

A Hymn to the Symbol

*It was like a dip
In the ganges
So what, if drops of water
Are left on my body
They will evaporate
With the warmth
Emanating from under my skin*

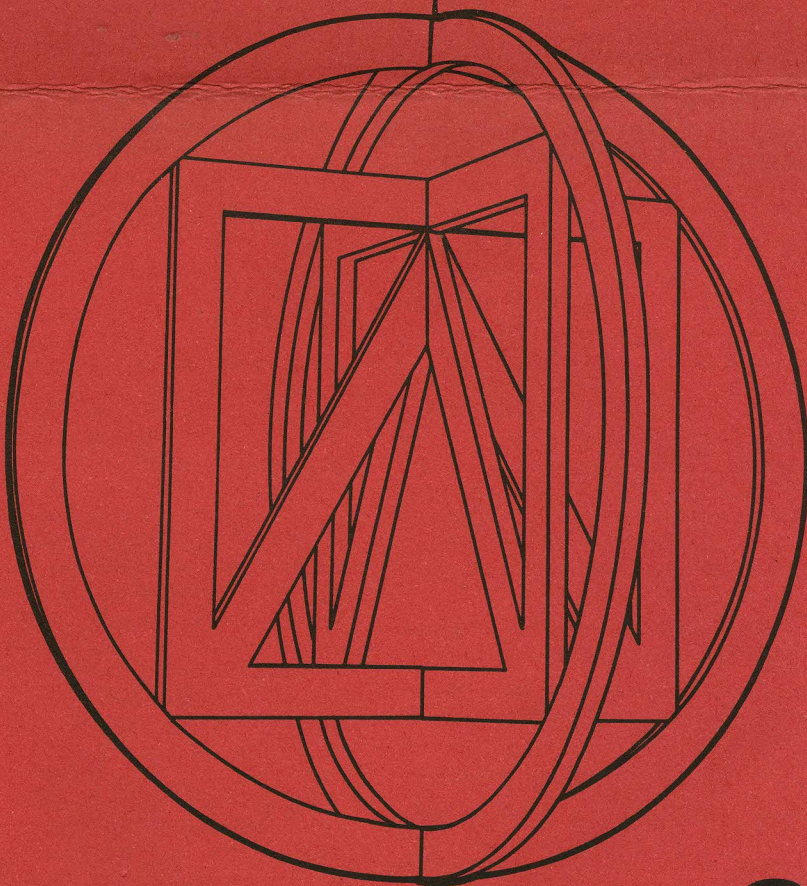
*Thousand suns were
Brought to me
To bathe in their
Golden rays
I wish I can match these
With the fires inside me
And be a sun myself
To make the days bright
Or at least be a moon
To lit the night*

*Let it all churn
Inside my oceans
Let thousand lotus stems
Pierce through the murky waters
And sprout into
Thousand and one petals
Let these be the thrones
Of my new gods*

*Let me break the old chains
Let me transcend the links
Let me establish
New oms
To reach out to the gods
And be one with them
So they sustain me
And prevent my destruction
For I am them
And they my symbol*

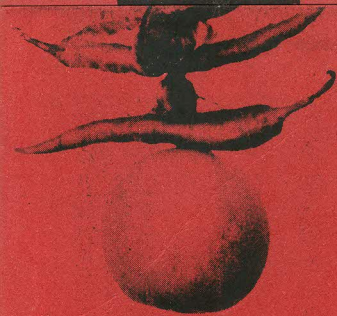
— K. Munshi

IDC/NEWS



6

Jan. - March '85



॥ शुभं भवतु ॥

Seminar on Indian Symbolology

A garland of mango leaves, tied on the doorway.
The music of shehnai.
A bride daubed with the fine paste of turmeric.
A vermilion mark on fore-head.
A greeting with folded hands.
A stream of water let run on one's open palm pointing towards ground.
A piece of sandal wood on the pyre.
A figure of tortoise drawn with rangoli.
The letters ॥ शुभं भवतु ॥
The figures 786.
A machine decked with flowers.
or
The pipal tree -

We come across innumerable such symbols, signs, and tokens -
Whether religious, social or ethical -
They are all around us - Even today we rever them - we carry them on our persons with some sort of faith - we use them - not with blind faith, but with conviction, in the practical day to day life - for communication - knowingly or unknowingly -

We are Indians - sons of this soil -

The soil here can boast of creating a lot - It is a witness to so many activities - Thousands of kings made their appearance on this vast stage and disappeared forever in oblivion. Hundreds of kingdoms, empires, came to stay - Many a regime came into existence - only to claim a mere mention in the historical records. Religions flourished, faiths gained ground. Different schools of philosophy had a sway for a period and cracked to pieces in the course of time. Various traditions, customs found firm roots, spread. Some were weeded out after a short span of time.

