

Designing Better Designers Summary

Organised by British Council in association with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) in India

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About the event

“The government supports design education when it has a financial imperative; this causes the education to be industrially or technologically focussed. The government needs to be educated on the value of educating young people on the process of thinking” – M P Ranjan

“We all want to design better designers and I suggest we all need to design better design users, and purchasers. Design requires good clients as much as it requires good designers” – Andrew Summers

The British Council in association with the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) in India organised “Designing Better Designers”, a forum to explore Design Education. The event, which was held on 25 Feb 2012, at the British Council, New Delhi, served as a platform for design educators, students and policy makers, to relook at design education and the role it plays in a rapidly growing India. The event also aimed at building collaboration between India and UK to fill gaps in their current education models.

The event which was supported by Sushant School of Design and University of Arts London was held in three parts:

1. A discussion on “Design Education in India: where is it heading?”
2. Workshop for school students on “What is design? And how it can change your life?”
3. Event for design students and educators, “What I wish they taught in a design school.”

The first event brought to light, issues in teaching practice and pedagogy, as well as explored how they could shape future ready, empowered and original designers. It generated an insight into opportunities for design students through scholarships and collaborations as well as promoting design education in schools.

A summary of the first event is as follows:

Background to the discussion

“India’s current annual consumption of design services is estimated at Rs. 3,400 crore. This is expected to grow to Rs. 12,300 crore in the next five years. India currently trains around 1,000 design professionals every year against a requirement of 7,000 to 8,000.

Although a few design institutes have come up across the country in the last decade, the supply of design professionals will outstrip the demand. While the US, Western Europe, Japan and South Korea are leading players, India can make it if adequate attention is provided.” – Business Standard (January 10, 2011)

Chaired by Penny Egan, Fulbright Commission UK, this discussion was initiated with the hope of delivering practical outcomes for design education in India. Recognising the role of design in society, industry, economy and policy-making, this discussion was initiated to reflect upon the need to train larger number of designers and the issues surrounding it. Some of those concerns included:

- For long the leaders in the Indian Design Education have been the National Institute of Design (NID) and Industrial Design Centre (IDC) followed by the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) and Pearl Academy. In the last fifteen years India has seen many new Design schools opening responding to the need for design professionals in the 21st century.
- The lack of higher education opportunities will ensure that the design schools will always have students, but the quality of the experience and resultant designers will be determined by having the right vision and infrastructure in place.
- The shortage of faculty is a commonly acknowledged problem within the design education community. The government has taken cognizance of the fact that there is an acute shortage of faculty which would be aggravated with more institutes opening in their [RFP document](#). In many of the private institutions there are also gaps within the curriculum and an articulation of the larger vision and understanding of the industry seems to be missing. Additionally there are interesting initiatives within school curriculum introducing design and there needs to be a mandate of encouraging potential designers to understand this vocation at an early stage.
- There is a parallel enquiry taking place in the UK by the Design Commission named The [inaugural report](#) from the Design Commission explores the link between the UK's national design capacity, and economic growth in the 21st century. In so doing, it describes and analyses the design skill set, assesses UK's current strengths in the field of design education, and compares those to the practices of other nations. It sets out the current threats to the ongoing successful delivery of design education and what the Design Commission believe the UK must do now to continue to compete.

"I just wanted to say that both countries are at tipping points in their development in terms of design profession." – Penny Egan

The participants through their discussion touched upon the broad context of understanding design as well as particular concerns in pedagogy, training, infrastructure and collaboration. The following are the themes covered through the discussion:

1. **"Why design matters?"** – Penny Egan

Articulating the importance and scope of design

- *"Many countries in the world have specially in the last 10, 15 years really got to understand the importance of design and how important it is for economy and quality of life"* – Andrew Summers, design partners.

Design being intrinsic to material culture and human life, needs to be demystified to gain relevant support. Anjan Das, CII representative, agreed in suggesting that integration with the larger community and industry, needs design's scope and purpose to be understood and related to by not just the design community, but also the clients, the government and policy makers. According to M P Ranjan, design academic and design thinker, "Because we need to spread design education in the country – we need to be sensitive towards it."

