partners in the project and to remember that they are the custodians of their own history and knowledge system. Whatever they create in terms of intellectual property belongs to them. Additionally, being humble about the fact that they are far more skilled than most of us designers. And that, we are not doing them a favour by working with them — but it's quite the contrary. Some of them might not have a formal education — but their knowledge and belief system, which has been handed down for generations — is immensely rich, and much more valuable than a college degree. It is also important for us to understand their context — in terms of where they come from, their practices and beliefs and current social and economic situation and challenges.

As far as The Typecraft Initiative is concerned, we involve craftspersons from various parts of country — some groups are more ‘exposed’ to working with outsiders, while others are not so. Understanding these differences is an important aspect of how much time is to be allocated to a particular group. The group that is less used to working with outsiders, needs more time to work and get comfortable with the project at hand.

Since all the people we work with have no exposure to typography, we start slowly. Sometimes we don’t even work on typography for the first week of our exchange. In the case of the Gond tribal artists, who create godna tattoos — we began by documenting their existing motifs and designs, and, interviewed them about these motifs and their tradition and belief system. We also recorded some of their songs. This made them feel more at home.

In the subsequent weeks, we slowly introduced them to working with typography. Giving an understanding of the project and yet being able to not burden them with the technical aspects of typography and type design is important. The designer must be sensitive to the both the artistic and aesthetic considerations along with the practical realities to type design and usage. The more complex the letters, the less usable they are. Conversely, the more simple and neutral the letters are, the less unique and authentic they might be to the original art or craft form they have come from and represent. Collaboration with Spanish type designer, Andreu Balús,
was an essential step for us to transform the letters into a workable typeface.

As an aside, I am saddened to see many designers and designs students brazenly create some form of craft or tribal art, on their own — without involvement of the group that owns that craft or tribal art — and claim ownership of the designs or concept. They have in effect stolen the IPR of the craftspeople and tribal artists, and used it without their permission.

The methodology for this project is to first understand the context of a craft — the tools, how its made, why it's made and any restrictions such as shapes or colors found in the craft. Additionally, to understand the life of the artisan, why they make a certain craft (for instance, for ritualistic purposes such as marriage, or functional purposes etc).

The next step is to think of how letters would work within the restriction of the craft if any and work with the artisan to get their understanding into the process. Its important that artisans aren't mere "implementers" but instead, are collaborators for the project.

We hope to scale this project and working in all the states of India, creating 29 unique typefaces, which when digitized and sold, while help the artisans and also take the project further and give them a more sustained income than a one-off project would.

**PROJECT EXAMPLES & TEAM**


Chittara Typcraft(2012): collaboration with Radha Sullur who works with traditional rice and clay paste art made on floors and walls of homes called Chittara. This art form is similar to rangoli (floor) and mandana (walls) and is made by women from the Deevaru community in Karnataka. We transformed Radha’s work into a fully functional digital display typeface.

Concept, Co-ordination, Art Direction, Type Design: Ishan Khosla Design | Type Design & Development by Andreu Ballus, Partner, The Typcraft Initiative.

Mithila Typcraft (2012): A commissioned work by the Australia India Design Platform for the conference, Make it New Again at NID. We worked with Mamta Jha to design the letters of the conference and eventually to design the entire typeface. Concept, Co-ordination, Art Direction, Type Design: Ishan Khosla Design

The following are not typefaces but letter forms done in a variety of mediums with different tribal and rural artisans and artists:
Manipuri Black Pottery (2013) a commissioned project by the Australia India Design Platform, was made with black pottery and cane in collaboration with Apam from the Ukhrul district of Manipur. Concept, Co-ordination, Art Direction, Type Design: Ishan Khosla Design

Dhebaria Rabari Embroidery (2011) an embroidered brand identity for the Australia India Design Platform, where we worked with Sajnu ben from the Dhebaria Rabari community based in Kukadsar, Kachchh. Concept, Co-ordination, Art Direction, Type Design: Ishan Khosla Design

Tal Patra Chitra (2011): lettering made by Bijay from Raghurajpur, Odisha on via engraving on palm leaf. Concept, Co-ordination, Art Direction, Type Design: Ishan Khosla Design

Skin Ink (2010) a commissioned project where we worked with mehndi artist, Raju Kumar, for the design of lettering for a book cover. Concept, Co-ordination, Art Direction, Type Design: Ishan Khosla Design

The Typecraft Project has received a lot of positive feedback from within and outside the design community:

Finalist, Kyoortus Design Awards

Both Godna and Chittara were a part of a recently concluded exhibition, Crossing Visions V: The Ecology of Creation at the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum in Japan.

