



Sudhir •

designer | publisher | entrepreneur | speaker | blogger
Sharma

▶▶ 24 hours in the head of Mr. indi

I was thinking for days about this intro and still I am not sure if the following lines describes **Sudhir Sharma**: Born in Rajasthan of Dogra parents, he has a twin brother (Sudhish), a non Indian wife (Marianna, who is also a designer, born in Ukraine) and two children of his first marriage, (Ira, who recently graduated from NID as an industrial designer and Ram, who studies Physics and Philosophy in Boston).

Sudhir holds a graduate degree in Visual Communication Design (1983) from the National Institute of Design (NID). After graduated moved to Pune. At NID he met the other co-founders of Elephant, India's first multi-disciplinary design studio, launched in 1989. Worked for almost 20 years. This circle closed in 2009. Then founded Indi Design. Since then Indi keeps growing, and now has 14 offices all over the world. Sudhir Sharma is not only a designer, he is a publisher, a speaker, a blogger, the list is long: **Founder and Creative Chairman** of *INDI Design Pvt. Ltd* www.indidesign.in, **Member** of *World Economic Forum's* and *Global Agenda Council on Designing Complex Systems*, **Publisher & Chief Editor** of *Pool Magazine* www.poolmagazine.in, **Invitee on** *The first India Design Council*, **Member** of *Design Mark task force of IDC*, **Founder Moderator** of *Designindia*, in.groups.yahoo.com/group/designindia/, **Member-Advisory Board** of *Design Institute of India, Indore*, **Governing Council member** of *Symbiosis Institute of Design, Pune*, **Regional Ambassador** of *Index Awards (Denmark)* **Member** of *CII – National Design Committee*, **Executive Board** of *Maratha Chamber of Commerce*, **Advisor** of *yourstory.com*, *Bharathealth.com*, *TEDx Ahmedabad*, **Founder Director & COO** of *Elephant Strategy + Design*, **Founder, Governing Council Member** of *Elephantiversity*, **Creative Mentor** of *Brand Planet Elephant*, **Jury** of *Cannes Lions for Design (2008)*, *Adfest 2009 (Pattaya, Thailand)*.

The above information comes from the internet, since he is well known and very communicative. He has all the characteristics of uniqueness, he is much talented, hard worker and the same time easy to reach, BUT he is not just that. For me Sudhir Sharma is the *ahimsa* itself. Let me explain this: For many years I was listening to this word "ahimsa" (since I'm on the spiritual path for long, and India was always a Spiritual Mother to me), I thought I knew but I couldn't REALLY realize what is the essence of this word... until I met this amazing guy! *Ahimsa* means "nonviolence" and "compassion", it is the basis of all Hindu-spirituals, the same way Mahatma Gandhi used in politics. *Ahimsa* in action, means to be open to everything, no resistance, no negative actions and thoughts, no NOs. And Sudhir does that so well because this is the way he sees the

world. He has a positive view for everything, he let things happen, because he is transparent and sincere so he has nothing to be afraid of. He gives chances, he motivates people to unfold themselves, he finds diamonds even in things that most of us avoid to mess with. He is very simple and makes everything simpler too. He gives solutions, he is helpfull and easy to cooperate. He doesn't give you what you expect, he gives you what you dream, or even more than that*. That makes him irresistible! This *way of seeing* gives him a "good flow" and all this positive attitude finally returns to him in the same positive way, because this is the law of attraction, it's not just theory, and Sudhir turns this law to everyday's practice.

While talking to him (except this feeling that I know him forever) I realized that he has nothing to do with the boring yuppies who just travel the world and make money. He is intellectual and the same time spiritual (and not because he is indian), he is deeply and sincerely kind ~not pretending kindness~ and when he laughs or talks seriously he means it, he doesn't play any role. He is advisory like a dad and enthusiastic like a schoolboy, warm hearted and always smiling. And he has a great sense of humour which is a sign of intelligence.** So enjoy this special interview...

* I sent him my questionnaire, so he can answer it whenever he can, because I know how tight is his everyday programme, plus the travelling, and I let the deadline open so he's not feeling pressed. My PDF was like that:

The questionnaire is made without second-thoughts. You may answer in words (many or less you decide it) or pictures, designs, poems, whatever you like or comes first in your mind, in english or even in hindi! I want you to do this as a relaxing game for your mind+ soul, so take your time and enjoy it!