Political theories, religious regenerations, social up-heavals made their impacts felt.

There were differences of opinions - Rational - philosophical - practical - followed by compromises and rifts -

Any good way of life was always welcome.

The impact of all these diversities can be traced in every manifestation of Indian art, culture, and literature. May be occasionally obvious or faint - but there it is nonetheless.

Substantial has held its own; superficial succumbed to the onslaught of Father Time.

Innumerable symbols, symbolic figures, signs, systems of signs and tokens that have stood the test of the time for thousands of years,

and which have been adopted and used by the Indian society are nothing but the revelations of the rich and ancient Indian heritage.

Every gallery in the realm of Indians arts - whether it be painting, or sculpture, music, dramatics, or dancing - is teeming with various symbols.

And the noteworthy feature is that these symbols are not merely decorative show-pieces, but things of day to day use.

They were useful in every day communication and even today they have retained their utility to some extent.

'Omkar' as the primordial sound, The progressive nature of the Indus Valley system of signs. The clause in the Vedic code of conduct, Panini's formulae regarding the basic principles of sound, Leelavati of Bhaskaracharya, Kadambari of Bana, Cave temples and sculpture of the Hindus, Bauddhas and Jains; signs in the various languages, Basic principles of drawing in the graphic arts, Experiments carried out by sciences of dance, music, and drama.....

Such innumerable places and products claiming direct relations with the Indian traditions So many points to ponder - points that even today make one wonder about values of creation honoured in the ancient times.

Behind this creativeness there has, inevitably, to be some definite method of working, rituals, analytic and synthetic processes, without which creation of such works of art, such symbols are well-nigh impossible.

So many questions, perplexing, bewildering questions stare one in the face, Who conceived these symbols? How? What was the view-point behind it? Whether or not they had any philosophical, radical base? If so what sort of base was it? What is the significance behind them? What about their syntax? What was their exact position in their respective social practices? Has any one ever tried to calculate the measure of the consequences?

If follows, therefore, that it is expedient to study comprehensively the traditional Indian symbols from the view-point of their semantics, their syntactics and their pragmatics. In case this has already been done, it has to be brought to the notice of the public at large. It has to be a study by the Indians, from Indian point of view. There should be a radical criticism of the old and new symbols, we have, for this purpose, to resort to the principles

of semiotics. Of course, the extent of such symbols, signs and tokens is very vast and the measure is also tremendous. If the symbols found in various fields and on diverse levels are to be studied objectively and qualitatively, it is obvious that scholars in the various fields have to cooperate mutually.

Historians, theologians, philosophers, scholars, philologists, sociologists, educationists, artists, researchers in arts, designers, all these must participate with a vengeance. Their findings have to be properly edited, have to be neatly presented to the contemporary society. A cooperative method of study has to be evolved. Art students have to be actively involved in such a project.

If we want the modern generation to accept that whatever old has stood the test of time must be of sterling quality - even in the modern context -, this has to be done.

More-over it is a dire necessity to prepare pictorial symbols and signs for communication that can be understood by the multi-lingual people of this nation, which is currently afflicted to some degree by the multi-lingual diversity. A preparatory (primary) study of symbols will be definitely useful for this purpose also.

Therefore conclusions arrived at, as a result of historical research, have to be finalised after their verification with the contemporary context.

Perhaps, the right direction leading to the formation of future symbols might be found through this critical process.

For this purpose, and with this background, on 17th, 18th and 19th January 1985, a seminar was organized in the campus of the I.I.T. Powai, as a part of the educational programme of the Industrial Design Centre. The subject was - Indian symbols and the science behind them. Co-organizers were 'Inside and Outside' the Indian design magazine.

So incidentally, the archy garland of mango leaves, the rangoli patterns, the shehnai tunes, all these had to be there. Yes. You have caught the point there.

It's time we learn to be proud of what is genuinely our own, and not wait till the proclamations of its importance to come from a side lane of Berkeley in California.

(Written by R.K. Joshi.

Translated from original Marathi by Ulka Nadkarni).

