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from a g rao

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My thoughts
January 5, 2020

Golden Jubilee-50years of IDC-School of Design

a g rao

IDC completes 50 years! Even as we celebrate Golden jubilee of IDC-School of design on 6,7,8 January 2020, it is time to dwell into the past and examine IDC's historical contribution for 'design in India'. Release of a book on 5 decades of work is due on 6th January 2020.

My thoughts go back to 1979. Our first publication in book form 'Industrial design Centre- a decade of design experience' came out in 1979.
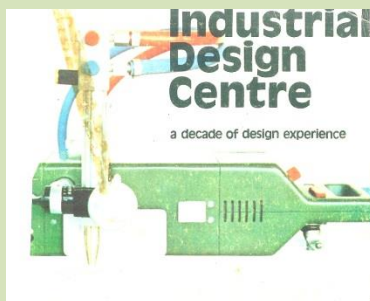
You can see the full book on my web site

http://www.agrao.in/books-manuals-and-reports

Authoring and bringing out the publication in a month's time was an unique experience for me. Lot of material was there as IDC outputs which I used to edit with inputs from prof.Nadkarni. Hari Kumar Nair made an initial compilation, which helped to organise into cohesive document. The text for the book was set in ' lino type'! There were no computers at hand yet!

Prof.Sudhakar Nadkarni brought in the legacy of famous German school of design 'Hoshüle for Gestaltung-Ulm' which was the second land mark in history of 'Design

Education' after the legendary ' Bauhaus!'. His link with Ulm school brought into IDC, the guiding Gurus of Ulm Prof.Sugiura Kohei and Prof.Gui Bonsiepe whom we remember fondly on this 'Occasion'.

It is also time to remember Late Prof.V.N.Adarkar who laid the groundwork for IDC to be housed in IITBombay. His presence in IDC as an 'Adviser appointed by MHRD(Ministry of Human Resources and Development)' ensured a separate Identity for IDC in a large Institute of Technology like IITBombay. Not many idcians know that IDC was concieved by Ministry(MHRD) as an independent Design Institute to be moved out of IITB after first five years. But IITBombay got so fond of IDC, that it ramained in IITB till today, spreading the seed of design to other IITs as well!

IITBombay has been unique in providing a structured framework with academic freedom enabling IDC to become a 'School of Design' with five branches Product design, Visual Communication, Animation, Interaction Design and Mobility Design with Bdes, Mdes and Phd programmes. IDC also offers courses as 'Minors' for other departments.Today IDC is a vibrant department of IITBombay. Rupee symbol and EVM have reached to 'people of India' as proud contributions of IDC at IITB. Number of awards won by IDC students and Faculty membersover the years are highly appreciated at IITB.

Looking back in time, IDC was always different from other departments. Credit goes to prof.Nadkarni to name 'labs and workshops' at IDC as 'Studios' which helped them to function creatively. Later this paved the way for an unique 'Bambu Studio' to come up, which looks into the repositioning of 13.5 lakh bamboo- craftpersons in the country through 'design and technology intervention'.

IDC has acquired an international status by getting selected as one of the top 10 design schools in the World. Our Ergonomics lab, Ceramic and Pottery studio, Virtual reality activities , Innovation studio, new efforts in transportation,... all are dynamic and will be expanding.

IDC alumini have made great contributions holding 'lead positions' within and outside the Country.IDC Faculty, many being IDC Alumini, has been the core strength of IDC. Technical and Office staff members have played a significant support role in

shaping IDC. Faculty of other departments always gave a helping hand! Visiting faculty from other Institutes and Industry played a big role.   IITB authorities at the helm, have been guiding and mentoring. 50 years have been 'golden' in many ways for IDC!

It is time to celebrate and feel good!

It is also time to take a critical look at
 what IDC has done and
 what it needs to do in the field of design.
Great expectations are glaring at us as a leading design school, in number one IIT in the Country.

