Social Design in a Developing Country

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ABSTRACT
"Social Design" was the default mode of design in the pre-industrial era. All design effort was by the people and for the people. It rarely was monopolized by individuals or special interests and was never protected. Objects of pleasure or mere curiosity were rare. Many of these traits still persist in developing countries where participatory approaches flourish and the purpose of design is often less to do with material comfort and equally to do with convenience of systems involving the public good. This paper explores how Social Design exists even in such an environment, taking examples from service design, non-profit design, and ethically conscious design from a developing country like India to illustrate the point.

INTRODUCTION
Design is an occupation, an activity, a process as old as civilized Man. The event that marked the domination of the prairies by the two-legged genus Homo was the invention of tools. Tool development was unlikely to have been the work of a single individual, rather would have been the effort of a social group, or the entire herd, putting their collective minds to refining something that an individual might indeed have noticed, and then developed it for the benefit of all.

Design of the modern world has become an individualist activity, with armies of specially educated and well-trained individuals taking on the well-paid task of creating objects of great convenience and aesthetic experiential pleasure for people who use them but were never involved in their making. Increasing industrialization has meant the compartmentalisation and specialization of the task of design in the hands of a few.

Somewhere in between this spectrum of owned-by-all-made-for-everybody design and made-by-few-sold-to-buyers design lies the world of Social Design. In the experience of this author living in India, many instances of successful design for the public good have been observed which span the spectrum of highly visible commercial design at one end and public projects of low visibility at the other. They all have the common factor of being design efforts (intentionally planned and targeted efforts to achieve some desired goal), of being for public good, and of being for other than purely commercial profits. Some involve participation of the beneficiaries, others democratic decision-making, some production by purely manual, employment-generating means. All these capture the essence of what is defined in the literature as and are described in this paper as examples of it.

SOCIAL DESIGN
Ideo defines (IDEO, 2015) Social Design as a process that a) encourages community facilitation, b) is supportive and empowering for those involved, c) offers

an innovative and feasible process, d) does not try to change people's behavior, e) draws on cultural traditions and beliefs to frame problems within society, and lastly f) acknowledges the importance of the wider influence of design, for example upon the environment.

Wikipedia defines (Wikipedia-contributors, 2022) the term as the application of design methodologies in order to tackle complex human issues, placing the social issues as the priority.

There are many other definitions which all substantially capture the same essence. Considering "design" to include projects of designing experiences, services, and policies in addition to physical products and message-conveying images, many projects the world over can fall into the category of Social Design for abiding by some if not always all the criteria mentioned. Some (described in the section Pseudo-Social Design) have the contrary combination of achieving social good through use of a service designed for commercial benefit of the creator.

Kokum Design Trust have compiled and catalogued (Kokum-Design-Trust, 2022) many such Social Design efforts happening in India in the domains of Architecture and Urban Design, Communication Design, Product and Industrial Design, and Strategic Design. It is an invaluable library of the documentation of such efforts. The described projects cover a range of topics like Energy, Water, Climate Change, Craft, Culture, Disability, Environment, Education, Economy, Health, Gender, Governance, Food Security, Textiles, Tourism.

Many educational organisations have also opened departments or disciplines dedicated to this area of Social Design. National Institute of Design, India, is a prime example of mainstream educational institutes offering programs that stress upon social needs in a time of unbridled material development. Through all its courses, it encourages its students to question the social realities in the midst of which material development is taking place. Its students in turn respond by choosing highly sensitive topics for their design projects such as women's reproductive hygiene needs, children's mental needs, needs of the differently abled, and so on. Many choose to deviate from the traditional individually-scripted design paths and instead explore co-creation and participative design as alternative design processes. Courses like Design for Special Needs, Systems Design, and the program for Universal Design are ones that particularly kindle the interests of students in Social Design. Examples of such student work are Co-creating Farmers' Futures (Patil, 2021), The Juvenile Justice System (Narvekar, 2021), Out of Syllabus (Prasad, 2021), and Water Management in Smart Cities (Shenoy, 2018).