- Design process and characteristics must also be explained to the purchasers and users. Simon Hamilton, BIID, emphasised on the importance to understand how design touches everyone's life. Nien Siao, Pearl Academy of Fashion, mentioned that *"ultimately design has to relate to people, it has to be useful to people and has to be understood by the masses and be used by them. Because only if they understand and use it, will it be useful for all of us to be a part of that stream and would they require so many designers."*
- Simon and Rajesh Dahiya, design professional, suggested that the media too needs an orientation to design, for an inclusive communication and promotion to masses. *"Because mostly the newspapers I read its fashion design. It's as if all design is fashion design. Or maybe once in a while making a lamp and its nothing beyond that"* said Rajesh.

2. What is Design?

"We tend to value science because it works on general principles and we under value design because they are dealing with particular and the very ultimate particular." – MP Ranjan

- Resonating with Ranjan's views, Andrew expressed that *"it is not design for sake of design, its not technology for sake of technology. Its taking issues and problems and using the design process to solve problems of real life."* While he mentioned design as human-centred problem-solving and a tool for innovation, Dinesh Korjan, design educator and professional, mentioned that design is an elegant solution.
- Ranjan and Dinesh expressed that design is co-creation through a design process, which could solve complex problems, and achieve transformation even at a systemic level.
- Tapan Chakravarty, design educator at Pearl, felt that as designers, rather than *"than waiting for problem to happen I think you should be able to see opportunity."* Design therefore includes identifying opportunities and possibilities for the future. Andrew and Ranjan shared that it is integral for growth of creative industries and a country's economy.
- According to Dinesh, *"creation doesn't mean always tangible creation. There can be intangible creations."*

3. Leadership in Design: Design Commission and Design Policy

- *"In the 1930s the RSA again felt that design was a very important profession; it wanted to support design and it set up the Royal Designers for Industry."* – Penny
According to Penny and Andrew, the UK Design community demonstrates leadership through RSA and a parliamentary design commission. The RSA set up design institutes, organized students' awards and gathered industry support from different sectors. By organising a series of prizes on identified problems, variety of practical solutions were found. UK looks forward to a design strategy to ensure a common goal for all parts of the government while leadership and resources are being aligned with it.
- The Indian Design Council being more industry focussed is deficient in representation of design community, the design associations, institutes and role of design in India. As per Ranjan, who also

participated in its formulation, the National Design Policy, coming from the department of industry promotion and productivity, and drafted with the support of CII and NID, is “deficient” and lacks a broader perspective. Anjan Das, representing the industry point of view, mentions that there is a need to look beyond the industry and to identify leaders from within the design community.

- *“In the east and particularly in India where we have chaos around us and one dimension that is truly missing is a design conjunction” – M P Ranjan*

Where Ranjan and Nien mentioned the lack of union, Dinesh felt that setting up a Design Commission could be a good idea.

4. Factors determining demand for designers in India

- *“One of the big discussions we have been having in Britain is that if industry has migrated to India, to China or elsewhere” – Penny Egan*

The industry having migrated to India and China creates opportunity for experience and expertise at the site of production.

- In India there is a tremendous opportunity to work with materials, to work with communities which actually produce things. Sangeeta Shroff, who was the director at Indian Institute of Craft and Design (IICD) said that *“At the Indian Institute of Craft and Design our experience has shown that in just two years’ time we have had fifteen to twenty universities of Europe and America who want their students to come and spend an entire semester at the school. Since many countries in Europe since manufacturing industries are not there here there is a tremendous opportunity to work with materials, to work with communities which actually produce things.”*

- Ranjan mentioned the rising opportunities in small towns and cities where the need for trained designers and institutes was not addressed earlier. Tapan agreed and added that *“As a service, if there is enough hunger for design, then there would be hunger for designers.”*

- A need for more specialised designers has emerged. There is a dearth of designers and design educators as compared to rising demand and job opportunities. Where Tapan asked to face the situation and accept the dearth, he also marvelled at the 400 new schools of design in China, that have enabled the country to rely on its own designers. Anjan questioned how we would ensure the quality of human resource and their passion for the profession in future, where large numbers are to be trained for industry’s demands.

