PARADOX PARADIGMS AND ETHOS IN DESIGN EDUCATION

Immanuel Suresh
Faculty of communication design
National Institute of Design
Paldi, Ahmedabad
Gujarat , India 380 007
imsuresh@nid.edu

PARADOX PARADIGMS AND ETHOS IN DESIGN EDUCATION

Abstract

This paper I would like to present my observation of the paradigm shift in design education in the context of globalization and the influences of new technology.
New technology and work processes seem to bring about a homogeneity which has also an effect on the socio cultural environment not forgetting the loss of local specific cultural values. There seems to be a loss or neglect of aesthetics or influence of new visual languages.

Education at large
The geographical vastness of the country with diverse cultures has its own limitations. Education systems largely are dependent on the decision making bodies, which seems to have been caught in wilderness and unaware in addressing these issues. Privatized institution has cropped in all over the country trying to meet the educational needs. There has been a stratification and disparity in education.

Design Education
Modern Design education in India had its roots in the European tradition and developed an indigenous education system relevant for the Indian context.
But in the global economy the well evolved contextual design pedagogy and methodology seems irrelevant and/ or getting obsolete rapidly and is in a state of dilemma for many educators.
There seems to be an upsurge in many design educational institutes and probing into the need for design in this country.

Art and Design education
Education at large had been categorized and classified and in the end leading to specialization in varied fields. In our context a broader philosophy was interrelated with art. Art was part of life and never in isolation, it was a way of life and there has also never been clear distinction between art and craft. Art education is a western conceptual model. Education is broadly linked with employment which is a fallout of the earlier colonial rule; hence art education seems to become obsolete. The older educational subjects is no longer attractive and the need to qualify higher has become prime important that gaining the necessary knowledge.

Conflicts and misinterpretations
In this scenario design education seems to be an easy resort. Design is mistaken for fashion or decorative arts in the minds of the people at large.
The present paradigm has very rapidly brought in changes which results in fallouts of varied nature. I would probe and soul search through this paper the influence of media and technology the loss of visual aesthetics sand the fall out of cultural values and would reflect upon what and where should design education and educators need to draw inspiration from and should it seek for values or get carried away with the tide.

Key words

The fallout of languages, the role of Media – educate entertain and inform the transition. The entertainment industry and Education as an industry, The fall out of visuality, The misinterpretation of design.

Introduction.

The Indian environ – unity in diversity

The Indian environ and the populace is quite large, according to the latest census the population has crossed the billion mark and the rate of literacy stands only at 65.4%- [1]
This only has to be experienced. We are varied in terms of landscape, language and its pluralistic culture. With about 325 languages the dialect changes with every small district as one passes by. Literacy and elementary education to a larger mass has been elusive in spite of the phenomenal growth in the education scenario.

The Indian mind – introspective

If one observes the Indian subcontinent's image with a discerning eye, curiously there are no straight lines that divide the landscape. It is defined and demarcated by the natural boundaries of rivers and mountains. The Indian mind follows the natural trail.

This also has a reflection on all our motifs whether it is floral, animal or human form in the art of decoration. It turns symbolic in the eyes of the user and the interpreter conveying deeper meanings and connotations. Our motifs are not the influences of the knots or the springy wires of the Bronze Age.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, a philosopher thinker says in his treatise on Indian philosophy[2] "The speculative mind is more synthetic, while the scientific one is more analytic," having said that he elaborates beautifully about the western thought and the Indian thought[1]

Education at large

When discussing about the design education it is worth looking at the historical context of our education system and its different form it has metamorphosed over time. A conflicting wound which has been inscribed into our cultural fabric. This needs to be elaborated since design education system cannot be seen in isolation. In the Hindu model of the stages of life the knowledge of dharma (can only literally be translated as the law of virtue) is more emphasized in the Bramacharya stage (apprentice stage) the prior to this the childhood stage only prepares it to comprehend dharma. The householder stage or the garbasthya emphasizes on the practice of dharma, and the teaching of dharma is allowed in the withdrawal stage known as the vanasprastha, it is only in the renunciation stage that an individual is led to the realization of dharma and attains wisdom.

