

Memory Lane 10

Soul of NID

I submitted my diploma project thesis in May 1970 and left NID, Ahmadabad to join IDC (Industrial Design Centre) at IIT Bombay. I had joined NID in December, 1966. Reflecting back at the three and half years at NID, what attracted and held many unusual persons was the *Soul of NID*. I will dwell on this *'tacit dimension or spirit'* which prevailed at NID at that time. There was a strong intention for adventure in Design from many people who had joined NID. It had intentions and beliefs which went beyond pragmatics and social realities. Even for me, though it was a God (?) sent opportunity, *it could be called a madness to join an unrecognised course of undefined duration after studying engineering for 5 years. But there were others like me who joined the course after their degree in Engineering. But they were just trying out as not much was known, 'what design is'. So it took its toll.* The first casualty of our product (Industrial) design course was Sadgopan. A tall guy with spectacles, Sadgopan had a back-ground of electronic engineering. Very early in the course he resigned. He told Kumar Vyas in our presence, "I can't make out any sense of all these graphic design exercises. We don't know where we are going?. It is like going into a darkness without lights".

No doubt his departure jolted us. Coming from all parts of the country to a city new to us with a different language, We had become close with each other in no time! Insecurity of treading an unknown path had created a strong bond between us. In our group 2 were from Tamilnadu 2 from Andhra Pradesh, 2 from Delhi, one from Kolkata, 2 from Bombay and 3 from Gujarat! After Sadgopan left some of us got together, picked up courage to confront Prof Kumar Vyas, "Kumar, Is our course 3 years or 4 years?" In the brochure it was written 3 years- programme with one year of 'foundation'. It was not clear whether foundation year was included or excluded from 3 years. We were all getting a scholarship or stipend, which was attractive at that time!

He was cool!

He said," Let us complete first year, we will see!"

This was the spirit. There was no fear of Govt rules or being popular! Strength of conviction ruled the roost!

Then we had unusual, skilled carpenters and model makers. Haribhai was one of them! We used to borrow tools from them as we had no separate workshop or tools to make our models! Haribhai was very particular how the tools are to be used. He would often get angry at us, as we didn't know how to sharpen the tools or leave them without bringing them to its earlier sharpened state!

An incident which stays in my mind which happened in the end of 2nd year or beginning of 3rd year. Prof. Sudhakar Nadkarni was with us at that time! He was working on a design project for an Industry in Bombay. He was going to Bombay (Now Mumbai) on the week end. His presentation was on Monday. We were helping him as 'interns'(As per our programme we were supposed to work on live projects). The model which he was to take with him was getting ready. Haribhai's hands were working rigorously! But the model had not reached his level of satisfaction! We were trying to help him. Prof. Nadkarni came down to the workshop in a hurry! He was getting late as he had to catch a train to Bombay! " Haribhai! fatafut pack karo, ye chalega" (Haribhai, pack quickly this (quality) will do" he said.

Haribhai, looked at Prof. Nadkarni with his big eyes,

"Nadkarni sab, hum chalega kam nahi kartha hai! 'Haribhai' ka Nam kharab ho jayega! (Nadkarni Sir, I don't do chalega (hindi word for 'will do' quality) work. Name of 'Haribhai' will get tarnished!" Prof. Nadkarni was taken aback, and angry at his rebuke! But, he had a great quality! Soon his anger subsided, he appreciated Haribhai's concern and asked us to send the finished model to Bombay through 'Angadia' (a local transport service- there were no courier services at that time) to reach by Monday morning.

I haven't seen such pride in one's work at a skilled workers' level anymore! Haribhai was ready to take the risk of upsetting his boss for his quality of work!

This was NID at that time!

Then there was J. A. Panchal, who was a senior draftsman at that time. Later, he went to Germany for further training and became a faculty member. Panchal had worked with designers like Hans Gugelot from Ulm, Germany, who developed a tangential fan at NID. Panchal would tease us with questions on the details of products we were designing and point out how it is not the best detail. We used to have lively debates. He would explain the meticulous detailing of the 'Blue Star' water cooler for which he was working with Prof. Nadkarni and Prof. Vyas.

We had a model maker Budhar bhai, who was highly skilled at multiple tasks like fabricating with plastic, wood, painting, etc.,. Budhar Bhai was working for months on a full scale mock-up of a scooter which Kumar Vyas was designing.

One more unforgettable character was Pratap kaka who was a cook at NID-canteen. He will keep dinner for us when we come late! With a mild fatherly scolding we were sure to get food when we return late from a trip to city in the week ends! He also used to bring us tea in a kettle during the working hours.

NID canteen run in a kind of temporary shed was a great place! It also housed ping pong Table . Myself, Chatto(Maniram Chattopadyay), (Sudarshan) Khanna, (Mohan) Bhandari, we all learnt Table Tennis. Chatto, and Khanna had long games. (Paramanad Dalwadi) who used to come often to play had a peculiar spin serve, which everybody had a difficulty to play. Pratap Kamath a student from 'Printing' had a powerful wristy flicks.

There was a great restaurant outside NID called 'Madras Cafe!' with an open space to sit. We all used to land up in the evenings for thick Gujarathi tea and fresh fafda or papdi to munch. Puri with Sukha (dry) potato bhaji or masala dosa with endless fillings of little over boiled sambar were the specialities. I can smell the sambar even now as I am writing this after 50years!. Then there was our great 'Bakwas(useless talk) committee', headed by M.P Ranjan who had joined NID furniture Design course which had started after a year to our product design course! Invariably talks went around Design! Girls started appearing at NID only when the textile design course started later!

We used to work late into the night, a month before the year-end exhibition. All the unfinished work would have accumulated. There was a great concern

for quality. Professionalism pervaded all around! When foreign consultants gave talks in the Auditorium, the events became historic. NID chairman Gautam Sarabhai and director cum acting chairperson Giraben sarbhai would be present. All the designers, faculty and students would be present! Big names did not disappoint in their presentations. Adrian Frutiger, Leo Lioni, Saul Boss, Louis Kahn, Bob Gill, Voteller, Bowman, Charles Eames,..... a galaxy of designers from all over the world nourished the *Soul of NID*.

We, students and faculty at that time, were fortunate to

experience

the Soul of NID!
