

News and Views -15

COVID-19 Crisis and 50years of Association with IDC

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To day is 7th, july 2020!

It is a sad moment for Indian Design Community as we loose Prof. Vikas Satwalekar, **a friend and ex-director of NID(Ahmedabad)** to Covid-19, on 27th June, 2020! We were together at NID, as students: He, in the first batch of VC and Me, in the first batch of PD(ID) post graduate diploma programmes of 3 to 4 years! The VC batch started an year earlier to PD course! I always remember Vikas with a cheerful face!

Covid-19 has been close to us. Even as my neighbour next door got infected and cured, four more people in our building are affected! We do get better attention and treatment belonging to the privileged section of Society, though Corona makes no distinction between poor or rich!

The human tragedy of migrant workers has been appalling! Images of people walking for miles without food and dying has stirred our 'Consciousness'! An IAS officer, who articulated the status sensitively, felt 'ashamed'! We all ought to feel ashamed for what has happened as we belong to the same 'consciousness' as human beings!

Even as we respond emotionally, it is time to look **deeper!**

All our economic growth and prosperity is dependent on increased consumption endangering the very planet we live on. And we have come to believe that higher economic growth (10%) will solve all the problems.

We have been

- Closing our eyes on deep social and economic inequalities in the Society,
- Ignoring the fact that present economic growth is still fueled by 'Building of War machinery' and 'Conflict between Nations'.
- Promoting **consumption** as mode of bringing happiness even after knowing that we need 7 to 8 planet-earths, if all people in the world emulate American model of consumption.

- Adopting unintelligent solutions like use of private cars for transport in crowded Cities.

Covid-19 has given us 'a whack' to relook at our assumptions and life patterns!

We have been insensitive to the facts like

- 20 to 30 industrial workers have been living in one small room in cities like Mumbai.
- Children and Women are ill treated to an unacceptable extent all over.
- Economic and Health security has not reached all.
-the list goes on.

Current crisis is rooted in all these facts!

It is imperative to respond individually as 'human beings' and collectively as 'professionals'! Crisis like Covid 19 and human sorrow provoke us and demand to reformat our lives!

*A similar challenge in 1972 had a major influence on **Us**, as a group at IITB, and on **Me** as an individual.*

Let me elaborate the story!

In 1972 a severe 'drought' took place in Maharashtra! IITB and people in Mumbai were not affected to cause any discomfort to them as such! But people from Villages had migrated in large numbers to Mumbai for livelihood! A group of Students and Faculty members got concerned at the disturbing events. FREA (Front for Rapid Economic Advancement) an organization initiated by IITians was involved actively in the relief work ! A meeting of our group with FREA led to our participation in drought relief work!

This involvement brought many insights to our group in our 'approach to Rural development', later manifesting into an academic centre, CTARA, which runs M Tech and Phd programmes today at IITB!.

To me it was the beginning of a long journey to find a direction in profession and meaning in life!

I have elaborated my engagement with FREA in an article uploaded in my website recently! Please see 'FREA and Mahua Magic'.

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

My search for 'design response' to 'rural problems with social concern' resulted into a long professional commitment to the area of Bamboo craft! It gave me a meaningful challenge to pursue in profession and life. My efforts gave shape to 'Bambu Studio' at IDC ! An elective course which I ran for many years, called CCPM(Craft, Creativity and Post Modernism) ensured an acceptable intellectual position for 'bamboo craft' in a Technological Institute like IIT. Our expert craft-persons Niranjan Rudrapaul and Gangamma have been engaged as craft Instructors at IDC, IITB which was unthinkable earlier!

It also resulted in starting a SINE(Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship) COMPANY : AGBS (AG Bambu Style) pvt ltd with Me, prof. S.S.Talwar,(who was in IITB drought relief team earlier) and M.Chattopadyay, (who was in the initial faculty team of IDC) as directors. A new team of designers have joined the company and I am glad to say that we are providing much needed earnings to craft groups in villages through design, small technologies, and marketing supports. We are getting formally linked to MBPF (Maharashtra Bamboo Promotion Foundation). AGBS has been making and selling mini toolkits, developed under UNDP project at IDC for several years, to bamboo craft-persons!

I joined IDC(Industria Design Centre) on 7th july,1970.

Today 7th of july 2020, is a day of remembrance for 50years of association with IDC. On 31st,May,2020 my formal engagement with IDC-School of Design came to an end.

IDC provided me a platform to grow professionally in the conventional mode! I was able to undertake prestigious design projects like EVM(Electronic Voting Machine) with a team supporting me.

More than that, the intellectual freedom enjoyed as a faculty member and rich interactions with faculty of various disciplines at IITB, enabled me to find new meaningful directions in 'design' as well as in 'life'! I am thankful to my colleagues, staff of IDC and the students with whom I have been interacting and learning from all of them till today!

It has been a long exciting journey. Soon my memory lane on my website will be entering IDC at IITBombay!
