

DESIGN & BUSINESS- TOWARDS A SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT:

After a fairly successful attempt to “scientise” Design we are on a journey to “businessify” Design. It’s indeed encouraging for the Design community that business has found its next source of competitive advantage in Design.

However, given the economic crisis that world is into, business is viewed as a cause of social, environmental, and economic problems. Hence, businesses need to redefine their role in society. Secondly, businesses adopting Design in a reductionist way and labeling it as ‘Styling’, “Design Thinking”, etc prohibits Design to realize its full potential in the current Business systems.

This poses a challenge for a design educator to marry Design and Business for the future designers. The paper discusses an approach in which inputs on Business can be brought into Design education so that future Designers can create a win-win situation for both – Business and Design. The paper describes the experience of past three years of teaching Design Management course for the UG Design learners at MIT Institute of Design and also discusses the proposed changes to make the Design Program at MIT ID more responsive to the socio-economic conditions.

1. INTRODUCTION

MIT Institute Of Design (MIT ID) was started in 2006 and is part of the Maharashtra Academy Of Engineering Education and Research (MAEER).

MAEER aims to develop professional education facilities to train the young generation and provide dedicated and skilled professionals to serve the society and the nation. MAEER , established in 1983 currently has over 50,000 students across Engineering, Medicine, Research, Management,

Education, Peace Studies, Environment Studies and Design under its umbrella.

The motto of MAEER is "To harness the knowledge of Science and Technology for the welfare of the society"

MIT Institute of Design was started with the aim to create a design community which will not only cater to the Industrial economy but also to the small scale and rural industries and handicrafts.

MIT Institute of Design is guided by Prof. H. Kumar Vyas who is the most respected Design educator in India and recipient of Sir Misha Black Medal for Distinguished Services to Design education in 2011. A dedicated team of senior academicians and practitioners from Design and related fields are behind the emergence of MIT ID as the preferred centre for Design learning in India.

2. DESIGN PROGRAMS AT MIT ID

MIT ID has UG (4 ½ Years) and PG (2 ½ Years) Design programs for following disciplines.

Product Design

Graphic Design

Film & Video Design

Transportation Design

Animation Design

Interior Space & Equipment Design

Retail & Exhibition Design

User Experience Design

The paper will focus on the UG Design program whose structure is described in Table-1.