So the transition of information, knowledge to wisdom is perceived at different stages of life.[3]

The Gurukul System

This form of education system prevailed in the pre British education system, where in the student resides in the house of the teacher and does all the chores of the guru and learns and imbibes knowledge from him. The student here was part of the family. This system is mostly seen in the tradition of music and dance learning of the past and therefore each and every dance form is also identified with its school commonly known as the *Gharana* (a style pertaining to a specific school of though)

---

[1] the Indian thought attempts vast , impersonal views of existence, and makes it easy for critic to bring the charge of being more idealistic and contemplative, producing dreamy visionaries and strangers in the world , while western thought is more particularistic and pragmatic. The latter depends on what we call the senses; former presses the soul sense into the service of speculation. Once again it is the natural condition of India that account for the contemplative turn of the Indian who had the leisure to enjoy the beautiful things of the world and express his wealth of soul in song and story, music and dance, rites and religions, undisturbed by the passions of the outer world."

The contemporary education.

The colonial context

The beginning of the contemporary structure of education is more attributed more to the colonial context. The colonial education is sometimes seen with contempt saying that the form of education was structured only to make clerks and administrative personnel for governance.

Lord Macaulay a great scholar lived in Calcutta in the year 1834-37.[4] He perceived the need of education for the Indians and made reforms in education which is valid for the contextual relevance of the time. It is quite but natural for the British to enforce the study of English language. Due to the multiple languages and diversity of cultures prevailing more strongly at that point of time he felt it necessary for Indians to understand the highly developed cultures of the Greek and Latin etc. In this process of the enforcement of English as a language one saw the fallout of Sanskrit and Arabic which were predominant at that point as an administrative and highly developed literary language. E.B.Havell strongly criticized the foolish dictum of lord Macaulay who believed that all of India's literary culture was not worth a single bookshelf of a good European library he called it the blind leading the blind.[5]

Schools of industrial arts and E. B.Havell's realization

Indian craft shops had collapsed due to lack of state and public patronage on one hand and the import of machine made goods on the other rendering artisans and craftsman unemployed. The British felt that it should aid its fellow subjects i.e. the Indian craftsmen every possible aid in cultivating the branches of art specific to them. This led to starting of the first school of art in Chennai in 1850 by Dr. Alexander Hunter, an eminent surgeon of that time in the British military service. It had two departments the artistic and the industrial. He took full charge as the principle in 1855 and also introduced photography as a subject. Emphasis was given on map and diagrams, botanical and anatomical drawings, woodcut and engraving on one hand and on the other it specialized in machine tools and apparatuses mostly for the specific need of hospitals, barracks and bullet factories and telegraphic purposes.[6] this could be said to be the first milestone in the industrial design in this country.

Many great masters' drawings were brought to Madras College of arts from the Royal College of arts, London as teaching material and the nuances of craft were taught by master crafts man selected from various parts of Tamilnadu. On one hand it can be said to have broken the tradition of the crafts as a hereditary family culture. There was a clear demarcation between the art and the crafts perspective.

It is also said there were great many artifacts were sent to the great crystal palace exhibition in London in 1857.At the end of which Owen Jones happened to compile the famous "grammar of ornamentation" this could be said to be the first documentation of the finer points of the Indian ornamentation, since until then, it remained in the form of oral tradition.

In 1884.E.B. Havell, an art teacher and critic took over as principal; he felt that the English education has led to an extreme loss of the visual and aesthetic sense, Madras at that time which was also considered to be an "artistic desert." He had great ideas for the spread of fine arts. He observed that the power of spiritual insight is the foundation of all the highest art , whether it be eastern or western he also felt that photography and the commercial art of Europe was propagating a wrong grammar of art in India [7]. It so happened that when E. B. Havell left Madras school of arts in the year 1896. It was converted into a manufactory of aluminum cooking pots – aluminum as a material was new to India at that time and he lamented that the Indian art became invisible to the officials[7] of that time. He introduced wood carving, carpentry and metal work. He felt the need to preserve the traditional architecture and sympathized with the handloom weaving.

However the good intentions only saw the bifurcation of fine art and the crafts.
The terminology of fine art and the crafts are too western and alien.

