



Craft: A contemporary narrative

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Abstract

Commonly, craft is envisaged as a process. 'Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institution, or people' (Adamson, 2007).

In India, during the 5000 years of urban evolution since the Harappan period, the articles were produced for local consumption and, to a lesser extent for use in trade or barter. All the articles were utilitarian, be it for everyday use or for ritual purpose, and concern of the community as a whole. Its original function became extinct once the artifact had served its purpose and the religious ceremony had been performed. The artist-craftsman was intimately bound up with the caste and trade he was born in with seemingly no religious restriction in professional activities. He has always fulfilled the needs of the entire community as well as worked for patrons on ambitious artistic court and temple projects, where his work would reflect the desired aesthetic sensibility.

Post-independence, machine made alternatives gave more options to choose from; hence the craftsmen's exclusive masterpiece took a back seat. On the other hand, many rural/tribal level social structures collapsed or got absorbed into modern industrial society. This led to the alienation of various crafts products /practices from the society. Hence future generations of the craft community with restricted opportunity to practice them, lost their technical and artistic skills.

In India, during the latter half of the twentieth century, rapid changes in the society and lifestyle led to the formation of new psychographic zones. These major changes in the lifestyle of the average Indian were also observed internationally, which can be summed up in the statement by Margaret Thatcher during an interview in Women's Own magazine that "...there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families..." (Keay, 1987) ^[1]. In the Indian society, earlier every product had specific cultural connotations, which were understood within the regional communities. The new cultural institutions have stripped away the age old meaning and purpose associated with each product. Now the product is individualistic with emotive connotations and global in its application. These connotations appeal to the psychographics extending to an individual's own persona and surroundings and have risen from cross cultural interactions across the globe. For instance, gifting a rose to express one's love and amorous feelings for the other is not mentioned in Indian culture anywhere, but its connotations are now well understood within Indian communities.

For the new and highly individualistic product, a new skill set was required which was made possible with the varied use of technology. Technology became craft; the way it is applied and the will and the idea behind it paved the way for a new generation of techno-craftsmen.

This paper would focus on innovative application of technology to create an exclusive product for an individual vis-à-vis a community.

Keywords: expression, persona, individualist

Introduction

The concept of craft is perceived across the world as a process; it is any work done by hand and requires a certain skill set. 'Craft only exists in motion. It is a way of doing things, not a classification of objects, institution, or people' (Adamson, 2007). Whereas, in India, till independence and in many sectors even today, each product created has been the concern of the community as a whole. Since the Harappan period, through five thousand years of urban evolution, traditional practices and knowledge have been handed down from one generation to the next within the community. Each product, be it for utilitarian or for ritual purpose contained in itself community specific meanings, symbolism and aesthetics. It was hand-crafted by the artist-craftsman, to

always fulfil the needs of the entire community and his work would reflect the desired aesthetic sensibility as well as community specific cultural connotations.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, major and rapid lifestyle changes noted globally, reflect the formation of new psychographic zones and consumer segments. This is substantiated in the statement given by Margaret Thatcher during an interview with Women's Own magazine that, there is no such thing as society, there are individual men and women, and there are families (Keay, 1987) ^[1]. Similar changes are reflected in the Indian subcontinent / society post independence, when the country worked towards industrial development and looked to synch global sensibilities.

Across the world Indian lifestyle is known through its rich

cultural heritage and handicrafts. With modernization, the craftsmen's community specific yet exclusive masterpiece took a back seat. Many rural/tribal level social structures collapsed or got absorbed into modern industrial society, which led to alienation of various crafts products /practices from the society. Future generations of the craft community with restricted opportunity to practice them, lost their technical and artistic skills. On the other hand, with its innovative applications technology became craft, and paved way for a new generation of techno-craftsmen.

India became independent in 1947. With its rapid industrial developments, technological advancements, cross-cultural interactions and influences from across the globe impacted the length and breadth of the country and paved the way for new lifestyles. These new lifestyles led to the rapid formation of new psychographic zones made up of the individuals Margaret Thatcher talked about. These individuals, risen from cross cultural interactions create psychographic centered consumer segments across the globe. They crave new products with emotive connotations created for individual psychographics, persona and surroundings; products that are global in their application instead of products with culture and community specific meaning. In the Indian context this could be well understood with an example a rose which addresses the needs of the psychographic specific consumer.

