

## *An Exploratory Study to Reconcile Urdu Language and Contemporary Logo Design*

Anosh Gill, Florida A&M University, United States  
Syeda Mehwish Zara Zaidi, SZABIST University Karachi, Pakistan  
Jeffrey S. Wilkinson, Florida A&M University, United States  
Anthony Rundles, Jr., Florida State College at Jacksonville, United States

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### **Abstract**

This study explores the integration of traditional Urdu script with contemporary logo design principles to create a cross-cultural visual style that retains cultural authenticity while appealing to global audiences. Urdu script, known for its fluidity and unique ligature-based system, is prominent in South Asia, especially in Pakistan and India. Yet, much of the graphic design in these regions has been shaped by Western influences, limiting the development of Urdu-specific typography in modern branding. To address this gap, the study employed four distinct design approaches: (1) Non-Ligature Form: breaking down Urdu's conventional ligatures to present letters in disconnected forms, allowing designers to experiment with shapes and new arrangements; (2) Geometric Shapes: using fundamental shapes like circles, squares, and rectangles as structural frames for Urdu characters, thus blending traditional typography with minimalist modern aesthetics; (3) Single-Letter Design: isolating individual Urdu letters as standalone design elements, showcasing their unique forms and enhancing their use as recognizable symbols; and (4) Conceptual Design: applying Gestalt principles to create symbolic and visually engaging logos, where Urdu characters take on conceptual shapes to convey brand meanings. Through these approaches, the study illustrates how Urdu script can be adapted to contemporary branding while preserving its cultural essence. The final case study on the Pakola brand, a popular Pakistani beverage, demonstrates how these design methods can generate logos that are both locally resonant and globally recognizable. This hybrid design style offers a foundation for future Urdu typography development, fostering innovative design that bridges cultural heritage with modern visual communication (Boutros, 2007; Shehab & Nawar, 2020).

Keywords: Urdu, Graphic Design, Calligraphy, Cross-Cultural Communication, Branding, Logo Design, Contemporary Logo, Conceptual Logo, Typographic Logo, Typography

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## Introduction

Languages shape visual communication, with each script offering unique design potential. While English is dominant in international design, Urdu holds a significant place in South Asia. With over 230 million speakers worldwide, Urdu's script presents a flowing, cursive structure that is like Arabic and Farsi in appearance but distinct in alphabet and phonetics (Munir & Ifftikhar, 2024). Unlike English, which easily lends itself to typographic experimentation, Urdu typography remains closely tied to traditional calligraphy, limiting its use in contemporary design (Boutros, 2007).

In response to the growing need for multicultural communication, this research proposes a fresh approach: blending Urdu script elements with modern typographic principles. Such integration could enable Urdu to function visually beyond its verbal content, allowing for innovative logo designs that resonate across cultures. By exploring the visual applications of Urdu without the constraint of its customary ligature forms, we open new opportunities for designers to experiment and redefine how Urdu script communicates meaning (Duncan, 2020).

## Historical Context of Script and Design

Urdu script traces its lineage to early visual communication systems, evolving through prehistoric art, Mesopotamian logographs, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and the Greek alphabet. Each of these ancient systems laid essential groundwork for Urdu's distinctive form.

1. **Prehistoric Communication:** Over 40,000 years ago, early humans used cave paintings and petroglyphs to tell stories and convey beliefs visually. This foundational use of symbols to represent ideas influenced the development of structured writing systems that followed (Little, 2021) (Figure 1).
2. **Mesopotamian Logographs:** Around 3200 BCE, Sumerians created cuneiform, one of the first writing systems, which evolved from pictographs to logographs, allowing symbols to represent words and ideas. This move to abstract symbols paved the way for scripts like Urdu, which blends phonetic and symbolic elements (Spar, 2004) (Figure 2).
3. **Egyptian Hieroglyphics:** Egyptian hieroglyphics combined pictorial symbols and phonetics to represent sounds and meanings. This layered system inspired later scripts, including Urdu, by demonstrating how symbols could convey complex meanings through both form and sound (The British Museum, 2024) (Figure 3).
4. **Greek Alphabet:** The Phoenician alphabet introduced symbols for sounds, later adapted by the Greeks, marking a shift to phonetic alphabets. This phonetic focus influenced Urdu's approach to representing sounds through distinct letter shapes (Howitt, 2020) (Figure 4).

Urdu's cursive structure, symbolic ligatures, and phonetic versatility reflect these historical influences, making it a rich, visually expressive script well-suited for innovative design. The evolution of graphic design in Arab and Persian regions was deeply influenced by social and political factors, which encouraged designers to experiment with traditional scripts. As Arab designers migrated to the West, they began developing typefaces that combined Arabic calligraphy with Western typographic styles, leading to the creation of new fonts that retained

cultural elements but were adapted for broader audiences (Shehab & Nawar, 2020). Urdu, despite its close ties to Arabic and Persian scripts, has not experienced the same typographic evolution due to limited development within Pakistan’s design industry. This has resulted in a gap in Urdu typography, which remains heavily reliant on calligraphy (Ijaz et al., 2022).