New York's School of Visual Arts (SVA) offers an MFA in Design for Social Innovation, covered very nicely in Metropolis (Mattioli, 2017). In this article, the founding chair of the program, Cheryl Heller, discusses the genesis of the program, how Social Design relates to people and things instead of things alone, the universality of social

aspects in all design, measurement of the impact of social design, responsibilities of the designer, design versus policy, and the opposition that Social Design faces in current political developments in the world.

The Master of Design (Social Design) program (Ambedkar-University, 2019) offered by Ambedkar University, New Delhi, India, is a 2-year, full time, practice-based programme in which students are (sic) trained in the methods, tools and approaches of design disciplines with those of the social sciences to creatively address complex social issues through participatory and collaborative design methods. The areas of focus are public services and systems (such as health, education, transport, waste, governance interfaces), community networks and livelihoods (pertaining to crafts, informal economies, built and intangible heritage, urban and rural commons), digital technologies (social media, user interfaces and experiences, privacy). Students are also introduced to entrepreneurial competencies and leadership to support them to establish their own enterprises while also providing internship opportunities in established organisations.

Another example is Maryland Institute of College of Art's Centre for Social Design (MICA, 2022) whose commitment is to (sic) "increasing the social literacy of designers so they have a better understanding of the issues of equity, power, race and privilege that exist at the heart of the social problems we aim to address."
The prevalence of such programs in mainstream education along with the relentless drive towards technological advancement is a very good sign of balance of human values alongside material progress.

It has not been long, however, since most design work the world over could be dubbed "social design" if only for the reason that it used to be individualized to customers, free from stifling protection over rights to manufacture, participated in by many, and involving the customer at many points along the way. The mass production era introduced by automobile manufacturing could surely be said to be that turning point. Even much more recently, however, in the author's own lifetime, he has experienced a way of living quite different from today's "ready-to-wear/eat/use" culture, in which things he used were designed and made for him. Clothes used to be tailormade to measure. Ready-made garments (made for everyone in general but no one in particular) were viewed with suspicion, not least because they were also more expensive than their tailor-made counterparts. Food was mostly cooked at home and thus by a known person (one's mother?) who knew our tastes, our preferences. Eating out used to be an extravagance, not to mention considered bad for health … and the pocket … and where the "design" of the food was guided solely by perishability and taste both of which are enhanced by ingredients bad for one's health. It was not uncommon to see cobblers offer to make shoes for you, although their livelihood had been well taken over by the branded shoe houses. Readymade shoes gave one shoe-bite as well as "pocket-bite" because none of them fitted one's Nature-made foot perfectly. Similarly, larger projects like wood-work, metal-work were commonly attended to by local carpenters and blacksmiths, both in design and in execution.

The market was not the customer's paradise it is today. Markets were oligopolistic—many consumers, a few producers. People had to be satisfied with the offerings available in the market. A number, let alone a variety, of choices was a rarity, one used what one got and learnt to be happy with it. There was no overt or covert wooing of the customer. Things had to be custom-made—that was the only way there was—and making things custom-made is time-consuming. Wait times were long, mistakes were difficult to rectify. Parts interchangeability was non-existent in custom-made objects.

On the positive side, things had a low ecological footprint, since the producer-consumer gap was small relative to today. People found happiness through non-material things, mental stresses might have been lower too. Because of low mechanization, individual's skill were at a premium. Work was based around human skill, human execution, resulting in high self-esteem (and sometimes arrogance) of the producer, but in low reliability (compared to machine-made objects of later years), low repeatability, low interchangeability, high dependence upon people (all frustrating) for the consumer. Products used to be used till their disintegrating end, used to change owners, used to be repaired, repurposed, recycled.

Community services-wise, people of the neighborhood got together to build facilities of common need. Projects of social consequence used to be charted by residents themselves. Even in recent times, the social crusader Anna Hazaare managed to come up with a model (HydrateLife, 2013) of ideal village development through gathering village folk themselves and getting them to do their own development for themselves without relying upon external help.

DESIGN IN THE AGE OF TECHNOLOGY

With Industrial Revolution 2 came the enabling of mass production. But "enabling" is a slightly misleading term, since it signifies choice. The investments in large machinery and the mathematics of economies of scale meant that mass production was compulsory. One could not make a few pieces of a plastic product, one had to make thousands since the process involved—injection molding—required a die, producing which was so costly that unless one produced thousands of parts from it, its cost was not recovered. This caused mass production out of all proportion with actual demand. Shops stocked up with unwanted types and numbers of goods and presented a wastage and disposal problem and resulted in a stockpile of garbage that today litters the gyres of our oceans.