5. Need for Design to be non-exclusive in India

- *“We should look at the collaboration of design education with communities, with the manufacturers.”* mentioned Sangeeta Shroff, while demanding for design education *to be non exclusive*. She also mentioned that design in India appears to be an elite opportunity and most students do not experience design prior to higher education which restricts the numbers who opt for it in future. *“where we are coming from, everybody is a designer but they don’t see themselves as a designer”* said Lalage Prabhu when speaking of incorporating design education in schools.

Design education is expensive and commercialized which restricts the number of students opting for it. Nisha Berlia, Member Management Board, Apeejay Stya Education Research Foundation, mentioned the fact that design institutes are silo institutes and *“very rarely you see designers as regular part of the university”*. According to Sangeeta, in India, even today higher education is still primarily directed or triggered as an economic decision. Higher education or professional education should not be so expensive, so that there are students from all classes. Also an affordable education ensures that students’ aim is not narrowed to ensuring return on investment, it is important to ascertain that design remains passion-driven and not a forced decision for money-making.

- Sangeeta further questioned *“Why is it that engineering or art is so much a part of people’s life - people know about it”* and *“Are we integrated with the larger life, the larger community, the larger industry and is design still patron centric in contemporary world?”* Simon Hamilton suggested that *“the only way to progress is to actually include people in process and be visionary about what we trying to achieve and that does include media, that does include the general public.”*

6. Inclusion of the unorganized sector

“Germany has an entire system where they recognize their craftsmen, they have an education programme, they have government recognition we need to do something like that in India also so that our basic support base is there for the future.” – Nisha Berlia

“Can design grow through a non formal education or practice?” – Sangeeta.

- Ranjan and Sangeeta shared that barriers on informally trained designers or craftsmen must be removed. These different groups must be valued and connected. *“In fact we believe that every one of our craftsmen in this country – a skilled and innovative craftsman is a designer who can produce and provide value. And they are the foundation of the creative economy of the future”* said Ranjan. Nisha Berlia suggested that there should be a Tertiary Level Certification to recognise craftsmen and provide support. Penny mentioned that UK has lost its manufacturing base and Nisha mentioned that since in India we don’t recognise our craftsmen, they don’t get a loan and lack support in society, hence their base here too has sunk.
- Ranjan commented on the lack of any institution that has the mandate to provide new knowledge for the crafts sector. Bani jha expressed her regret on crafts dying out and explained that NIFT is working towards incorporating crafts in Design Education and is *“on the verge of finalizing clusters where students will, as part of curriculum and we have design and technology streams, they are all going to adopt or work with certain clusters over a period of five years.”*
- Sangeeta offered that collaborations should be equitable and include communities and people, a cultural exchange and international exposure through collaborative work, than mere student exchange.

7. Pedagogical and infrastructure concerns in training and developing designers for future. The role of Design Institutes.

“Every engineer says I am a designer, they don’t know about it, they have a different notion of design” – MP Ranjan

- The design community felt a need to redefine the purpose of design education in India. Where Tapan mentioned how the industry and design has got into the mind as one theme, he wondered if design could be considered a life skill. Ranjan mentioned the need to acknowledge design as separate from science and art. Jitender Shambhi, Head of Department at Sushant School of Design, added that design is *“to be able for young people to connect the word or the experience or the approach of taking part in design to the whole aspect and whole variety of the disciplines or even experiences.”*
- The community also felt the need to acknowledge the need and role of different design institutes, those set up by the government as well as private institutes. Where the former were parent institutes, the latter train good number of designers with practical inputs aligned with profiles in industry. Institutes could focus on thought; skill, management etc. and these different aspects must be recognized and celebrated. Bani Jha and Ranjan raised the point of having institutes dedicated to crafts while Nien demanded a broader perspective towards different streams in design, including fashion design.
- According to Nien, design institutes in India need to devise innovative methodology for training larger number of students, in a more realistic environment, than a specific number in a special environment. Further, to increase numbers, the gap between high school and design school needs to be bridged.

