Letter phones

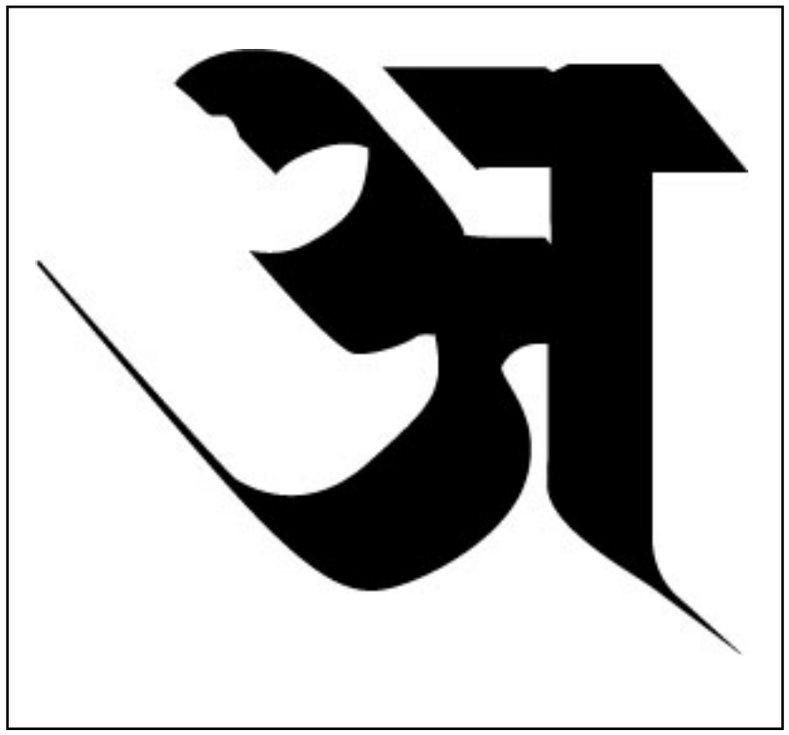
In 1990, Sony corporation had announced a competition for the design of 'telephone for the Future'! They said conceptual ideas are the requirement. They can work out the technology later! It was exciting to have such an opportunity during those days! We had project 1, with one month duration for M. Des students after they completed first year. I opted to guide the project that year, which used to be in the vacation months of May and June.

Sony competition was the high motivating factor!
Students started working on different concepts. But a review after one week revealed that "original ideas" were missing! All the ideas were highly influenced by the concepts which were already there!

Studio assignments are unique to Design Education. A small number of students like 12, is a luxury! In the IDC, IIT frame-work we had a high interaction time, depending on the faculty concerned!

That is when I came out with an idea of using letter forms as a metaphoric basis for a new telephone!' It would become a generative metaphor, arbitrarily imposed. So next day I prepared a brief which stated,' as a requirement for the class assignment each student has to take an alphabet from any language and convert it into a 3D, telephone! The students were exposed to results of a previous assignment, 'a 3D letter form in wire!'.

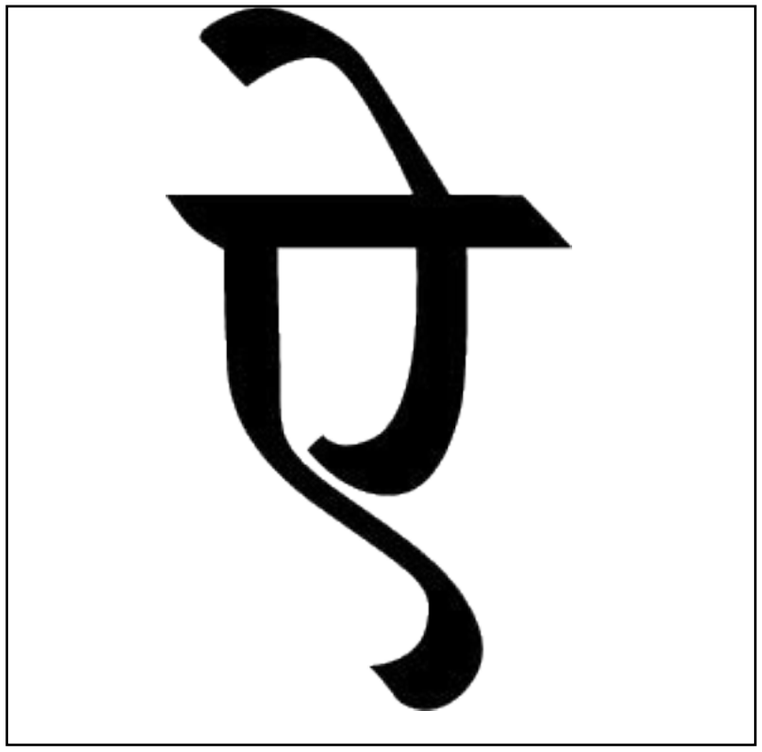
A discussion took place on our rich heritage of languages with their own letter forms! Since letters exist in only 2D, the three dimensional manifestation can be open, completely new, taking the character of the letter forms in total or in parts in the context of a new phone!



As students started working, I could see group behaviour and group dynamics operating. In group of 12, the learning environment acquires a wider scope. Students at IDC, most of them coming from engineering back ground were readily sharing their thinking with others! There were some students especially with some previous experience in Industry who would come to a solution rather quickly. They get the advantage of getting more teacher's time. I would engage them in a discussion and urge them to explore more.