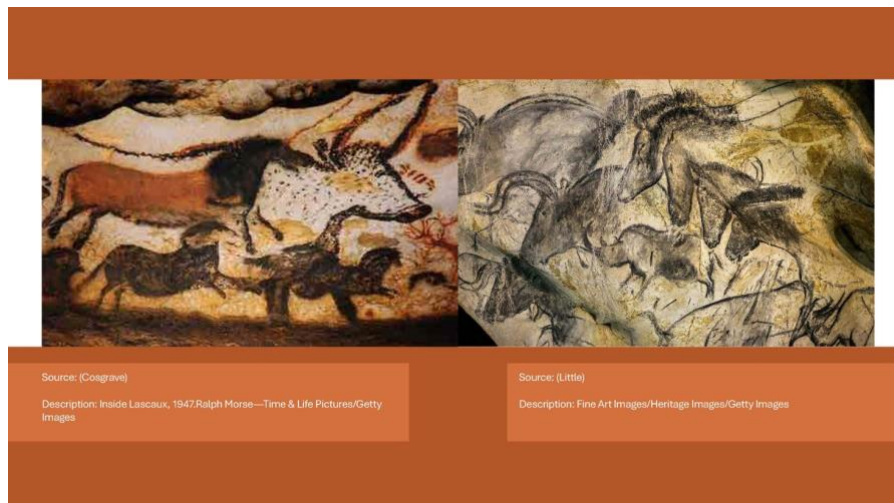


Figure 1: Prehistoric Cave Paintings

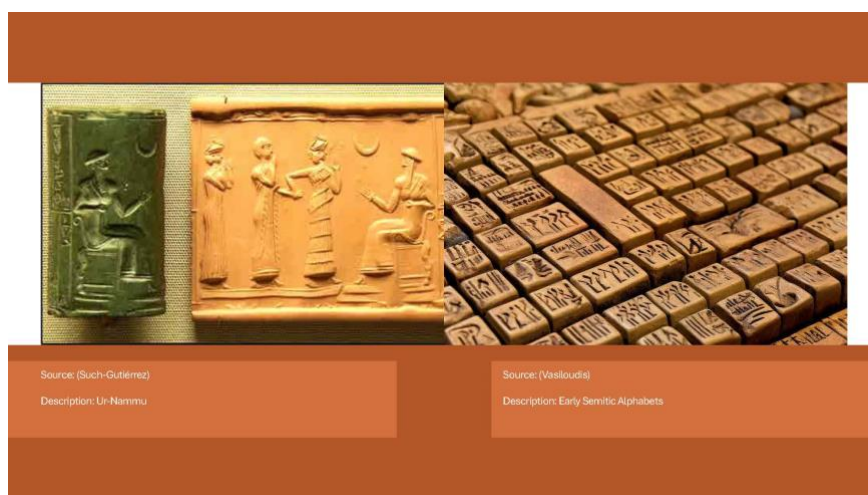


Figure 2: Mesopotamian Logographs

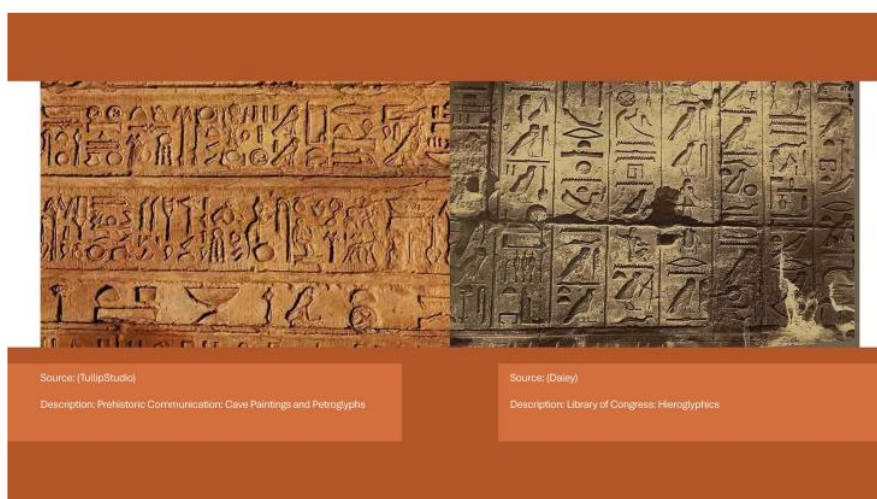


Figure 3: Egyptian Hieroglyphs



Figure 4: Greek Alphabet Tablets

## Study Focus

This research explores how to treat Urdu script as a purely visual form, minimizing its traditional verbal associations. By focusing on established Pakistani brands, in this case, Pakola, this study emphasizes experimental design approaches without altering brand identity. Pakola, with its association with Pakistan's green national color, serves as a canvas for this exploration, representing how Urdu script could be visually modified to maintain cultural significance while achieving a modern look (Mooney & Coorey, 2017).

## Methodology and Preliminary Brand Experiments

To develop a foundation for the Pakola brand logo, preliminary experiments were conducted with three other prominent Pakistani brands: Qarshi, Shan, and Bundu Khan. These projects allowed us to explore different approaches to Urdu typography, blending the script with various conceptual and geometric elements.

1. **Qarshi (Ligatures):** Qarshi's logo experimentation focused on the rich ligature style of Urdu script, preserving the flowing connections between letters. This approach emphasized the beauty and harmony in Urdu ligatures, making it possible to create a brand identity that speaks to purity and wellness. Ligatures were manipulated to maintain readability while giving the logo a refined, organic look that fits with Qarshi's brand image of health and natural products (O'Connor, 2015) (Figure 5-10).
2. **Shan (Conceptual):** Shan Foods, known for its spices, inspired us to explore Urdu typography through conceptual design. Using Gestalt principles, Urdu letters were stylized in a way that suggested concepts of freshness, quality, and culinary heritage. The letterforms were modified to incorporate crown-like shapes, reflecting the brand's emphasis on premium quality. This design exercise highlighted how Urdu script could visually convey product qualities without relying on literal representations, adding depth to the logo through symbolic elements (Martin & James, 2022) (Figures 11-16).
3. **Bundu Khan (Geometric Shapes and Conceptual Letter Shape):** For Bundu Khan, a popular Pakistani restaurant brand, geometric shapes were experimented with to represent Urdu characters. Squares, circles, and rectangles were used to explore how Urdu letters

could be framed to maintain both cultural relevance and aesthetic appeal. This geometric structuring simplified Urdu forms, enabling a minimalist, modern look that diverged from traditional calligraphic style but retained cultural significance. The logo also incorporated single-letter designs, such as a "ب" shape that symbolized the food the brand is famous for, emphasizing Bundu Khan's traditional culinary roots in a contemporary format (Bokhua, 2022; Duncan, 2020) (Figures 17-22).



