

DESIGN EDUCATION IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT: INFLUENCE OF REGIONAL HISTORY, CULTURE AND ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT:

In the Indian sub-continent, we see vast diversity in cultural, geographic, demographic and economic aspects from one region to another. Within this diversity, it is interesting to observe, analyse and compare the most prominent design institutes across the country with regards to the local influences (importantly history, culture and economy). The authors have narrowed down the scope of study to fashion and industrial design disciplines. They identified two significant regional influences: first influence is that of *arts and crafts* in Gujarat-Rajasthan-Delhi area for the fashion & lifestyle accessories' design schools and second is the *industrial* influence surrounding Mumbai-Pune on the industrial design (product and transportation design) schools located in that area. How these regions celebrate the spirits of fashion and industrial design respectively is elaborated at length from various perspectives. The discussion presented in this paper is a result of inferences made from literature, observations and personal interviews with some of the key relevant people in Indian design education.

Keywords: regional influence, Indian arts and crafts, Indian industrial development, design education, Indian traditions, fashion design, industrial design.

1. INTRODUCTION & APPROACH

The authors start by taking a bird's eye view on the historical development of Indian design education. Next, prominent design schools (fashion and industrial design only) were located on the Indian map. This showed a concentration of schools in north western regions of the country. A deeper analysis showed the possible reasons for these concentrations and the underlying patterns. Two significant thematic influences were identified: first influence is that of *arts and crafts* on fashion and lifestyle accessories' design schools in Gujarat-Rajasthan-Delhi area and second is the *industrial/ engineering* influence on industrial design schools in Mumbai-Pune area. These themes are the underlying current that relate to the proximal history, culture, industry and economy. The interaction of local industry with the design schools for internships, projects and employment naturally follows course. This study of regional influences helped to attain a sneak peek into the future of Indian design education.

A combination of various research methods was deployed. Following preliminary literature studies on the topic, analysis of concentration areas of design schools led to interesting

findings in identifying two main influences. These influences were studied in relation to the local economy, industry, culture and design activity. Further interviews with some of the most experienced living design educators in the country confirmed the observed influences.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

India has had a rich cultural heritage since the beginning of civilization. Although the country was ruled for many centuries by Mughals (1500s to 1850s) and later by the British (1600s to 1947), the cultural roots of Indians remain strong to this day. The variety of traditions, rituals and festivals has been passed over generations and are still a part of daily Indian life.

Supporting and surrounding these traditions are the objects, symbols, garments that are based on the innumerable arts and crafts propagating for centuries from one generation to another. Historically, design in India was in the concept of '*kala*' or arts and crafts and even today continues to be of importance in formal design education (Mathur 2014 p36).

Relatively late in starting formal design education, India's first design school was the National Institute of Design (NID) established in year 1960, Ahmedabad, Gujarat ("History of Design Education in India" n.d.). Eminent American designers Charles and Ray Eames travelled and studied India for a long duration before completing their popular 'The India Report'. This report was the guideline document on the basis of which NID was founded. One of the key points in this report was to keep the tradition of arts and crafts alive (Eames C. and Eames R. 1958). The second prominent design school was Industrial Design Centre (IDC) set up in Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay in the year 1969. It had a natural inclination towards technology because of the surrounding eco-system of the IIT with engineering disciplines all-around on campus. The third significant development in Indian design education was the establishment of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in New Delhi in year 1987 by the Indian ministry of textiles. To this day, the above mentioned three schools are the most sought after design schools by aspiring learners for respective disciplines.

As a result of strong association with arts and crafts, design in India to a large extent remained in the revival/ development of these techniques. Design schools such as NID and NIFT had (and continue to have) a dedicated course called 'Craft Documentation' where students go to the place of craft, learn it and document it well. When NIFT was established, the apparel industry was at a nascent stage (Indian garments were custom-made). 'Students were trained to become entrepreneurs during the early days of NIFT' said Prof. Asha Baxi in a personal interview conducted during the research. Entrepreneur fashion designers mostly worked with the traditional crafts in launching exquisite collections. So also was the case with industrial design. Designers worked with bamboo craftsmen, coppersmiths, glass workers etc., 'There has always been a heavy influence of arts and crafts on the Lifestyle Accessories design programme in NIFT Delhi', quotes Prof. Arvind Merchant (another interviewee), who has been in the education field for more than three decades. He points out that Indian jewellery is very ornate and used to be hand-crafted with various techniques.

