

Reaching NID a g rao

Bombay Central- the Local station was familiar to me. I had made two trips to Bombay(now Mumbai). But this time I was carrying a trunk and moving with a group of Muslim Gentlemen who were going to Ahmadabad on business from Anantapuram. They knew telugu and became friends in no time. It was my first trip to Ahmadabad, that too, travelling alone. I felt secure to be with the group. To go to Ahmadabad we had to change to Western Railway at Bombay. When i suggested to take a cab from VT(Victoria Terminus: now CST –Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus) to Bombay Central, they ruled out taking a taxi saying “why waste money? We are all with you. We will go by local train”. I kept mum. I could not tell them that I had a hell of time carrying my trunk! The handle made of thin steel rod(about 4mm diameter) was cutting into my hand. I did not know at that time that rest of my life I will be dealing with design of such products and will be studying a subject called “Ergonomics”! That experience made its mark on the importance of ‘Ergonomics or Human Factor Engineering’!

We managed to get some seats as we got into an unreserved compartment to Ahmadabad.

There I was, thinking of what National Institute of Design would be:
*When I enquired with one of my professors who used to teach us ‘Machine Design’ at my college, he said, “I have never heard of it!”. Then he saw the NID brochure, went through it and said, “If what they claim here is true, it will be a great Institute!” In the brochure it was written that, NID will follow “**practice to theory and theory to practice**” as a methodology!*

Then I was remembering my interview at the Hyderabad-Hotel, where I met Kumar Vyas, an young, handsome man in his thirties. He had a cloth bandage on his left palm, nicely wrapped and fixed with a small metal clip. He was wearing light coloured Coton shirt with full sleeves. The simplicity made me very comfortable. He was very polite! He asked me if I have brought my portfolio! Trained as a mechanical engineer, I had no idea, what a portfolio was. I had taken my final year project report on design of ‘IC engine’ done by our group(of 4). It was akin to what our seniors had done with some changes with little conceptual understanding.

It didn’t interest him that much. I showed my certificates from college for exhibiting paintings and sculptures. Then I took out the imperial size account book in which I had pasted all my cartoons which had been published in various magazines. I was shy to show as I had written my name prominently ‘A.Gopinatha Rao’ and below that, ‘Artist’ in Telugu. Further below was my rubber stamp in English. But he didn’t pay much attention to it. he opened my log book to see the Cartoons!

How I got into *Cartooning and sculpturing* was another story.

When I was in my school, I got fascinated with sketching and drawing. Once I made an exact copy of a bird in large scale from a small picture in a Calendar! My uncle who had come on vacation from Madras(now Chennai) praised the drawing! I got more confident of my drawing skills. At that time 'Cartoons' got lot of attention in Telugu weekly magazines. Cartoons drawn by a well known artist with a pen-name 'Bapu', were very popular. Bapu, also illustrated stories and he had an elegant style! He was a role model for us. I had a friend who was also intensely interested in Cartooning! Being in a small town we couldn't find any mentors. Nobody could guide us about how or where to learn. Then we located an advertisement in a magazine offering postal tuition to learn 'cartooning'. I wrote to them and got details of the course. Rayburns cartooning offered postal tuition from Delhi for 6months. Total fees was Rs.30/- to be paid in 5 installments. But thirty rupees was a big amount at that time! There was no question of asking parents. In fact we had to keep it a secret for it to survive! I skipped Breakfast and saved the allowance given for it. My friend took tuition from a school called Shantanu art school from Chennai.

Once we acquired a level of skill in drawing human figures with a crock will and Indian ink, We started drawing cartoons. Our target was every day one cartoon. These were 'General cartoons'. We were looking around to get ideas for cartoons.. Every incident, situation around was a platform and we were struggling to extract ideas from them. We started observing other's cartoons more carefully to see their strategies. We started seeing Exaggeration, literal interpretations, reversing the roles, trivializing a serious relationship,.....slowly we developed a pattern of thinking. Mind was looking at each scene with an intention of converting it into a cartoon. We were literally programmed! We avoided mixing with others in our leisure time. It became a deep commitment! Soon we started sending the cartoons to well known Telugu weeklies: Andhra prabha and Andhra patrika. We got a rubber stamp made for both.

Mine read :

A.Gopinatha Rao

Artist,

8/130, Adimoorthynagar,

Anantapur.

My friend, A.D.Gowri Shankar, got a similar one. We were both using my grandfather's address which was safe! We stamped our addresses behind each cartoon and sent, 5 of them with a self addressed envelop(fixed with a postal stamp for returning rejected cartoons). Within a week we got the cartoons back! But we were not daunted! We were ready with another 5 cartoons.