But prices dropped too and capacity was no longer an issue in meeting needs (incomes were, but that is yet another story).

With mass production and efficient long-distance transportation of raw materials and goods, came into being the discipline of Industrial Design. Creative minds could now think about designing things out of materials that did not need to be local, could be of previously unimaginable shapes and colours, were light if wanted, and because of mass production, inexpensive too. The producer-consumer distance

increased hugely, to leverage efficiency, and increased the apathy of consumers to the source of their consumed objects and labours. Design unfortunately turned a blind eye to the suffering of animals, to climate change, to resource depletion.

Industrial Revolution 3 onwards brought us the technology of electronics and computers, opening enormous possibilities of what was possible and in smaller and smaller sizes because of miniaturisation. Creativity and design skills began to use technology to create wants that nobody needed or had asked for, but all enjoyed.

Design began to now be done for population segments, not individuals. Made-for-the-masses replaced custom-made, with the resultant compromises in fit as far as apparel was concerned. To make them buy the huge amounts that were being produced for no proven demand, the customer began to be pandered to. The open market allows multiplicity of choices and variety. Human ingenuity and creativity thrived.

CASE STUDIES

Below are presented 4 case studies from India that have some elements of Social Design in them. The connection might seem tenuous in some, but are included because of their relevance to the quality of life of people and the environment. It is not claimed that these have been life-altering or that are well-known to all in India, but are just examples that the author has experienced and been impressed with as examples of good Social Design.

1. Trash management in Himalaya Trekking

The desire of tourists to go trekking in the hills is natural and universal. The grand Himalayas are an exceptional attraction. However, the popularity of this activity (trekking) has come with bad consequences for the very locale that people come there to enjoy. Garbage littered everywhere on trekking trails, in water bodies, in forests is a sad sight (Figure 1[1]).

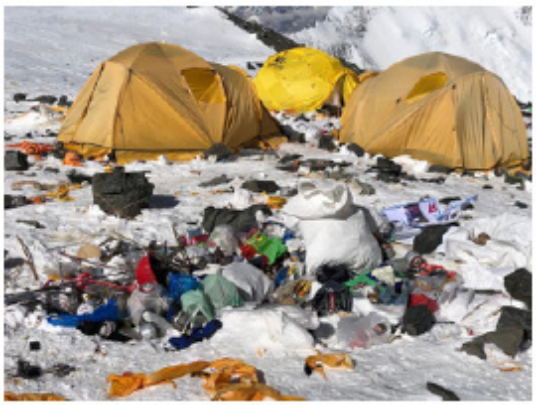

Fig. 1: Bags full of human waste, tents and garbage left behind by climbers above Camp II on Mt Everest.

Concerned citizens have responded to this depredation by volunteering efforts to clean up the trails and the hill slopes. But these are individual, one-time, charitable

[1] Photo courtesy: David Liau00f1o

efforts that cannot be relied upon to last. It is also not possible to monitor every hiker on the hills and penalize the defaulters. Public education and motivation through public service messaging and sloganeering also has effects upon only a minority of people, usually the ones already faithful to the cause.

In a trek up to the Gomukh glacier where the river Ganga gets its water from, the author found a very interesting system set in place to counter this problem. At the entry point of the trek, a check-point was set up manned by personnel from the local administration. Tourists passing the check-point were being asked to show the contents of their back-packs and all other articles carried and worn by them, much like a manual airport security check. The security guard made a note of all disposable items he found (potato chip packets, fruit juice cans, etc.). At a rate fixed for each type of item, a charge was levied for all the disposables the tourist was carrying, which he had to pay and for which he got a receipt. On the way back, he would get his security deposit back (minus some processing fees, maybe) only if he showed the same number of wrappers and cans (empty if consumed) that he carried in.

