## From banyan tree to keyhole — SBI's iconic logos tell a tale

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Arundhati Bhattacharya, Chairman, SBI

Ahmedabad, June 17:

It was the prestigious National Institute of Design (NID) that designed the iconic keyhole logo for State Bank of India, with matching fonts of the name of the bank in nine Indian languages, in 1971.

The country's largest lender, with a combined balance sheet of over ₹ 37 lakh crore, 22,500 branches, 52,000 ATMs and 2.77 lakh employees, is now poised to enter the exclusive club of top global banks, following merger of five of its associate banks, and Bharatiya Mahila Bank, with itself.

Under the Imperial Bank of India Act, 1920, the British had established the Imperial Bank of India (IBI) in 1921 in which were amalgamated the Banks of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.

In 1955, following a Parliament Act, IBI became State Bank of India with a new logo, a banyan tree in a round coin form.

After nationalisation of 14 banks in 1969, when 'financial inclusion' commenced with nationalised banks increasingly branching out to unbanked areas and people, SBI decided to go in for an image makeover. The change was necessitated as some SBI officials felt that the symbol of a banyan tree was "inappropriate" as no other plant could grow under its span!

"SBI commissioned NID with this professional job and we created the new logo in 1971," Prof Pradyumna Vyas, Director, told BusinessLine .

Mahendra Patel, a former faculty, said a two-member design team was set up for the purpose. Shekhar Kamath and Vikas Satvalekar, ably guided by Prof Dashrath Patel, Head of Design Department, were entrusted the task of creating a new logo. It was not a student assignment but a proper professional faculty assignment for which SBI paid a fee to NID, Patel said.

The new logo of a solid circle with a keyhole symbol, resembling a lock-and-key was the contribution of Kamath. The logo depicted the purpose of the bank— that of a custodian safeguarding customers' money. The bank adopted the new logo on October 1, 1971. Mahendra Patel designed the matching fonts of the title of State Bank of India in nine languages which are used even today.

Of the seven central banks of former princely States that became associate banks of SBI, two (State Bank of Saurashtra and State Bank of Indore) were merged with the behemoth in the last decade.

The remaining five (State Banks of Hyderabad, Mysore, Travancore, Bikaner and Jaipur, and Patiala) are set to follow suit by the end of the current financial year.

(This article was published in the Business Line print edition dated June 18, 2016)