Ishan Khosla has been invited to speak at the prestigious Typo Berlin — an annual conference of leading voices on typography and type design to speak about The Typecraft Initiative in May 2017.

Ishan Khosla has been invited to speak at the following venues to talk about The Typecraft Project:

The Relevance of Craft in Today's World, at M.S. Aalto University, Helsinki, Finland. 05/2017

University, Baroda as part of the Narrative Design in Craft conference. 02/2017

From Skin to the Screen: a look at the Godna tattoo Typeface, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Japan. 10/16

Work in Progress for Better Tomorrow, Gujral Foundation, Delhi. 09/16
Textile & Politics, The Yarn Club, The Lodhi, Delhi. 09/16
The Everyday in Design, CEPT, Ahmedabad. 09/16
University of Edinburgh, Scotland. 06/16
Design Akademie Berlin, Germany. 06/16
Work in Progress for Better Tomorrow as part of the Porosity Kabari event, Studio X, Mumbai. 02/16
Methodologies and Strategies in handling design projects. Oracle India, Bangalore. 09/15
10 Manifestos to Succeed as a Designer, Srishti School of Art and Design, Bangalore. 09/15
L'institut Supérieur des Arts Appliqués, Bangalore. 09/15
Understanding Design from Village India. T.A.J. Residency/SKE Projects, Bangalore. 09/15
Between Future and Tradition: Creating a New Design Idiom at Maison Des Sciences De L'Homme, Paris. 06/14
Speaker at Click Next: Conferenc on Design Thinking at IIT, New Delhi. 02/14

The Japan Foundation on Connections between Design and Traditional Culture. 12/13
The 7th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale, South Korea. 10/13
Speaker: Roots, Identity, Modernity, on tradition and the contemporary in the Asian context. 07/13
Culture, Craft and Society in the Context of Indian Design, Kona Design Pop-up, New Delhi. 01/13
Semi-Permanent (NZ): Panel Discussion: Value of Design from Different Cultures, Wellington. 11/12
Design x Design, Alliance Francaise, New Delhi. 09/12
TypoDay, Industrial Design Centre, IIT, Mumbai. 03/12
COFA, University of New South Wales, Sydney. 10/12
Sangam: the Australia India Design Platform, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi. 10/12
Moderator/Speaker, Multiple Realities: Creating Fruitful Client-Designer Relationships. 12/11
FUTURE GOALS

The long-term vision for this project, is to create a non-profit foundation to be able to give back to the communities we engage with. I believe that while this project is already beneficial to the tribal artists and craftspeople we work with — there is little long-term impact to their day to day lives. For this project to really make a difference, would mean giving back to the artists beyond just the payment of their fees.

The needs of each craft or tribal group can be very different. And the foundation would need to be able to support the specific needs of the people we involve in this initiative. For instance, while one group may need their home to be rebuilt for the monsoon, another may want to be able to sell online, and yet another needs funds for tools and raw materials.

My long-term vision for this project as well as other projects that engage with tribal and crafts groups is for them to have a palpable benefit to their standard of living. The foundation will also provide interest free loans to the groups it engages with. This can be of tremendous assistance in hard times.

As far as the near-term goals are concerned, I would like The Typecraft Initiative, to be more involved in creating Indic typefaces in scripts such as the devanagari and dravidian systems. This is far more challenging than creating typecraft in the Latin script, due to the number and complexity of the glyphs in Indic scripts. We will have to re-think our approach and how to simplify the letters to make them functional and yet embed the "DNA" of the craft into the letters — so that they represent the particular tribal or craft community involved in their creation.

Since I work a lot in the cultural sector, my goal is to include the completed typefaces from, The Typecraft Initiative, into these projects and also have more and more people and state governments use the these typefaces. It is only then that the project will be successful and can make a bigger impact.
GODNA
A TYPECRAFT INITIATIVE
FOR TITLING & DROP CAPS
CREATED WITH GOND
TRIBAL TATTOO ARTISTS FROM CENTRAL INDIA
GODNA MOTIFS

Karela Godna  Karela Godna  Bichoo Godna  Hardi Gayith Godna  Machi Mudi Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna
Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna  Machli Godna

ANATOMY OF MOTIFS
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

THE TYPECRAFT INITIATIVE

New Delhi | Barcelona
Ishan Khosla & Andreu Balisú, Partners
www.typecraftinitiative.org