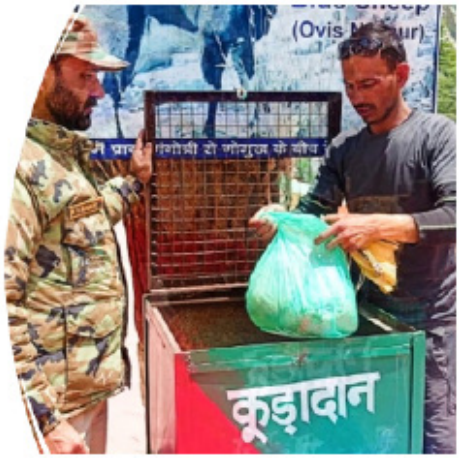

Fig. 2: Garbage management system in which refundable deposits are charged for all disposable items one carried into the trek.

Tourists were seen (Figure 2[2]) readily complying with the procedure since all transactions were being documented and seemed reasonable. The security personnel himself also was conducting himself civilly bringing out the best in the tourists. The system seemed to be a success and hopefully has led to less litter in the surroundings.

This system is presented here as a social design example because of the following factors: a) it strives for an outcome that is not of material benefit to any individual or group, but rather for the cause of preservation of Nature, which is of benefit to everyone, b) it does so in part by appealing to the consciences of the people involved as part of the process, c) what it charges is for the purposes of recovering costs and for exemplary penalty, thereby hoping to modify the irresponsible mindset and behavior of people involved, d) the effort is financially supported by the relevant public administrative body in part and partly by the fines charged.

[2]https://www.newsncr.com/national/administration-started-a-new-initiative-regarding-waste-management-in-gangotri-national-park-940-tourists-have-so-far-collected-18-bags-of-garbage/

2. Railway ticket line system at Mumbai Railway Station

Fig 3: Long queues at railway booking windows due to one-window-one-train restriction

Railway travel is common in India—trains are a very affordable means of travel for its middle class. Travelling by train involves obtaining tickets for the travel… and obtaining those tickets means standing in line with the other people wanting to travel with you. Serpentine queues in front of ticket windows was a common sight at railway stations (like Figure 3[3] , except far worse), and something that the author has been a part of more often than he had wished to. Each window used to be for a particular set of trains with the result that after standing in line for 2 hours if that train became full you had to move to the end of another line for another train. Entire mornings used to be wasted in such incredibly badly designed service systems. Until the author came across a system where someone had thought of a very sensible and non-wasteful way of doing the same thing. This involved: a) getting a physical token with a serial number on it indicating your turn, b) multiple windows all attending to any route, any train, any destination, c) a large display board visible to everyone in the hall with a constantly updating display showing the token numbers being served currently and the counter numbers attending to them, and d) places for people to sit. You had to look at the display board, get a sense of how fast it was changing and therefore how long your turn would take, and be seated waiting your turn. If it seemed as if your turn would take 2 hours, you were free to leave, attend to other work you had, and return in time for your turn. The concourse changed its looks from long queues to an empty hall with just one person in front of every window (Figure 4[4]).

Fig. 4: Effect on customer comfort of the new queue management system: no lines, better service.

[3]https://www.asianage.com/metros/mumbai/240518/vip-quota-train-tickets-racket-busted-by-cops.html
[4]https://www.dailypioneer.com/2020/top-stories/ticket-reservation-counters-to-open-at-select-railway-stations-from-may-22.html

No “product” was involved in doing this. No expense beyond display boards. Noone stood to monetarily gain by doing this. No rocket science was involved. In fact, this system might well be in use everywhere in the world. Everybody gained. Even if not original, its efficacy is undeniable and a lot of relief was brought to the life of the common traveller by whoever thought of this way of doing the same task. And thinking and doing is to design, isn’t it?