1. You have the chance to remove one color of the rainbow and to double another one. Which are they?

After a month (and some long distance journeys!) what he sent me was like that:

Questionnaire
without second-thoughts

The questionnaire is made without second-thoughts. You may answer in words (many or less you decide it) or pictures, designs, poems, whatever you like or comes first in your mind, in english or even in hindi! I want you to do this as a relaxing game for your mind+ soul, so take your time and enjoy it!

1. You have the chance to remove one color of the rainbow and to double another one. Which are they?

I would remove either Green or Red, both these colours are very special to me. Red is

The conclusion is yours.

(**I think I wrote enough Sudhir, check your e-mail, I sent you my bank account! :P)

1. You have the chance to remove one color of the rainbow and to double another one. Which are they?

I would remove either Green or Red, both these colours are very special to me. Red is my favourite for identities, automobiles and fashion, green is life... but these two colours played havoc in my life and in life of others I am sure. Just if one of them could go... life will be so much simpler.

2. If you were a product, what would you like to be?

I would be a very well tuned, automatic, four-wheel drive, car. I think that's a complete product, environment and experience which works very hard and plays even harder, I am something like that too..just that I wouldn't consume so much fuel.

3. Graphic design is not for the museums, it is for the market and aims to everyone BUT there are so many blind people in the world who cannot see our work, and for them "graphic design" doesn't matter. Have you ever thought how these people choose a product? What can we designers do, to make our work more functional to these people?

They just don't know that whatever makes them choose anything is called Graphic Design. They book tkts, go to airports, find their seats, buy water bottles, choose coffee, buy bread, buy clothes... Graphic Design is all around us. Not many people may know the trade name of that thing that makes their world go round is "Graphic Design". They not knowing actually doesn't matter, they are consumers. It would be good for our ego if consumers knew us, but as long as manufacturers and providers of services recognise our value..we will survive. The awareness of design has to be brought in at elementary school level, that would make our life more knowledgeable. The real learning is how this world works and all education is to help us survive. Design can do that context building in much more effective way.

4. Tell me a book you have read more than once and a book it was so close to your thinking, so "Sudhir", that you whispered "did I write this?"



Left: Detail from *The Judgement of Paris*, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1530. Right: Victoria's Secret branding image, 2012



John Berger's 'Ways of seeing'. I read it first time when I was in NID... and it resonated, I felt I knew a lot of it already... then I read it later when I was practicing and I saw new connections. Recently I was in San Francisco and looking at a Victoria Secret's billboard and I thought how things recycle.

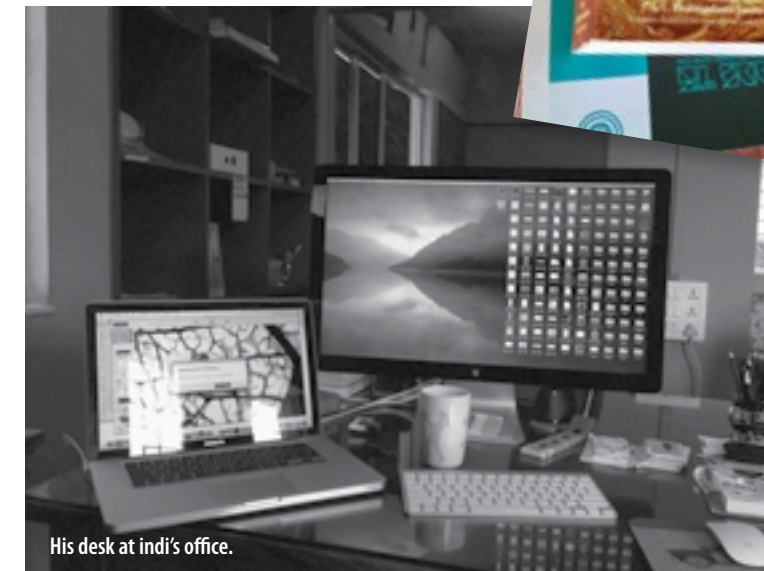
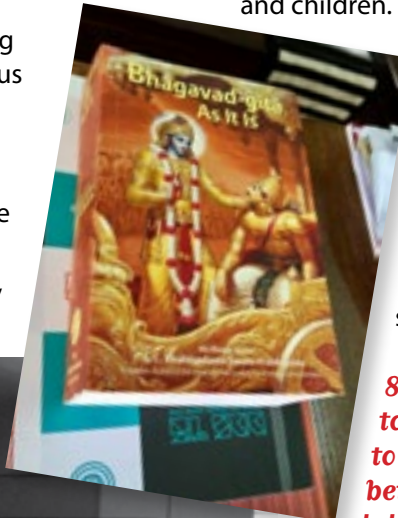
"The female nude in Western painting was there to feed an appetite of male sexual desire. She existed to be looked at, posed in such a way that her body was displayed to the eye of the viewer"
 "Glamour, envy and the act of looking – these are the foundations on which our current fashion and social media obsession rests"