Figure 5: Qarshi Ligature Concept



Figure 6: Qarshi Inner Leaves

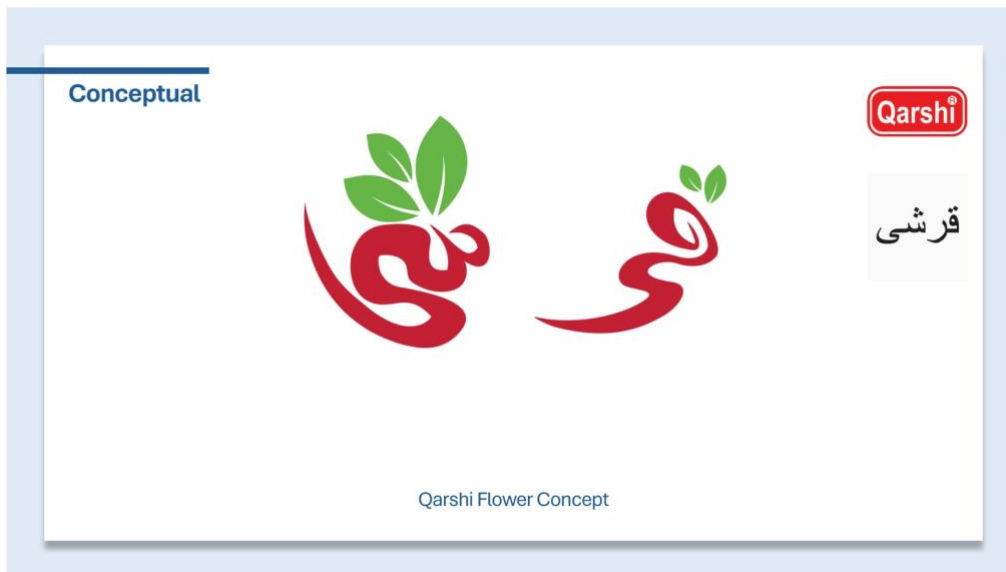


Figure 7: Qarshi Flower Concept

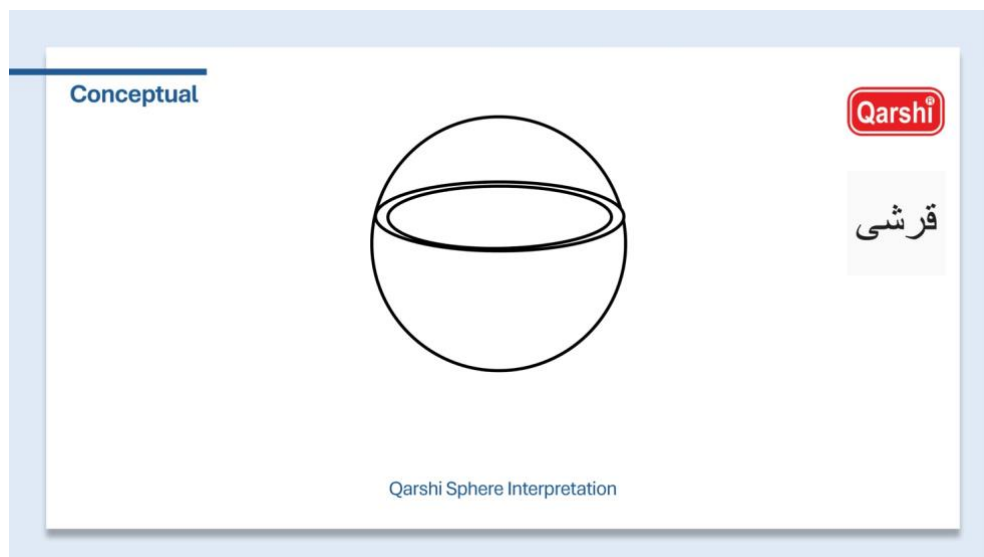


Figure 8: Qarshi Sphere

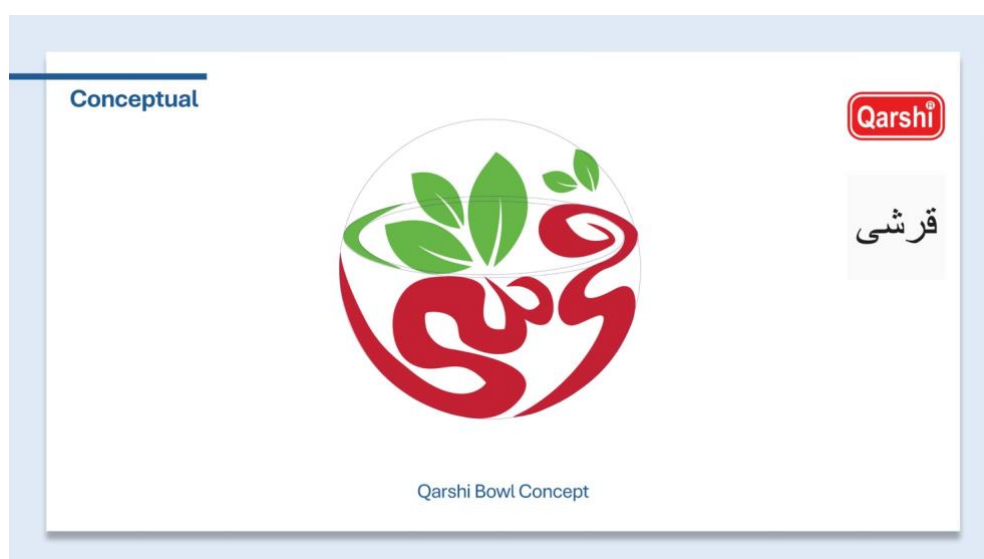


Figure 9: Qarshi Bowl Concept



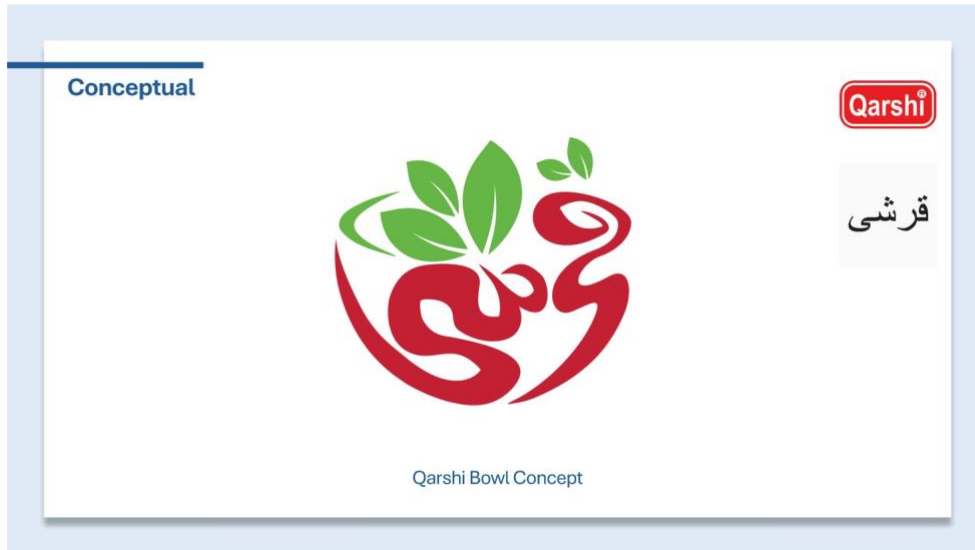


Figure 10: Qarshi Flower Bowl

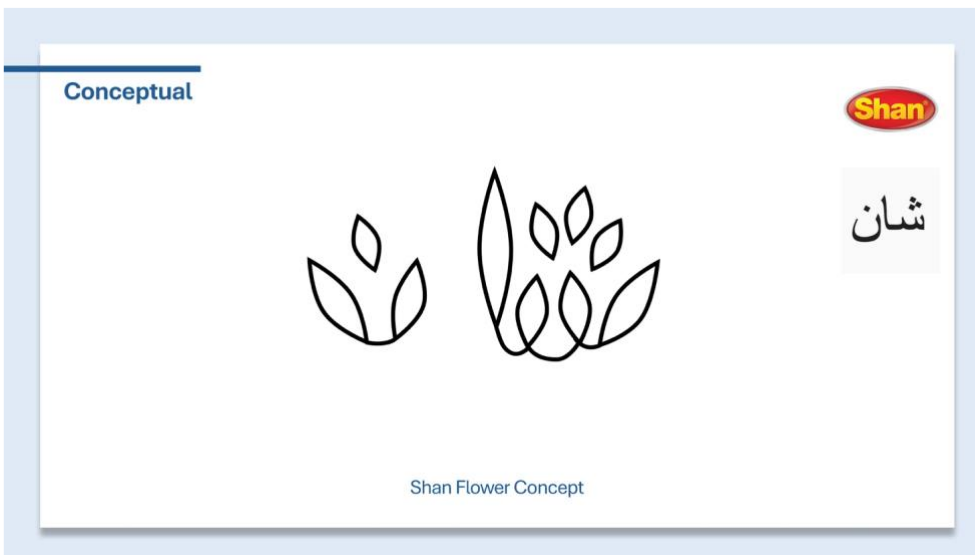


Figure 11: Shan Flower

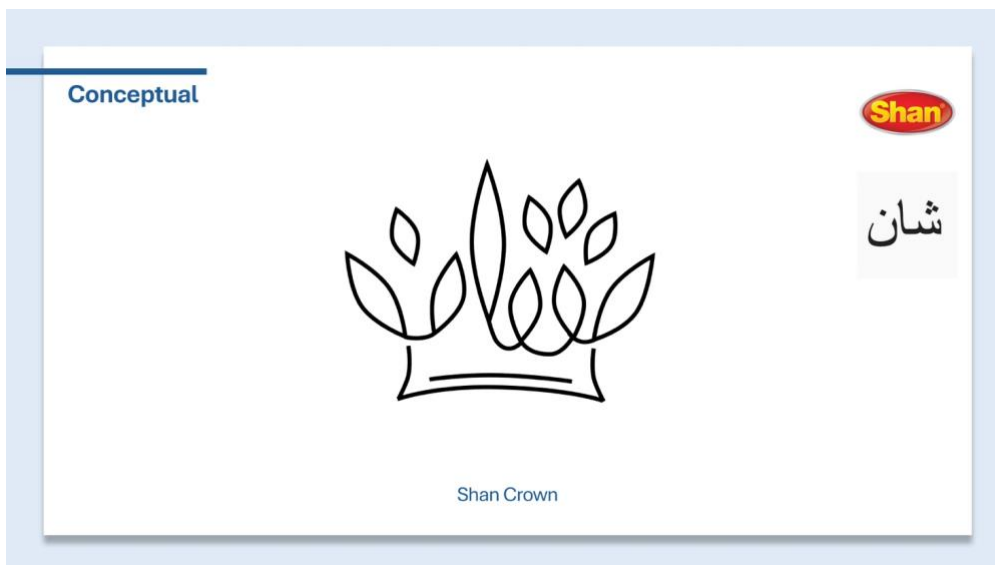


Figure 12: Shan Crown

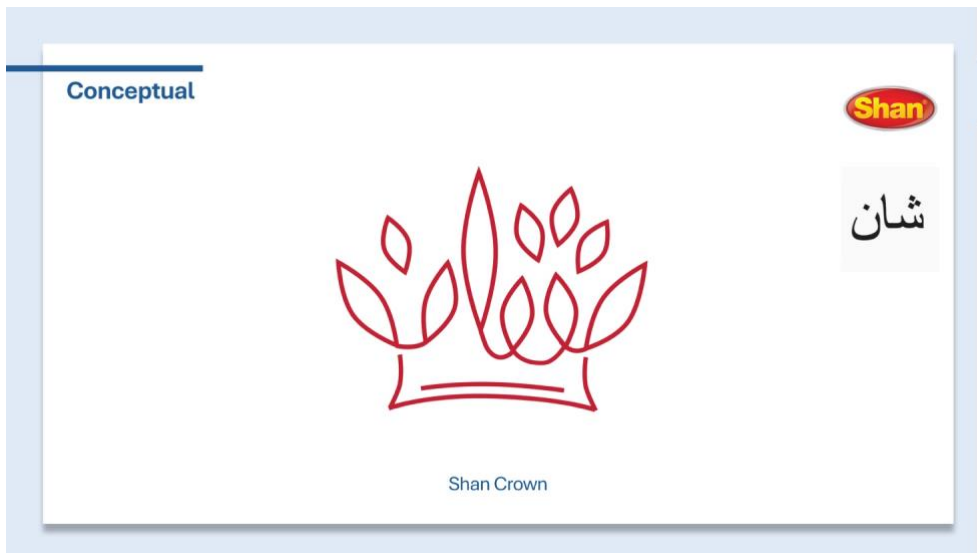


Figure 13: Shan Crown

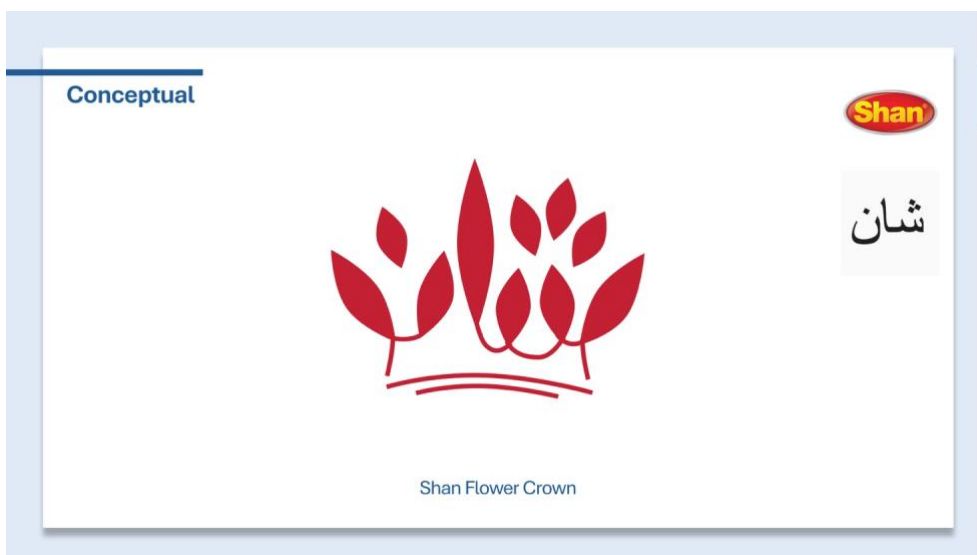


Figure 14: Shan Flower Crown

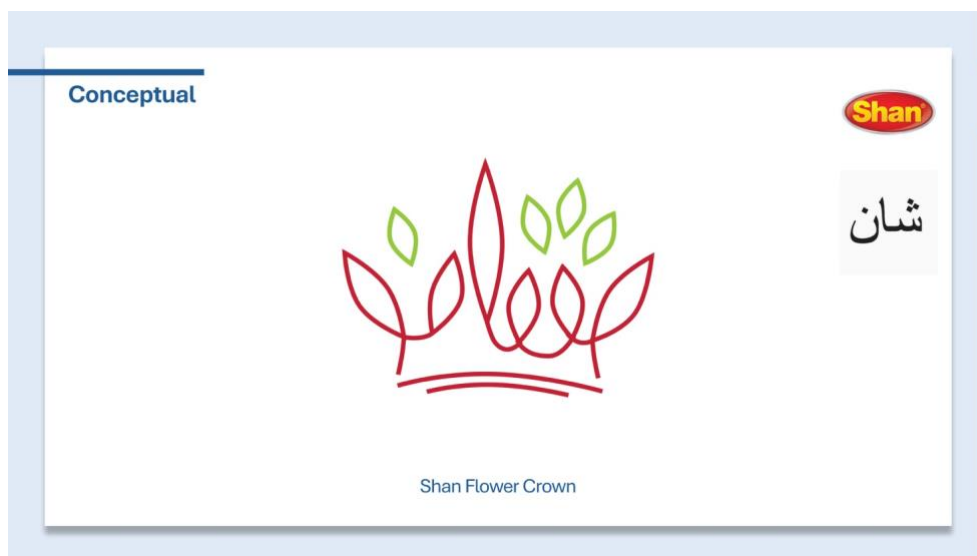


Figure 15: Shan Flower Crown



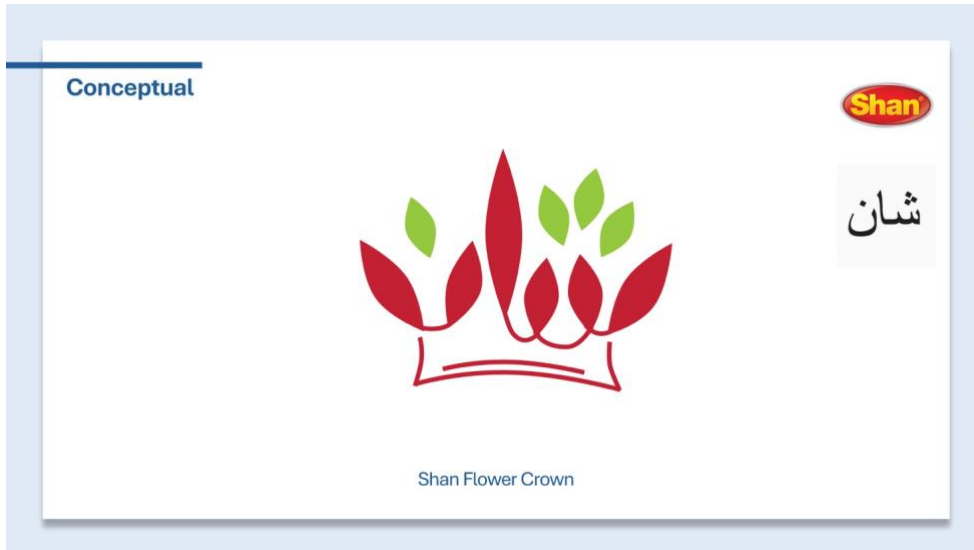


Figure 16: Shan Flower Crown

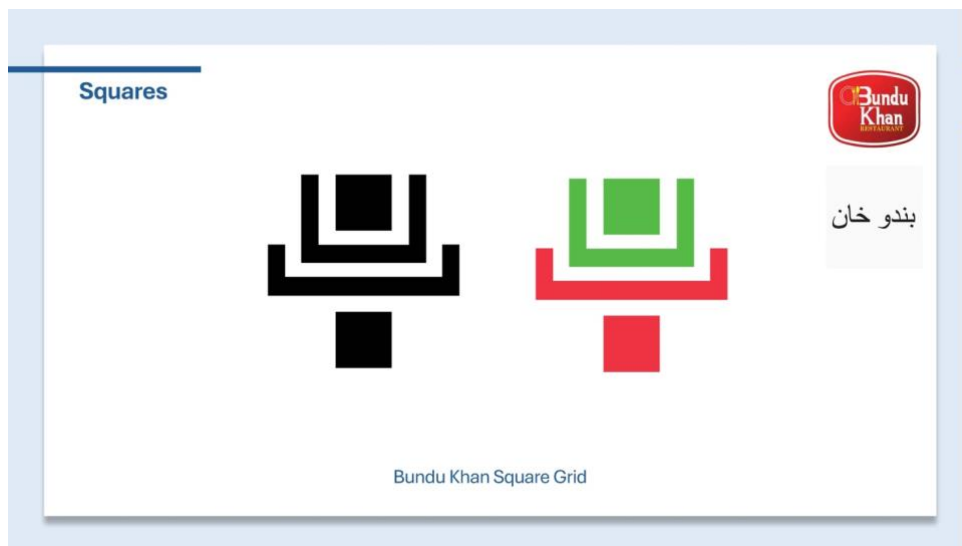


Figure 17: Bundu Khan Square Grid

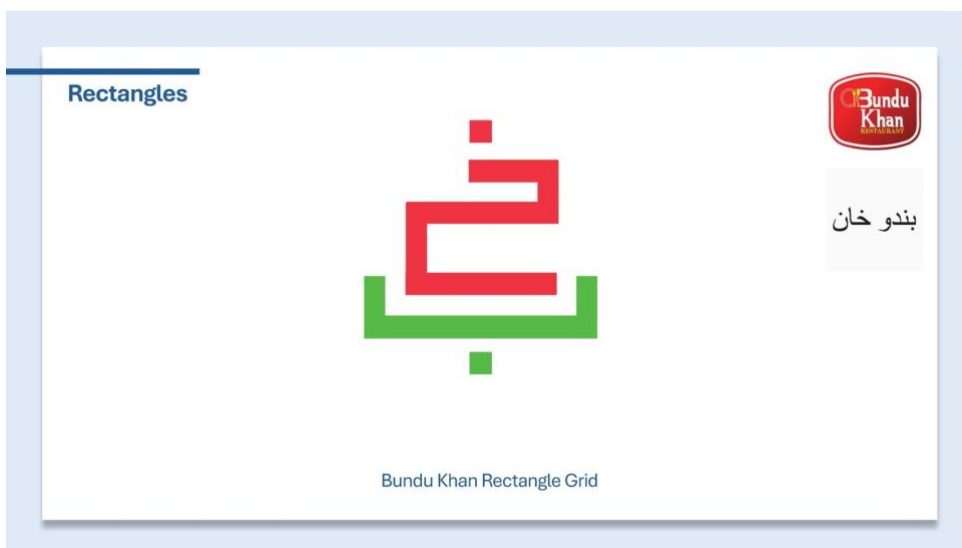


Figure 18: Bundu Khan Rectangle Grid