3. Bicycle rental MYBYK

The third example illustrates a very recent effort by a group that seeks to popularize bicycle riding (Figure 5[5]). Called MYBYK, it seeks to achieve its aim by a) removing the need for owning bicycles to be using them, b) using a model of availability where the point of access is not one shop in the whole town but multiple points, c) using the best of modern technology (internet, electronics, online payment) to achieve the logistics of the rental process like payment and ensure security for the company (in terms of stolen bicycles), and d) providing attractive, branded bicycles compared to the unappealing black bikes no one likes anymore. All one has to do to rent their bike is to a) download the MYBYK app, b) sign up in the app, c) use the interface to locate the nearest available bike and navigate your way to it, d) unlock the bike, e) use it to your heart’s content (or your wallet’s), and lastly, when done with it, f) drop it off at the nearest hub indicated on their interface. The advantages of design thinking stand out in the flexibility (of pick up, drop locations), in the provision of full information for self-help (in locating available bicycles, drop-off points), and in the ease of payment. Definitely, MYBYK gains monetarily, but it is not selling us a bike, it is encouraging us to share a resource. In doing so, a very healthy, non-polluting, inexpensive, slow-life, outdoor habit of bicycling is revived with all-round benefits for the user, the environment, the planet, the economy, the city, everybody, without the compulsion to buy the bicycle.

Fig. 5: The bicycle rental MYBYK as publicised on its website

4. Ecokaari

This example is of a plastics-upcycling cooperative. The passion of one person led to the setting up of this social enterprise which achieves the end of turning our excessive plastic waste into very functional items of allure and desire, like purses, bags, and other accessories (Figure 6[6]) which in turn it appeals to people to buy, using their sense of guilt at excessive plastics consumption and waste creation and exhorting them to play a part in its responsible repurposing by purchasing articles made from it.

[5]https://mybyk.in/
[6]https://www.ecokaari.org/

Although they have an established supply chain of disposed plastic, it invites every person to mail them the disposable plastic articles they might have, thus contributing to the supply. At the cooperative then, these are segregated (Figure 7 [7]), cleaned, cut into strips, woven into fabric, designed and stitched into accessory products by women artisans of less privileged backgrounds.

By using raw material avoided by most (in fact, discarded by all), employing people of humble economic background, using manual labour, yet delivering products that only minimally compromise on quality (compared to their virgin plastic counterparts), and having an appeal to people's sense of duty to do well by the planet and its residents, this project is an ideal example of Social Design.

Fig. 6: Lifestyle accessory made out of waste.

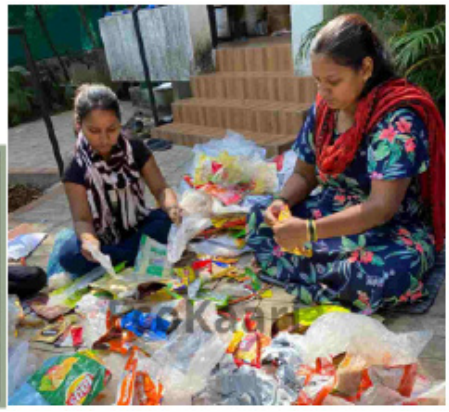

Fig. 7: Female workers of Ecokaari sit down to segregate and group plastic waste

Others…

There are many other examples that are evocative of the idea of Social Design. The simple service design model of bottled milk home delivery in Mumbai was a time-tested and well-accepted way of obtaining milk (Figure 8[8] as illustration). Until materials technology created a convenience that proved to be irresistible: a plastic pouch of a 100th the weight of the glass bottle and unbreakable too (Figure 9[9]).

Fig. 8: Bottled milk delivered on doorstep and empty bottles picked up from doorstep.

[7]https://www.ecokaari.org/
[8]https://totallywelsh.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Milk-doorstep-e1571828780844.jpg,
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Milk_Bottles_on_Doorstep.jpg

Fig. 9: Milk pouches popular now…and the garbage they create

Gone was the need to be tied to the morning delivery for one's supply of milk, and the need to be careful not to drop the bottle or inadvertently puncture the foil cap and cause a spill. But people's attraction to convenience turned to addiction and their tenuous commitment to the long-term idea of environmental sustainability proved to tilt the scales on the side of the plastic pouch, never mind the enormous waste it generates (Figure 9).

The service design model of lunchbox delivery to offices (also in Mumbai) is another old example that has proven successful over the decades and has not yet fallen prey to modern alternatives. It is a project that employs the extremely coordinated manual labour (Figure 10[10]) and mental synchronization of many hundreds of daily-wage labourers to bring an office goer's lunch box full of home-cooked food to him on time. It is reported to have a failure rate of 1 in 2 months.