In the 1990s, Indian economy was opened to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). As a result, there was increasing competition from international conglomerates who mass-produced items.

Indian companies had to come up with new product launches more frequently and therefore design activity gained momentum. The last decade has seen a considerable rise in the number of contemporary fashion and industrial designed products from Indian design industry. For example, till 1990s, India had only three to five models of scooters and motorcycles overall. Today there are at least six to seven models offered by each Indian company catering to different segments. So also is the case with fashion industry - Today's top clothing brands in India were all launched in the 1990s ("Top 10 Clothing Brands in India" 2014). Numerous other examples can be supplied and all of these from the last decade or so. Initially, foreign companies introduced items that were designed in home countries (such as USA, Europe, Japan, Korea etc.). With passage of time, these companies are offloading local design work to Indian design houses because of ethnographic advantages. For example, companies such as Whirlpool, Samsung, Nokia etc., all have large design offices in India now. Since around the same time (late 1990s), many private design schools have sprouted in India - some in collaboration with western schools. They have a new school of thought and work in line with the global design thinking model. Examples are MIT Institute of Design, Pune; DSK International School of Design, Pune; Symbiosis Institute of Design, Pune; Pearl Academy (validated by Nottingham Trent University) New Delhi and other cities, Indian School of Design and Innovation (ISDI), Mumbai (collaboration with Parsons New York). A natural progression of the study from historical development and influences was to investigate the region wise distribution of design schools.

3. REGIONS IDENTIFIED AND THEIR INFLUENCES

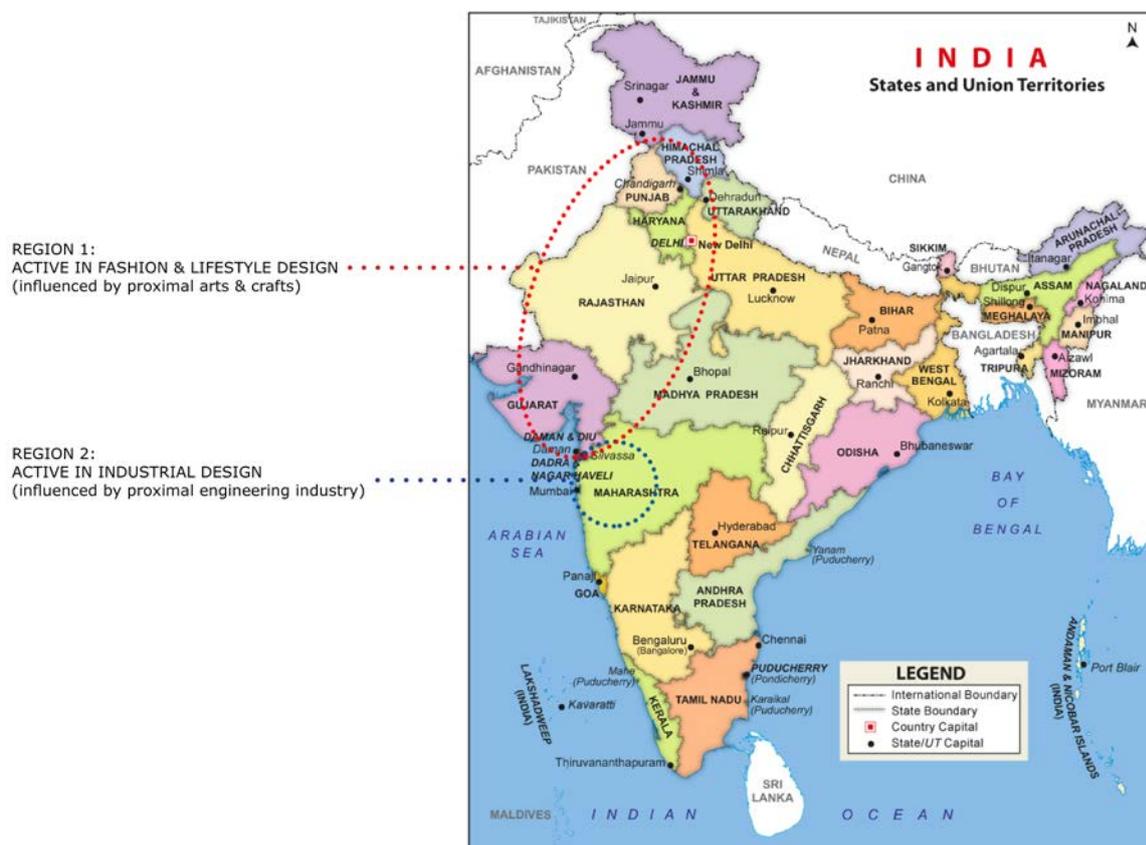


Figure 1: Regional influences on design activity.