Cultural connotations of the Rose

It is interesting to note that gifting a rose to express one's love and amorous feelings for the other, is not mentioned in Indian culture anywhere, but its connotations are well understood in the Indian community. This is in spite of the fact that India's association with roses goes back more than 5000 years, and is known through traditional myths, legends and folklore. A rose would typically have been used as an offering to the gods. The founders of *Ayurveda* from around first century BC used roses mainly for their medicinal properties. For its rich fragrance and its influence on the human senses, the book *Ananga Ranga* written about 1172 C.E. by the poet Kalyana Malla, mentions the lavish use of rose water for amorous interludes (Burton, 1885) ^[2]. Two Portuguese travelers, Domingo Paes and Fernaz Nuniz during their visit to Vijayanagar Kingdom in 1537 observed that roses were integral to the daily life of both aristocrats and commoners, who adorned themselves with roses. The king, Krishna Deva Raya, would dress in pure white silken robes embroidered with golden roses. Every morning he would shower his audience and courtiers, favorite horses and elephants with white roses (Sewell, 1980) ^[3]. Mughal emperor Akbar took camel loads of roses to give to the wives of his allies. There are many portraits in Mughal miniature painting traditions that feature the subject holding a rose.

Emotive connotations of the Rose

Rose is naturally grown, yet is as a product of consumption bearing emotive connotations worldwide. Moreover, within the family of roses all the different colour varieties have acquired different meanings through cross cultural interactions across the globe. Gifting a natural rose has very specific emotive connotations with a potential to convey a message that sometimes words cannot express. It bears a physical as

well as symbolic manifestation of emotional and amorous feelings of one person towards the other. If the receiver is not sure of the feelings towards the giver, the immediate emotional impact may be an ambiguous one. A rose is perishable and the freshness, colour and form of the flower plays a highly decisive role in conveying/perceiving the intensity of the emotion and strongly indicates the occasion and intention of the giver and relationship between the two. When the rose is sold, thorns are already removed by the florist.

Moreover, if the flower is dried and preserved in the books to keep afresh the memories associated with it, this could be perceived as an intense and positive emotional response to the gift. On the other hand, throwing away the flower once it has dried, could be considered a bad omen for the relationship; so the receiver may choose to preserve it.

The rose now serves as a memento or a souvenir of feelings experienced and moments spent together. It becomes a meaningful object in itself, taking on a special emotional value, that can trigger powerful, long-lasting emotions. The gesture of gifting the rose and symbolism of the act contains these emotive connotations more than its fragrance. There has always been a desire for a non-perishable rose to cherish the very moment and for an extended experience. It further acquires new connotations when it is artificially recreated.

In modern times, the requirement of a non-perishable rose was perceived and artificial rose/flower production has progressed to a point where it is hard to visually differentiate between real and artificial. Some of the main advantages of an artificial flower are longevity, low maintenance, appearance, practicality and availability of a range of colours. However, artificial flowers available in wide range of materials and colours have not been able to reflect the connotations of a real flower, as the artificiality of the rose tends to weaken the emotional impact on the receiver. This drawback has been identified and viewed as an opportunity to address this desire to have a non-perishable rose reflecting the connotations similar to a real rose. The techno-craftsmen have evolved an innovative application of electroforming techniques, to create a rose in gold. This charts new territories of individuality, emotion and exclusivity.

Electroforming technique and its innovative application

ASTM B 832-93 describes it simply and concisely as follows: "Electroforming is the production or reproduction of articles by electro-deposition upon a mandrel or mould that is subsequently separated from the deposit." Technically, in the process of electroforming, a metal or conductive material is immersed in an electrolytic solution with a DC power source to deposit electroplatable metal. Nickel and copper are preferred over other metals such as silver, platinum, gold, tin, iron, etc. because of their physical and chemical properties are more suitable for electroforming.

The process allows high-quality production of interesting shapes from conductive and non-conductive mandrels. Non-conductive manmade objects as well as natural objects—leaves, flowers, shells or nuts can be made conductive with the application of a layer of conducting paint.

Compared to other basic metal forming processes such as electroplating, casting, forging, stamping, deep drawing,

machining and fabrication; electroforming as a technique is very effective to achieve fine surface finishes and to maintain complex interior configurations. The process addresses extremely close dimensional tolerances and complexity and helps to reproduce light weight form with extreme precision without shrinkage and distortion.