Initial tendency was to achieve 3D by adding a vertical dimension akin to an extrusion process in computer rendering.

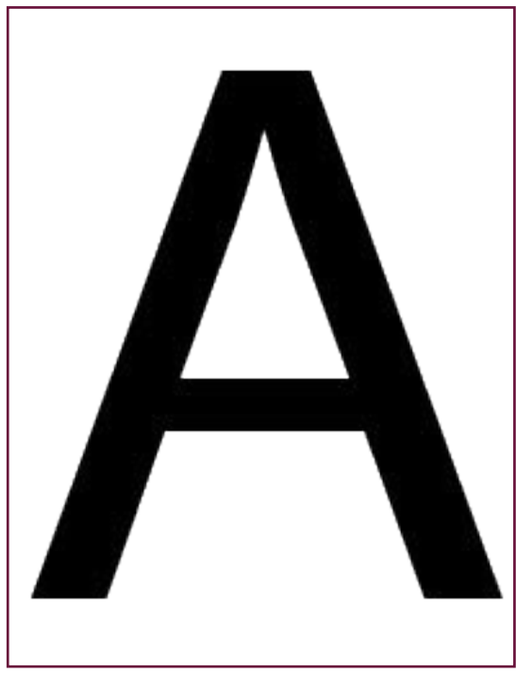
Telephone with devanagari 'Aa' had its charm even when it was based on a simple extrusion as a basis to create 3D form.

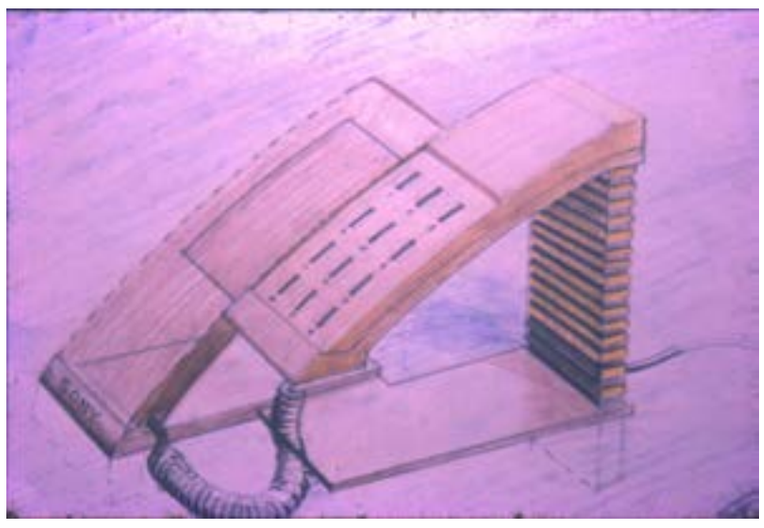


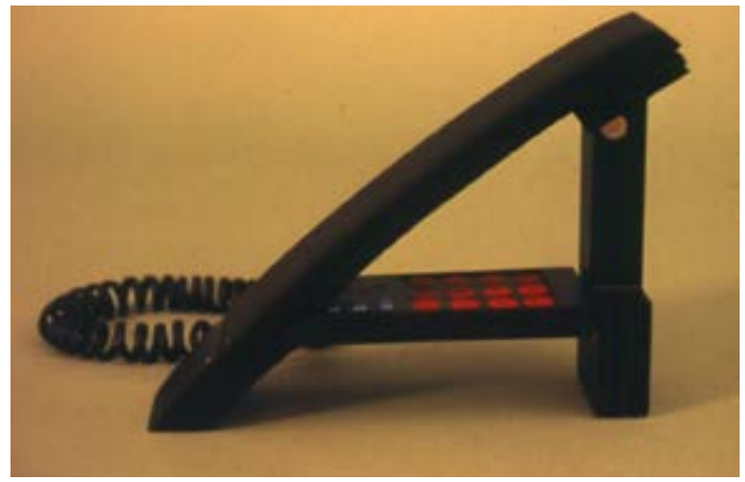
Another solution was with letter ‘Ae’ in Devanagari. The complex relationship between the line elements gave new challenge. The telephone structure had to change from the conventional forms . The handset got placed in a new way, which was very different from the existing phones.

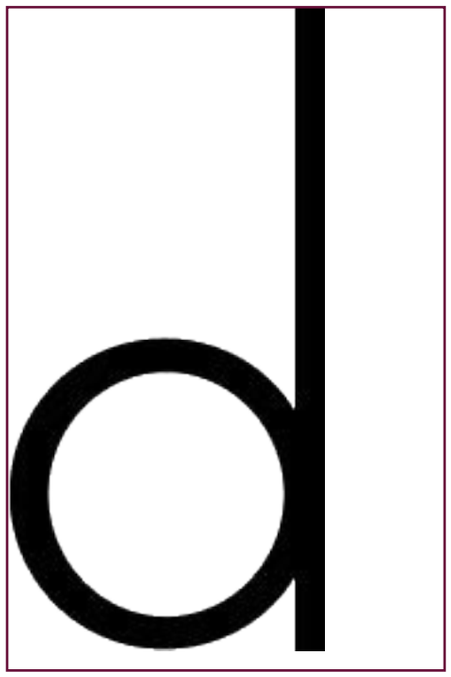
One student chose arabic numeral ‘2’. The extruded form brought out surprisngly new form of telephone, suitable for a ‘Telephone -Exchange’.

