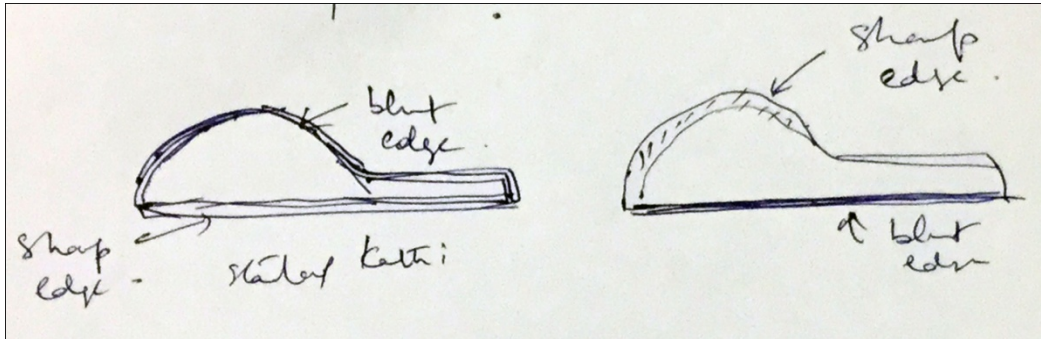


## Bamboo Craft Training

a g rao

I was looking at the bald head of joint secretary who was getting restless as I dozed off!

*The shiny bald head had turned in to a round edge of a blunt tool*



*It was November, 2002. Lawada is a remote village in Melghat district of Maharashtra. There were no signs of tigers though the place is near a well known Tiger Reserve. Smt. Indira Gandhi had even visited the place in this connection. We were there for the KVIC-UNDP training workshop. Late in the evening, we were sitting outside on a Charpai (a Jute woven cot)! The weather was pleasant. "Sunilji, Coil Technique ka bowl finish karne ko bahut time lag raha hai!"*

*(Sunilji, it was taking long time to finish the coil technique bowl!) I was pointing out the method and tool used by them! They were using a standard chisel. It being straight, any curved surface would have low contact! Consequently finishing of round surfaces would take a long time. The result of the conversation was that we came out with a new tool! We adopted a local rounded knife and sharpened the blunt 'edge' which became a finishing tool!*

The sharp edge on the round curve cut into my finger. 'OUCH' I woke up to realise that the D.C (H) had arrived! There were many people, researchers from KFRI(Kerala Forest Research Institute), designers from NIFT, Delhi and others. Some were getting impatient. but in

meetings in Delhi it is common! It is taken for granted that you have to wait unless you are higher up in the bureaucratic power order. Initially I used to get worked up.

*It is a great challenge for creative professionals to work on Govt projects and still remain creative! But with experience I learnt to tolerate, doze off and even dream in such situations if possible!*

Finally (one of the) UNDP review meeting took off! Our tool kit had taken shape! 50 toolkits were getting ready after we made 10 as trial pieces! But to my disappointment I found, in the whole UNDP project there was no 'plan' on how to reach the tool kit to the craft-person! Most of tools in the kit will be new to them. Meeting went on. CFCs (Common Facility Centers) with a budget of Rs. 30 Lakhs each! were discussed in great length! Still no talk on our Tool kit! I had no idea what to say when my turn comes! I had no idea what we should do once we developed! Will it be my responsibility to take it further. I didn't know! In front of me there was an open empty field! you are left with a ball with team to play on either side!

My earlier involvement with FREA(Front for Rapid Economic Advancement) and NGOs like SBK in Melghat and Uravu in Kerala came to my rescue! I quickly formulated an idea and proposed MCFCs( Micro common facility centers). This has been incubating in my mind since I made a report for Shanti Sadhana Ashram in 1997! To my surprise it was accepted without any questions and I was asked to give a written note on that! No discussion took place! Thus MCFCs got a birth! Later under KVIC project they acquired new name 'Mini bamboo Clusters'!

I realised that new design, tools or technology cannot reach ground level unless 'training at ground level, happens! In IIT it can be done in project mode. But only way it could take any significant shape was my personal presence in each of the training workshops to ensure importance, execution in time and quality in training.!No doubt I enjoyed such village trips! Yet it became a major commitment in my

life! Niranjan Rudrapaul and Gangamma, the master Craft persons were the core in all the workshops! We have conducted around (50) fifty workshops in remote villages all over the country, meeting 1500 craft persons personally and conducting workshops for a 'week! The experience has been rich! I know the country much more after these workshops! Each place had a unique charm and learning which went with it. *I will be writing more about my personal experiences and insights !*

Over a period we evolved a new format for the workshops! Our workshops are packages along with "tool and technology assistance". In each workshop for 30 people, a colleague or young designer along with me is there! Three Master craft-persons are there! We plan well beforehand! At least for a month for each workshop is spent in preparations! Often specific designs are developed. 5 sets of moulds for each new product, 2 sets of 4 machines and initial chemicals for treatment are given to the craft group! Each craft person getting trained is given a 'mini tool kit and work compensation of Rs.100/- per day in addition to food and stay!

Lot of pre work is done for each workshop! A preliminary trip by me and a young designer is made to collect data on the skills, local bamboo variety as well as to check where the workshop will be held, PPTs are shown and where our team stays, etc., We arrange for projection with a LCD Projector! Films are shown on bamboo craft! PPT talks on related topics are given each day! Production planning treatment, use of moulds and machines are learnt as they make products! Craft persons work in groups of '10' ! They also learn treatments, natural dye colouring and other finishes! Each Group learns to make at least '3' products! 50 to 60 finished products come out of each workshop along with ability to make them.

Quantity of strips required for each product we introduce are calculated! This data is sent to NGOs to keep the initial strips ready! We ensure that on the very first day we are ready with 'sized' strips for treatment and coloring This elaborate planning helps us to start off product making by groups on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day onwards. Each group is

kept under one craft instructor(CI). Then groups are moved to other CIs! We make a detailed daily plan for the week, print in a booklet along with tool literature etc. in Hindi,English or local language and give to each craft-person!

These intensive workshops have been very effective

If organizational support continues they can easily produce these products later!

*Detailed reports have been made for many of these workshops! All available reports are being put up on the web!*

*I also intend to write on my personal experience and insights I gained in each of these clusters*

To our dismay 'follow ups after we leave' are not up to the mark, except in few places! Committed NGOs like SBK, Uravu, Sahaj Tambac, Konbac have been able to absorb these inputs into their general plan and proceed! We have been supporting them from 'Bambu Studio' even outside the 'commitments of specific project'! Though IDC has no special support budget for this, our personal commitments and students participation have ensured reaching out to those who have taken initiative. IDC students have also been going to some of the NGOs for summer internships to augment the continued support! AG Bambu style, a Company started by me under SINE (Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship ) has been supplying Mini tool kits if the NGOs need them later. It also offers market support if they are able to supply quantities with quality! We have also been linking others who want supply of bamboo craft products with these NGOs.

A big initiative in formalizing a course on 'Bamboo craft training for a year after 12<sup>th</sup>' is on the cards with Gondwana Univerisity at Gadchiroli! (Maharashtra)!

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