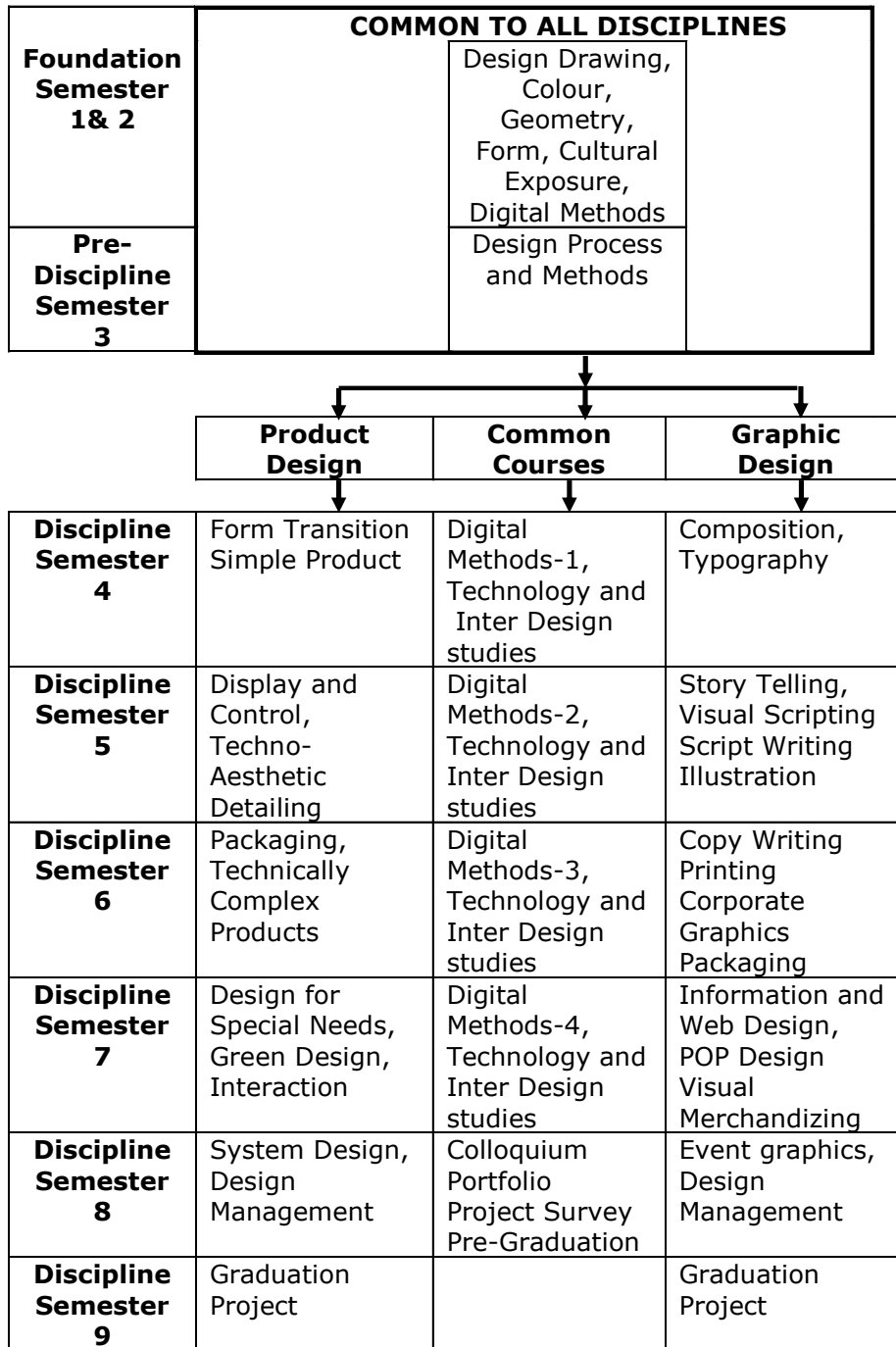


Table 1- Program Structure of UG Design Program

Table-1 shows the key courses offered in Product Design and Graphic Design Programs. The courses for other Industrial and Communication Design disciplines (E.g. Retail and Exhibition, Animation etc) are on similar lines but specialized as per the discipline requirements.

3. DESIGN MANAGEMENT COURSE AT MIT ID

Design Management is a 3 week course in the 8th Semester through which learners were exposed to concepts of business. This paper is based on the new approach of running the Design Management course.

3.1 DESIGN MANAGEMENT course- OLD APPROACH

The previous approach of was based on the premise that Design is function in a Business organisation and needs to be managed as any other function. Therefore, the focus was on exposing students to this functional role of Design in and organisation. The course covered professional practices that a Designer needs to know to start her own Design consultancy.

The main faculty gave the inputs on the basic of business, types of organisations and the technical and legal aspects of setting up a Design consultancy. Design Consultancy owners or design leaders from Industry were invited to share their experience.

This is compulsory course for all the disciplines and a typical class has around 150 students and has following composition.

Discipline	% Of Students
Graphic	40%
Product	35%
Animation	10%
Interior Space & Equipment	8%
Retail and Exhibition	6%
Transportation	5%
Film and Video	4%

Table 2: Composition of the Design Management class

After running the course for two years, in the feedback from students and discussions with senior faculty members of all disciplines, it emerged that while this approach was good to deliver a conceptual understanding about business, the students were not able to relate to the overall learning that the course delivered. Following are the major gap areas that were identified. The course was perceived as theoretical course and hence the learners' interest levels were lower as compared to that in the other studio and project based courses.

The guest speakers coming from various backgrounds were able to bring to diverse view points about Design Management. However, in absence of a formal understanding of business processes and a framework to comprehend it was difficult for the students to assimilate these diverse viewpoints.

There existed an ambiguity about where and how to apply the concepts learned in real life situations.

The notion of Design being a function that needed to be managed created a hierarchy with Management at top and Design lower in ranks. This led the learners to look at Management as something that stifles their creativity and blunt their craft.

Industry professional spoke about their experiences and often the discussion would get discipline specific. The multi-disciplinary nature of Design was not getting highlighted and a session by say an Industrial Design did not interest a student from say Animation Design.

