

FACED: For A Collaborative Effort in Design – Reflections on a framework for design in India.

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Introduction

Indian Design Industry today is faced with an identity crisis. Having worked in the design industries across continents, amongst cultures that are so different from one another, it is interesting to see the ways in which design is practiced. This essay is to provide a reflective analysis of the present scenario of design profession in India and also to provide a framework for looking ahead and facing the challenges that lie ahead. While the analysis is currently limited to and based on Interaction Design, it can be expanded to view the other frameworks in design.

The Current state

The notion of non-designers also designing things and design in the way of making sense of things [4] has been practiced in the society since ages. Design is said to be an ancient activity, but yet a modern profession [19]. In countries like India, China, which have a very cultural history, it has been practiced as an important activity in the Non-Western style of Designing [19]. Especially with the richness that is visible in the form of paintings, sculptures, architectures, it is hard to imagine that design as a 'profession' is still fully accepted in India. Design, however has been preached and practiced in its full glory in the traditional domains of design like, interior design, graphic design, product design, and crafts.

Of late there has been a resurgence of the design industry in the form of Interaction Design, which has led to the unification of the Indian Design Industry. This has also been purported by the governments and the better interaction between the academia and the industry. There is a common consensus on the formation of a coherent design entity. This desire has also led to the establishment of the '*National Design Policy*' [22], the organization of the '*Pune Design festival*', and the annual '*Kyoorius Design Yatra*' [23]. The success of these has led to the proposal for the '*Indian Design festival*' (to be held in Feb 09) [24], in-order to bring together Indian Design in one umbrella. The opportunities for this are tremendous especially looking into the areas in the Indian society, which can benefit from design.

However, this current state of design seems to be constantly striving towards the imitation of the West. Non-Western Designing [19] and the notion with which institutes like National Design Institute at Ahmedabad, were set up, is lost or is being very shallowly followed in the context of Interaction Design. Under this notion there has always been a constant altercation between the rational thinkers and the creative thinkers. Unlike the East, where design rose out of genuine human needs and a consequence of creativity, the Western world saw its designs as a being born out of scientific methods. This scientific approach, with some exceptions, has not provided the kind of guarantee of outcomes one would imagine possible. On further scrutiny, it appears that this has actually come from the confusion between the true, and the real.

The influence of the Internet revolution has had a huge impact in the creation of the design base in India. This has exposed the public and the existing designer to more forms of art and design and as a consequence, accepting and acknowledging different forms of art. It is within a very short time that information is disseminated across boundaries today. The success of online forums, the discussion groups has made interacting with another person not being limited to the presence in the physical sense.

