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[ LIFE IN TECHNICOLOR ]

## POSTER PERFECT

Indian Hippy is keeping an old cinema art afloat

TRISHNA GUHA

**T**he year 2013 will mark the 100th year of Indian cinema.

Bollywood, in these 100 years, has undergone a sea change. What started off as silent, black-and-white films have now evolved into futuristic interpretations of dreams backed by the best of graphical and digital aids.

It is not surprising, then, that what used to be an art form has now

evolved into a gratifying business platform that just keeps on rolling.

According to a 2010 FICCI-KPMG report, the Indian film industry is projected to grow at a rate of nine percent between 2010 and 2014 and will reach the size of ₹13,700 crore by 2014.

Our movie viewing experience has certainly changed over the years,

given the modern lifestyle choices and tastes. But when a new trend takes over, not everything is able to make it to the present. Some just die out. Some, become a part of a legacy.

Founded by Hinesh Jethwani (32) in Mumbai, Indian Hippy was formed on the primary objective of reviving the art of creating hand-painted movie posters. The venture was christened



in December 2009, with a capital investment of less than ₹5 lakh.

#### A dying art

Back in the sixties, the only medium of advertisement for films were cinema posters. Cinema halls, walls of public urinals and general stores donned techni-colored, hand-painted posters of upcoming movies depicting famous actors romancing their leading ladies or the protagonists beating the daylight out of villains.

Each poster, depending on the size and complexity, used to take days or months to be finished. All was well for these artists till the 70s era.

The 80s brought with them the age of still photography and digital printing. Posters were now being printed on vinyl flex sheets, which were available in any desired size.

And with that, poster painting was forced to sink into oblivion.

#### Hippy revival

Working with the last few existing poster artists, Jethwani's online store offers a collection of unique hand-painted furniture and accessories like wallets, bags and belts. It also sells authentic vintage memorabilia like hand-painted movie posters and handbills of yesteryears, old vinyl records, magazines, movie tickets etc. Jethwani's major sources for all these collectibles are shut-down production houses, art studios and single screen cinema halls and on some days if he is lucky, even antique dealers and collectors.

However, the products selling like hot cakes are Indian Hippy's customized, hand-painted posters. Here, posters of famous movies are customized, by replacing the faces of popular actors with the clients' faces. The letterings on these posters can be customized as well. These posters are being used as banners at weddings and needless to say, are a hit with couples.

Starting from the 80s, Jethwani says, cinema posters could be made in a much shorter time frame and didn't require any manual labor. "The

cost of production came down drastically. Hence, digitally-made posters became the new rage and the poster artists were forced to take up other jobs", adds Jethwani.

#### Then and now

It was in 2009, that Jethwani gathered these artists and made them a part of his network for Indian Hippy. His venture has put many of these painters back on the payroll and positively changed their lives.

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— HINESH JETHWANI,  
FOUNDER, INDIAN HIPPIE

Sixty-year-old Lucas Mondal was only a teenager when he came to Mumbai in 1970 with dreams of landing a job in the city. After his initial days of struggle, Mondal started working as a poster artist.

"My first major feature film was Manoj Kumar's *Purab Aur Paschim*. In those days, I used to paint gigantic hoardings outside movie theaters," recalls Mondal. With an income of almost ₹40,000 per month, Mondal's life was smooth sailing until the 80s when all poster artists were thrown out of work. He was then forced to take up odd jobs on contract basis.

"I have worked at construction sites and hospitals; I never thought I would get back to painting till I was hired by Indian Hippy," says Mondal. He now earns up to ₹20,000 per month

through his paintings. When asked if he faced any teething problems while launching Indian Hippy, Jethwani says that many of the products were initially rejected as they weren't accurate enough. This was because the artists were painting after a long time and most of them weren't used to painting in small frames such as bags and belts. "When I found these artists, most of them were already suffering from low self-esteem. Add to that, all of them were very senior to me, so I had to handle the situation in a delicate manner," adds Jethwani. Now, of course, his accessories section is doing much better.

#### Fan fare

With a team of about a dozen artists, Indian Hippy has its head office and retail presence at Atria Mall in South Mumbai. Jethwani doesn't see himself opening more outlets as his business is mostly online and a large quotient of his customers consist of nostalgic NRIs and foreigners fascinated by this art form. Others include Bollywood biggies like producer-director Karan Johar and even the occasional Hollywood star like Hugh Jackman.

"We are running the current store simply to provide a touch-and-feel experience to those customers who want to see our products," says Jethwani. As far as international projects go, Indian Hippy has been associated with one Hollywood project so far, namely *Atlantis*.

"We made a hand-painted poster on canvas for the movie and also sent them high resolution prints of the same," adds Jethwani. Posters from Indian Hippy were also showcased at UK's premier auction house, Sotheby's, a few months ago.

Jethwani says that he is open to taking investors on board. For now, he is busy developing products to celebrate the 100 years of Indian cinema in 2013—one of them being hand-painted old vinyl records converted into wall clocks. The final product he will ever make though, he tells us, is a Bollywood museum. ■