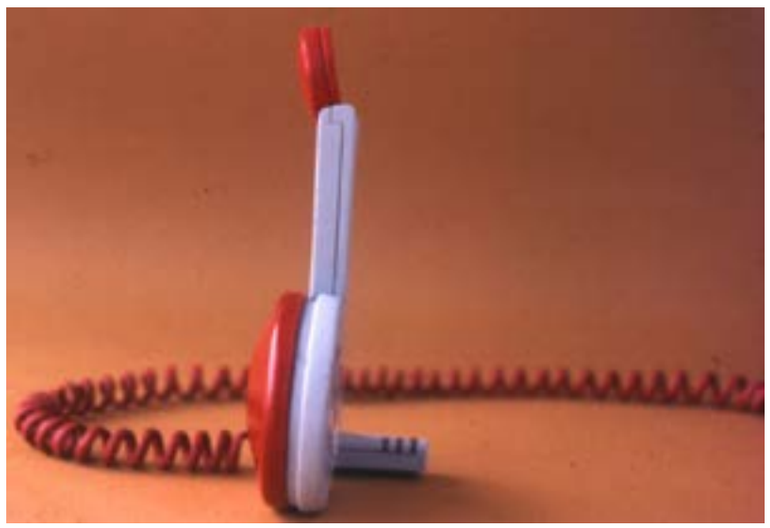
Rajiv chose roman letter ‘A’ . He brought in the concept of ‘picture phone’ which was still new at that time! His deconstruction of letter ‘A’ provided a new convenient structure for the telephone. It had a post modern flare in its approach!