5. Have you ever liked other designers' works and wished you have done them?

Yes always and not just designers, artists, film makers, writers, poets, singers, actors and even sports people. I think that's how inspiration works. I get inspired by many things and not just things that humans do... but also nature, trees, birds, mountains, and sea. I am always in this state of overwhelm and wonder. This world is so beautiful with so much magic in it.

6. Inspiration is hidden to many places, almost everywhere, but let's make an hypothesis that you are completely empty of it. What saves you? Do you have your Personal First Aid?

Very difficult to imagine that, even emptiness is inspiring. Sometimes visiting ashram and sitting in meditation in quiet is so inspiring you wonder if the world exists outside of us or inside. But I do reach out to books like *Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramayana* routinely to see insights. I find this a very creative process, unrelated stories can give you the spark you may be looking for. Recently a monk from Iskcon gave me a copy of *Gita*, and it is on my table.



His desk at indi's office.



With his mother. (At the background you can see... one of his toys!)

7. Every man has its toy. (i.e. Teacher Osho had that Rolls Royce collection.) What is the toy Sudhir likes to play?

I have many toys too. I love to drive. So I drive my 4X4 often on very long drives with my wife, parents and children. I have almost all gadgets you can think of - Cameras, Video and Still, Mobile devices. The new toys are Apps. but I have a very practiced detached attachment to these. I am happy spending time on my own without anything as well. I love watching movies. Most of my flying time is spent in watching world movies.

8. Many times it happened to me (mostly while listening to music) to think "wow this is better than sex!" Have you ever felt like this and what was it for?

Nah, sex is still better than everything else. But there are times that you go into another world altogether, sometimes when watching movies... I forget myself... as if it's not me watching the movie, Movie is happening like life.

9. It is late at night, everybody is sleeping but you are still awake thinking about "this new project". Suddenly a brilliant idea comes up and you feel like getting out on the streets and kiss everyone, but you can't. What do you do? How you handle this sudden happiness?

This happens very often. I used to then tell ideas to anyone who would listen anyone. But now I start writing. I write on my iPhone on my iPad on my computer. I make notes.





10. Logos Logos everywhere! Which is the best logo you've ever seen and which is the best you designed and you are really proud of?

I really think the time of Logos is over, they are over rated and are not necessary anymore. What really works for me is a visual language. Colours, Fonts, alignments, layouts, shapes, forms, interactions. It is the whole experience. I am very proud of work I have done for Bajaj over the time, I think it sort of becomes a language. But I am not sure if it will remain like this. Things change, new ideas always clear the old ones.

11. They say that the Devil is hiding in the details. What's the thing you are checking again+again to your work and what you are checking to other people's work?

I like work that doesn't need a designer standing behind it and making explanations. Each work should work on its own and in context of the person using or looking at that work. So that means it needs to be ubiquitous. I am always looking at making my work stand on its own. It needs to be meaningful without me being a part of it. When I like something, I don't care what designer thought while creating it, I care what I think while seeing it.

12. Who gave you the most inspiring moments in your life? And to who you give the best credits for the man you are today, except mama and dad? (You don't have to mention names if you don't like, unless it is necessary.)

