

UNDP Project on Tools for Bamboo and Cane

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UNDP (United nation development Programme) Project, which was assigned to IDC by D.C (Handicrafts) laid a foundation for Bamboo activities at IDC.

It has a background.

In 1997, when I was on my sabbatical leave, I met D.C (Development Commissioner) - Handicrafts, an IAS officer Mr. R. Mathur. He was impressed with my motivation to be in 'Tripura'. It was a memorable meeting. By the time he finished the official routine at BCDI, it was nearing 5, O'clock . He was keen to meet me and discuss few things the moment he came to know that I have come from IITBombay on a sabbatical leave! One of his officers reminded him that he has a meeting with a Minister! He simply said, 'let him wait'. At the instance of officer in-charge, I had prepared a proposal to upgrade BCDI. Mr.Mathur said that can be easily assigned by his office! I told him that it can be only after my sabbatical leave! He agreed.

Time passed. I was mis-informed that Mr.Mathur had moved to another position tin Govt. Then suddenly Mr. Mathur visited IDC, to meet me. He spent few hours visiting IDC studios. After seeing all the facilities at IDC, and having a long talk on my interest in Bamboo, he came with a proposal, " we want to develop tools for Bamboo Craft. I think you are the one who can do it. Will you take it up?" My immediate response was, 'I am more interested in designing bamboo products, 'Tools' is not really my area". My graduation was in Mechanical engineering. Very reason to go to NID for post graduation was to come out of 'shackles' of Mechanical Engineering! He said, " Don't worry about 'Design.' I will give you a separate project for that!" I was still hesitant, " I don't have lab-space to work on such a Project". I was indeed, struggling to get a lab space at IDC for Bamboo Craft at that time! Mr. Mathur said, "That is not a problem I will give you funds for it." I could not say any further! Every objection was over ruled! The meeting ended

I was not sure about the need for design of new tools! I had spent a month at BCDI (Bamboo Cane Development Institute) at Agartala before I met Mr. Mathur. My perception of tools was different. Mr. Krishna Das Paul who is a master craftsman (with excellent weaving skills) in BCDI, had told me, "this Dhau (Hindi name for a bamboo tool) is all I need. I can do any thing with this". But he had taken out several bamboo tools, supplied by DC (handicraft)'s office through an earlier project. The tools were mostly copies of standard carpentry tools like chisels. They all came out into display when the D.C from Delhi (i e Mr.Mathur) came. When he asked Krishna Das Paul, whether they are useful, he said "yes"!

After his, I asked Krishna Das Paul, why he said they were useful !He replied, "it is to avoid unnecessary arguments with superior officers!" With this back-up story I was not sure whether I should take up a tool project at all

I had been thinking a lot during that time, looking at my life, finding meaningfulness in design profession and many other serious questions of existence! I was even thinking to leave IIT. But many things happened after meeting Mr.Mathur at BCDI. I spent couple of months in Assam with a group called AVARD(NE). I came back to IITB by end of April, to avoid Monsoon there!.But most shocking thing happened in June. Mr.Sanjay Ghosh, leader of AVARD(NE) was kidnapped and killed by ULFA. It became obvious that it will not be easy for outsiders to work productively in North East. But one thing was very clear! Bamboo is a future material with many dimensions! Social dimension of design involving a large community working in bamboo craft in the Country was another factor which pulled me towards bamboo craft!

There were two to three calls from Delhi asking me to send the proposal. A sample project proposal was sent to me. 40 to 50 lakhs could be given! It looked like I had no choice other than to take the project. It was clear in my mind that craft-persons don't want new tools per say. They want more earnings on their products. So I put the logic together. If they want more money they need to make new designs with novelty for urban markets. For this they will need new tools and then they will be keen to get them!

That is how we went about in the project. I tried to identify basic problems with bamboo mats for use in a contemporary design. I identified a typical product: a letter pad! The edges in the mat needed to be finished. For this, we, myself and Avinash who had joined me, as a design associate in UNDP project, innovated new tools, jigs and moulds. We had Rudrapaul, the craftsman from Tripura to back us.

How Niranjana Rudra Paul, younger brother of Krishna Das Paul came to IDC was another story!

The new pad in bamboo with interesting hinges, led to set of new tools, which made it possible to make it easily! As we worked we found new relevant tools. we could identify 97 tools for Bamboo from all over the World. a tool kit emerged out of it. few small machines, Colouring techniques with Natural dyes, treatments, training needs.... all these came out of holistic approach we took in the project. What more it laid a foundation for the unique 'Bambu Studio' at IDC, IITBombay.

But the later events made me even happier! In a workshop we did at BCDI to introduce them to 'new tools and Moulds', the master craftsman Krishna Das Paul said "Bhai log! Ye gauge hum ko bahut jarurat hai! (Brothers, this

IDCgauge is very necessary for us!). On that day I felt satisfied. It was no less than getting a degree from a Vice Chancellor.

Tool-development gave us a new positioning in bamboo Craft! We also innovated 'Moulds, jigs and fixtures' appropriate for the Bamboo craft. All these efforts including product specific tools and coil Technique along with the whole process, how we developed the 'toolkit' is reported in the "UNDP" project report. This can be viewed under 'Books and Manuals' in the web site.