This did not augur well for a healthy Design learning environment. To address the issues mentioned above it was decided to rethink the approach, content and delivery of the course.

3.2 design management course-New Approach

Design Management programs that are now common in most of the Design schools are based on bringing Design Thinking into Business.

Programs co-taught by Design and Business professors (d.school at Stanford), partnership between schools of University (Helsinki) and dual degrees in business and design (IIT Chicago) are some popular programs.

However, reverse attempts at introducing business principles to design folks seem to be less consistent and perhaps more problematic. (Walters, 2010) Teixeira (Teixeira, 2009) notes that design programs, focused only on the graduate level, give little attention to the demands and opportunities in undergraduate design curricula.

Teixeira further notes that undergraduate education in design is still handicapped by a lack of business knowledge in terms of dealing with phenomena influenced by market-driven production systems. (Teixeira, 2009)

This unfortunately is still true and is evident in the most of the design program. As a result there is also a lack of a framework to include business inputs in Design programs and what exists is a course on professional practice that exposes the Design learners to business inputs.

Kasturi proposes a pedagogy that facilitates integrative learning in design institutes to ensure that design is taught as an integrated discipline. She further states that design programs should facilitate co-creation of knowledge rather than a teacher-tells-student model. (Kasturi, 2005)

Borja de Mozota suggests that designers should be explained that business inputs are contextually important because of macroeconomic changes, and not because design is per se strategic. Design becomes strategic because designers' skills are useful to develop new strategy routes. The problem is that even though designers have this potential to work at higher strategic levels of organizations, (Borja de Mozota, 2011) and even be policy makers, they are not trained to do so. This is a challenge for design education.

Design skills are resources and core competencies for reinventing new business models. Rather than seeing the present system as more complex, it is the system that has to be reinvented. (Osterwalder, 2010 as cited in (Borja de Mozota, 2011)

New business models and new industries will emerge that will change the balance of our socio-technical system within the shift in strategy definition (Borja de Mozota, 2011))

Tan suggests that as design and designers continually expand the discipline, adding new dimensions and adapting to the changing economic, social and environmental circumstances, so too must education. (Tan, 2002)

It is quite clear from the discussion above that an approach to integrate Business inputs in Undergraduate Design education is required.

In the light of the discussion and with discussions with the Design and Business leaders from industry, the faculty team at MIT ID developed following guidelines for new approach.

The course should be run in workshop/studio format

The course should break away from the “functional” view of Business and adopt a more broad-based view and value of Design can be explicitly identified.

The course should open up the learners to diverse opportunities that Design to contribute to.

The course should rationally acknowledge the changing nature of Business, its role in society and address the current challenges that Business is facing. Each learner/group should be able to carve out a learning path appropriate to their existing knowledge and interest level.

Based on these drivers, the Business Model Generation (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) framework was adopted for the course. The framework was used as a platform to build live Business + Design Labs through which the concepts of business management as well as the role Design can play in Business and society were demonstrated.

3.3 COURSE METHODOLOGY

The students are first introduced to the Business Model Canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010) as a tool to understand the various processes and constituents of a business. Then through a boot camp on entrepreneurship the students are taken through how academic projects can be taken to the next level towards real life ventures. The objective of boot camp is primarily to motivate and inspire learners and hence essentially is conducted by young professionals who either have worked with or run their own start-ups.

With this priming, the learners formed into interdisciplinary groups of 4-5 each. Each group has to brainstorm potential ideas for which they can build a business proposition.

After finalizing the business idea the groups develop the idea into a business model using the Business Model Canvas. This raw business model then acts as a live case and vehicle for the faculty to expose the students to various business concepts that are relevant to their business proposition.

Learners work on refining their business model by discussions with the potential users and other stakeholders.

Parallel to this, 3-4 Design and business leaders from Industry come and share their experiences and provide feedback and insights on their relevant business propositions. The guests are chosen so that they cover a spectrum of design intervention opportunities.

So with inputs from main faculty, industry leaders and their own validation the learners refine the business model as they progress in the course.