I feel like I have lived 4 lives so far, very different from each other. The first was one I was in school and I remember a teacher in Amritsar, she was an Osho disciple. She was the first one to make me realise I was special, I must have been 10 years old then. I think I was already spiritual because of my parents. Second life, During design-school I was inspired by so many seniors and also by books. This life was very different than what I was used to. This life made question many things that I believed to be absolute



truths, perhaps that was the age. This is also when I found love. After Design school, life changed again, in 3 life I started learning the world of money and business. Mixing that with design was not always easy. I was inspired by my partners and friends. I also found inspiration in many examples of success in our chosen area. This the life got very complex with multiple responsibilities and too much stress. I acquired depression and went through crumbling of life. Somehow my core sustained. I guess I also found higher level of spirituality here. I broke away from my 3rd life completely, and made a fresh start. My fourth life started with an unexpected inspiration from afar far land. I never thought I will marry again or do design like I did earlier, Marianna changed all that. It was almost reawakening of my life 1 and 2. I am what I am because of all who were with me during these 4 lives. Some inspired me and some kicked me to shape. And I am thankful to all with all humility.

13. Indi is about to open a new department in space. Have you decided the planet yet? Would you move there with no return?

I mentioned I have this detached-attachment with everything. Indi is ready to start this new department and it seems very exciting. We are moving headlong

into digital products and solutions world. The world is so transport friendly now that you don't have to consider no-return. You can be everywhere anytime, So I will be on this new planet and I will be on the older planets as well.

14. India has a great culture of thousands years and surely you are very proud of being an Indian (beyond all the talents you have yourself as a personality and you should be proud of). If you were not an Indian what else would you like to be? What culture attracts you the most?

I am blessed to be an Indian, by no virtue of my own. And I am fascinated by almost all cultures of the world. Whenever I travel, I think about this, what if I was born here? I feel at home in so many places in the world, and I truly could live there forever. Vietnam, Srilanka, Europe, US and recently China. I think one life time is too short to get enough of what's happening in present, history becomes only a ego happiness for us.

15. What makes a designer really good? What is your advice to new designers who just entered the market so they will be successful? What are the DOs and what the DONTs?

I would ask new designers to think hard about their purpose of becoming a designer. I am sure everyone has different reason. So many become designers because they want to make lot of money, so many opt for design because they failed everywhere else, so many like the creativity part so much and so many just love the lazy lifestyle. Whatever be the reason, you have to be really good in what you do and there is only one way to be good... work very very hard. Do not take short-cuts and be curious and learning forever.



At the airport... where else?

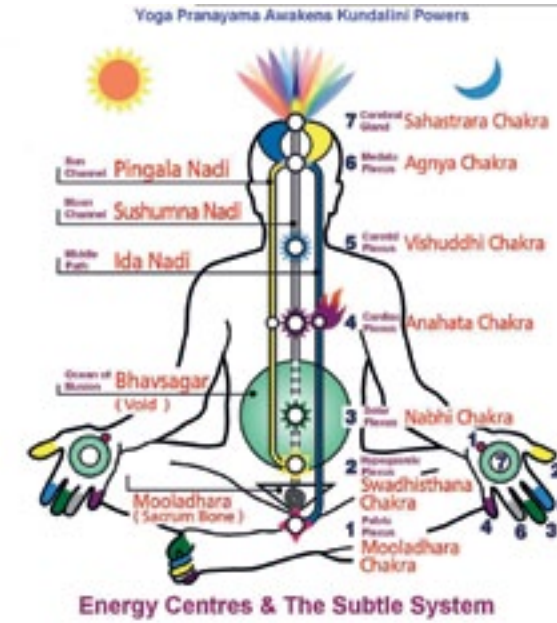
16. Teacher Osho used to say that the problem in India is that culture and religion goes hand in hand and it doesn't help people to be truly creative and taste their real potential, they just accept their fate so they lose the opportunity for a real wonderful life. This is said years ago, India has many faces, and for me India is years ahead in many levels, but what do you think about this, did he really make a point? What is like living in modern India?

Yes it does make a point, There are so many who think they do not need to question and improve things because they have already been answered in religion. Thats not true however, Religion is the biggest abstraction that one can face in life, at least Hindu religion is.