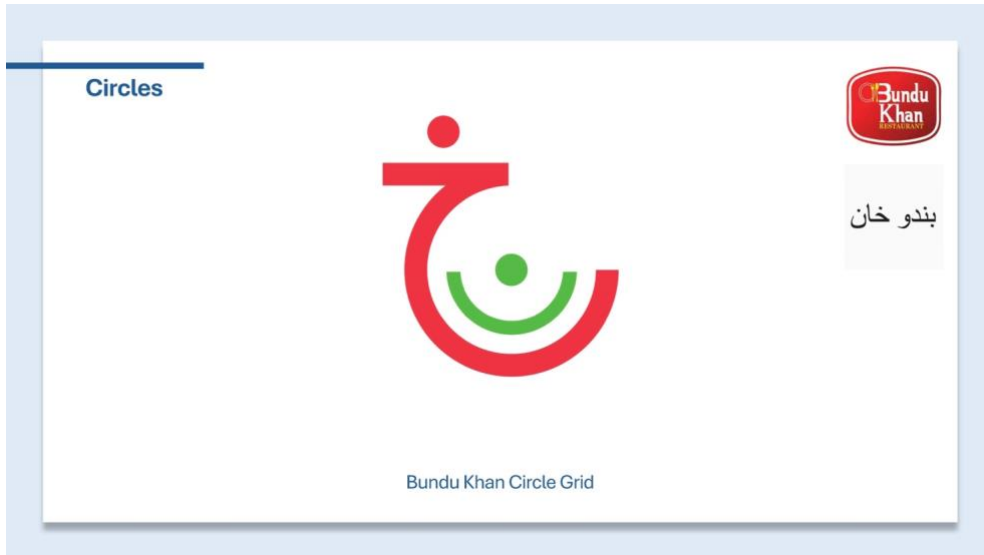


Figure 19: Bundu Khan Circle Grid

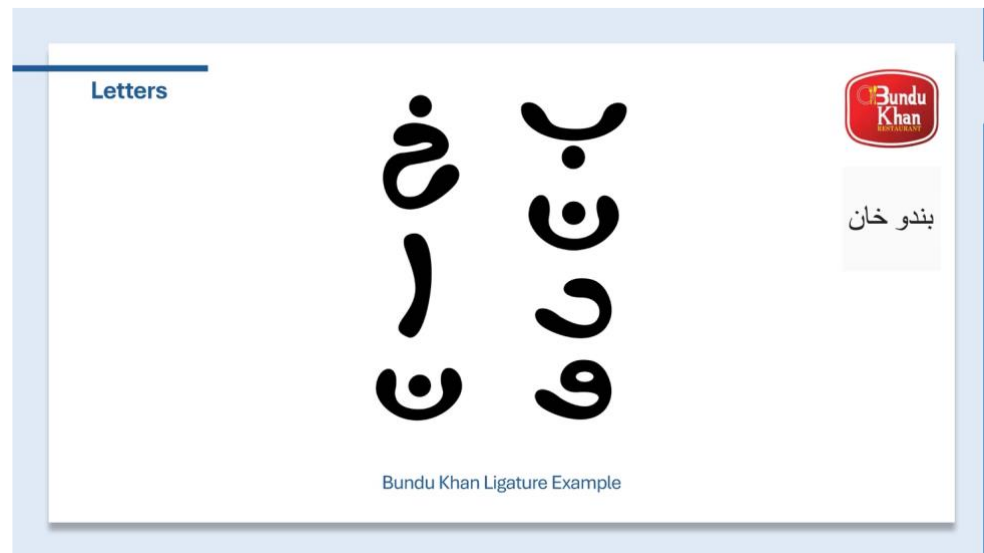


Figure 20: Bundu Khan Ligature

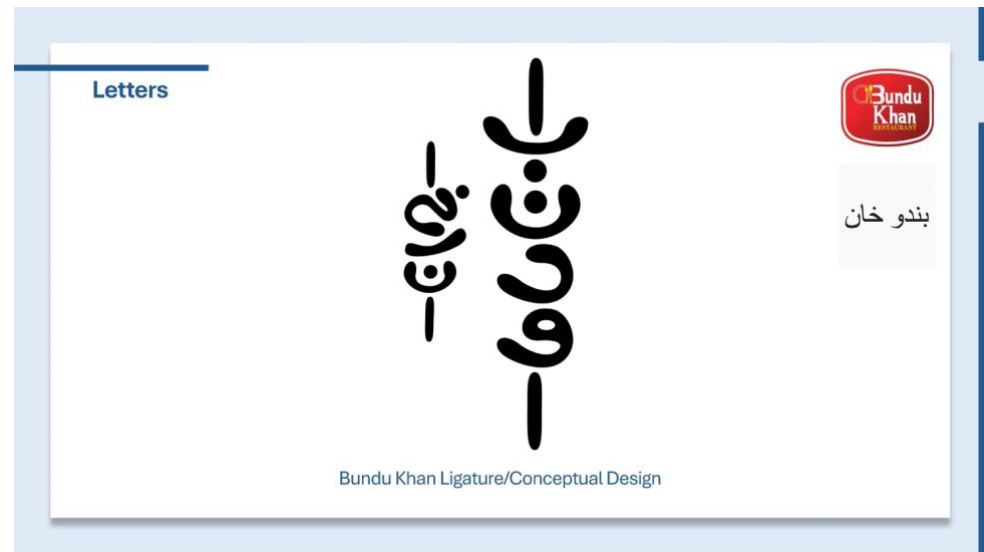


Figure 21: Bundu Khan Ligature Conceptual Design

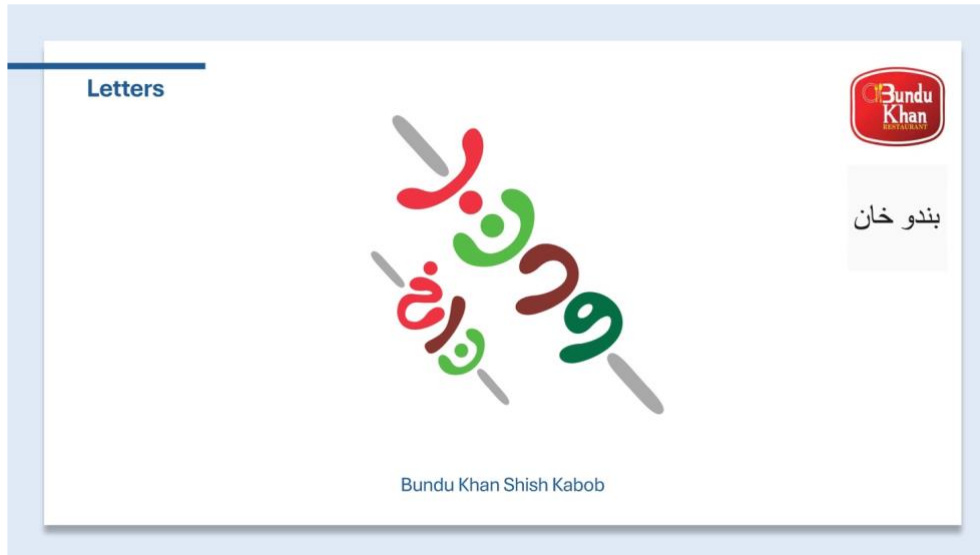


Figure 22: Bundu Khan Shish Kabob Design

### Application to Pakola Brand

The insights gained from the preliminary projects with Qarshi, Shan, and Bundu Khan provided a solid foundation for experimenting with the Pakola brand, a beloved Pakistani carbonated drink known for its distinctive green color and strong association with Pakistani identity. Building on the approaches used for these brands, each technique was applied—ligatures, conceptual design, and geometric shapes—to the Pakola logo, aiming to preserve its cultural associations while modernizing its visual style.

