

Grand Designs

The National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad, is abuzz with several new initiatives, including the inauguration of the travelling exhibition, "The Great Arc", celebrating the bicentenary of the great Trigonometric Survey of India.

Darlie O Koshy, NID's executive director, tells **Narayani Ganesh** that design does not have to be the preserve of the privileged — it can revolutionise the social sector too:

What is "The Great Arc"?

It is a travelling exhibition the NID is designing for the department of science and technology, the Survey of India (SI) and the British Council. It will have 5,000 sq ft of walking space, telling the story of the great quest, amplifying the fact that anything you see can be mapped. Whether you are looking for Dwarka or the nearest McDonalds, a good map can give you the information. *The Great Arc* will be inaugurated in Cambridge on July 15 and travel round the world. Later, it could become the SI's permanent exhibition. Maybe this will inspire Indians to become more map-savvy — which they're not at present.

Are maps going to play an important role in the future of design?

The future lies in intelligent mapping.

Our graphic design students have mapped Ahmedabad; now they're working on Hyderabad. We're also focusing on a Design Business Incubator (DBI). At California recently, I saw two incubators — one of which was for NASA. Normally, bright students, once they pass out, are snapped up

by the market. But a student who wants to innovate cannot afford to actualise his ideas on his own... Suppose a student thinks of a small plastic device with a spout to act as a dispenser. Now, he may not be able to execute it all on his own. The DBI will incubate the idea for him for seven to eight months. The department of biotechnology has given us a grant of Rs 250 lakh for this. With help from venture capitalists, students can become small entrepreneurs. The NID will receive a small royalty for its facilitating role.

Don't the IITs have something like this already?

The IITs have technology-based incubators. This will be the first time a design-based incubator will be created. This will help select and nurture ideas from the concept to working or commercial prototype stage.

Are designers in India leading from the front or are they just copying western ideas?

There is definitely a movement in terms of looking at emerging areas of design — earlier, only the physical world was being looked at. Now there's the virtual world, too. So we're constantly looking at emerging areas, combining different

disciplines. For example, we're working on new currency and coins which are visually impaired-friendly. The idea is to design products that include in its reach the non-privileged people.

So you agree that design is not only about adding value to products but also enhancing the quality of life across society?

Certainly. The institute has a commitment to the social sector. We are the national consultant for khadi; we design rural products and textiles, pottery, ceramics, agarbatis and paper, among other products. We are trying to tap local design resource by empanelling designers across the country and helping them form commercial alliances.

The NID has been a consultant for coir for the last two years. We've designed a new yarn, making 1,300 m from just one kg of coir, in Alleppey. In the north-east, NID is setting up a bamboo and cane development centre with government collaboration. We will be conducting classes; we'll look at creating new bamboo products. Our Craft Development Institute in Srinagar is a Rs 12 crore project — NID will manage it for the next four years. At Cuddapah, AP, we're designing new toys and other products from stone waste. In Hyderabad, we're developing a master plan, including sign-

ages and maps. We are trying to generate indigenous business solutions.

How is design expanding patient benefits in the field of medicine?

Our indigenously designed pre-natal infant incubator (Shashank, 1989) was a major hit. We are planning to have a full-fledged post-

Q&A

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Udayshankar

graduate plan for medical equipment design. We have been helping design or improve prosthetic and other medical aids. We designed a "grasper" to help arthritic patients grasp objects in their hand.

What is your overall vision for design?

Design should be people-friendly, which also means eco-friendly. Whenever possible, local suitability should be kept in mind. Second, we should not become design-centred, we should be design-led, to find solutions. We have to move forward from designing for a privileged few to designing for everyone. Also, we must realise that the 20th century belonged to design for profit, in the 21st century design should be socially responsible, in line with the importance being given to corporate social responsibility.

What do you think of the proposal for a huge shopping mall around the Taj Mahal?

It's atrocious. Designers should design for need, not greed. Even the NID was asked to submit a plan for development around the Taj. We submitted an approach paper to the UP government last year. But nothing has come out of it so far.