Annual Report for the year 2005-06

Introduction

The year 2005 06 marked a watershed year in the activities of Samskriti Foundation. After a lull in the activities of the Foundation for the last few years as far as undertaking different projects were concerned, this year saw a giant leap in the activities.

I. MoU signed with National Mission for Manuscripts, Dept of Tourism and Culture, Govt. of India

The Foundation was approached by the National Mission for Manuscripts, Dept of Tourism and Culture, Govt. of India to develop Self-Teaching Interactive Multimedia Packages on the ancient Scripts of Grantha and Sharada. An MoU was signed between the National Mission for Manuscripts, Dept of Tourism and Culture, Govt. of India and Samskriti Foundation and the same was taken up in right earnest.

II. Development of Self-Teaching Interactive Multimedia Package on the ancient Script of Grantha

GRANTHA LIPISIKHSHAKA
'An interactive Multimedia tutorial on Grantha Script'

Objective: To create a unique multimedia tutorial on Grantha Script, that is simple, user-friendly and knowledge-oriented.

The objective of this document is to provide information on the nuances of creating this product, through intensive research, knowledge gathering and technical evaluations.

Product: An interactive multimedia tutorial on age-old Grantha Script, that One can click through an user-friendly interface with relevance to Devanagari Script.
Audio sounds for each alphabet have been included, enabling the users to easily identify the Grantha alphabets, and aid them to phonetically pronounce them perfectly.
An option to practice the calligraphy has been provided to teach the user the correct process of writing the Grantha Script for a better understanding of the language.
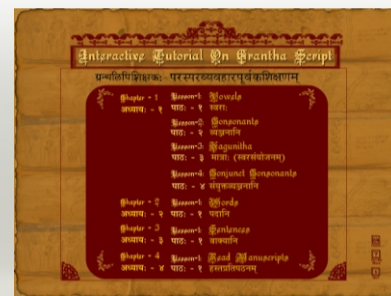
The 'Write' button in the interface enables a feather tip utility to practice the calligraphy, with options to 'Erase' and 'End' the practice session.

These options have been included to provide maximum flexibility for the learner to practice umpteen numbers of times, learning to improve the calligraphy style each time.

Features: The product includes many unique features, to facilitate users to learn the script through an interactive approach, making an interesting fun-based learning.
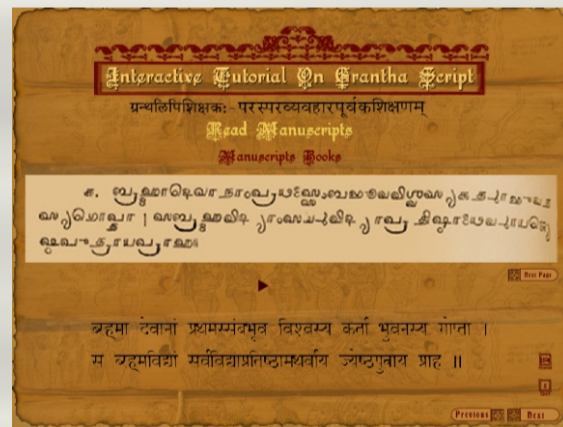
Feature include,

- ♦ Display of Grantha alphabets
- ♦ Calligraphy of Grantha Script
- ♦ Devanagari Equivalent
- ♦ Practice Area To enable the User to write and practice the calligraphy of the alphabets
- ♦ READ option for understand the phonetics of the alphabets with audio files of the respective alphabets
- ♦ WRITE option for practicing the calligraphy

Content: The product is a one of its kind, comprehensive, interactive learning package, which empowers the Users with in-depth understanding of the Grantha Script.