It is very open to the one who can equation and be curious and very closed to the one who starts taking abstraction as dictum. All our deities are graphic abstractions of concepts of our being that can not be understood otherwise.

This religion is an unfolding of myself, as me inside myself. This realisation. And it is true in modern india as well. But the moment you start seeing then illustrations of God, as one who rules my life... I think you didn't understand the religion. In Modern india I live in a very awakened state, where I understand the abstraction and it helps me understand the world.

These pictures are sent by Sudhir and are part of his answers. (I made only two corrections: I changed the pictures of Goddess Durga and Lord Ganesh so all the four deities are mentioned will be in similar technique. In this picture, Goddess Durga doesn't hold a thunderbolt like the one at Sudhir's picture, here she gives a blessing, but all her guns are written.)



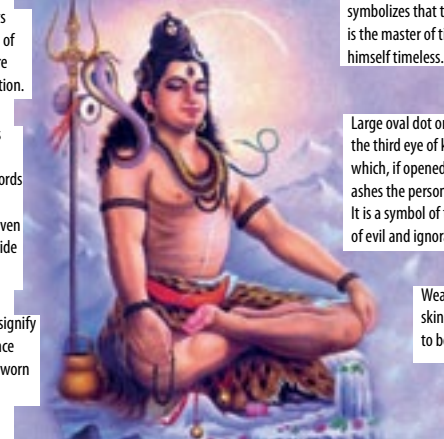
Face on head represents the Ganges, the holy river, signifying the flow of spiritual teachings passing wisdom from one generation to the next.

Shiva

Trident represents the three powers of knowledge, desire and implementation.

Drum symbolizes sound which represents the words of the Vedas, the holy scriptures given by the Lord to guide us through life.

Serpent on neck signify the ego which once mastered can be worn as an ornament.



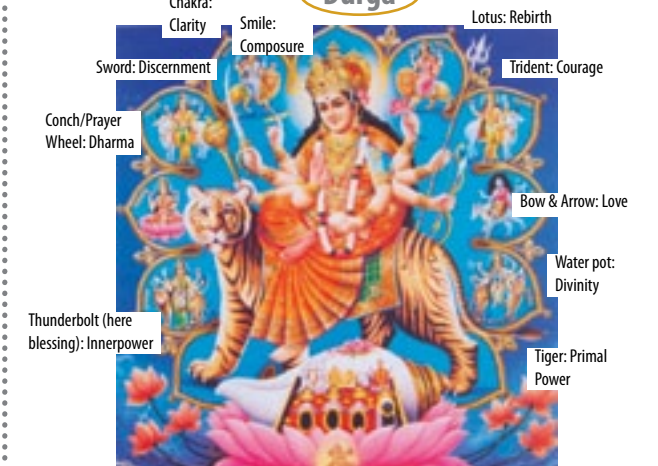
Moon on forehead symbolizes that the Lord is the master of time and himself timeless.

Large oval dot on forehead is the third eye of knowledge which, if opened, reduces to ashes the person in its vision. It is a symbol of the Destroyer of evil and ignorance.

Wearing a tiger skin Shiva is said to be fearless.

Rudraksha beads denote purity. The mala or rosary in the right hand symbolizes concentration.

Durga



Chakra: Clarity

Smile: Composure

Lotus: Rebirth

Sword: Discernment

Trident: Courage

Conch/Prayer Wheel: Dharma

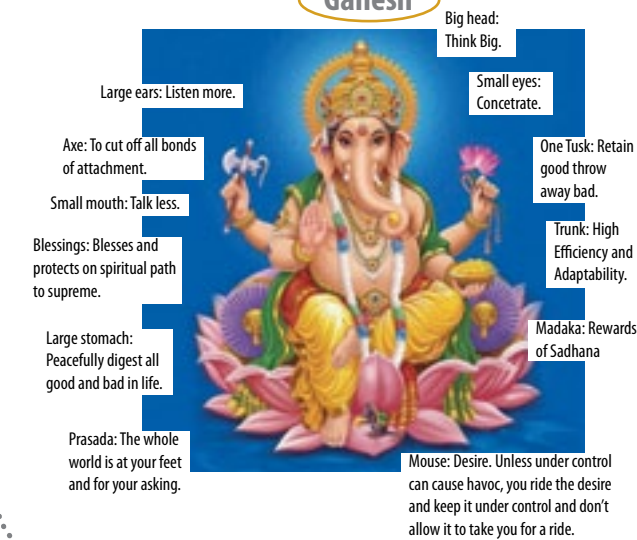
Bow & Arrow: Love

Water pot: Divinity

Thunderbolt (here blessing): Innerpower

Tiger: Primal Power

Ganesh



Big head: Think Big.