3.4 A Symbiosis of Design and Business

The new method is very well received by the students and learners are able to understand how their Design skill sets can be relevant to business. Rather than looking business as something that poses constraints, they treat the constraints as opportunities to make their design solutions more robust, rigorous and contextual. This enables to them to see Design and Business rationally in its correct spirit and combine best of both the worlds. This is what the author feels is the starting step for a symbiotic relationship between Design and Business.

Given below are some of learning and insights from the experience.

Business Model Canvas as a teaching tool

One of the important improvements in the new approach is the use of Business Model Canvas.

Business Model Canvas breaks away from the conventional view of business organisation as separate functions. Business Model Canvas defines a business model as a mechanism to create, deliver and capture value. With such holistic and systemic view it is easy to visualize Design as an all pervading activity and is not subject to any hierarchical biases. This enables learners to explore multiple roles for Design to create, deliver and capture value.

This is all the more important in India, where although Design education is qualitatively and quantitatively changing, the status of Design as a value-driver in Business leaves a lot to desire. With few Organisations who can qualify to be design led, Design is often an afterthought for a majority of businesses. It is such environment in which a designer has to work and deliver. Hence it's necessary for Design educators to expose the learners to the methods, approaches and vocabulary of Business. Moreover, this has to happen such that they are not bogged down by the constraints that Business poses, but go beyond the conventional business methods and leverage their Design skill sets to tackle these constraints.

Business Model Canvas is a very visual tool and is developed using principles of visual thinking and inputs of Designers. This inherent "visuality" of the tool makes it easy for the learners to relate with the concept of Business Model. Such "Designerly" way of looking at business enables them to see Business as a means to take benefits of Design to the intended users in a way that is feasible and viable.

In an interview, Osterwalder says that visual language is crucial. It helps others buying in. It expresses what's needed when language is not enough. With business model discussions, before the existence of the canvas, people didn't know what they were talking about. The canvas is a tool to help them in a practical way. (Osterwalder A. , 2012)

Live Business Idea

Each group having a business idea to work upon is beneficial as it provides a live case for discussion and validation. There is an emphasis on validating the ideas by the users and other stakeholders of the system. During the duration of the course itself, the learners come up with a minimum viable proposition of their business model which they test out and validate in as real as possible situations.

Such validation and the iterations that the learners carry out provide opportunity to build a rich discussion about the relevant business concepts.

In the same interview Osterwalder points out the importance of design thinking, prototyping and experimenting. (Osterwalder A. , 2012)

Having a business idea also serves as a case on which they can apply the concepts that they learn from the main faculty and industry professionals.

The little success that Groups get while testing their business ideas boosts confidence and morale of the learners. This course happens in the last semester after which the learners have to work with an industry sponsor for a Graduation project.

Multi-disciplinary Work environment

Since the groups are from such that the students from each discipline are evenly spread. So the groups are a mix of students of various disciplines and each student can contribute in multiple ways. Moreover, the focus is on integrating the disciplines and looking at Design as a holistic activity, without compartmentalising in separate disciplines.

Ground work for the Graduation Project

As this is the last semester, after this course student's work with the Industry on a sponsored project as fulfillment of their Graduation. Typically, learners work with industry on the projects that the organisation offers them. However, this year 8 students have taken up an idea of their own and are working on self-initiated projects. These students will be mentored by MIT ID faculty, industry partners and consultants to develop their ideas further. Such entrepreneurial approach will enable them not only to conceive a design solution but actually take their solutions to market.

The students are given flexibility to choose an idea to work on. The ideas that they select say a lot about their understanding of Design. The students have taken up ideas that go beyond the profit-seeking motive of business and address the larger issues that Business ideally should be solving.

This is very important given the current turmoil the existing business system is into. It is necessary that Design learners don't blindly accept the prevalent

notions of Business but, using their design sensibilities, seek out newer business models and solutions to solve the current problems faced by society.

4. The way ahead

The new approach to the course on Design Management has opened up many possibilities.

