

## Memory Lane – 3

NID days – getting grilled by Bob Gill.

He was a short man. He had a fierce, nasty look on his face! We were sitting in front of him. 4 or 5 of us, product design PG students of 1<sup>st</sup> batch at NID! Year was 1968 or 69!

*“I want to know! What is original in Indian design! Wherever I see, I see imitation of western Design! Look at your building! It looks like a building in London! Look at that greeting card! It is a third rate imitation of a new year card in West!*

*The greeting card read: ‘Best wishes for 365 days: 365X60(21,900) hours365X60X60 (1,31,4000) minutes!’ and was designed by a NID designer!*

*Tell me what is original in Design in this country?”*

He was aggressive! We were rattled! We were trying to gather our thoughts! This was totally unexpected! A message came from Gautam Sarabhai, chairman of NID, that we are to meet Mr. Bob Gill, the Graphic Designer from UK who was invited to NID to design and teach! Only later I came to know that he was an American designer working in UK. He later initiated ‘Pentagram’!

We were looking at him without knowing what to say. Balaram happened to be at one end. Bob Gill was looking for answers!

“What will you do when you get out of here?”

In his unique style, Balaram took his own time. He would never answer in a hurry! Bob Gill was too impatient!

“Tell him in Gujarathi”, He shouted!

Some students in Graphic design were from Gujarath. They were not fluent in English! He thought ‘Balaram did not understand what he said in English’!

By that time I had picked up little courage! This was a shocker to us! We saw so many new things at NID. Blue glass paneled sliding doors, Rose wood frames! A 40’ x 40’ dome built with one brick thickness! Indian visitors used to look at them with ‘awe and admiration’! My mind was racing fast to answer something, how to defend our country ! How will Mr.Bob Gill know with how much difficulty some of us have reached NID coming from small places in India.

I said,” You see, India has been under a colonial rule for 200 years! All the technology has come from West! All the machines are from West ! Any product we design or make is dependent on this technology! You see Cigarettes! They are made from machines which have come from West! But ‘Beedi’s are Indian made. They look different! They are original!’ By this time Sudarshan Khanna said, ‘ I would like to work in Social Sector! We all said something what we would do! But the session ended as there was a call for Bob Gill.

But this jolted our thinking! What is original Indian Design? Till then all our inputs were coming from West. NID had a very good Library. But all the design magazines were coming from West! ‘Marg’ was one Magazine which stood out with Indian content!

*‘Oh God! How 200 years of British rule had depleted our own thinking in Design!’*

A seed got into our mind. We have to look for Indian things to be proud Indians! Unfortunately, as students we never got exposed to a place like Shanti Niketan at NID. The adoration of 'western' was too much!

But we got the best of West through well known designers who came to NID at that time. Bob Gill was one of them!

His book published in 1981,

*'Forget all the Rules You Ever learned about Graphic Design, including ones in this book'*

reveals his thinking. We had a chance of tasting it through direct experience! In all our courses there used to be a component of actual participation in client assigned projects under some faculty or directly if a senior student could handle it! Mahendra Patel was one of the students of the first visual communication batch. He had designed a map for a client and he was asked to present it in an open internal meeting! Mahendra was meticulous in his work even as a student. He presented it. Client had already accepted the work and was satisfied with his work. We were a small number of students at that time! Many senior designers like Kumar Vyas, were also there! Bob Gill was the main attraction. Every body was waiting for his comments!

He started, 'Mahendra! You have solved the problem of the client! Everything you have done is as per the rules of graphic design in the books! But a designer must go one step ahead! You need to break the rules! That is the challenge for a creative designer!'

Everybody became silent. It was a *great learning*. It is important to follow the rules of visual grammar, rules of visual ergonomics, rules of printing, but where is the surprise for designers?' That is the challenge for a 'creative design'.

When other designers start looking at it with admiration you have touched a new mile stone. And that is not easy. You strive for it throughout your life as a designer.

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