Content includes,

- ♦ Vowels
- ♦ Consonants
- ♦ Ka gunithas
- ♦ Conjunct Consonants
- ♦ Words
- ♦ Sentences
- ♦ Exercises to evaluate Oneself after thorough learning
- ♦ Read manuscript option Sample scripts written on palm leafs, books
- ♦ Tell Me More Background of the Grantha Script and its evolution
- ♦ Final observations Scholar's observations about the script, its importance and relevance in this modern context

Production Approach:

Primarily the product development was approached through a prototype using Visual Basic as front-end to display respective Grantha alphabets based on specific inputs, with relevance to Devanagari Script.
This successful prototype formed the basis for the development of the product.

After thorough review, Flash MX was identified and concluded as the application package for authoring, scripting the publishing this interactive tutorial product.

Challenges encountered during the product development:
Being a rare unknown script to the modern human race, this script does not find any mention or support from the Information Technology domain. Owing to this, the script has not be converted to digital formats for reading documents or communicating using computers. Scholars with knowledge of the Grantha Script and Sanskrit have done intensive research in custom developing the Grantha Font from ground zero, including creating exclusive calligraphy and then converting each alphabet into Grantha Fonts. Character mapping technology also widely used for various fonts/applications has not been a very successful tool for this script, as most of the subscripts and super scripts is not recognized and does not work.

Each time the technical team had to carefully evaluate the process of font generation, font import and match the calligraphy to ensure that each alphabet, word and sentence translates to the correct meaning, as expected.

Flash MX one of the most advanced graphic applications for developing multimedia products, has also got its own limitations including behaviour of fonts (custom-made) within itself, as Grantha Fonts were custom developed and imported to suit the interactive requirements. Animating the calligraphy for each alphabet was very time consuming and challenging, as it involved in creating the calligraphy for more than 800 characters, each of which demanding precision and finesse.

Further, defining the co-ordinates for each alphabet to appear within a specified area and also to enable the user to practice the calligraphy within a specified area was even more tedious.

Conclusion

Using all the above software and the expertise at the disposal of the Foundation, the software was completed and sent to the authorities of the National Mission for Manuscripts, Dept of Tourism and Culture, Govt. of India for approval. The same was very much acclaimed and further funds were released to develop a similar package on Sharada script.

III. **Conducting of free Sanskrit and Yoga Classes at the Premises of the Foundation**

As in the previous years, Sanskrit and Yoga classes were continued to be held in the premises of the Foundation. This year the response was very encouraging and about 10 students from different parts of UK attended the classes. The classes were conducted in the months of July / August 2005.

IV. **Prof. M.A.Lakshmithathachar conferred the award of President of India**

Prof. M.A.Lakshmithathachar, President of the Foundation was conferred with the award of the President of India for his outstanding contribution to the cause of Sanskrit and also his versatile scholarship in Sanskrit literature and Indian philosophy. In a grand investiture ceremony held at the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in December 2005, the President of India Dr APJ Abdul Kalam honored Prof MA Lakshmithathachar and also congratulated him for his yeoman service to Sanskrit and urged him to continue the same for many years to come. The Foundation is proud to place on record this honor to its President who is an internationally acclaimed scholar and wishes him many more fruitful years of service to humankind and Sanskrit.

V. **Collection of Manuscripts and Library**

From time immemorial Indians were experts not only in the oral tradition but also in the tradition of preserving their knowledge in the form of writings. These writings used different media like palm leaf, birch bark etc. However palm leaves are the predominant media that was used from long ago to house valuable information about the wide range of topics including medicine, indigenous science and technology, philosophy et al. The Foundation is actively involved in not only creating awareness about the invaluable worth of the palm leaf manuscripts that house our ancient knowledge system but also collect them and preserve them for posterity. Many invaluable manuscripts were collected during the course of this year also.

Apart from this, many valuable books also were added to the library of the Foundation.

VI. **Conclusion**

This year has been one of the important years in the history of the Foundation due to the fact the President of the Foundation, Prof MA Lakshmithathachar has started to devote his services full time for guiding the activities of the Foundation. It is hoped that here onwards, under his able guidance the Foundation will realize its full potential and will set a unique benchmark in service to mankind by taking pioneering steps for the preservation and propagation of Indian Cultural heritage.

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