Department of Business Studies: Realising the importance of inputs of Business in Design education, a restructuring of the existing Design curriculum is underway. Design learners will be gradually introduced to concepts of business appropriate to their stage in Design learning. This intervention is to be carefully thought and devised keeping in mind the symbiotic relationship that is envisaged in the discussion above. Therefore, business inputs will be introduced such that they are not detrimental to creative and organic Design thinking. At the same time the learners will be encouraged to generate alternatives for redundant and defunct topics of business management by applying Design methods and concepts to business and economic scenarios. A department for Business Studies will be formed under which all these courses will be consolidated. Given below is the overview of the program structure and indicative contents

Sem	Program Stage	Inputs	Premise
1	Foundation		
2	Foundation	Basics of Business, Basics of Economics	Fundamentals
3	Pre-Discipline		
4	Discipline	Marketing, Finance & Operations , Technology & Business	Concepts
5	Discipline		
6	Discipline	Research Methods, Opportunity Spotting & Innovation	Skills
7	Discipline	Green Design System Design Design For Brands Design for Emerging Markets	Contexts
8	Discipline	Design Management, Project Management, Entrepreneurship	Integration & Execution

Table 3: Proposed structure and contents for revised UG Design program

Business Incubation Centre: A Business Incubation Centre is established, which will support students who have innovative design ideas that have

potential to be converted into business propositions. The Business Incubation centre will work with external agencies to get support for funding and any other technical expertise that is required.

Industry Interface: Professional projects and classroom projects are one of the key activities that enrich Design learning at MIT ID. Such projects and other industry interface initiatives will be consolidated under the new department of Business studies. Executive education programs for industry professionals, customized training about role of Design in Business for organisations and short term workshops on Design Thinking is also an area where MIT ID is looking to expand into.

Steady, organic and sustained growth has been a hallmark of MIT ID's journey so far. In a short span of 6 years MIT ID has grown to be one of the most preferred Institutes of Design learning in India. MIT ID is always in a search to seek out opportunities to grow and improve. By attempting to integrate business input into Design education MIT ID strives to contribute to develop a symbiotic relationship between Design and Business – which is the critical need of the hour.

5. CASE STUDIES

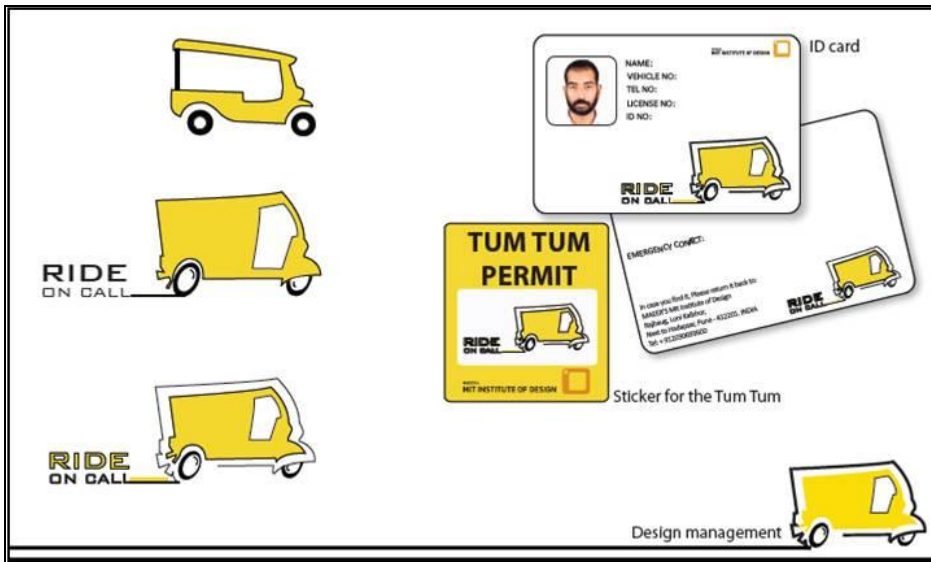
Given below are select business ideas that students worked on

CASE 1- TRANSPORT SERVICE FOR MIT ID CAMPUS (tum tum)

Background: MIT ID is located in an educational campus 20 Kms away from the main city of Pune. Public transport by road is not yet properly developed and there are problems commuting to the main city. A group of students took this problem area and developed an enterprise TUM TUM to provide shared transport service to the students of MIT ID. They owned this enterprise and collaborated with people who own transport vehicles. Users benefitted because they had a convenient option to travel at a reasonable cost and the service provider also got an assured business.

They publicized TUM TUM on the campus and got the bookings done and ran the service for few weekends.