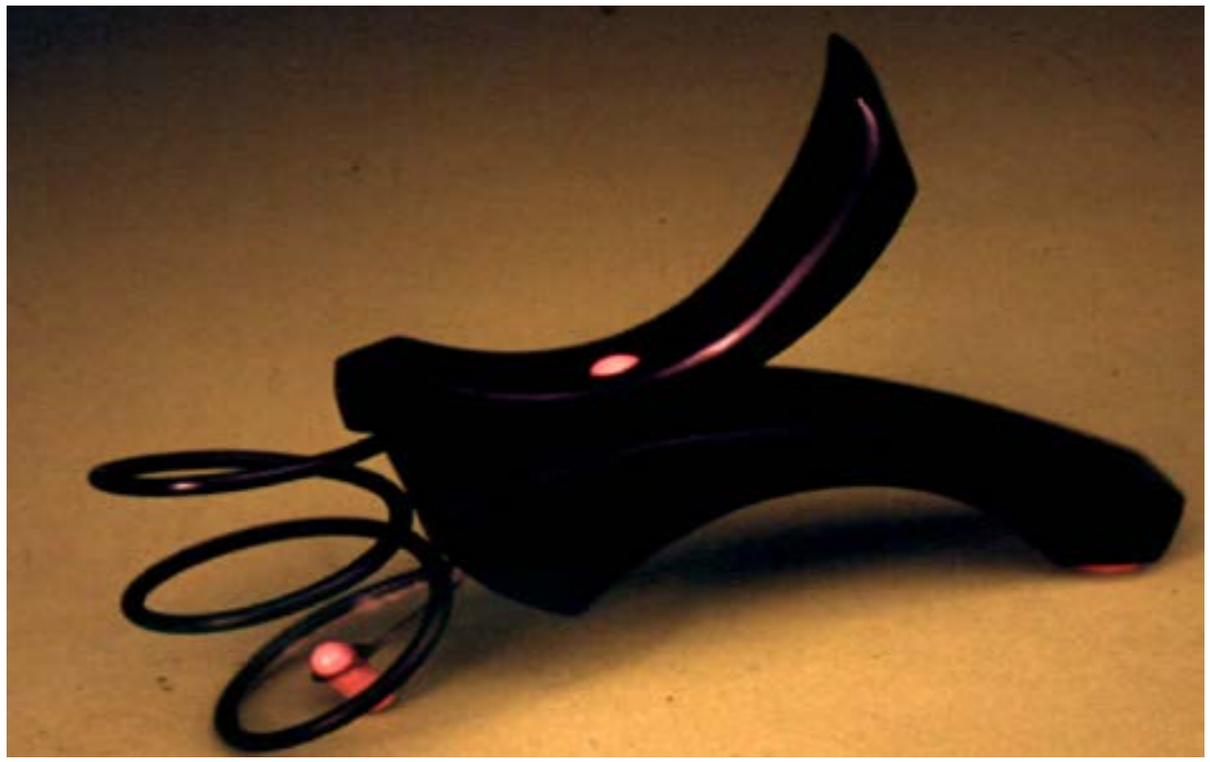






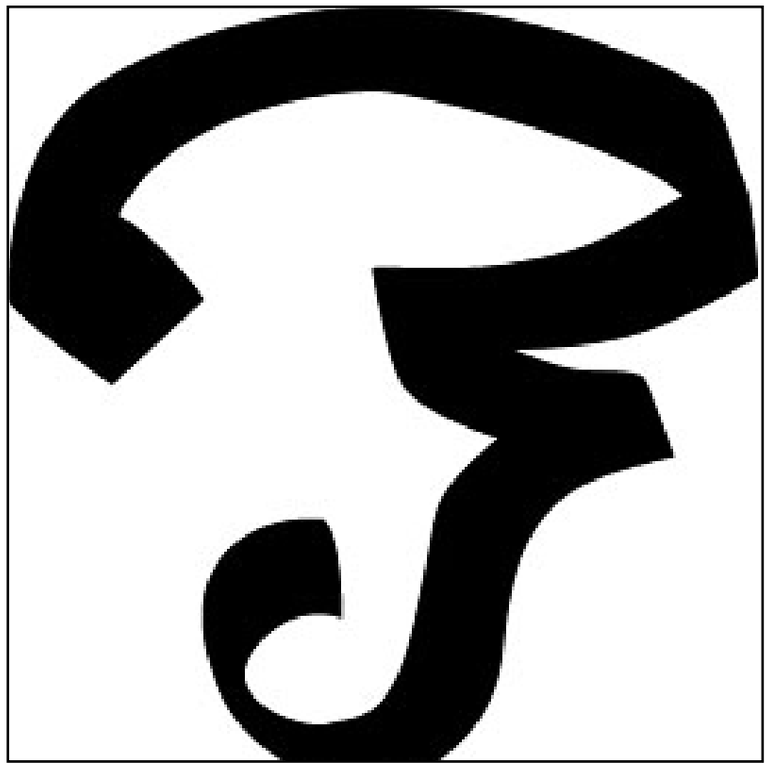


Sanjay Koli's telephone based on 'd', had a slick elegant form.
The negative space in the letter became a logical space for the operating buttons.
The circle in the letter became cylinder with schamper!



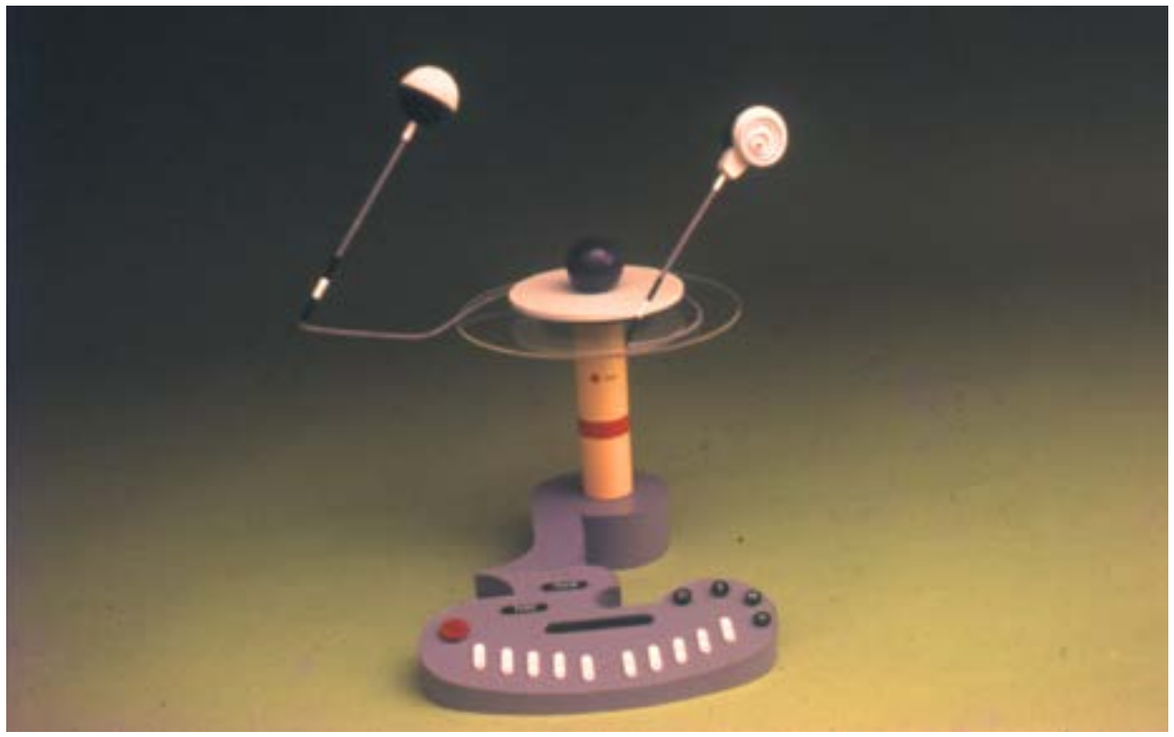
There was a new flair in the design output when Anupritha took letter ‘Om’ in Devanagari. With a logical approach such connections to an alien form outside the semiotic