I will dwell on five areas

1.Design Education

Design education of youth is a great challenge! Today creating motivation with large intake of students is a dominant issue. This cannot be done through pass and fail mechanism. We need new approaches to enable students to discover themselves, their place in Society, purpose in Life,... etc,. When a young student attempts to commit suicide, many questions come to the fore questioning the 'Education system' as a whole! It is important to create confidence,meaning and self pride in one's own work. We need to borrow some inspiration from areas like 'Fine Arts'. Any creative work of depth demands inner commitment and concern for others.

 IDC needs to create a 'frame work' to probe such 'spiritual dimension' in design.

IDC has been instrumental in setting up design departments in other IITs.
Short term exposures starting with 'expo-ids' in Seventies, have benifited many faculty members of other design schools. Many of IDC alumini head design departments and architecture schools as deans and directors or principals.

But much less has been talked about and written on teaching methodology of 'Design Education'. We can see hardly any published books on this topic!

We also need to probe designerly ways of 'Learning and Teaching' larger groups with new tools like internet access.

2.Design Research

Phd programme of IDC has given a stable framework for research efforts. Many Phds have come out of IDC.
Yet very little of 'design research' has been addressed.

Often it is research, somehow linked to Design. The guiding force for Phds has been a 'phd requirement for faculty positions'. Research training acquired while doing Phds has been useful in design with complex information.

But it is more of procedural knoledge and less of conceptual knowledge!

Design being a practicing profession still has uneasy relationship with Research, as Prof.Gui Bonsiepe has put it in one of his papers.

Research in Design is necessary and Phd is a convenient frame work.

But Phds in design need to brake the shackles borrowed from other descing to shape itself. There is a need to redefine 'research for Phd' for the benifit of Design as a 'Discipline'. Today a 'practicing designer' need not look at knowledge generated by design Phds.

Our Phds have to generate usable knowledge in Design at various levels!

Design resaerch has been looking at Qualitative research with frameworks generated in other fields. Qualitative reseach is rooted in the practice of each field.

It is time to look at qualitative content in design practice. Study of 'Abductive thinking' and 'holistic approaches' adopted by designers like Sugiura Kohei can become unique starting points for qualitaive research in Design.

Total dependence on published papers which are very limited in design has been a limitation for research in design!

3.Designerly ways of learning and teaching other 'subjects'.

Design has the tradition of unique way of learning. ' Studio culture' of learning has been well articulated by stalwarts in the area like 'Donald Schön'.

Designerly ways of learning and teaching can transform learning in many adjuscent fields like 'Engineering' which still by and large depends on 'chalk and Talk' method of Teaching! In an Institute like IITBombay, Design ought to lead 'Collaborative designerly ways of Learning and Teaching Engineering Subjects!'

4. Designerly ways of Teaching in Schools.

School eduaction in the Country is out dated and is in a Crisis! Designerly ways of Learning and Teaching can make a significant dent! Many projects have been carried out at IDC from time to time. But it has not culminated into a significant mass of knowledge! IDC frame work seems to carry the burden of 'independently run projects.' Faculty evaluations seem to favour individual achievements of faculty members, compared to collaborative work.

To make significant contribution in areas like School Education, a strategic group appraoch is necessary.

5.Strategic Thinking for a significant role

IDC-School of design needs 'strategic thinking' to solve Country's problems. IITB has many identified directions like Solar energy, Rutag in CITARA, Bio-design, policy cell…,etc,. A natural strategy for IDC is to be part of these projects.

But IDC also needs to think of its leadership in design for the country as a whole for 'Future of Design!'

It would be a good idea to have a 'Think tank' to plan for strategic directions using the strength of IDC. It need not be fund driven always! We have student projects and Phds. A combined group force could be 'powerful' in addressing major problems!

'Think tank' can also dwell on issues like 'effect of AI on design,on society' and our response!

I will further try to elaborate these issues and upload in my web site!

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