

Satyajit Vetoskar- Future is Now
Review with reflections on Post Modernism
a g rao

My review will be in a general framework of 'problems and opportunities' in practicing industrial design especially in a peripheral country like India!

I visited a thought provoking exhibition of Satyajit Vetoskar, an Idician from MDes, 95 batch, along with Prof.Uday Athavankar on 15th May,2022.



As you enter the exhibition you see

When a successful industrial designer decides to a quieter life in Goa, chances are he will change track and find a new way to approach design.

And so he did.

13years ago, SATYAJIT VETOSKAR accepted the challenge of a different way of life as a call for a more mindful use of resources. He started using every bit of his training, experience and expertise to look for ways to truly make change.

His vision focused on collaboration: artists, designers and other sustainable brands working together to reclaim, re-propose and transform and transform materials for optimum functionality.

The ubiquitous tarpaulin of monsoons in India became bags of every kind. Aircraft junkyards, automobile scrap yards, factory excesses and waste: all of these became catalysts

To path breaking design....

From source to design to manufacture each part of the process is a passionate journey that is setting standards for others to follow. It is not about being fashionable: for Satyajit it is about truly offering an excellent alternative.

The ordinary, the common, the reclaimed become extraordinary, unique and durable. This collection showcases both his independent and collaborative work that highlights the immense possibilities from existing resources that are ethically sourced and ensure minimal waste.

For Satyajit, the future is not a speculative concept, it is a reality we have the responsibility to create.

*The FUTURE. **ISNOW***

We, me and Uday, were delighted to see the creative work of Satyajit and his collaboration with Praveen.M, another M des alumnus, in addition to others.

Satyajit with his excellent, committed work of quality gives me an opportunity to reflect on few related issues, even as I go through his work in detail.

1.0 Future projections in Design

2.0 Design Innovation and Design entrepreneurship in Post Modern Industrial framework

3.0 Postmodern expression in Design

The theme of the exhibition 'Future is Now!', reminds me of my exposure to a 'way of gauging the Future' by a professional group.

1.0 Future projections in Design

1.1 One month with 'Delta Planning Group' (DPG) at Chicago in 1980

Looking at future strategically, based on 'information' in related fields like Technology, social behavior, etc.,

'Delta Planning Group'(DPG) was identified by IDC for collaboration under UNDP programme and Mr.Inder Agarwal, a partner of DPG, became a consultant. DPG was started by Richard Latham (R.L), who was a close associate of legendary designer Raymond Lowey. R.L's earlier company 'Richard S. Latham & Associates Inc' got converted into 'Delta Planning Group'(DPG) with Inder Agarwal(Inder) as a partner. I had the opportunity to spend a month in 1980, as UNESCO scholar with DPG at Chicago. I also got a rare privilege of meeting Jay Doblin, and having lunch with him and Inder often. Jay Doblin, another well-known designer, had also worked with Raymond Lowey and was a close friend of R Latham. He would just come to DPG often, have chats with Inder especially when R.L was on vacation. DPG was advising many companies on their 'future plans and product strategies' based on statistical data and competition. User profiles as well as trends in Technology were studied by the group.

DPG was generous to allow me to see all their case studies, which were otherwise confidential.

An example to indicate DPG's work:

A large car-maintenance service company had approached DPG for advice on Future Planning and Strategy!

The Company had a large pool of skilled-workers who had rare expertise in 'diagnosing faults of car engines' by just 'listening to them'. DPG study indicated that future diagnosis of cars will be completely based on computer analysis of engine performance! Based on this DPG advised the Client company to

either

- *sell off their business*
- or*
- *invest heavily in Computer infra structure*

Consequently, the client company took a decision to sell of their 'car business' which had premium share value at that time.

This gives us a way to look at future from strategic business point of view, may be less interesting to designers, if they are not engaged with that company.

1.2 Looking at Future 'designerly way'

Designers are trained to look at 'future' as 'it is their bread and butter'.

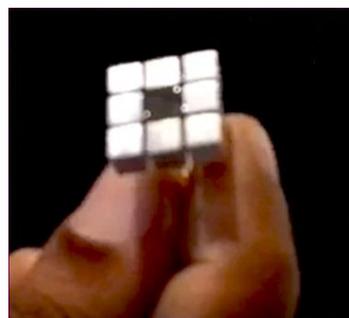
Deeper understanding of conventional and new materials and processes, knowing trends in user behaviour, concern for the societal issues like gender equality, right education, sustainability become the guiding factors. 'Feel' or 'Tacit knowledge' and 'Skill' in dealing with these topics become crucial for good design.

Convictions develop over a period and real 'Challenge for Designers' is to convert such convictions into 'ACTION' which becomes 'spiritual in nature'!

Satyajit got engaged with using quality materials which get discarded as junk like 'air-craft parts' (his specialty). Ironically aviation has a share of 3.5 % in global warming according to one estimate. His choice of items like jewellery gives ample scope for refined, precise product detailing.



Watch strap made of precise cubes and embedded diamonds



ring

Satyajit takes the Inspiration from Japanese 'Shourai' as he states in one of his panels:

SHOURAI

In Japanese, Shourai means 'The future'. The future may be uncertain but Shourai speaks about a future that will surely happen. This collection embarks on a new beginning. Aluminium sourced from discarded aircrafts is crafted into precisely machined cubes. These ordinary aluminium cubes are then combined with re-used gold and ethically sourced diamonds to create unique pieces of precious Jewellery. New designs, new materials and a new future.