“How do we interest those 7000 students at the high school level and prepare them for getting them into design school with the proper support they need – layers.”

– Silvia Ojeda García, Academic Director, Raffles Millennium International, New Delhi.

Design Education to begin from school was hence favoured by the participants. Design could be included in school curriculum and positioned such that it is not at the bottom. Students should experience and be made to understand the relevance of design and creative development to different subjects. Lalage Prabhu, IB School, suggested that *“it needs to be come down to the school level so that students understand that whatever subjects they are actually studying in depth there is a design or creative development to them and it should be celebrated.”* Penny pressed upon the need to increase demand from school age children. Simon Hamilton gave example of the Professional Pathway, at the British Institute of Interior Design, *“you get from 1000 to 7000, you might get that if people think there is a future for them. So if you say that if there is some sort of way of mentoring student or school children and they know there is a Pathway they might think it is worth doing this course.”*

- Design as an interdisciplinary field was agreed upon. Students in design institutes should interact with different disciplines and universities. According to Ranjan, Design could be part of a university where it need not fit into any one department but be an adhesive for the different subjects and add to their strength. Design need not always be taught to make designers, rather it is the ability to think in an open way and connect with reality on ground. Tapan agreed and asked for the bars and fragmentation to be broken and Penny wondered if every university could have an opportunity to have a design input in some way. *“How many universities do we have in this country? Close to 500 at least – not a single one has a design department”* said Ranjan, and added *“I think the strategy which perhaps we have to use – is how do you put*

design inside the university – not to say make designers...don't confuse designers with design education."

- There was discussion on design education as a foundation in problem-solving. This aspect of design education could be relevant in elementary as well as higher education to face newer challenges. *"It could be a fantastic foundation for many countries in the 21st century. You could have that in schools as well as higher education - it could be fantastic grounding."* – Penny
- Tapan referred to design education as an attitude building, following Ranjan's views he mentioned that it should not just be socially relevant but be a part of society. It is the ability to see gaps and options; *"Can we propose a small program that can go into any university in this country? What it is that we talk about design and try and introduce it to every university?"* asked Tapan while referring to design education as a life skill. Responding to this, Moneesha Gupta, British Council, Education UK, asked whether design education could then be similar to management education which is *"very popular because of its generic nature; it can go into any industry management and so is design – there is a lot of similarity."* Anjan Das mentioned that an attitude of serving well is to be retained in Indian design institutes.
- Ranjan emphasised upon the need for design education as team work and catering to local needs. Design Education should emphasise on team projects than individual demonstration or examination. Students should be able to work with a variety of things and learn from each other's experiences. Design education should encourage identifying local needs or problems, setting up challenges, and finding contextual solutions. *"If you are in Kerala we have lot of coir- that coir does not appear in the curriculum of that local community. Similarly you go the north east we have bamboo but it is not in the curriculum"* – Ranjan commenting on central curriculum followed in design schools in India.
- There were views exchanged on the significance of good educators and how to retain good educators within institutes. Bani Jha, Dean, NIFT, expressed that *"after a point of time we are unable to hold on to very good faculty people who are that experienced perhaps because design faculty need not just the monetary aspect, it's also about creative freedom."* There was a consensus that Government and industry, both should invest not only in infrastructure, but in training trainers and increasing their number. According to Sangeeta, presence of good quality trainers is bound to popularise design education and attract larger number of students.

Dinesh and Tapan agreed on the need for institutes to provide opportunities of growth and monetary as well as systemic support for simultaneous practise or engagements. Lalage Prabhu and Usha Iyer, Dean, IILM, mentioned that institutes need to be flexible in their rules and regulations such that skilled personnel from industry do not hesitate in joining an institute. As permanent faculty, they would be unable to do anything actively because it's not allowed. Apart from monetary support, the educators require creative freedom to innovate and improvise so they can bring in the latest into the classroom. Ranjan further quoted an example where the Delhi University, approached design as a performing subject to prevent the rigidity of administrative requirements.

