

### **Bringing elegance to letters**

Jayan Menon's thesis, which links the content of typography with the form of types and design, will be the subject of a talk and exhibition on June 25 at the British Council.



"A BOOK is a thing to be read. Hence it is the act of reading and the circumstances of that act that determines the size of the book and the kind of type used — the reading, not what is read," said Eric Gill in an essay on Typography.

Most of us tend to agree with this statement, or rather we have not thought of the role of typography and its implications beyond a point in connection with the art of reading and the function of publishing books. As long as the letters are legible, and not too small or arranged in a crowded fashion in a page arrangement, we are happy.

Not so for Jayan Menon, who has done an M.A. in Communication Design from one of the oldest institutes, Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design, London. Jayan will be sharing the contents of his thesis to be submitted at the end of the course through a talk and exhibition arranged at the British Council on June 25.

Jayan disputes the traditional theory that a book is to be read and not to be seen. His contention is that while the function of a book is "to be read", seeing what is being read adds a new dimension and is an integral part of it. So, the visual aspect of typography cannot be ignored.

typography is not  
 another language system  
 to represent language  
 just make the language  
 system of speech

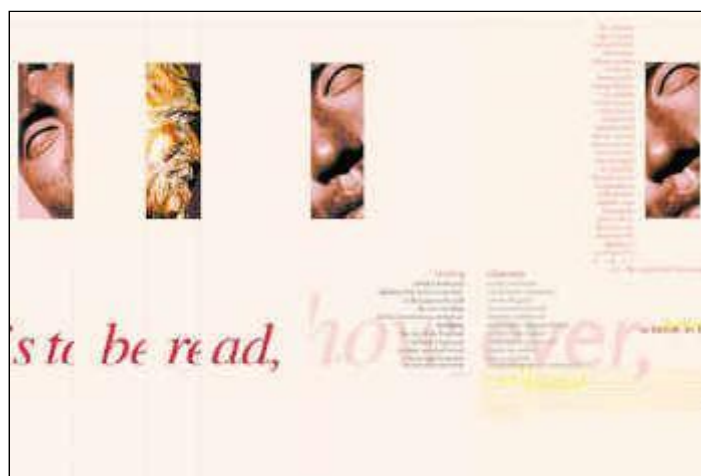
Through his thesis, he argues that the traditional emphasis on the aesthetics of typography can be judiciously combined with the modern and more commercial emphasis on printing more material at a cheaper cost by standardising typography and reducing it to a mere functional quality.

In other words, Jayan is linking the content of typography with the form of the types and the way (design) in which they are arranged.

When asked what was the impulse behind his research, he said that for 20 years, he had worked on editing and designing and therefore, had an interest in the development of typography. As a designer, he feels that form and content cannot be separated into water-tight compartments.

In more literary terms, while the content is the signified, form is the signifier and therefore, has to be given as much attention as the former. Even though commercial viability has reduced the form to a standardised format, from the reader's point of view, the value for money becomes important and therefore, the quality of the paper used, the arrangement of typography on the pages, the method of binding etc., have a bearing on sales. An ideal mixture of the use of a book with the aesthetics of design is what Jayan recommends. The practical work he did at St. Martins is fascinating. He has converted it into a book, which will be showcased at the exhibition. Only when we see the traditional ornamental designs and arrangements of letters on a page do we realise how crass the present day standardised typography has become.

All over the world, the reading is on the wane. If we pose the question why, the answer is clear. The printed word is not presented in an attractive format.



The children find it more interesting to watch TV or play around with computers rather than read books.

So, if aesthetics of typography is given more attention and books are better designed, the younger generation may shift attention from TV and computers to books.

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