INDIAN SYMBOLOGY Practice & Theory

Semiotics as a discipline is relevant to almost all branches of humanistic enquiry. It is a systematic study of signs and symbols used by human beings. As such, it asks fundamental questions about the nature of human experience and human communication, because these are possible only through the medium of signs. Language, for example, is a semiotic system, for it uses signs - both auditory and visual - in an organized way. The same is true of all the human activities which are "meaningful": the encoding and decoding of meaning are dependent on the presence and use of a semiotic system. Thus, semiotics is directly concerned with the problems of the production and interpretation of signs.

It is obvious that semiotics pervades all the areas of human life: rituals, religious practices, festivals, architecture, performing arts, visual arts, literature, information systems etc. Given its wide scope, it is necessary to see how semiotics operates at three distinct yet inter-related levels:

- (a) Semantic, where signification or meaning of a sign is studied;
- (b) Syntactic, where the interrelationship of signs is studied;
- (c) Pragmatic, where the use, application and the effect of signs are studied.

The semiotic approach has already been substantially established in certain areas, such as language and literature. At the beginning of the 20th Century, Ferdinand de Saussure, the Swiss linguist and C.S. Pearce, the American philosopher, initiated the semiological/semiotic approach in the fields of linguistics and philosophy. Charles Morris gave clarity to the critical concepts in semiotics. Roman Jakobson developed a semiotic theory of literature, while Roland Barthes extended the methods of semiotics to the study of cultural practices and the design activity.

Undeniably, the diverse socio-cultural, intellectual and creative practices in India offer a fertile ground for a semiotic study. It is this consideration which prompted the Industrial Design Centre (IDC) at IIT, Bombay, to organize a three-day seminar on "Indian Symbolism" (17th to 19th January).

The Seminar on Indian Symbolism was intended to initiate the semiotic concern in the context of Indian Symbols. It focussed attention on three important aspects of this vast field of enquiry. Firstly, it was necessary to project the immensely rich traditions of symbols in various aspects of Indian life. The key-note address by Pandit Narendra Sharma highlighted this aspect in the Indian Visual Philosophy, particularly through the discussion of 'aksharas', 'akritis' and 'colours'. Dr. S.A. Dange in his scholarly paper explained the symbolism of Vedic myths, while Dr. P.P. Apte charted out the symbolism of 'Tantra and the Temple Cult'. Dr. N.S. Gorekar's paper dealt with various Islamic symbols and Dr. S.V. Gorakshakar presented through slides the animal symbolism in Indian iconography. Shri Kohei Sugiura, graphic designer from Japan, made a fascinating presentation on the images of cosmic mountain in Asia; while Prof. M.A. Konishi of Rikkyo University, Tokyo talked about the symbolism of 'Alpana Paintings of the Magahmandala Vrat rite' in West Bengal. Dr. H. Sarkar discussed the 'Mandala' concept in Indian Architecture. Shri Gopal-krishna Modi described the astrological symbols while Dr. (Smt.) S.S. Dange gave an account of the various symbols used in ceremonial rituals. In his discussion of the Indian concept of design, Dr. S.A. Upadhyaya pointed out underlying symbolic principles in the construction of 'Yadnya Kunda'.

This projection of the vast panorama of the traditional Indian symbols was counter pointed by linguists, critics, designers and artists. The theoretical principles of linguistic and literary semiotics were discussed by Shri M.S. Malshe; 'Tacit Symbols' and the problem of 'Vulgarity' were examined by Dr. Ashok R. Kelkar; the various types of musical expressions and their semiotic possibilities were analysed by Dr. Ashok Ranade. Designers Shri Manu Desai, Shri Yeshwant Choudhary, Shri Trilokesh Mukherjee, Shri Sudarshan Dheer and Shri Mahendra Patel (NID) all demonstrated influence of Indian symbolism in their design work. Presentations by Shri Shivapriyanand on 'Colour Symbolism in Indian Religious Art', and by Shri L.K. Das on 'Living Force of Symbols' further emphasised the contemporary relevance of symbolic traditions. Kum. Hema Govindarajan's demonstration of symbolism of hand-gestures in Indian dance; and Smt. S. Jagannathan's description of various symbols used in Indian festivals, highlighted the living presence of Indian traditions. Continuing the theme of Indian identity in its symbolic expression, Prof. R.K. Joshi showed how the Indian letterforms travelled eastward and acquired an esoteric significance under Buddhism as 'Siddham' letterforms.