2nd lot went and was returned promptly! We used to wait for the Postman to receive the 'returned envelops,' ourselves. We didn't want them to fall into other's hands! We needed to protect our venture! In a small place like that it would get unpredictable attention!

We sent 6 times! Every week new set of cartoons went like a missile. Somebody in the Weekly might have got fed up of returning them again and again. One of my friend's cartoons got accepted. It was published and got paid Rs6/-! This was a break through for us. Soon couple of my cartoons got selected. I used a pen name 'Gopu' akin to the famous cartoonist 'Bapu'

Meanwhile we had developed a strategy. We looked up and found new start up magazines: Weeklies and Monthlies to send our rejected cartoons. Many of our rejected cartoons got published. We were an enterprising team. Soon we started writing stories! We got them published in Telugu magazines. We both wrote 'a children's novel' for a competition. When we didn't get the prize, we found a new publisher who was ready to publish. He was unable to pay any royalty to us. We only got few free copies. But it didn't matter!

Soon we got into painting and sculpture after seeing an exhibition of Art which came to Anantapur. We had little idea of carving. We managed to buy some chisels, sandpaper, linseed oil for polishing and started off. Our strategy was to buy cut logs after figuring out what we could make out of it! The wood depots mainly had cut logs for fire wood purpose. One of my pieces turned out to be 'Tamarind wood'. I could see 'Mother and child' in it already. But carving was a tedious task, with a fibrous wood like 'tamarind'.

Luckily an exhibition in Hyderabad was announced. We got the entry forms to participate. Each of us sent 5 paintings and five wooden sculptures. In painting we restricted to landscapes. We had used different materials like local seeds and gravel to create textures. All our paintings and sculptures got exhibited. To our great surprise one of my sculptures, 'Mother and child', was bought by the Lalith Kala Academy. This gave a boost to our efforts and confidence! I went with my uncle and bought a HMT watch! I didn't have a watch till then. News spread and got a lot of attention from relatives and friends! No wonder it paved my way to the interview for NID!

Kumar Vyas started seeing the cartoons. Some were silent cartoons! Some had a sentence or two in Telugu!

I asked him, "Should I translate what is written?"

'that won't be necessary' was the reply!

He saw my stories and the small children's story book I had published in Telugu.

"Have you got any photographs of your 'Paintings and Sculptures'?"

I didn't know what to say. I had not thought about it. And I had never touched a camera till then! I said, "No I don't have a camera! But one of my sculptures was bought by Andhra Pradesh Lalith Kala Academy! I can show the letter!"

"No, that is not necessary!" I could see a smile on his face! Then I suddenly realized how foolish I was. He was not looking for a proof!

Then he asked me a series of questions about classical music, names of famous Karnatic musicians, What is, Palghat Mani Iyer' known for?, and so on.. Some I could answer! Some I didn't know! Suddenly another type of question came:

'What do you think is 'Industrial design'?

With some hesitation I replied

'To make products beautiful! I gave an example of 'radio front panel'.

'No, It is much more than that!it involves functional things as well!" .

The interview ended there!

"Well! We want people like you! Do you have any question?"

I picked up my courage, "Will I get a job in Industries afterwards?." I was more worried about convincing my uncle and brother, to allow me to join NID. Till then nobody had heard of 'Design' or 'NID' at my home. I was the first graduate engineer in my house. They want to see me as a great engineer, like Vishveswaraiyya!

'By the time you finished, Industrialists will be queuing up for you!' he said.

I was impressed with his confidence!

.....The train stopped with a jerk! We had reached Ahmadabad. I found a place in the dormitory of Railway Station! Left my luggage there! Got ready and reached NID!

NID in the initial years was housed in a building designed by Le Corbusier! It was in the first floor of 'Sanskar Kendra', just opposite to the new NID building which was under construction. Exposed brick walls was new to me. There was a cast iron spiral stair case. First person to meet was Sadgopan who also came to join the same course. We soon became friends. He had already found a place to stay nearby. There were no Hostels at NID at that time. We were the first batch in product design to join NID. We were 12 . Me, Balaram, Sethuraman, Chatoopadyay, Parmar, Khanna, Bhandari, Tulyani, M.O.Patel, Ranade, Sadgopan and K.Desai.it was a mixed group coming from all directions of the Country, 4 from South,one from East, two from North and rest 5 from West. Seven were degree holders and five with diploma In engineering. M O Patel was the only Architect. Few of them had field experience. Parmar had two degrees (Mechanical and Electrical!). Every thing was new. None of us knew what exactly we will be learning. It was full of Excitement! To our surprise we had only one teacher, Kumar Vyas. But we were lucky to get such a wonderful , dedicated teacher and an excellent human being! Little we realized that we were part of 'design history' of India! First batch of industrial designers to be trained formally! The difficult, exciting ,untrodden path was ahead.