Institutes therefore need to strike balance between permanent and visiting faculty to ensure input of skill and students' satisfaction. One such example was shared by Matt Corral, New Business and Marketing Manager, CADA Design Group, from the University at South Africa, where the permanent faculty manage the learning of the students, curriculum and the pedagogic structure, while practitioner faculty deliver particular specialist elements. The full time faculty should continue being part of and researching in the subject field. Tapan and Nien reminded that it is not necessary that best

designers would be best teachers and vice versa. Jitender mentioned educational models such as “Teach First” and supported the view that there should be a provision for formal programmes and training of educators as well as provision for design students with an academic bent to go further into research and training.

According to Sangeeta, institutes should provide a significant role to senior teachers not only in education but role in institution and sector building, in the running and managing of the institution. Also in institution building, if the teachers don't have a shared vision or a shared philosophy, the school will never build up.

Bani Jha mentioned that requirements such as UGC Guidelines should be reconsidered. As per UGC, many skilled designers cannot be hired due to absence of PhD. Tapan also felt that prior learning or qualification must be recognised and considered valid. Dinesh felt that some amount of practice should be essential to teach. It was suggested that to train the trainers, there could be collaboration with schools of education to understand the approach in training for a discipline.

- Design institutes should support research and scholarship. According to Ranjan, there is very little written material available in Indian Design Context despite several successful and relevant projects. The seniors need to communicate the history of Indian design which requires more scholarship. There is a requirement of funds for research.
Also, there might be students who would want to directly go into academics and education than practice first; in such cases there must be programmes to build capacity in this field. This would encourage younger students and professionals to be involved in design education.
- Ranjan felt that increasingly designers are emerging as entrepreneurs and not job seekers. Since they wish to build their own label and demonstrate their worth, they also need support for venture funding.
- *“How to take design education as we see it in India towards some sort of standard”*
– Silvia
Design institutes in India need to create standard for bachelor education aligned with design international institutes.
Bani resented that *“over the years we seem to find that the collaboration more in the nature of student exchanges rather than any collaborative work.”* Penny felt that internationalization could lead to collaborations as well as joint degrees of institutes across countries. Tapan mentioned that boundaries should be removed as *“It's not a question of that university coming here or we going there to study it. It is something that now has to mix up.”* He agreed with Penny on thinking about co-education than solely focus on collaboration.
- Infrastructure, *“the dirty place that does not exist”* – Tapan

In Indian education system, drawing, model making, prototyping and building are almost absent. Even in professional institutes the infrastructure is very poor. There is dearth of space to experiment and try new things.

8. Need for one voice/forum

- Through comments from Nien, Sundar and Dinesh it was suggested that India needs a unified forum for design than separate forums. The Indian Design community lacks in a single voice for lobbying, as well as any single forum for mutual support and sharing of opportunities.
- Ranjan felt that India also needs a mapping of its design community and the variety of work being done. This mapping rather than being done by the industry should be a collaborative effort by the government, the institutes and associations. *“There is an informal channel through which designers are coming from and many of our design offices are producing designers of calibre.”* said Ranjan while emphasising upon the need of them being documented.

9. Role of the Government

- *“There are thousands of projects which are of huge value but there is no reportage of that and no reflection or debate on that. And not a single one of those have been awarded by the government.”*
– M P Ranjan

Design projects in India have not received recognition from the government; the only acknowledgement received has been under the umbrella of technology. Indian government should acknowledge the different aspects of design spanning across crafts at one end and hi-tech design or engineering at the other. *“I ask you what investment you have in design in the last fifty years in India versus the investment in science and technology the ratio is one to ten million or hundred million”* said Ranjan.

- State Level Design Councils
In India state level design councils are possible if the states are large enough. This requires leadership within the state governments other than at the centre.