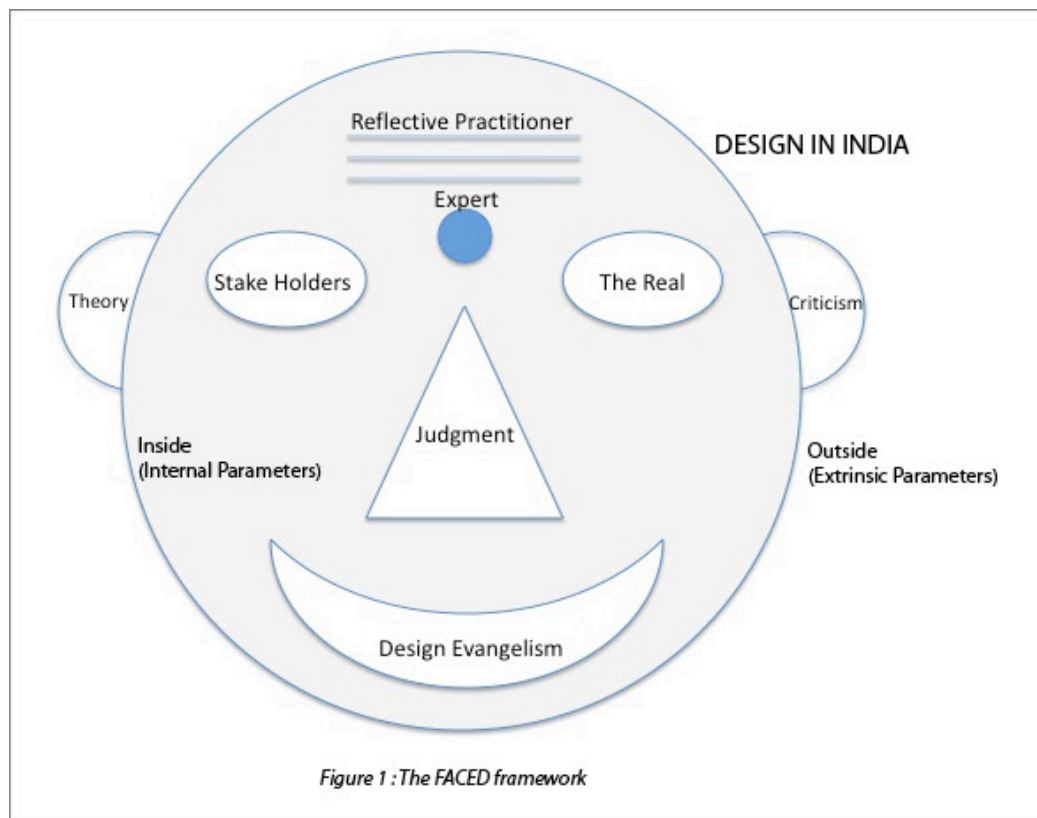
Interactions between people from different areas of the country and from diverse backgrounds, is happening like never before. With this the notion of intersubjectivity in the case of audience for design acceptance in India is blossomed to an extent, which would have been unthinkable a few years ago. The IT industry has played a major role in bringing about this change. The influx of people into the Indian Silicon Valley located at Bangalore and other cities like Hyderabad, Pune, Chennai, Gurgaon has resulted in a wider, more knowledgeable, well read and richer audience. Exposure of Indian professionals to different parts of the world, on onsite work duties has led to the changes in the life-worlds and their views about design.

The metaphor of the Face

The metaphor used for the FACED (For a Collaborative Effort in Design) framework here is that of a face. It is an epitome of a perfect design. It is with this wholeness that the Indian Design needs to face the world. Neglecting even one of them would lead to incompleteness in the face and hence the efforts could be lacking. In particular the face is that of a Brahman priest, who is considered to be the highest class in the erstwhile existing caste society in India. Design to me is a profession that is of the highest class and hence this association.

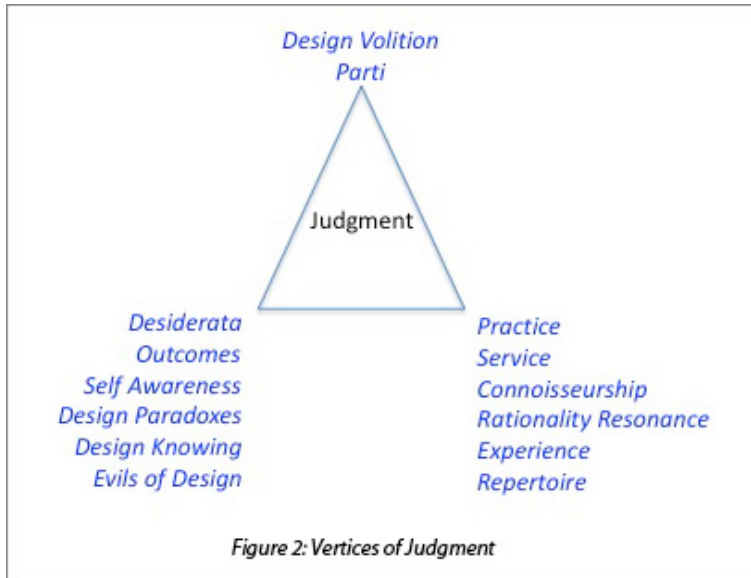
The boundaries of the face signify the Design in India presently. The internal parameters (the Stake holders, the Real, the Evangelism, the Judgment) that lie within the boundaries are the ones that the designer has control over directly. The external parameters (the Theory and the Criticism, as denoted with the ears) are the ones, which have been controlled from the outside.

Within all these the designer has to become a reflective practitioner. The center of the forehead is used to signify the expert, which every designer seeks to become.



The center of the face representing the Judgment

Occupying the central position in the framework is the notion of Judgment. Judgment is the knowing based in knowledge that is inseparable from the knower (Stolterman)[10]. This knowledge that is separable from the knower is an end point in a continuum that transitions from data to information to knowledge. Noted philosopher Kant mentions that, 'Judgment is one of the three cognitive faculties of human being'. Design knowing [1][5] is one of the most important aspects of building a sense of judgment.