Another inspiration which manifests as a 'Pen' for him:

KALAM

Kalam, means pen in Hindi, is also an Arabic term for speech.

These days, wars are fought over religion, freedom culled over what we eat and education stalled over what we wear. "The pen is mightier than the sword" the old adage, was the inspiration behind this line of fountain pens. Why not make pens from old artillery shells?

Materials used range from brass from used artillery shells, aluminium from old air craft and wood from used handloom spindles.



There is more to savour in the exhibition.

A unique peg measure to delight those who enjoy makes its presence felt!

Bandit is a range of bags made of materials like Tarpaulin, Denim, aircraft parts, etc., (see www.therealbandit.com) with an established 'Identity'. Product details, construction, durability and re-use of materials with a network of organizational framework have been the hallmark of this successful brand!

Satyajit with his exhibition opens up larger topic of 'Product Interface' addressing 'design Innovation' and 'design entrepreneurship'.

I will discuss this further in a general frame work covering 'Craft and Postmodernism'.

2.0 Design Innovation and Design entrepreneurship in Post Modern Industrial framework

IDC as one of pioneering design schools, started with a post graduate programme in design for engineers and Architects, in IITBombay a technical University, as a strategy to meet the demand of design leaders. The M des programme continues along with B des now. From the beginning an effort was made to nurture students' individual personalities as 'creative persons' in MDes. Total attachment to the profession was encouraged with emphasis on devoted self-learning. Often tasks were set which demanded working overnights in what Donald Schon called a 'studio culture". Bringing a 'learning culture conducive to design profession in a 'technical Institute' was a challenge, which was met by IDC faculty and staff, successfully over the years!

Once a student after joining an Industry told me, "*Sir. IDC has spoiled us. We are addicted to working many more hours than Industries allow us to work in their office/studio premises.*"

Industries have been happy to engage young designers charged with creative energies. But what happens over say 5 years is interesting. New young designers join the design group and the role of senior designer changes. Demand for 'Individual creativity' drastically comes down. He/she becomes a system person. System level creativity which includes managerial functions becomes more crucial for the company. The experience gives a better power position and a pay package but there is '*less room to exercise individual creativity*' which can lead to 'creative frustration' of a designer.

This is a challenge to an experienced designer. A deeper commitment to design and an insight into the 'interface aspect' are required for 'Design Innovation and Entrepreneurship'.

Postmodern Industrial production frame work gives a new opportunity in this direction. I have argued of such a possibility and opportunity in the domain of 'bamboo craft earlier. See 'CRAFT AS A POST MODERN VENTURE: EXPERIENCE IN BAMBOO CRAFT' in my website.

See (<http://www.agrao.in/images/Articles/CraftAsAPostModernVenture.pdf>)

Such a framework is valid and feasible for industrially produced products as well due to

- Availability of high tech processes like laser cutting, laser etching, 3D printing, etc., which facilitate production without large investments
- Online marketing
- Increased high end outlets like airports
- Reach of select groups through exhibitions in major cities
- Possibility of joining hands with art events and exhibitions
- Select group of users looking for sustainable, useful products.



3.0 Postmodern expression in Design

As we see the postmodern production framework suits 'Design Innovations' which can be started by designer- entrepreneurs! Then, one wonders:

'Do we need Postmodern design expression as well?

And

what does that mean in the current context?

Modern Design aesthetics started at Bauhaus and extended by Ulm school, has been relevant due its roots in Industrial production and user- convenience.

Brand identity and promotion of consumption through media: powerful tools of Capitalism took over the scene challenging the notions nurtured in these design Schools!

Post modernism in product design got into prominence with the work of Memphis group led by Ettore Sotsass and Products made by the Italian company Alessi by well-known designers!

Designers took inspiration from new 'thoughts in language' like deconstruction by Derrida. The onus of 'creation of meaning' in the text no more rested with the author but moved to the reader! Abstract art has been comfortable with this kind of frame work. Several architects interpreted 'deconstruction' in their work. In 'Product design' exploration of asymmetry, use of allegorical elements, etc., took place!

Earlier, designers had looked at 'Design as Order'!

With postmodernism, very notion of ORDER took many transformations giving room to wide scope for interpretations!

Thus today, a designer has a choice of 'Order' to adopt!

Satyajit's choice of pure geometric forms as a mode of expression inspired by Bauhaus has its merits when he brings design innovation to select areas like jewellery, pens and peg measure. There is no brand image imposed on the products as such.

But his use of 'flying aircraft - image' on cube packages as well as in cubical space of the exhibition does catch our attention!



Cube package





In the exhibition hall

Here comes a 'provocative thought'!

Use of 'Pure geometry' has a suggestion of 'moving to a perfect state'.

Can the 'form' also encode the origin of the material or its earlier state and make it perceivable through textures or images, which is now possible with processes like laser etching?

Can the 'flying aircraft-image' itself, find a new positioning as a postmodern expression?

Satyajit's well organized initiative, certainly provides us a platform for such a design discourse!

I highly recommend designers and design sensitive audience to visit the exhibition which will be on till June 12th, 2022.

SATYAJIT VETOSKAR

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at 47-A, Khotachi Wadi, Mumbai
May 14 to June 12 | 11am to 7pm | Mondays shut

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