structure of telephone would not have taken place . That is when we realise that big jumps in the structure of ‘product form’ can happen when distant semiotic ‘frame works’ get connected through a creative Act.
In the process she also found a new way of holding the phone leaving both hands free.

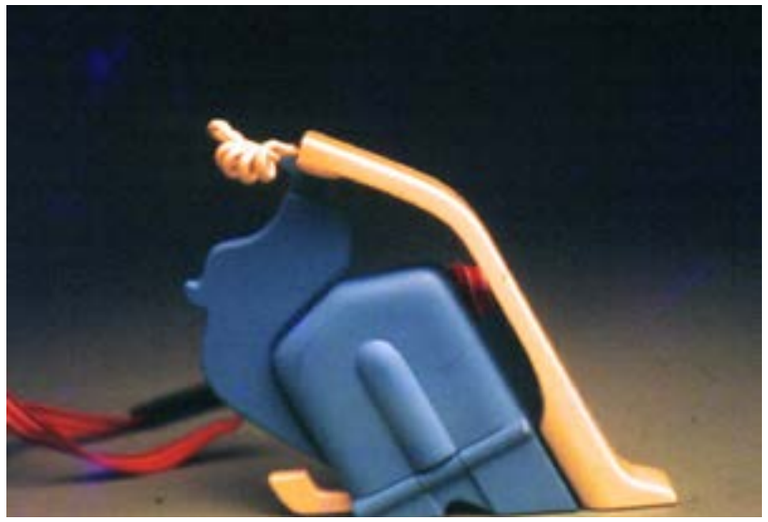
The jury made a special appreciative remark referring to the entries based on letter forms. Out of 12, only 5 students took part in the Sony design Competition.



