

Homage
to
Prof.Kumar Vyas (1929-2017)
Father of Indian Design Education



Kumar Vyas with S M Shah, 22-2 2014

Prof.Kumar Vyas passed away on 25th March, 2017.

It was a sad day for me. I was catching a flight to Bengaluru, when Balaram gave the news. I could not attend the Condolence meeting arranged at IDC on 27th evening. Prof.Sreekumar , Head of IDC was kind enough to read out a write up sent by me, which follows:

Dear all,

This is a difficult, emotional moment for me. Prof.Kumar Vyas was the first Industrial Design Teacher at NID in India and I had the privilege of being in the very first batch of 'product designers' to be trained under him.

We got design education, instead of mere training as he was a born Teacher'

Meeting him in Hyderabad in 1966 for the Interview changed my life completely.

He is our 'GURU BRAHMA' who created generations of design teachers in the Country!

Kumar (whom we used to fondly call as) is a finest human beings I came across in my Life! His polished gentle way of treating students completely changed us! It brought a new Culture of 'Design Teachers' who do not impose on students!

I feel emotional to express all my experiences with him at this moment.

One Incident is significant which established his International level as a design Teacher'!

Our course of 4 years at NID after a degree in engineering was rather long. All seven of us who remained in the course for 3 years were anxious to know where we stood as design students. Few people in the Country knew about 'Design ' at that time! Prof.Votteler (pronounced as Fotteler) , a renowned professor of Furniture Design from Germany was invited by NID to teach us for 6weeks. He was happy with our performance!

We had a personal meeting with him in his Hotel

we wanted to know from him where we stood internationally!

He said, "You guys are as good as any design students in the World, be it Germany, UK or USA. Your teacher Prof. Kumar Vyas is one of the best 'design teachers' I have come across in all over the World! If he is ready to come, tomorrow I will snatch him away to Germany to teach 'Design'!"

Our eyes opened, we realised that we had one of the best design teachers in the World and What more; he was the most likeable teacher on our Planet! What else we could ask for in our lives?

He has been writing a book on Design till his last day! We miss him and miss him.

Please look at my website www.agrao.in to see more on Prof.Kumar Vyas!

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(a gopinatha rao)

I have more to share!

As the first pioneering batch of Industrial Designers trained in the country at NID, Ahmadabad, we, seven of us(Me,Balaram, Bhandari, Chattopadhyay,

Sethuraman, Sudarshan khanna, and V.M Parmar, who completed the course), had a special bond with Prof. Kumar Vyas. Simple, humble person he was, very association with him made us humble. He never had a harsh word to say. For me, **GOING FROM A TYPICAL ENGINEERING COLLEGE, WHERE THE TEACHER WOULD THREATENINGLY ASK YOUR NUMBER (NOT NAME) IF YOU ASK A QUESTION IN THE CLASS**, it was a dream like experience! At NID, We addressed all faculty members with first names. For us it was like going to another country (like U.S.A). Kumar as we used to fondly call him was a very special person. Even when you were in grossly wrong direction, he would say with his gentle voice, “if I were you, I would do like this”. We learnt what gentleness is!

3 years back when I met him he referred to our student times as ‘those enchanting days!’. At that time he was young, full of energy with a mission to change India with ‘Design Thinking’. And he was shaping us through all uncertainties. The batch which started with ‘12’ ended up with ‘7’.

An incident in the beginning of our course brought a great revelation of ‘Kumar’s personality’. Dasharath (Padmashree Dasharath Patel) used to be very friendly with us and also provoke us by saying 'we were too dull and not adventurous'. He used to tell us the pranks he used to play with his ‘Art teachers.’ M.O. Patel one of the initial 12 students, got an idea! He convinced some of us that we should surprise 'Kumar' by all of us resigning from the course! He drafted a letter and (most of us signed the letter!) It was about lunch time. M.O Patel gave the letter. Two more of us were with him! Kumar saw it, he took it seriously. His face drained. We could see 'an intense emotional commotion going through him’. He said with a disturbed voice,

"What is the reason? What have I done wrong?"

I was scared, avoided looking into his eyes! I tried to hide behind M.O. Patel thinking with great regret, "oh God! What have we done?" But our bold leader would not budge!

"We will tell you the reason tomorrow, Kumar".

He asked, "Where are others?" M.O said, “they have gone for lunch".

First time I saw Kumar getting ‘angry’, Call them, I am going to miss my lunch anyway!" These are the most pungent words I have ever heard from him in all my 3½ years association with him as a student.

Disturbed he was he left for lunch. At that time NID was housed in Sanskar Kendra, a building designed by Le Corbusier, just opposite to the present Main building of NID at Paldi, Ahmedabad. We were completely lost with this totally unexpected response. We shouted at M.O. Patel for the 'stupid idea' and wanted to tell Kumar that it is 'joke' **A S P**. We were afraid of his scooter ride in that state of mind, and wished he has not yet started his Vespa Scooter to go home. We rushed down the spiral stair-case to catch him up and say "Kumar it is only a Joke! We are sorry". But Kumar was so upset with that episode that he did not talk to any of us in the whole of that afternoon! That incident got impregnated in my memory deeply forever! I realised Kumar was vulnerable like a child and *Design Education was his life!* That is the time an eternal bond of 'Guru shishya' (Teacher and student) was built. I can proudly say that with such 'elements of foundation', Design education in India has been built.

Many things we learnt from Kumar were subtle. One day I saw Kumar stapling with great care number of bunches of sheets which he was to take for a seminar. I used to think, person with his stature should assign such work to somebody rather than wasting his time doing it himself. After many years of 'teaching and design' experience I realised that was his 'Zen Practice', Gandhian way of being simple and relaxing with physical work. Much later I discovered the joy of doing such little so called trivial things! They are therapeutic acts of Craft

Once I had confronted Kumar with a question, "why are we doing this radii manipulation task?" Coming after 5 years of engineering training I could not see exact reason in doing such an exercise. He replied, "Why are you so skeptic?" Much later, when I started teaching radii manipulation at IDC I realised, there are many things you cannot articulate in words. You have to become sensitive by feel and it can take long time for a hardened, left brain trained serious learner! But two inputs he gave remained ever with me. When I was designing a brief case (a travelling companion) he told me, "Never make all radii equal in a rectangular block! Make always one larger. The other radii will flow on it".

When I made a model of a new 'All Drop' Latch for my final project, Kumar simply marked the radii on the corners and it became a friendly form when I finished it. Kumar was a Master of radii manipulations. I still remember the

radii he would make with great care on the POP9(plaster of Paris) models when he was designing a starter for L & T.

Kumar's interest in Design Education was immense. In 70s every time he visited IDC, he would come and ask if any new design exercise has been introduced. He was keen to know from me and Atto (prof.Uday Athavankar) how Students respond to these basic design tasks!

He heartily congratulated me when we released 'IDC- A Decade of Design Experience' during the UNIDO-ICSID meeting in 1979.

His encouraging appreciation was there when we released "Bamboo Craft Design!" Backing of a scholarly teacher gave immense confidence to me as a budding author! He authored many books on Design!

We can truly call him '*Father of Indian Design Education*' with generations of design teachers nurtured by him and his students!

PS: Please see a nice write up on Kumar Vyas put up by Balaram(Dean at DJ Academy of design) on their website.

<https://www.facebook.com/DJADdesign/>

Video clipping of Kumar Vyas with SM Shah (alumnus) and Rashmi (Mrs. Vyas)

https://youtu.be/bw_x81AoDFE