1. **Ligature Form:** Inspired by the Qarshi design, a simplified ligature style was used to connect Pakola's Urdu script with a bold, cohesive design that retained the fluidity and familiarity of traditional Urdu letters.
2. **Geometric and Conceptual Forms:** Drawing from the geometric and conceptual work with Bundu Khan and Shan, rounded droplet shapes were introduced to represent Pakola's liquid nature, incorporating vibrant green hues inspired by Pakistan's national flag to further reinforce Pakola's connection with national pride (Nemeth, 2020).
3. **Multilingual Iterations (Urdu, English, Japanese):** To showcase Pakola's cultural resonance across languages, logo iterations were developed in Urdu, English, and Japanese. Each iteration was designed to capture Pakola's identity while adapting to the visual characteristics of each script. The Urdu version emphasized traditional ligature forms, while the English and Japanese versions employed geometric simplicity and minimalism to make the brand accessible to a broader, global audience. These multilingual conceptual designs reinforced Pakola's cross-cultural appeal and also demonstrated how Urdu script can be stylized alongside other languages to maintain brand coherence and cultural inclusivity (Figures 23-29).

Through these experiments, the Pakola brand logo illustrates how Urdu characters can be adapted into innovative designs that connect with audiences in different cultural contexts. The combination of Urdu, English, and Japanese iterations demonstrates the flexibility of the Urdu script and its potential to represent a brand across diverse linguistic and visual systems.

This approach underscores the importance of culturally adaptive design and sets a precedent for future logo creation in multilingual branding contexts.



Figure 23: Pakola Ligatures



Figure 24: Ligatures Suggesting a Water Droplet



Figure 25: Using Brand Colors



Figure 26: Pakola Logo in English



Figure 27: Pakola Logo in Urdu and English



