



The Art of Letters

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Early last year, Mohammad Samiul Sabbir Islam Ayon from Khulna University became interested in calligraphy – the art of drawing letters in an artistic fashion. After experimenting with Latin letters for a while, he figured he should give Bangla calligraphy a go. From that idea sparked the creation of “Matra -Bangla Calligraphy and Lettering”, one of the biggest Bangla calligraphy communities online. That happened in May 2015. Nearly a year later, the group is thriving and has over 700 members regularly posting and sharing their work.

Ayon was fascinated by Bangla fonts from the old days, especially those used for newspaper headlines and banners during the Liberation War. The wall writings, commonly known as “chika mara”, had also intrigued Ayon since childhood. At the same time, there was a renewed interest in Bangla typeface across the internet. All of these things came together in inspiring Ayon, who realised there was no common place for discussion on this particular interest online. “There was no place for bringing the lovers of Bangla letters and calligraphy

together and that got me thinking,” Ayon said.

Ayon, now an experienced artist and graphics designer, sought help from fellow artists. “I spoke to Tamzid Farhan Mogno, Tilok Adnan and Atif Ahmed Akkhor from Ionsketch, as well as my friends Ashrafal Amin and Tasmiah Alam from Hootum Design Studios. We agreed that we should open a group and it all took off from there.” The name “Matra” was chosen because the *matra* itself is an integral part of Bangla and its sister languages, something that is uncommon in languages around the world.

From day one, the group focused on becoming an archive of sorts. Besides posting their own works, members also collect and share various examples of Bangla calligraphy and fonts from the past. As it stands, the photo albums in the public group are rich with samples from various points in history as well as modern styles created by members.

Members of the group include calligraphy enthusiasts from across the country. Abul Hayat Shiblu, a full-time engineer and calligraphy enthusiast, said, “Bangla has been used to type official documents for centuries now. From the early printing presses to

typewriters to today's fonts, the letters and designs have evolved tremendously. We are trying to keep track of and celebrate this diversity. I believe this group will inspire people to know that there is a lot of scope for exploration here.”

Ayon himself hopes to expand the group in the coming days. “It was basically created to get Bangla lovers under one roof and get everyone to see the beauty of our written language and its letters. We want to organise festivals and workshops to inspire people into knowing more about this. The fact that I live outside of Dhaka sometimes gets in the way but I am hopeful.”

Given the sort of growth Matra has had in under a year, it's fair to assume that this group has a bright future. A vibrant and thriving online community, it's worth checking out if you are curious about Bangla calligraphy and how our letters have evolved over the ages.

Check out Matra at www.facebook.com/groups/649949545105471

ILLUSTRATIONS: MOHAMMAD SAMIUL SABBIR ISLAM AYON, HAMIM XEF, HULO HULO, NAEM AHMED, SHAKIR HOSSAIN, TASMIAH ALAM, SUBINOY MUSTOFI ERON