The three vertices of Judgment that the designer needs to understand consider revolve around firstly Practice, the knowledge and awareness and the person will. The ultimate aim of the designer should be able to create the *'authentic attention'* [17]. This can come about by the proper understanding of what is required, based on the past experiences and the repertoire [20] that is been built across projects. These lead to the proper understanding of the designer's volition and an enhanced sense of *'parti'*. [12]

Stolterman mentions *"although, design judgment cannot be separated from the designer, the designer can reflect upon the nature of judgment making and begin to approach the ability to make good judgment as an essential to gaining access to design wisdom."*[11] Hence this notion of judgment becomes extremely important for designers in India who should seek to building their skills in judgment rather than simply following the clients and other stake holders. Having developed this skill, the designer would be able to put an end to the *'analysis-paralysis'* loop, which one often gets into when dealing with a project that involve wicked problems at times. A key example for this would be the design for social impact projects like designing for child education in Rural India, or the usage of Technology in Rural India and other ICT projects.

The notion of Desiderata (knowing what us desired) becomes important, as very often it is not known what is desired. This is often the case when someone else than the designer decides the requirements for a project. And in the case of Interaction Design in India these days, this someone is often a person in some other country. Knowing what is desired is clearer if the designer is able to understand the notion of the paradoxes and evil in design [14]. Since most of the times the designer is not interacting directly with the final user of the service (the product, the website etc); it becomes all the more important to enhance one's sense of design knowing.

The experience in design practice is a result of a service-oriented approach to design. Understanding the existing methods and processes as reflected in the notion of Rationality Resonance [21], would lead to an experience that leads to a rich repertoire and build to a connoisseurship [3].

Building this expertise on judgment on the parts of the design or the whole would enable the designer to fit better in the design and other ecosystems.

The eyes representing the vision

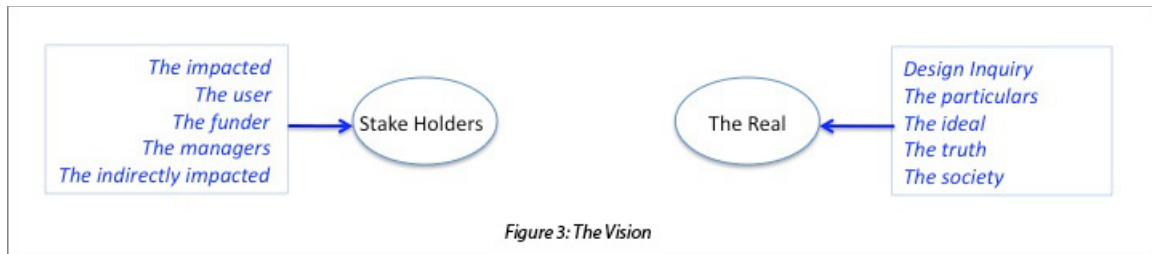


Figure 3: The Vision

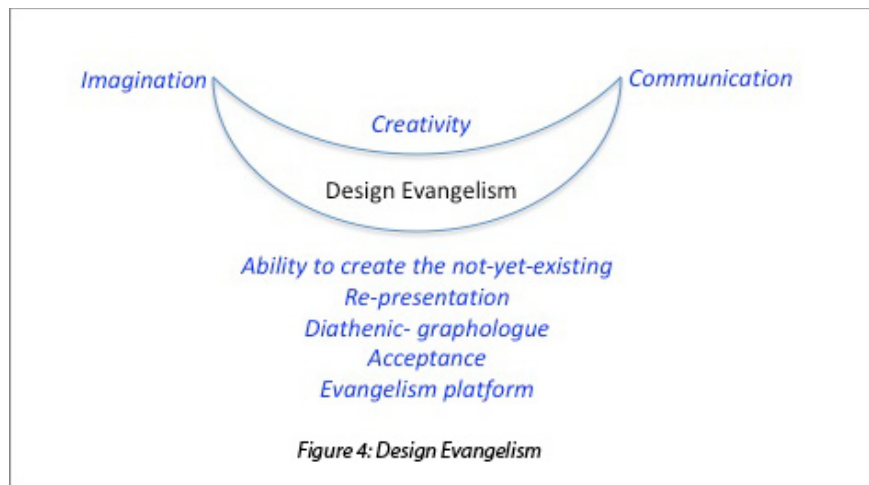
Perhaps the most important of the senses is the sense of vision. With more and more corporate group in India being interested in investing in design, and a large number of systems moving to a computerized framework, as a designer in India, it is important to understand and view the real as it is and the stakeholders involved. The number of stakeholders these days expands also to the managers and the funder of the project. Often the designer has to collaborate or interact with the people from a management and technical backgrounds. Hence understanding who impacts the design and how the design impacts them is necessary.