Figure 28: Pakola Logo in Japanese



Figure 29: Pakola Logo in Urdu, English, and Japanese

### Observations and Insights

The experimental designs reveal that Urdu script has the potential to engage global audiences when visually adapted in unconventional ways. Breaking down traditional ligatures and reimagining Urdu characters as standalone elements allows for a fresh perspective on Urdu's role in branding. While certain designs challenged readability, they also stimulated viewers to think beyond conventional typography, fostering an appreciation for the cultural and visual depth of Urdu script (Bokhua, 2022; Nemeth, 2020).

This study demonstrates that Urdu script, when treated as a design form, can enhance brand identities and expand the boundaries of visual communication in Pakistan. This approach underscores the need for continued experimentation with Urdu typography to establish a unique visual language that speaks to both local and international audiences (O'Connor, 2015).

### Conclusion

This research bridges the gap between Urdu's rich calligraphic tradition and modern design needs. By introducing new ways to engage with Urdu script, designers in Pakistan can establish an innovative visual vocabulary that resonates with global design standards. The findings emphasize the importance of cultural representation in typography, advocating for the development of Urdu typefaces that retain cultural authenticity while offering creative flexibility. Through experimentation with non-ligature forms, geometric structures, single-letter symbols, and conceptual designs, this study contributes to the evolving landscape of Urdu graphic design. As Urdu typography continues to develop, designers are encouraged to explore its potential as a powerful tool for visual storytelling and cross-cultural communication.



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