The precision offered by electroforming allows finer geometries with superior edge definition and near optical finish. It enables retention of the aspects of a rose such as delicacy and softness and permits excellent edge definition of the rose petals. Plating is controlled and kept much thinner with desired wall thickness as it grows molecule by molecule on the natural rose which eventually is not removed. The process facilitates high volume to reach the masses with low production cost, vis-à-vis mass customization at affordable prices. The fine process of depositing electroplatable metal onto a conductive patterned surface ensures no loss of metal, though it may require adjustments in chemistry, operational parameters, and methodology depending on the properties of the metal used. Due to its refined crystal structure, electroformed metal is extremely pure to the extent that electroforming is possible in karat gold ranging from 8 karat to pure 24 karat. Gold has the strength and coherence to support itself and to perform the task for which it is designed. Use of electroforming technique with an inherent ability to accurately capture intricate surface details has always led to innovations in the field of design, art and craft. One such innovative and inspirational endeavour is electroforming the natural rose in gold giving a new dimension to a naturally available product. The fabrication of the golden rose requires a fresh flower every time as a mandrel, it is selected with a keen eye towards a perfect desired form. A rose with even the slightest flaw is discarded.

The exclusive golden rose

The gold electroformed rose leads to the ambiguous feeling which depends on the perception of the giver and the receiver. The natural rose after being transforming into a golden rose acquires new connotations and has taken emotive expression to a different platform. With these connotations, it has become an icon. It could now be gifted to someone precious to you; your daughter, lover, wife, sister, mother. It amalgamates the emotive connotations associated with a natural rose and the connotations associated with gold as precious material. It could be flaunted, displayed, cherished instead of preserving in a book where it stays hidden. The rose in gold has acquired this value not because of the precious and expensive metal but because of its enhanced intrinsic value, because of the aesthetic appeal and emotional impact on the giver and the receiver. At once, the tangible value of the material is taken over by its intangible value.

When it is time to judge the gold electroformed rose, it is difficult to categorize it in terms of product development with enhancement or as an innovative product development. "Enhancement means to take some existing product or service and make it better. Innovation provides a completely new way of doing something, or a completely new thing to do, something that was not possible before..." (Norman, 2004) [4]. It is much easier to categorize it as an enhancement, as the existing product could definitely be perceived as improvised.

At the same time it is an innovation, as in this category existed previously to provide a similar experience. It is further established when the said product is judged at the three levels of design: visceral, behavioural and reflective.

At the visceral level the product is dealt with by the intuition and not the intellect; it is the immediate emotional impact as well as sensuous experience. "Because visceral design is about initial reactions, it can be studied quite simply by putting people in front of a design & waiting for reactions. In the best of circumstances, the visceral reaction to appearance works so well that people take one look and say "I want it"..." (Norman, 2004) [4]. At the behavioural level the product is dealt with in terms of the pleasure and effectiveness of use. Good behavioural design is full of content and tells a story. It is human centred and satisfies the needs of the people who use the product; and at the reflective level the product is dealt with by looking at the meaning or message it contains and sends to others and the culture it belongs to.

When the two different forms of a rose: the artificial available in different materials and colours and the gold electroplated rose are judged against the natural rose at the three levels of design: visceral, behavioural and reflective, the artificial rose lags behind at the behavioural level as it lacks the pleasure and effectiveness of the gesture. It lacks content and has no story to tell. Whereas, the gold electroformed rose performs well at all levels: it conveys the message (emotion) and fulfils the desired function very well. It has the potential to do the trick and leads to utmost satisfaction.

Conclusion

The response or emotions as well as the sensuous experience connected to a natural rose, are so constant across all societies and cultures that its connotations are perceived in a similar fashion across the globe. The technology has enhanced the elegance and sophistication of the expression creating an instinctive response, re-conjuring and validating the emotion originally connected to the natural rose. Moreover, it would be appropriate to categorize it as an innovative application of technology to create an exclusive product for an individual vis-à-vis a community that has led to new fashion which is a 'Classic'.

The golden rose is a brand in itself, it is symbolic, and it plays at the emotional and cognitive level simultaneously. Its innovative approach, originality, simplicity, elegance and sophistication in form and material create an appreciation as well as a desire to not only possess but to feel empowered and gift it at the same time. It promises to make an ordinary action extraordinary and transform it into a special experience.

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