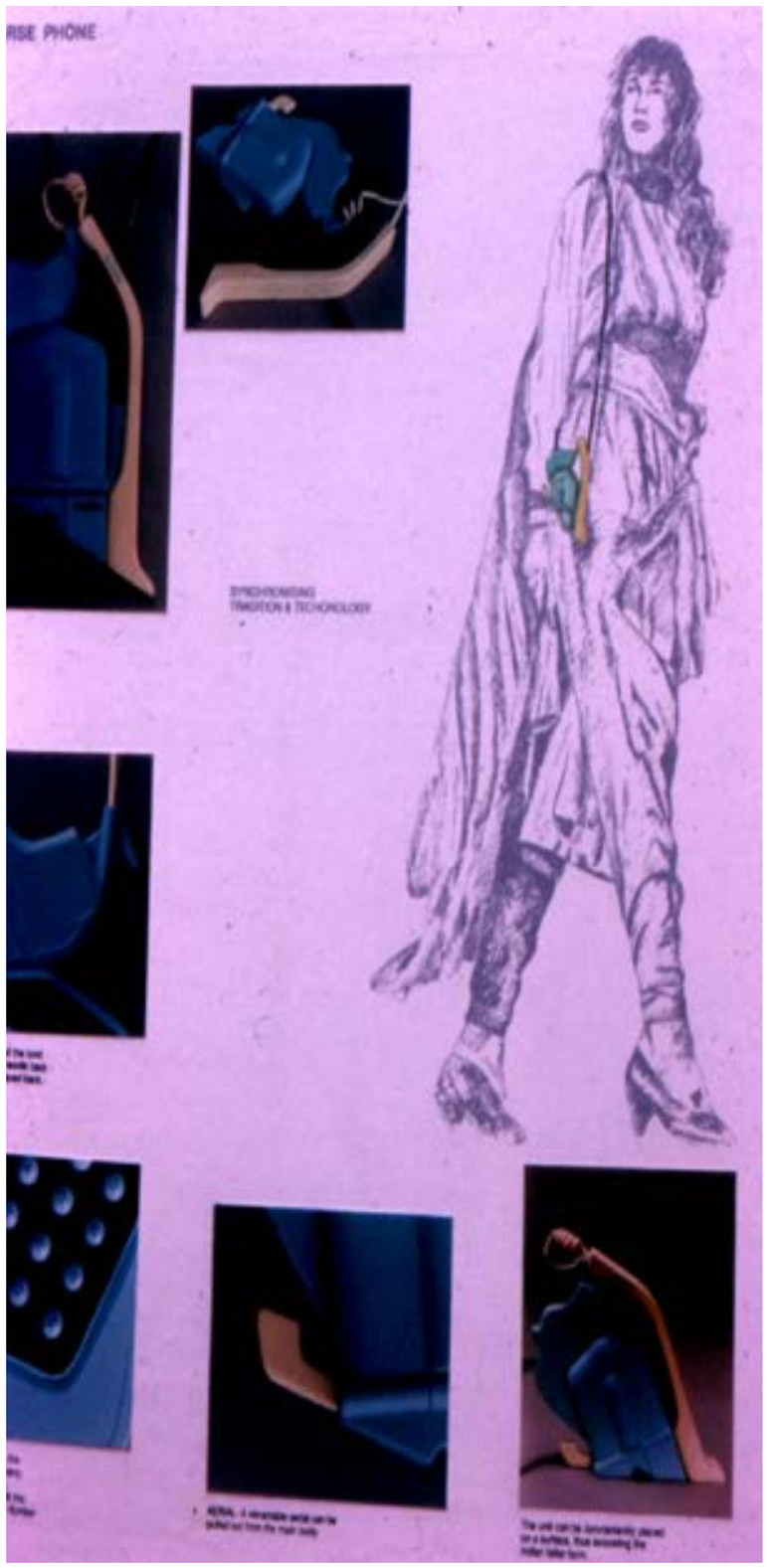
Award Winner

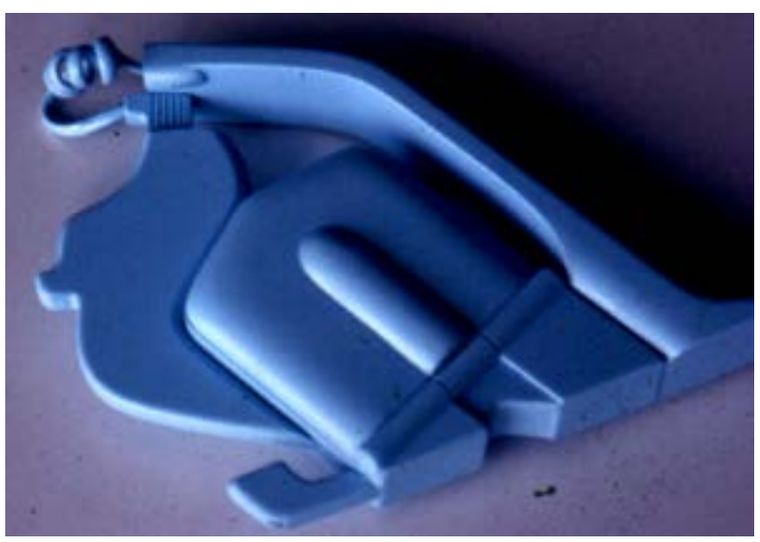
Another unique phone based on letter 'Oh' in Tamil, designed by Salim Ahmed got the Sony Award. We were all excited as it was the first international award for a student at IDC. General confidence in our design ability and creativity went up. Again the unusual form of the letter led to the unique shape of 'head phone' , which became an ornament rather than a 'head phone'. Women could make a special connection as users. Deconstruction of the letter form made it possible to jump into another completely different 'semiotic frame work'.



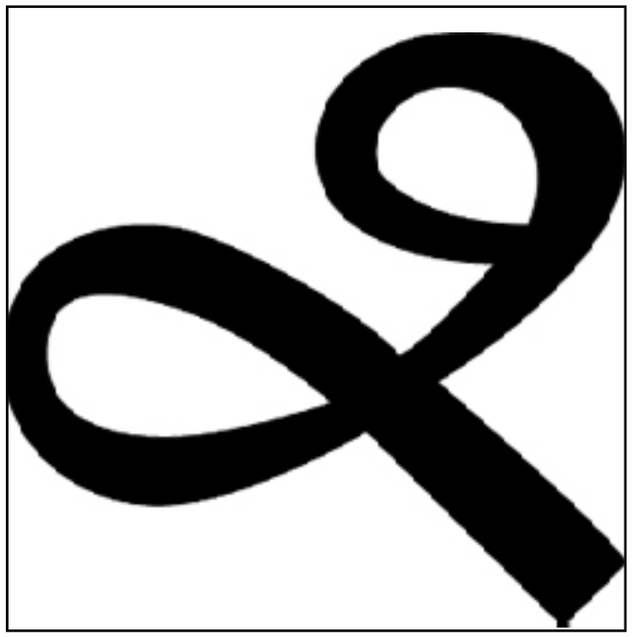


Satyendra Pakhale chose letter ‘Hrim’ from Siddham, a unique letter font. He converted the phone into a ‘carry gadget’, and added a mirror. It made a fashion statement!
No wonder today IDC is proud of his ‘celebrity status’ as an International Designer based in Amsterdam.

