



Vani Brahmachari

Often I face the question, “How come neither of your children chose science when both of you are scientists? How is it that, the choice of a non-science course, or art, visual communication and design as a career by your children did not make you blink even once?” For us, it was simply about the pursuit of creativity. In fact, in these career options, unlike scientific research, one can contribute something which many people relate to in their own life time.

Now if you ask me if this was a conscious decision by my son and his parents, my answer would be partially in the affirmative. For one, my child is dyslexic and had an interest to work with wood and wire. Creating jewellery using copper wires was one of his special skills. These endeavors also meant that we would have some experimentation that resulted in unexpected blackouts in our apartment when the power supply was normal in all the others!

The decision to take art as a subject was certainly made easy for all of us with our move to Delhi, where there was no “Do medical or engineering or die” situation as in Bangalore. The highest cut-offs for admission to undergraduate courses at Delhi University is for commerce every year and not for science subjects. A common perception is that art is spontaneous, (“Do you really need to train to be an artist?”) and hence it should only be an addition to one’s primary profession. At high school, when my son decided to choose art as a subject, the teacher was skeptical. She warned him that it was not easy and that she would watch him for a while before admitting him into the course. So there was no implication that art was a default option. Since she could see the natural inclination and his ability to do things differently (often

to avoid hard work), she was happy to give him the formal training. A wooden shelf decorated with porcelain chips that he made for his board project, adorns our living room even now! He continued with art as a career, further in its natural course, just as any other profession.

This brings me to the other challenge we face - to communicate the nature of his work. There is no problem in understanding if I were to say that my son is a software engineer; the concerned friend/relative would be satisfied to know which multinational he works for and would not worry about what software he creates! However if I were to say my son is in art and visual communication, the immediate conclusion is, “Oh, he is in advertising”. But I know it is very unfair on my part to leave it at that, because there is a deeper ethos that creative individuals have for their profession, which often doesn’t get the appreciation it deserves. Therefore, I engage in describing the work in a little more detail, but I am sure that I fail to describe it not only to his satisfaction but also to my own!

Most often, everyone appreciates that we were so unbiased and open-minded in allowing our son to choose “art” as a career, but I do get the feeling, at least in some circles, that they might not have dealt with it similarly if it came to their own wards; very similar to the much clichéd attitude of many men, appreciating the ‘smart ways and go-getter attitude’ of women other than their wives (the same attribute will be described as aggression in their wife/daughter-in-law!).

If you ask me whether I envy his profession, I cer-



tainly envied his course. The modular courses and the assessment criteria looked so much more fun than all that I had done in the course of my student life. On my part, the concerns I nursed when he started his career after a five-year diploma course in art, design and technology, was the issue of “job security”. Growing up in a family where my father and brothers had pensionable jobs and my husband and I having one ourselves, it appeared as a life with day-to-day uncertainty. I must mention that my husband was not particularly worried about this aspect. But with time, I realize that it is enriching in many ways and there are other ways to live than the path we have followed. I am acutely conscious that our own societal disposition, financial or otherwise, allows me to adopt this position.

This brings me to an important consideration that is the root of compulsions on the part of the family as well as the child not to choose art as a career. Sustained success in this career is not only linked to one’s own

talent and grit, but it also depends on opportunity, exposure and contact. In my experience at the University, in every batch of Master’s course students, there are one or two whose heart is not in Biomedical Sciences, but in wild life photography or painting and art. After a couple of weeks into a semester, I can see that a girl/boy is capable of much more than what she/he is putting into the course. When I probe further, the confession comes out something like this - “This is not a course I liked. I got admission in Wild life Institute of India at Dehradun. But my parents felt it has no scope.” Of course, the career options in India have expanded over the years, but the awareness about the courses themselves - and also the opportunities available after the course - needs much more publicity; not only for the growth of these institutions, but more importantly for parents and children, to feel secure and have the freedom to follow their own dreams, with confidence.



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