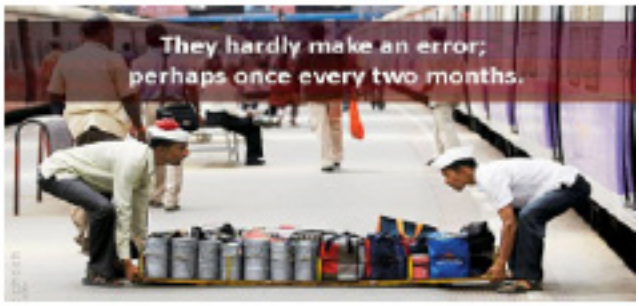

Fig 10: Mumbai's dabbawaalas (lunchbox carriers)

Pseudo-social projects

Often projects that are undertaken for the commercial purpose of profits alone are of a nature as to share some characteristics with Social Design projects. Such projects are of service design nature and involve service to a large, if not the general, population. An example is the taxi-hailing services like Ola and Uber in India. While purely profit-centric in genesis and purpose, these services have used a model of behavior-modifying design that benefits society as a whole and which few other agencies have built into the working system's models.

For example, both Ola and Uber ask you to rate the driver after the ride is over. The driver knows this and is therefore at his best behavior in order to get a good rating from his rides because he knows that the ratings convert to more rides for

[10]https://smedia2.intoday.in/indiatoday/images/stories/2016April/mumbai-dabbawalahs3-650_041416060958.jpg

him. Likewise the driver also gets to rate the passenger, keeping him at his best behavior too. This nugget of user experience and interface design borrows from a deep understanding of human psychology and is at the heart of the system. The reason to think of this as Social Design is that although built by a few designers its working involves the participation of a large population of customers and a large population of drivers who are together vested in the system, and whose combined ethic of working makes for the success of the system.

Other plus points of the system are also hallmarks of good design such as transparency (rider can see his fare at all times), real-time feedback (rider and ride can both see each other's locations before the ride arrives and the status of the ride as it goes underway), multiple payment options, possibility of changing one's mind (to a limited extent)…which all also go some distance in making it better socially since ill-behaved and law-violating, extortionist taxi-drivers have been the bane of this country. A proper design of taxi-hailing system has made life much better for all. This is valuable especially for developing countries with less-than-professional quality of services, public transport being one of them.

HOW DESIGN PRINCIPLES AFFECT SOCIAL PROJECTS TODAY

The examples above all demonstrate that for any project the functional goal has always been prime to achieve. For most of them of older vintage scant attention is paid to the get-up or the presentation, partly because the executors or the participants of the project might not be schooled, if even literate. Not for them the luxury of aesthetics and usability. Design was implicit, practised intuitively by the maker using her common sense. It was not considered more than fine art and therefore not worth spending money upon. Products and services were consequently not known for their aesthetics or experience quality. Social Design particularly so.

However, in urban projects of recent times, for example MYBYK (started in 2014), a new attitude to their formulation is apparent. Reliance upon technology, transparency of information, attention to detail of usability, quality of experience, the very quality of product rented out (the bicycle) are all the hallmarks of a design-sensitive and design-aware generation of entrepreneurs. Table 1 below summarises many aspects of bicycle rentals as they used to exist in the author's childhood to the MYBYK of today.

Table 1: Comparison of bicycle rentals 40 years ago and now

	In my childhood	Now
1 Agency	A cycle-repair shop doing rental also	A "start-up" doing just renting
2 Publicity	Word of mouth, no branding, no advertising	Paid advertisements in media
3 The bike	Rented bicycle was just another bicycle	Designed attractively for rental, with branding, security features, etc.
4 The deal	Time-based rent	Subscription, deposit, rent
5 Accounting	Time of issue jotted in a physical "register"	Automated record of all rental parameters
6 Reach	Only local	Spread out over multiple cities
7 Service	Human (sometimes smiling and talkative☺)	Software (sometimes user-friendly☺), no human
8 Demand	Necessity, for commute	For health, recreation
9 Presentation	No attention paid.	Attempt to allure.