3.1 LOCATION OF DESIGN SCHOOLS

For purpose of emphasis, only the top schools in the country were looked at (Tables 1 & 2). A pattern was observed in the concentration of schools in regions identified (Figure 1). For fashion and lifestyle accessories design, the top schools are located in Gujarat-Rajasthan-Delhi area with local influence of arts and crafts.

City/ Town	Institute
New Delhi	NIFT, Pearl Academy
Noida (near Delhi)	Amity School of Fashion Technology, Pearl Academy
Mumbai	NIFT

Table 1: Top schools for Fashion & Lifestyle Accessories Design in India (rankings by magazines India Today 2015 and Outlook 2014 - www.minglebox.com/top-ranking-fashion-designing-colleges)

For industrial design (product & transportation), a local influence of the industrial development in Mumbai-Pune area can be attributed to the success of industrial design schools in vicinity.

City/ Town	Institute
Ahmedabad (Gujarat)	NID
Mumbai	IDC
Pune	MIT Institute of Design, DSK International School of Design, Symbiosis Institute of Design

Table 2: Top schools for Industrial Design in India (India Design Report 2010)

3. 2. REGIONAL CULTURES

It is observed and well-known among Indians that people in Delhi and surrounding areas are known for their lavish living and larger than life celebrations. The Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of Delhi residents is second highest in the country (Prabhudesai 2014). The well-known are the fashion conscious and high spending population of Punjabis. Punjabi culture itself celebrates marriage to its fullest with series of rituals which may number up to ten, hence coined as 'Big Fat Indian Weddings' ("Big Fat Indian Weddings" 2015). Each ritual has its own importance and certain dress code for the same. In India there is also a huge significance for the trousseau for bride which becomes an integral part of wedding purchases. Many designers have tapped in this market of exquisite handcrafted wedding dresses and trousseau. A Punjabi wedding is the best example where not the bride groom and immediate family but all the relatives join the grand celebrations. Catering to this opportunity is the "Bridal India Fashion Week" and "Indian Couture Week". This bears a direct relation as to why all the leading fashion designers are located in and around Delhi. Besides traditional events, New Delhi also attracts foreign companies because of its fashion conscious people. 'Whenever foreign fashion

brands (e.g. Zara, H&M) arrive in India, they launch their first store in Delhi (even though Mumbai is India's commercial capital)', points out Asha Baxi.

The Mumbai-Pune region although economically developed is not extravagant and lavish culturally compared to the Delhi population (Prabhudesai 2014). The engineering industry workforce forms a large part of the Pune population, Pune being the largest auto hub of India ("Maharashtra State Report" 2015). Education in engineering and industrial design is relevant and valuable in Pune because of the immediate local employment opportunities. So also the accessibility and availability of faculty from surrounding industry aids the industrial design activity here.

3. 3. REGIONAL ECONOMY, INDUSTRY & DESIGN ACTIVITY

When one takes a look at the fashion and lifestyle scenario around Delhi, eminent institutions such as Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC) and Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) have their head offices in Delhi creating a conducive environment for the growth of fashion designing, manufacturing, export and promotion in the region. The availability of resources like skilled workmen, surrounding land (Noida, Okhla, Faridabad, Gurgaon) which is well-connected and access to the major textile and handicrafts hubs like – Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Kolkatta has propelled the fashion industry. Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Delhi are home to a plethora of arts and crafts - block printing, Ajrak, Bagru, Rogan craft weaving clusters like Patola, Ikat technique, Mashroo, tie and dye techniques and hand embroideries like bead work, Zari, Phulkari. A large number of textile mills, garment manufacturing units, fashion design houses are located in Gujarat and New Delhi.