Gandhi's views on education

"The function of Nayee-Talim is not to teach an occupation, but through it to develop the whole man." [8]–M.K.Gandhi. In the *nayee talim* system (new education) no subject or activity was considered in isolation. The growth of the mind and the body needs to be interlinked for a balanced development of the child. Gandhi felt that the English type of education was very elite and expensive and did not cater to the needs of the common man. There was and emphasis to learn a handy work and an occupation he visualized a self sustaining system of education.[7]

Tagore's view on education

Tagore had rejected the notion and practice of teaching based on textbooks. For Tagore, education was a process of learning rather than a mechanical method of thrusting information into. According to Tagore the best text book is life itself, and nature, of which we are an integral part: so also our cultural heritage and its significance in the ongoing process of our lives. To put it in a nutshell there are three centers of education: mother tongue, nature and creative activities. [9] as quoted by Devi Prasad who worked closely with the pioneering artist of that time and involved in Gandhian form of education therefore one notices that learning through mother tongue were given more emphasis.

The post independent government's awakening.

Design education must help in building knowledge and make connections of a different order. Not only revel itself in the making of good product. It should build perspectives and visions of a higher order for the better human existence. In this context I take liberty to discuss the larger scenario of the current Indian education not necessary the higher education, but limiting myself to the basic school education since great creative minds are being shaped at this stage with specific to art education. Since art education is considered synonymous to creativity.

Though the individuals were questioning the validity of the western type of education the policy and concern for education in my opinion had come very late. The resolution on education was addressed in 1968; the emphasis has been mainly on quality improvement and educational facilities and to focus on the education of girls about a decade and half Later. The national policy on education laid down a comprehensive plan for the development of education. A uniform structure of 10+2 (i.e. a twelve year) system at the school level has been adopted through out this country. However there are also some differences due to the legacy of the education left behind by the English rule in India. A disparity has been created in many forms of education system. Art has gained more importance only in the elitist institutions of learning and the normal school saw it only as a vestige subject which is unimportant.

The developing India

The sixties saw a sea change in the Indian climate with many management institutions, institutes of technology and other premier institutions being set up and one such premier institute, the national institute of design was also set up

The design education

Through the oral narration of the senior most members who were present at the moment of initiation of this institute it is said that the need for design education was felt by Pupul Jayakar during an exhibition of Indian textiles held in USA, wherein the idea of the design education was mooted and it is said that Gautham sarabhai one of the members of Sarabhai family, the connoisseurs of art and culture, was also present and took in the opportunity to set up a design

institute in India. Charles Eames, a well known designer was invited and gave a framework of a design institute through the India report.

This first design institute's curriculum was modeled on the great schools like Bauhaus and the Ulm. Bauhaus addressed the issues after the World War I and the Ulm addressed the issues of the World War II. The national institute of design though modeled on these lines evolved itself for the context of the Indian environment and constant evolution has been taking place ever since. It addressed the needs of cultural diversity of India and focused on the rural as well as the small scale industry's concerns in terms of design, through its courses like environment perception in the foundation programme and at the senior level in the form of craft documentations and crafts training.

However the perception of a larger populace in terms of design has been only fashion this is mostly due to the large amount of fashion institutes which has come about in the past two decades. This has also brought a large scale fall out of the traditional costumes. And there seems to be growing shift of education towards the visual since the other academic education is outdated in the heart of the growing youth. Media has also reinforced this phenomenon.

Tools of education.

The critical problem one sees is that for any education language becomes an important tool. And every body in the past was only responding to these challenges of an imposition of a language. The same could also be said of the visual arts and crafts of India. We had great literary works like Vishnu dharmotra purana , a treatise of the visual arts has been passed on from one generation to the other which helped in maintaining a high quality of the visual culture.

Besides iconography has also been followed over the years for maintaining a quality of refine ness in the imagery and the plastic arts they were written as shilpa sastra's and chitra sutra – canons of sculpture and painting. The sculptures and paintings of Ajanta and Ellora of the sixth centuries have reached the highest order of aesthetic imagination. The critical question in my mind is how can one revive this knowledge and try and interpret it in the modern context. The barrier is nothing but the language.

Tools of the visual.