The futuristic thrust of the semiotic concern was evident in the presentation by Prof. E. Dore from Canada, in which while explaining the activities of the International Standardization Organisation (ISO), he referred to the possible emergence of the international coherent theory for the design of public information symbols.

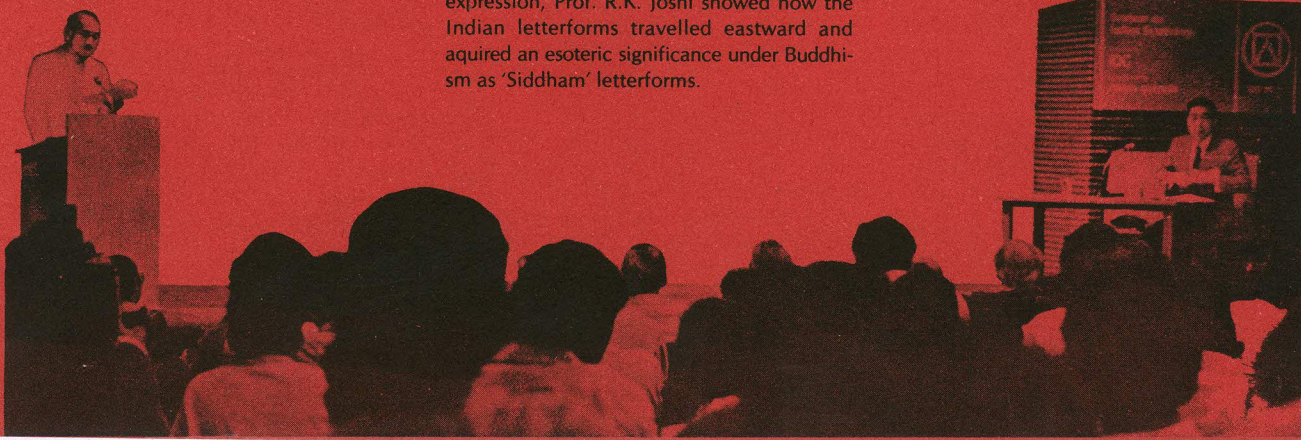
Along with the Seminar, there was a small exhibition of various symbols and signs complete with explanatory notes, presented with a view to demonstrate to what extent the contemporary artist has been impressed by the Indian way of thinking. A special screening of films related to theme was also arranged. A 'happening' on the theme 'Dot, Line, Circle, Square, Triangle' staged on the IDC lawns, vividly captured the spirit of the seminar by inviting multifaceted interpretations of these basic symbols from the participating audience.

IDC in Visual Communication Programme has incorporated the study of the semantic aspect of design to complement the syntactic and pragmatic aspects which have been a part of their design education. They believe that now the designer must understand the way man assigns meaning to and responds to a sign; and he must be capable of ascertaining which sign vehicle can carry specific messages and under which conditions in the process of communication. The field of Graphic Design seems to be in search of a "Theory". The search is on because graphic design is moving from isolated solutions to a more structured approach to visual systems. The increased use of visual production systems and the introduction of the computer in the field, have altered the context of design in the present communication environment. As such, the approach explores levels underlying the surface, and concerns itself with the substance, structure and function of communication. The field thus needs a strong theoretical back up, ideally offered by semiotics.

The study of semiotics by the designer would help him in acquiring greater analytical attitude and critical response, in realising the relationship between theoretical framework and practical design activity, and in generating new methodologies.

The design principles which the designers were inexplicitly and intuitively aware of so far, could be systematized and formalized with the help of the semiotic approach.

Milind Malshe.



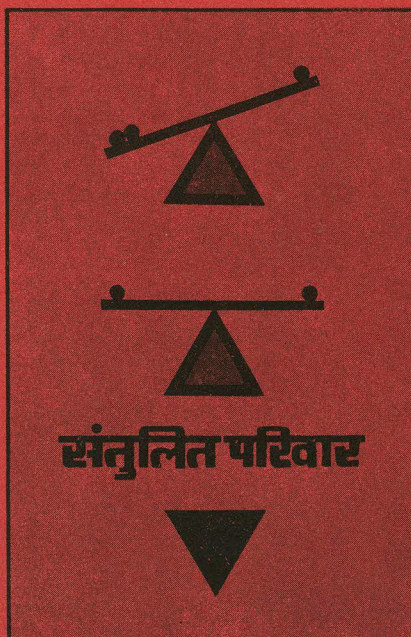


EXPO - ID

A 3-day course on Exposure to Industrial Design (Expo-ID) was conducted at IDC from 26th to 28th February 1985. IDC has been conducting these short-term exposure courses, for past several years, for managerial and R&D personnel from industries to acquaint them with the basic concepts of industrial design, and its role in product development, planning and innovation. An understanding of the whole process of designing has become increasingly important, with the influx of new technologies and the stress on product improvement on the Indian scene.