Design thinking as behavior-modifying strategy

In a country burdened by legacy of habits and behaviors, design thinking is of utmost importance in setting out to solve social evils. One example worth mentioning here is that of public sanitation, specifically the habit of people to chew and spit out 'paan' (tobacco and other intoxicating ingredients wrapped in the leaf of the betel-nut) in public. This leaves walls stained with extremely unsightly red spit marks everywhere. Many social design projects have been carried out, most of them unsuccessfully, to dissuade people from this practice. Laws have been formulated, penalties levied, public service message campaigns taken up…but to little avail. However, the design thinking demonstrated by one group's insight into people's habits and overall religiosity proved to be more successful than the administrative ideas of government officials: this group realized that the people habituated to spitting would not be dissuaded by any amount of sloganeering or moral exhortation.

Penalties were impractical to implement. What they came up with was the idea that if walls are painted with pictures of religious and spiritual figures, with the gods and goddesses of various religions, that even the most apathetic tobacco-chewer would not spit on those pictures. Somewhere this crossed the line of acceptable behavior even for him. This was a great insight and has led to many walls, public and of stairwells, being painted or tiled with pictures of religious symbols (Figure 11[11]).

[10]https://qph.cf2.quoracdn.net/main-qimg-a8d722c1b919b68ed6bfd464ff0f4105-lq

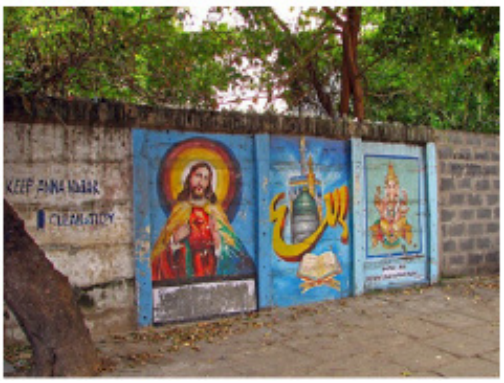

Fig 11: Wall painted with spiritual images to deter people from spitting on them.

Similarly, still on the topic of design insights in sanitation, the people's surprisingly responsible civic behavior in keeping the premised of Metro stations of India clean has revealed that if given a something in excellent condition and remarkable appearance, even normally apathetic people would not want to deface it. Railway stations and the general trains in India are sadly pictures of insanitation and unhygienic conditions (Figure 12[12]).

Fig. 12: Unsanitary conditions of many railway stations

But when the same people were presented with Metro stations and trains with their polished metal and glass and slick surfaces, good colours and aesthetically designed interiors and exteriors, they did not let them become the victim of their bad habits. Our metros are as spotlessly clean as any in the world simply because they started clean and aesthetic (Figure 13[13]).

[12]https://akm-img-a-in.tosshub.com/sites/dailyo/story/header/201605/train-ban_051616113537.jpg
[13]https://static.toiimg.com/photo/90042369.cms

Fig. 13: A spic-and-span metro railway station

TRAITS OF SOCIAL DESIGN PROJECTS TODAY

Social Design projects, at least in India, are characterised by the following traits:

- Small in scale and ambition, local in scope, e.g., EcoKaari. This is often the result of the promoter of the project being a passionate individual or group who don't want their commitment to waver for numbers or size. They stress performance over growth. Many of them do not have a profit motive to begin with. They cannot therefore think too big.
- Low investment, donation-sourced, tax-benefitting. This too is natural since the revenue model of such projects is usually not their strong point. Their point is not the revenue but the result and the effect of the result upon the public good. Investors on the other hand demand growth and returns. A lot of social design ideas find funding in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) investment requirement of the government from companies.
- Service design rather than product design. All the examples presented above are about service design and not about the design of a single object. This is a result of the fact that what hurts the public most is a lack of good services. Good products are available for anyone to buy in the open market.
- Idea that captures an insightful gap. All social design projects possess a spark of an idea which is usually uni-dimensional but sufficient to make a difference in its chosen focus area. Creative entrepreneurs with bright minds and a keen eye spot gaps where they exist in the service economy, such as in the last-mile delivery of goods, in delivery of food, in home service during the pandemic.
- Motive usually involves some element of ethics and socially beneficial outcomes. Alongside entrepreneurs who put their efforts behind wealth-increasing enterprises, more and more college graduates from management and design are turning towards solving problems of society than to come up with newer luxury goods. The young social entrepreneur is more value-driven than is given credit for.
- Means now almost always include technology: IoT, for example, is now ubiquitous in new service designs to make implementation easy, usage convenient. The low cost of modern electronics and computer peripherals makes use of digital engines and interfaces a rather obvious choice.