Small eyes: Concentrate.

Large ears: Listen more.

Axe: To cut off all bonds of attachment.

Small mouth: Talk less.

Blessings: Blesses and protects on spiritual path to supreme.

Large stomach: Peacefully digest all good and bad in life.

Prasada: The whole world is at your feet and for your asking.

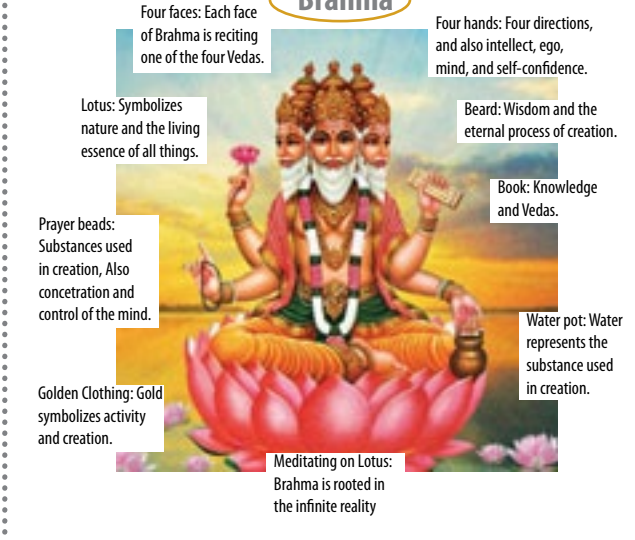
One Tusk: Retain good throw away bad.

Trunk: High Efficiency and Adaptability.

Madaka: Rewards of Sadhana

Mouse: Desire. Unless under control can cause havoc, you ride the desire and keep it under control and don't allow it to take you for a ride.

Brahma



Four faces: Each face of Brahma is reciting one of the four Vedas.

Four hands: Four directions, and also intellect, ego, mind, and self-confidence.

Lotus: Symbolizes nature and the living essence of all things.

Beard: Wisdom and the eternal process of creation.

Prayer beads: Substances used in creation, Also concentration and control of the mind.

Book: Knowledge and Vedas.

Golden Clothing: Gold symbolizes activity and creation.

Water pot: Water represents the substance used in creation.

Meditating on Lotus: Brahma is rooted in the infinite reality

17. I heard you are crazy about gadgets, is that true? If yes which is the most strange/weird gadget you bought?

No, that's not true. I am not crazy about gadgets, but I am an early adopter and I get excited by the potential of things and technologies. I remember we had started printing dotmatrix outlines on art paper to be hand filled by artists in colour when colour printers were not in, even laser printers were not around then. I used Palm3 organiser converting that into a mobile phone and used director software to make presentation films. Long back I shot slides off the colour monitor to make slide presentations and also did some business doing that. I buy too many things excited by the potential but have to throw so much because it doesn't even do what it promises to do. I just bought a 'Hasselblad Stellar' camera to find a rebranded Sony inside. The most weird will have to be a very small gadget that was gifted in the hotel room when I went to judge the Cannes Lions. I wasn't very functional.

18. I push a button and I send you with tele-transportation to the Tuvalu island (you know, that small island near New Zealand). Without your mobile phone, iPad or money, only with the clothes you are wearing. And ALONE. How

many minutes/hours will you stand this? What will you miss the most and what would you give to have it with you?

I think I could live a lifetime like that. I also feel to live on Tuvalu without any communication device will be a luxury. I might miss my credit card though. I could give free yoga lessons to get hold of my cards and be in luxury.