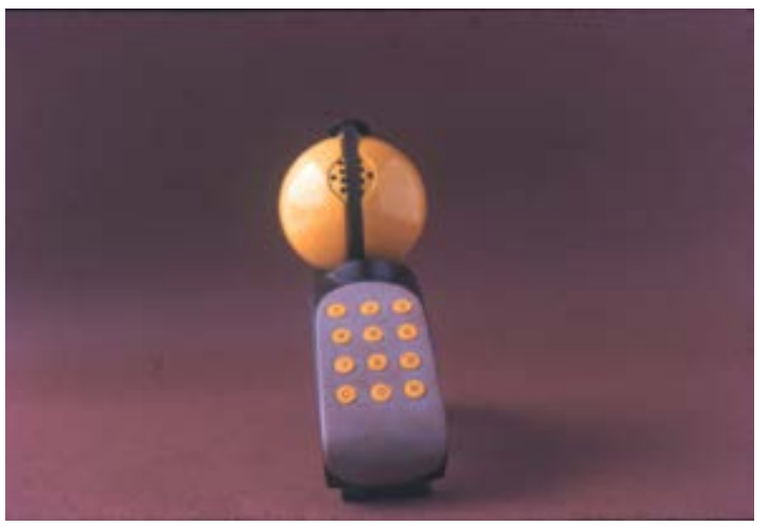


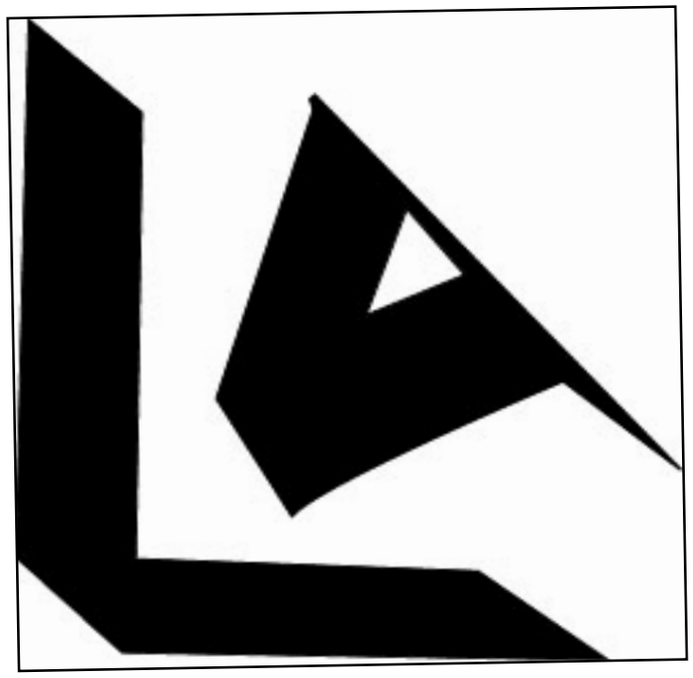


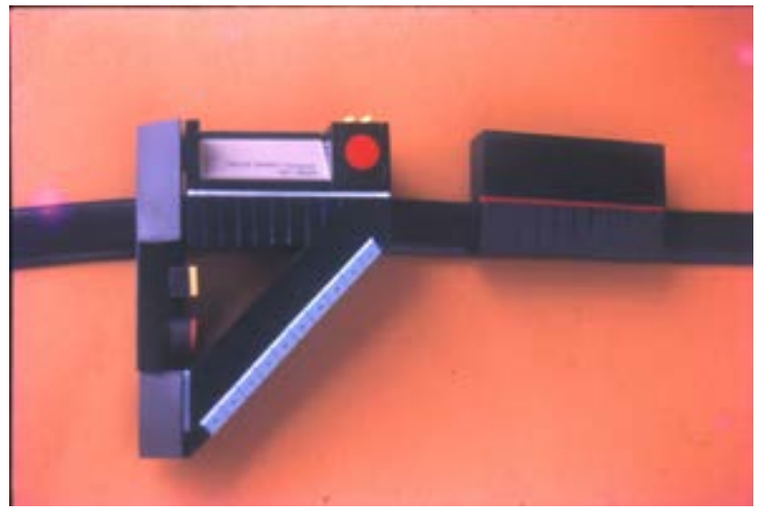
‘Om’ in tamil became one more interesting phone. Students were inspiring each other . With wide variety of forms available it was possible to have exclusive look for each telephone. Yet the form startegies to evolve had a common ground.
De-construction and extrusion could be observed in this phone



Gujarati letter ‘ja’ with a rotation and mirroring formed the basis for yet another phone. Similar semiotic connection started getting established. A closed circle became either cylinder by extrusion as in the bottom circles in tamil Om, or
it became a sphere on the top as in right side of ‘Om’, or middle of gujarati ‘ja’ (rotated and mirrored)