The inherent nature of any living being is to judge either consciously or instinctively. Conscious judgment is the inherent nature of the human being these Judgments could be, ideal based, value based, conceptual, spatial or visual. In the context of design I would like to discuss only the nature of conceptual, spatial and more specifically the visual.

Conceptual judgment is very much part of the spatial and the visual. It is to articulate and solve problems at each and every context as one goes by a problem, whether it is spatial or the visual.

The complexity of the spatial is the reference of the human existence with the environment. The inherent reference tools are the verticality and the horizontality. Which is the commonly known horizontality of the both the eyes and the constant effort of the human body to remain move vertical on the earth. The curvilinear and the diagonal are the evolution of the complex evolutionary processes. So over the years tools have been evolving as an process to assist and aid this articulation of the verticality and the horizontality for example the straight edge and the plumb line etc.

These tools are more to maintain a consistency and execute a concept according to one given norms. There fore in religious context there evolved a complex measure system called the iconography. Which prohibited and restricted any individual interpretation and have a collective understanding of a form which has evolved over the years and become a standard may also be called a dogma. Many of the Indian idol of gods and goddesses are still governed by this iconography .it is a highly refined system of representation. No individual is at a liberty to alter it or make any changes.

The straight edge and the compass which (divider which is an extension of the straight edge where in the equi- distance is maintained from one position to another.) has evolved over long years. Now computer as a tool is only about 25 years old when people started using it as a tool or an assist to interpret their concepts.

The loss of perception,

The loss of perception, scale, imagination and judgment due to the limitation of the monitor, the present design education and engineering seems more and more use of the computers. This is one of the most relevant tools for the developing economy and everybody is fascinated about it. On one hand every body is proud of this on the other hand the cause of worry is that the perception of space and length is so very limited to the 17"or a 21" screen. Whether a meter or a kilometer all is seen within the frame work of the monitor screen and there seems to be a loss of judgment and scope of imagination. Likewise the presentation techniques developed with the help of computers does not allow the viewer to grasp for some time to internalize since all comes with a prepared bullet point of view. Standardization of the software, which gives no scope of any individual ingenuity and becomes more a homogeneous solutions.

Quite interestingly people have learnt the English software language intuitively and proficiently. The other information search engines also functions with only English as the majority. The local specific information has to be again learnt in a foreign language.

Media and education

Media has a great influence in education. In the traditional system it was more of an entertainment enhancing the values of every individual.

The radio days – Initially some experiments were carried on by producing some programmes for the curious students as part of the study of the distant education system.

The advent of television has made radio almost obsolete however the FM band has been revived to area specific transmission these are more catering to the cause of entertainment.

The Television days The modern electronic media's effort in India started with the SITE experiment i.e. satellite instruction television experiment in mid seventies 74/75 with its prime objective of information, education, and entertainment. This was an effort by the first satellite programmes in this country. This definitely had a great influence in the masses. This was also followed by the country wide class room by the use of technology. However the takeover of the transponder by the corporate sector and the cable television has deviated from the prime objective – to inform, to educate to entertainment. Where in the entertainment became the prime focus of the telecasting and the entertainment production industries conveniently called infotainment?

Media and language

The fallout and the influence of English into the local language by the Video Jockey and Music TV culture has caught on. But it necessitates understanding that this also had an influence on the visual culture. The erstwhile fears of photography influencing on the visual grammar seems to have gone a step further and the media seems to influence the visual grammar the phonetics and also the language fallout. The fear mostly expressed here is that the local language is falling out. But the greater fear of English itself falling out is not far off with the advent of new tools of communication which I express in the following paragraph.

QWERTY versus the alpha numerical

The QWERTY system of the keyboards in the typewriters and later on which has to be adapted to the computer keyboards since there was no alternative. This system of key board has its share in the fall out of the written script. The influx of the large scale computer in all the fields have made the skill sets of the few who could touch type irrelevant and obsolete. On the other

hand it has become a necessity for every one to know the basic touch typing which people have learnt in their own way.

This has perhaps been a historical phenomena in any form of the script be it the reed or the invention of the fountain and the ball pen.

The reed introduced the concept of the scribe since the written word was known only to a few. The invention of the printing had made knowledge accessible to a larger audience.