Also with much fortune 500 companies opening their offices in locations across India, the exposure and interaction of Indian Designers to stakeholders has increased. And more often than not, these companies have their technical offices in India. With the representatives of the actual clients being present in person, the notion of the user holds more significance these days. The Indian designer needs to understand not only the target group for whom they are designing (the clients) but also the affected groups (the clients of the clients), who will be finally using the service.

The meaning of an artifact is a social construct by the society, there is often a misunderstanding involved. The society socially constructs the meaning of the things that the designers actually create in the real world. The designers should have a larger say in defining the intention of the meaning of their creations that they are presenting in the real.

As designers, one needs to be not only aware of the truth, but also the real. For designers in India, the ideal is often pitted against the design of the West and all creativity is sought to match up to that. The designers should try to get a better understanding of the real from their personal point of view and not necessarily seek to imitate. Moreover, this holds true to a larger extent in the field of Interaction Design, where the clients are mostly located at different locations. It is easy to get caught up in the ideal and keeping hope for the same treatment as design in the other Western countries. It is here that the designers should be aware of the real and what's possible within the framework of the Indian Design. Being able to identify the 'role' of the designer in the proper context is an important result, which can come about only by the '*understanding of the real*'.

The mouth representing Design Evangelism

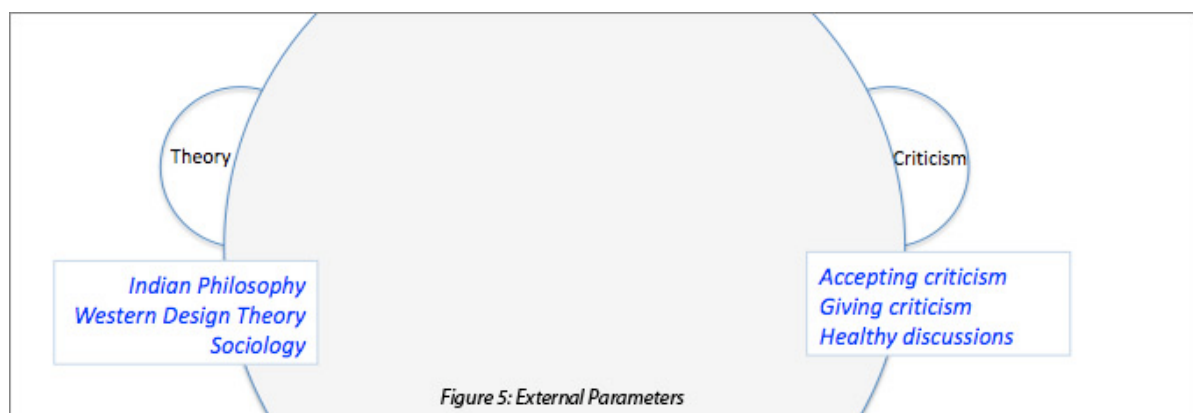


One of the key aspects of being an expert designer is to be able to good at design evangelism. It starts with the imagination [7], and the designer applies his creativity onto the problem and then needs to be able to communicate their thought process. This communication [9] needs to convey comprehension, meaning, and the promised value of 'that-which-is-not-yet' [8]. Going further into the core of the heart of this, it is about the designer having the ability to create the not-yet-existing. In the case of design in India, it becomes extremely important to have a 'diathenic-graphologue' [8] that would allow for the smooth flow of ideas while presenting to stake holders who would have perhaps not invested in design before.

Design Evangelism also requires a proper platform. Currently the yahoo group 'designindia' has 1662 members and the group 'hciidc' has 1710 members. A lot of members are common in both these forums though. These groups comprise of members from different design disciplines and schools. They allow for the dialogue to occur between the different design disciplines.