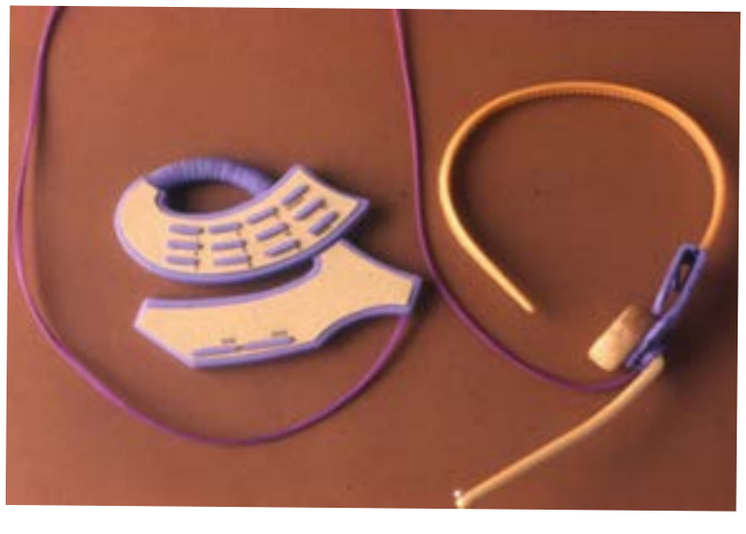


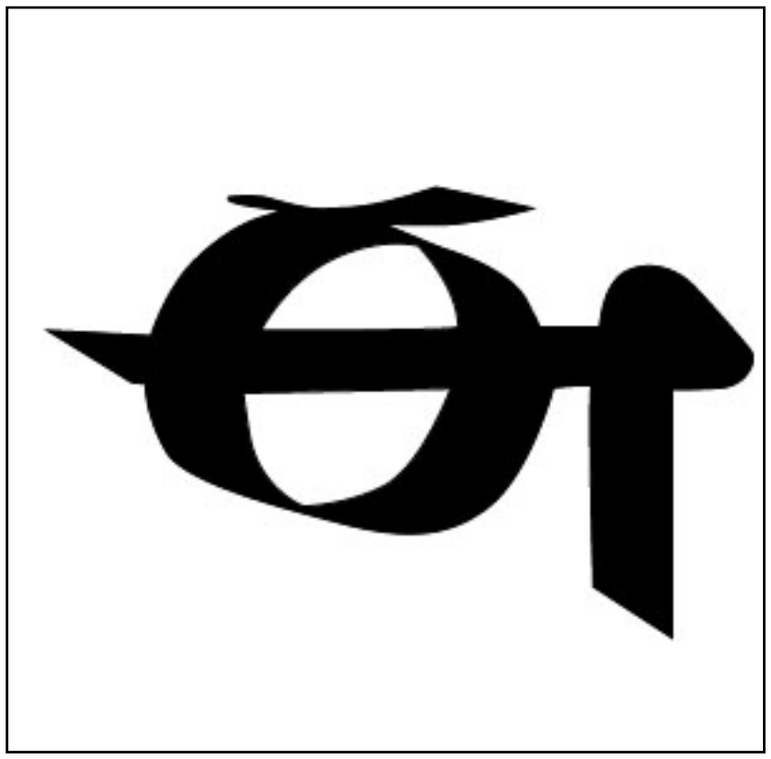




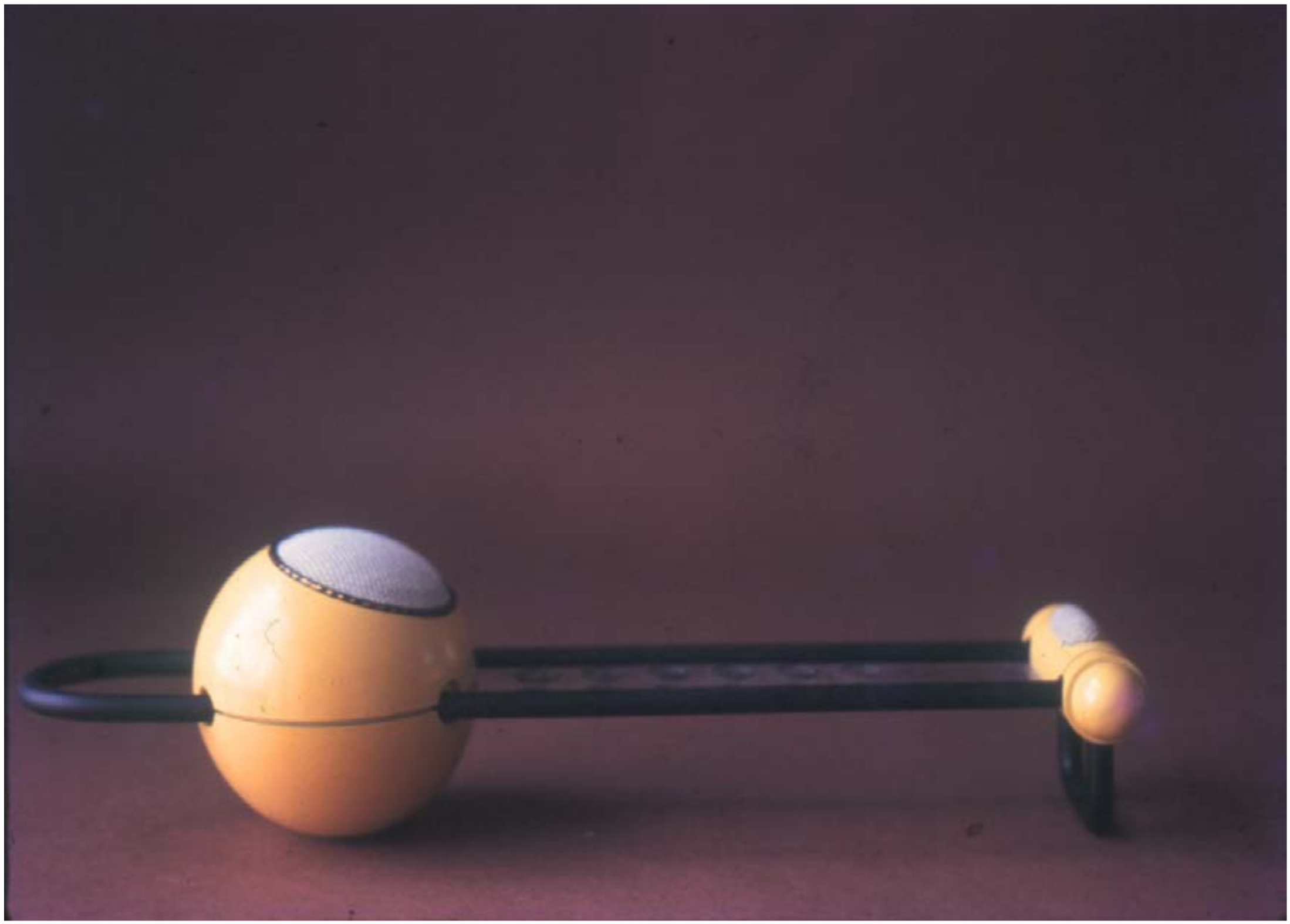
Two alphabets a punjabi letter and a tamil letter ‘Mu’ led to two wearable phones attached to the belt.
Interestingly semiotic connections could be observed. Straight lines became rectangular forms and ‘curved- additions’ (converting ‘ma’ to Mu) seem to have become head phones.

Looks like, a ‘Semiotic analysis may show some consistancy of thinking of the group in a given context, though we were not aware of that at that time!





Giridhar was the first to convert Kannada ‘EE’, into an attractive 3D telephone. The middle circle became a spherrical ball!
Horizintal line became thin sheet with rods at the ends. Rest of the form got adjusted in the overall context of elements of telephone to function.



Letter ‘He’ in Assamese led to a phone with complex structure. The structure of the product did not become simple. This is a challenge when we map two semiotic frame works.

The closed circle became spherical element like in other solutions. The transparent element became a weak connection. Achieving a compact product with logical structures will remain a guiding factor for good design. Deconstruction of the letter offers a platform to build a new telephone form. A ‘literal likeness’ may become a limiting factor in achieving a good design!

Reflections

A relook at this task done in 1990, can give us a framework to look at a creative process. Students intutively mapped the 2D letters to a (possible) 3D telephone. There was room for imagination to interpret features of a new telephone.
Analysis of all the solutions reveal a pattern of thought in translations from 2D to 3D, which were not articulated at that time! Examining them in terms of 'Semiotic Frame works' could lead to a method of generating new ' Product Forms'.
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