Most of the ancient text written on palm leaf has been immersed in rivers once for all. It was never passed on to anybody apart from the family. a strong belief that it would bring curse to the family. Thus many a great literary work has been lost in our tradition.

The Dip pen or the steel nib was a later phenomenon which was introduced during the colonial rule in Indian followed by the fountain pen. These tools have contributed to a larger number of people learning the script in the modern education.

However the vast spread of the cellular phone has brought in a new key board or the writing system – the alpha numerical system. This single handed typing of the short message has brought in a totally new fall out of a language, the acronym system.

People communicate in the acronym. A rapid fall out of the English language is inevitable in the near future. The Morse code and the telegraph also had short forms and numerical indicators of messages however it has not caused such damage as the alpha numerical system. A new mode of communication that seems to be evolving is the miscall communication. Where in this mode is used in situations where the context is understood by both parties the sender and the receiver and there is no need for an oral communication just a signal makes the receiver understand the situation. May be some technology must evolve on this lines.

The paradox and the paradigm shift

India inherently belongs to an agrarian ethos and the enforcement of the industrial ethos here has led into a different social and familial culture[11]. Our visual arts and crafts had its roots embedded in this agrarian ethos. The influence of the industrial ethos is historical in nature. The world is moving into homogeneity due to media, technology and the software's etc. in this paradigm it has become important to question our tools of design education

As the models of growth has shifted from Europe to the United States of America. We have lost the deeper philosophy of Europe as well and knowledge has become more of a techno-informative. The current westernized generation has become anchorless as before. Consumption grows as an evidence of success.[12]

To conclude in this paper I had been discussing more on education in common and little about design education and mostly about the language and its fallout. Now every language is governed by its own phonetics, semiotics and pragmatics which is contextual and local specific this is more of an analogy one needs to draw on to understand the design education needs also but the paradox is though the growth shift which had been quoted earlier which is towards the USA.Seems to be shifting down wards towards Asia but our design needs still seems to cater to other than itself. in this context we seem to be following the language of design of the west and not the local specific needs.

Design education needs to look into the contextual needs since the techno- informative is only one side of the coin of the design education. There is always variety in nature and human existence is dependent on this variety of culture. Homogeneity can evolve into a domination of another order.

Reference:

1. http://www.education.nic.in/htmlweb/edusta.htm,
2. Dr.S Radhakrishnan's *Indian philosophy*, p 31 (1922)
3. Sudhir kakkar . the Indian psyche.
4 http://www.languageinindia.com/april2003/macaulay.html
5, E.B Havell, the basis for artistic and industrial revival in India pp 96 (1912)
6. Anjali sircar a brochure on museum of contemporary art of madras school of art. 1997
7, E.B Havell, the basis for artistic and industrial revival in India pp147 (1912),
8. .http://www.mkgandhi.org/edugandhi/Gandhiji's_views.htm
9. Devi Prasad's Art: the basis of education p xx
11. Pulin Garg & Indira Parikh (1995) cross roads of culture   p65
12 ibid pp114

Notes
        " the Indian thought attempts vast , impersonal views of existence, and makes it easy for critic to bring the charge of being more idealistic and contemplative, producing dreamy visionaries and strangers in the world , while western thought is more particularistic and pragmatic. The latter depends on what we call the senses; former presses the soul sense into the service of speculation. Once again it is the natural condition of India that account for the contemplative turn of the Indian who had the leisure to enjoy the beautiful things of the world and express his wealth of soul in song and story, music and dance, rites and religions, undisturbed by the passions of the outer world."

        2 Gandhi's basic education was, therefore, an embodiment of his perception of an ideal society consisting of small, self-reliant communities with his ideal citizen being an industrious, self-respecting and generous individual living in a small cooperative community.

        3 The paradox of these educational experiments wherein we have lost our roots of knowledge is well articulated by Dr. Radhakrishnan
        "Let us also remember that these mechanical inventions belong after all to the sixteenth century and after, by which time India has lost her independence and become parasitic. The day she lost her freedom and began to flirt with other nations, a curse fell on her and she became petrified. Till then she could hold her own even in arts , crafts and industries , not to speak of mathematics , astronomy, chemistry, medicines surgery and those branches of physical knowledge practiced in the ancient times "

------- oOo -------