19. You get interview from two designers for a position at your company. One is a great designer but completely unknown, you have no feedback about character, habits etc. The other one is well known, someone from your family tree, but not so good designer, in fact you think he/she should do some other work, but the parents almost begged you to take him/her. Who would you choose and why?

I would take the second one, from the family tree. Because I believe that you must work with people you know. You must always help family and friends and family and friends of people you know. Design doesn't exist in isolation... it is a social act and you must be a part of the society. Also I really do not believe anyone can be a great designer. A great designer is always a work in progress. That is not



From his last visit to Hambourgh.

a destination. I can motivate and inspire the most demotivated designer into becoming a great designer. Becoming a great designer is a function of environment and not actions by a designer alone. create a great environment, encourage right ideas put ethics in place... anyone can be great.

20. You are a very hard working man and you receive the result of your working: you are successful. What motivates you to go further/higher? What is that magical thing you believe it deserves to try harder for?

Success is very difficult to define. For most of the world, financial independence is success, for others it's the social and peer approval. I need to enjoy the work that I do, once I enjoy it, my team as well as my clients enjoy the work that is magical. At that time the money doesn't matter, nor does the social approval matter. But strange thing is both become natural. You must get so much into your work that it becomes you.

21. In greek language advertising is a "she", and thus the synonym of attraction. So, considering advertising as a female, how do you like her? Can you give me an idea ("bust-waist-hips") of the most gorgeous version of her?

Advertising is seducing to buy. So it is a commercial she. Design as a process can be used to create things as well as to sell (market) things. There seems to be a larger scope for designers in selling things rather than in creating things, it more lucrative and more visible as well. though I do both as well, I enjoy the creation side more than the selling one. In India I would say design is "Saraswati" as well as "Kali". Saraswati is the Creation side and Kali is the advertising side. Both are gorgeous.

22. I've read that Sudhir Sharma prefers to lose a customer than to work in tight deadlines or push his colleagues with extra hours in office until late night etc. Have you ever got so angry with a customer, you wanted to throw him out of the window, no matter how would it cost you to losing him? How do you handle bad customers?

The marketing side of Design is always in a hurry, since once a product and service is ready, everyone is eager to take it to market and make profits. Where



as the creation side is always non-hurried... it has to be very thorough, you can not do any shortcuts here, any shortcut here impacts the final experience. Now there are many people who handle marketing and sometimes land up handling the development work as well, without understanding that it needs a different temperament. They try and push you to hurry and finish project without understanding consequences of hurrying and doing shortcuts. Most marketing men do not understand this. It is also a fact that many CEOs come from marketing and they just fail miserably in creating valuable projects, they just know how to sell. I always educate them and explain them the project in time schedules and resource spending even before I take up the project. many appreciate that understand the difference and I teach them. Some just agree that time but start rushing us later. In such cases we refuse to take the project ahead and give the project up. There is always a cost to giving up a project or a client but it's better to do that than to do a bad project.

23. I send you as a gift an old lamp I bought in a bazar from a strange person, it has a genie inside (yes it is a wish-lamp!), but you make wishes not for yourself but the others. I already made one (1) so another 2 remained. Will you make them, knowing that possibly they'll have a great influence to your life, or you prefer to give the lamp to someone else?

I will give the lamp to someone who needs it. I am my own genie with unlimited wishes. :)

24. I'm saving Nothingness, which is sacred for me, so can you please put Some-nothing in the box below? :)



Nothingness is very precious and very very difficult to have. If you have that in the box, I will only like to add more nothingness to it. That's Nirvana.

Thank you Mr. indi!

Thank you. I really enjoyed this interview. 🙏



Chilling out at Pool's office, reading and smiling. You see, being normal and enjoying everyday's gifts is a talent, either you have it or not.



He is a unique motivator while speaking ~ he is a mind shaker!



From his last visit to China.

- Arts & Crafts of all kinds
- experimental bookbindings
- paintings
- installations
- Lino-cuts
- DIY projects
- re-made / re-cycled
- handmade stamps
- bracelets
- pendants
- belts
- bags
- soaps
- my bank!
- clay dolls
- dreamcatchers
- home-made stuff
- old attic things
- magical recipes
- and many many more...

**WATCH OUT!
GREY AD ON RED...**

kookooniaou.com