Indian fashion industry taps on the rich heritage of textiles and crafts. FDCI hosts 'The India Couture Week', the third Couture event in the world. All the Indian fashion weeks and trade shows are kicked off from Delhi making it a forerunner and a desired location to set up the boutiques and fashion houses ("FDCI presents Amazon India Couture" 2015). Delhi houses the most designer boutiques and manufacturing units. Top designers like Tarun Tahilliani, JJ Valaya, Ritu Kumar, Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Rohit Bal are located in Delhi. 'Even designers who were in other parts of the country have moved to Delhi', pointed out Asha Baxi in her affirmations about the Delhi fashion design vibe. Further these designers have constantly worked on Indian textiles and craft which are a continuous source of inspiration. The younger lot of designers like Rahul Mishra, Aneeth Arora, Richa Agrawal, Karishma Shahani Khan also work with Indian textiles and crafts which form the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of their collections. It is noteworthy - most of these top designers are alumni of NIFT Delhi. This alumni network facilitates NIFT students for exposure to the fashion world. It also brings in lots of opportunities for education-industry collaborative projects.

Next is evident, the importance of arts and crafts in the strategies of international companies. Recently at Amazon India Fashion weeks' grand finale (October 2015) Susan Saideman, V.P. Global Vendor Management, Amazon said; "We have decided to theme the Grand Finale on 'The Banaras Project – Crafts of India' as Banaras has always been a source of inspiration for the fashion industry. She further added, "In our endeavour to bring the authentic arts of India

to our customers, we are soon launching 'Crafted in India' store on Amazon.in which will reflect the rich heritage of modern India put together by the expert weavers and artisans from all over the country" ("Reviving Banarasi weaves" 2015).

The large number of export oriented units and fashion designers in this area creates a huge demand for qualified design and technical professionals in the field of fashion. NIFT and NID schools thus established a strong base with most of the learners being able to be a part of this growth. Delhi and neighbouring states of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Punjab have also been part of academic visits and studies for young learners. In relevance to arts and crafts know-how, fashion institutes' curricula have a 'Craft Documentation' course. A visit for the craft clusters to understand the crafts and historical references gives several opportunities to learners to be able to look at the existing craft with a new perspective.

Above are main highlights that make Delhi and surrounding area vibrant with the fashion spirit. Also examples are provided regarding the main driving force for fashion designers and industry namely local arts and crafts. This influence therefore is reflected in the curricula of fashion design schools.

Moving to the next region under study, namely Mumbai-Pune (Maharashtra state), it is noteworthy, Mumbai is the commercial capital of India with home to various manufacturing, appliance and technology industries such as Godrej, Larsen & Toubro, Siemens etc., Pune is India's largest automotive hub, also referred to as 'Detroit of India'. Leading Indian automotive companies in Pune are Tata motors, Bajaj Auto, Force Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Premier Motors and Kinetic. So also foreign car makers are located here - Volkswagen, Mercedes Benz, General Motors and Fiat. There are innumerable other manufacturing companies such as Thermax, Forbes Marshall, Kirloskar Group and so on.

Maharashtra is the highest in Gross Domestic State Product (GSDP) amongst all the states in India. It is also the most industrialised Indian state. The state is equally a frontrunner in small scale industries and boasts of the largest number of special export promotion zones.

Maharashtra accounts for approximately 35.1 per cent of the country's automobile output by value. Pune is the largest auto hub of India, with over 4,000 manufacturing units just in the Pimpri-Chinchwad region. The state also has the largest base of local original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) ("Maharashtra State Report" 2015). The state of Maharashtra is well-known for its large industrial townships under the Maharashtra Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC). Popular ones around Mumbai-Pune area are MIDC Pimpri-Chinchwad, Shirwal, Amravati, Aurangabad, Thane, Panvel etc.

The concentration of the manufacturing and engineering industry attracts industrial design agencies and relevant activity to the Mumbai-Pune area. India's most prominent industrial design studios are located in Mumbai-Pune region. Six out of ten nominations for India's Best Industrial Design Studios (2015) were from this area (Sharma 2015) - 'Desmania design', 'Future Factory' from Mumbai and 'Design Directions', 'INDI Design', 'Onio design', 'Ticket design' from Pune. The Association of Designers of India (ADI) which is governing body in industrial design & communication design has its headquarters in Pune. Pune hosts the popular

'Pune Design Festival' (PDF) which is the largest industrial design event in the country. In the Mumbai-Pune area, one can observe that Pune in particular has the spirit of engineering and industrial design activity which influences and supports the local design schools. As explained in section 3.2 above on design schools, the top schools for industrial design are located here. A surrounding ecosystem provides learners tremendous opportunities to get exposure and experience both. Internships for industrial design are found in plenty because of the concentration of relevant studios and companies in the vicinity. Again, the alumni network keeps the industry-education bond tight and ever growing, thereby facilitating cross-learning and advancements in the field.