Two new areas: Product Planning and Design Management were introduced in this year's course, besides the regular talks on Industrial Design, Developing Product Brief, Product Aesthetics and Product Semantics, Creativity & Problem Solving, Ergonomics; and Future Projections.

The representatives of the following industries participated in the Seminar: Kinetizing Engineering, Pune; Ion Electricals, Bombay; Telco, Pune; Larsen & Toubro Ltd., Bombay; Roplas, India Ltd., Pune; Steelage Industries, Bombay; Prageet Engineers, Bombay; Bharat Forge Co., Pune; MITCO, Pune; Hercules Hoist Ltd., Bombay and Bajaj Electricals Ltd., Bombay.



Mitter Bedi

IDC/NEWS deeply mourns the passing away of Shri Mitter Bedi, India's foremost industrial photographer, in Bombay on 10th March 1985.

Shri Mitter Bedi was a member of the Visiting Faculty in Photography at IDC; and had helped in planning the contents of the postgraduate photography course for IDC's Visual Communication programme.

Course On Computer Graphics

Shri Arun Sulgia of Hinditron Computer systems and Consultants Pvt. Ltd., conducted a course on the use of RGL graphic library, for PDP-11; for the staff and the students of IDC from 5th to 7th February 1985.

New Potter's Wheel

A new motorised potter's wheel has been developed in IDC by Shri A. Gaffoor. The new design permits use of the wheel in a comfortable sitting posture, cuts off mud splash and improves percision. A prototype of the new design has been fabricated and is in use in IDC's Ceramics Workshop.

Dr. R.H. Harding

Dr. R.H. Harding of the University of Technology, Loughborough, U.K., was at IDC from 13th February to 7th March 1985. He helped evaluate the real time data acquisition software being developed in the Ergonomics laboratory of IDC for use on Micro PDP 1/23; and to work out different methods to implement them for real time data acquisition.

State Award For IDC Student

Shri Prashant Agarwal, M.Des. (VC) student at IDC, was awarded a prize of Rs. 2,500/- in the Maharashtra State Art Awards, 1985 for his poster design on 'Family Planning'. in the Applied Art category for Professional Designers. The winning entry was exhibited at the Silver Jubilee Exhibition held at Jehangir Art Gallery, Bombay in January, '85.

Mohan Bhandari

Prof. Mohan Bhandari has joined the faculty of Industrial Design Centre from February 1985. Besides teaching courses in existing academic programmes, he will be involved in formulating new undergraduate programmes and a programme in Environmental Design at IDC.

Prof. Bhandari was Senior Professor at Institute of Environmental Design, Baroda. Prior to that, as faculty member at NID he worked on design projects in industrial design, leather craft, environmental design etc; and in design education in the areas of visual perception, environmental awareness and education and design methodology etc. He has also worked in Herbert Lindinger's office in Institut Fur Umweltgestaltung, Frankfurt and in Technische Universitat, Hannover.

K. Munshi

Prof. K. Munshi visited M/s. Sundaram Clayton (Moped Division) in Hosur, Bangalore, to advise them on the industrial design aspects of their new models of moped. Two of IDC's graduates - Shri Basha and Shri Shringesh - are already employed by the Company as industrial designers in its R&D department.

Ravi Poovaiah

Shri Ravi Poovaiah, faculty member at IDC, has returned after completing Master's Programme in Art Education with specialisation in Graphic Design from Rhode Island School of Design, USA. Shri Poovaiah was in USA on a UNESCO fellowship. He also worked at the Carpenter Centre at Harvard University for studies relating to the History of Graphic Design and History of Art. He has collected lecture and research material relating to Visual Perception, Computer Graphics, History of Graphic Design, Video and teaching basics of Visual Design.

Anne Marie Dufour

Miss Anne Marie Dufour, design student from the University of Compeigne, France completed her 6-month project work with Prof. K. Munshi at IDC. She designed and developed a 'Solar Rice Cooker' - a single dish compact cooker suitable for cooking other dishes like 'dal' or low-temperature baking. A prototype of the cooker was built and tested. Miss Dufour also designed a low voltage reading light.

Editor: Kirti Trivedi

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