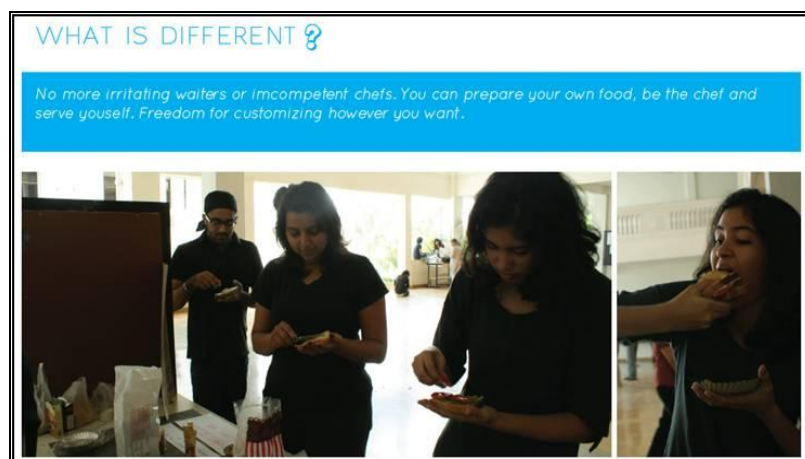
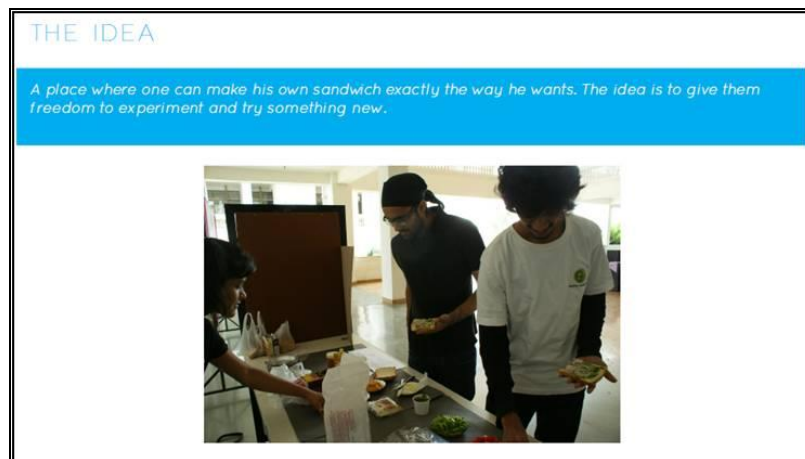
They worked out the costing, the operations and developed the visual identity and other marketing collaterals.



Case 2: Gobble Up- DIY Sandwich

One group identified food customisation as an area and built a business of a food joint where people can make their own food, have fun and hang out.

They chose sandwiches as the food item and "prototyped" the DIY restaurant to test out this idea on the campus itself. After a overwhelming response on the campus the group talked to a café owner who showed interest in the concept. Due to logistics issues and their current academic schedule the team was not able to take it further. However, interest and positive feedback from a real-life investor proved the validity of the concept. The students got to learn how an idea can be taken to market and in the process learned concept like costing, break- even and venture financing.



Case 3- FIRKI- From handicraft to Trendycraft

India has a rich tradition of handicraft and North Western state of Rajasthan has a rich legacy of producing leather footwear which is known as Jooti.

Jootis are very traditional and are worn on special occasions and looked upon as exclusive products. Two students explored the possibilities of making such Jootis that are more contemporary and suitable for casual wear.

They got in touch with local artisans and co-designed a few Jootis and put them up in the market for sale.

They got an excellent response to their products and all the Jootis that they made got sold out. Motivated by this early success they developed the proposition further and set up an online channel to sell their products and explored alternate ways to make the Jootis a casual wear.

Both of them have taken up this project as their Graduation Project and are planning to start their own enterprise and go beyond Jootis with a wider product range of leather products and accessories. They are also in talks with funding partners to invest in their venture.





Other ideas that students chose were as follows

Customised Gift packaging Service	Consumer to Consumer retailing using online social network
Social Networking website for developing money savings habit in youth	Spa on wheels
Service to professional home-maid services	Multi-Purpose Diaper bag for mothers
Personal Concierge Service	Lifestyle products on dying Indian art forms
Natural Remedy Beauty Kits	Snehabandha –a Helpline for Senior citizens in Pune

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