However often a design argument is shot down, owing to lack of the culture of design evangelism and pride in the design as a profession, activity and academic discipline. The design in India definitely requires more level of acceptance of design arguments, design evangelism.

The Ears representing the external parameters of the criticism and the theoretical knowledge



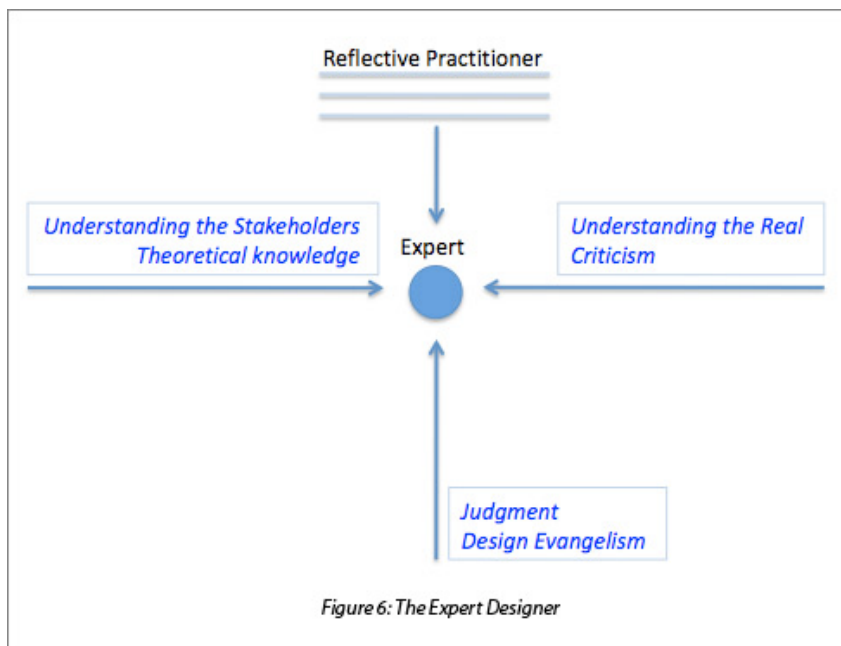
In-spite of design being present for a long time, there is currently a lesser amount of literature that has been published from the Indian design fraternity. Therefore the designer should look at the design theoretical models that are proposed from other places. However the Indian Designer should also be well

versed with the Indian philosophy and ways of living and seek to seek a balance in the knowledge gathering and practice.

The culture of design criticism has not been practiced in the Indian Design industry very well. One often tends to assume that all criticism is negative. The notion of constructive criticism should be preached. This can come out as a result of healthy discussions on different platforms. The designer should be prepared to give and take criticism with ease and without any personal vilification of the critic. Being able to accept criticism is the signs of an expert designer [2].

The center of forehead representing the Design Expert

In the Hindu philosophy, the location between the eyebrows is a place for the sixth chakra, called the Third Eye Chakra, in the chakra system. An understanding of the seven chakras offers a way to balance ones desires and lead a more happy and spiritual life along personal destiny. This is a chakra that is often called the Command Chakra, and is also the Chakras for the higher consciousness. [25]



Donald Schon's notion of the reflective practitioner resides in the head and truly occupies this position. It is with a constant reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action [20] strategy that a designer in India can seek towards becoming an expert in the service in Design [6].

The different senses as discussed here all leads to this position of the centre of the forehead. From all directions it all culminates at this position, as it is only with a proper understanding of all the other parameters the designer would seek out to be an expert. Only then will the notion of expertise by Cross [2], be followed.

In Conclusion

This essay seeks to provide a simple framework for designers who are seeking to become an expert in their fields. One also needs to be able to appreciate the splendor of design [r] and the ways in which design can make an impact in the lives of people. Finally, as Stolterman in his book "The Design Way", mentions, "becoming good at design, or helping others to become good at design does not assure that good design will be the outcome. The theories and the practice of design are still subject to the willfulness of the human being." [15] Therefore, there is only up to certain things that a designer can do. However accepting the challenges that are faced in terms of industrial support, lack of proper academic institutions, acceptance level of

design as a profession in the context of Indian Design is important if one is to see the Indian Design industry progress and stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest. What one needs at this time is a collaborative effort towards the prosperity of design in India.

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