4. INTERVIEWS WITH DESIGN EDUCATORS

Analysis of several interviews from the book 'Design Education in India' was done to see perspectives of leading educators in India (Mathur 2014). Further, the authors conducted a qualitative study with few more design educators (table 3). The main questions in the interviews were pertaining to the regional influences on design schools. Educators were also asked to give their opinion on the future scenarios for design education in India.

Interviewee	Affiliations	Academic experience; industry experience; areas of design	Educational Institutes employed/ involved with
Prof. Asha Baxi (age 65 years, female)	Ex-Dean - academics; Ex- Chairperson Fashion at NIFT Delhi	30 years; 2 years; fashion design and apparel design	NIFT Delhi, FIT New York, Nottingham Trent, MITID Pune
Prof. Arvind Merchant age 67 years, female)	Ex-Director - MITID Pune	35 years (parallel); product design/ retail design	NIFT Delhi, MITID Pune, DJ Academy Coimbatore
Akhilesh Anand (age 45 years, male)	CEO – Tropical Knits Ex- Head of Academics at School of Fashion Technology (SOFT)	10 years; 12 years; fashion design, apparel manufacturing	SOFT Pune
Manasi Kanetkar (age 35 years, female)	Asst. Prof MITID Pune	4 years; 8 years; product design, architecture	MITID Pune

Table 3: Profile of design educators interviewed.

5. VIEWS ON THE FUTURE OF INDIAN DESIGN EDUCATION

With the growing Indian economy (local and international players), industry perceives design as a tool to beat competition and add value, which earlier was not the case. The Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India for 2015 has surpassed China and USA ("India Pips US, China" 2015). Government campaigns such as *'Make In India'* have a direct impact on design activity. Therefore it is logical that presently India is riding the design education wave. In the last decade, a lot of design schools have opened up in the country ("History of Design Education in India", n.d.). In spite of globalization, western design pedagogy and course contents need to be adapted to suit the Indian context for both disciplines - fashion and industrial design.

From a fashion and lifestyle accessories design perspective, it is noteworthy to quote Prof. Asha Baxi's statements - 'Indian artisanal crafts have great potential. The future would be a convergence of crafts with technology'. Further, she is of the opinion that Indian design schools should invest in their educators' career development and look at the long-term benefits of having quality education. The design education needs emphasis on methods of improving existing crafts with focus on productivity, consistency in quality and economic empowerment of the craftsmen. Educational modules like "Craft Study and Documentation" should not just merely remain an exercise to document a craft but work on collaborations which will mutually benefit the craftsmen and designer. With context to fashion industry it is always the designer who is a forerunner and will be credited with the success of projects, very rare cases of success of craftsmen has come to focus. The future education model can empower craftsmen to become independent entrepreneurs.

India is an emerging economy, yet there is a sharp contrast in income levels of people and living standards. Much of rural India still does not get electricity and/or remains underdeveloped. With regards to industrial design, rural India demands frugal innovation. Philips' low smoke Chulha is a classic example in this regard. In rural areas, people often have workarounds to solve their problems. For example, the high power engine of a Royal Enfield motorcycle used by Indian villagers is tweaked by them to pump out water into fields when needed. A number of such Jugaad Innovation examples can be found in Indian urban as well as rural environments (RadjouNavi, PrabhuJaydip and Ahuja Simone 2012). Indian design education should introduce methods to design around such frugal situations and adopt Jugaad innovation within their pedagogy. Professor Arvind Merchant envisions a unique way of what he calls 'inclusive' design education - bringing the school to the rural area. He says that design education should not be in disciplines, rather have a holistic study model with 'design thinking' at the core. People in rural areas will be co-creators when they are empowered with design thinking since they understand their local problems better. The future of design education in India would be to empower the rural people with 'design thinking' in solving their problems locally or even better, creating new generation of rural entrepreneurs.

6. SUMMARY

From various points of view - history, culture, industry, economy and design activity, it is observed that the spirits and eco-systems of design schools located in the two areas identified

can be attributed to their regional influences. It can be clearly seen that the spirit of Delhi and surrounding area is Fashion and Lifestyle Accessories (heavy influence of arts and crafts) and therefore top fashion schools are located around that area. Similar relations are observed in Pune's design schools with respect to industrial design (product & transportation). With these spirits, India continues to ride on the design education wave. A country vibrant with varied culture and rich in heritage with extreme contrasts in economy offers a variety of challenges in design contexts. That makes design education in India even more challenging.

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