- Special-needs users find attention: Many new enterprises address the disadvantaged segment having special needs, thus making their effort deserve the title of Social Design.
- Design of offering being paid conscious attention. The overall packaging, interface, interaction of the experience offered is now getting good attention compared to that of a generation ago when functionality was the sole focus. The field of UI/UX is now pervading the social spectrum also.
- Attention from Media suddenly more. Media is now much more keen to cover social enterprises than merely wealth-creating ones. The positive publicity obtained by good coverage helps spread the cause…and increase the app downloads.

TRAITS OF SOCIAL DESIGN PROJECTS TODAY

Although the industrialised "first world" has always been the benchmark for the developing "third world," the differing situations, realities, and legacies of the two necessarily bring in differences in the way social design is conducted in each. Technology-wise the global South would always look to the North and hope to benefit from developments happening them when they reach them. The developing world is seeing a happy application of technology to solutions of their problems but with differences because of the different ecosystems and cultural legacies that exist in the two. This section tries to present some such points:

- **Poverty.** The low wealth available to governments is naturally spent on basic infrastructure like electricity-roads-water (bijli-sadak-pani in Hindi). It is another matter that it doesn't do a good job of spending the resources it has efficiently even on these. Lack of round-the-clock electricity is a common problem in many parts of the country, affecting the nature of solutions that can be thought of to address people's problems there. Low purchasing power also means that people availing of services offered by private enterprises would not be able to afford them unless in their budget. This in turn means that a very minimal, appropriate solution has to be devised—a challenge to the designer.
- **Thrift mindset.** This is a mindset peculiar to Indians, maybe to other countries still coming out of poverty. Memories of poverty, of living hand-to-mouth, on a very meagre income bring with them a tendency to save, a reluctance to spend, a willingness to make do and bear inconvenience rather than spend that extra 10 rupees on a well-designed product or service. People will repair, reuse, repurpose but not buy new. This is very good news for the planet's environment and is wholly to be encouraged. However, it also limits the creative output of the designer, who has to channel his creativity into making his ideas extremely inexpensive.
- **Old cultures.** The setting of the old world brings with it not only the baggage of the past that has survived the march of time but a resistance to change as well. Social customs, rituals, practices that are in dissonance with modern values of equality of all human beings present a challenge in removal. In many cases, they present obstacles more difficult than solving the actual problem.
- **Work ethic, work culture, mindset.** Absence of the structured, disciplined ways of working of the industrialised world often makes transplantation of western models of problem-solving less than a success here. In a work culture where inefficiency and unprofessionalism are common and quality requirements are not taken

seriously, a good design can often fall prey to bad implementation and therefore dissatisfaction and frustration for the intended beneficiary of the project.

However, new realities are setting in the world over (at least in democracies). Economies are opening up, open markets are the norm now. Old procedures and paperwork is reducing, business is becoming easier to conduct. Rules and regulations are becoming less and less restrictive, and technology such as the internet is making most remaining rules irrelevant. Private enterprise is encouraged. Young people are dominating the market. The internet is making individual achievements possible without dependence on large physical infrastructure or financial backing.

In this new era of today, enterprising minds and indefatigable bodies are searching for all opportunities to earn honest money in serving the needs of people. Many of these needs are mundane, for example, the need to transport one's belongings when changing jobs to another city and moving. The need to have food of your choice delivered to you at home when tired of cooking. The need to send something to someone urgently overnight. The need, in the pandemic, of having someone come home to cut your overgrown hair. The author recently needed to have his new rented apartment bathrooms thoroughly cleaned and could easily find a service provider for just that task.

Those were the needs of the vast majority of the population. Then there are people with special needs—the elderly, the disabled, the sightless, the slow learners—the outliers of society. There are many organisations working towards that as well, with innovative approaches to serving them, pooling together money from philanthropists, labour of love from volunteers, and physical products from donors. And why only human causes, there are many projects done for the non-anthropocentric world of animals, Nature, our ecology, the environment. The world of social design is alive, well, and growing.

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