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Changing Interests In Fine Arts as a Profession: A Study In Sociology of Art

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ABSTRACT

The present research paper in the field of Sociology of Art aims at understanding the choice of fine arts as a profession. It focuses on contemporary fine artists who are based in Baroda. The specific objectives are to understand the artists' views regarding the parents' encouraging or discouraging attitudes towards fine arts as a profession and to examine the artists' opinions of parents' approach to this choice through gender lens. The data was collected through in depth interviews of seventy fine artists of Baroda city. The sample was gathered through snowball sampling technique. Mixed method has been employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that interest in art was encouraged till the activity was considered a hobby by some of the parents. In comparison, to men, women artists received more encouragement in pursuing fine arts. Commercialization of art has made fine arts a more acceptable profession.

Keywords : sociology of art, profession, fine arts

Introduction

The present research paper in the field of Sociology of Art aims at understanding the choice of fine arts as a profession. This study focuses on contemporary Indian artists (fine artists) who were based in Baroda. The specific objectives are to understand the artists' views regarding the parents' encouraging or discouraging attitudes towards their choice of fine arts as a profession; and to examine the artists' opinions of parents' approach to this choice of the profession through gender lens.

Research Methodology

The sample consisted of seventy fine artists residing in Baroda, of these forty seven were men and twenty three women artists. To locate the sample for this study snowball sampling method was used. In the absence of any baseline data or a directory of artists of Baroda, the initial information was supplied by a few artists, who were known to the researcher. The desired sample included artists who practiced and exhibited their work in art galleries and were residing in Baroda. A semi structured interview schedule was constructed for data collection. Data analysis comprised of mixed method, qualitative as well as quantitative analysis has been employed.

Review of Literature

The relationship between society and the various art forms has been of pedagogic interest in the past. However sociological approaches to understanding arts are as recent as the early nineteenth century. Theorizing about the relationship between art and society has expanded to diverse approaches. In the past Dialectical and Marxist approaches have been extensively employed in the early nineteenth century for theorizing art and society relationship. Other approaches have been employed are phenomenology, social psychological, structuralism, cultural rationalization, postmodernism. Howard Becker's (1982) production approach examines the factors of creation, production and distribution of art. While there are a number of works globally, in India attempts by sociologists to explore arts were sporadic. The earliest endeavor was by R.Mukherjee (1948) and D.Mukherji (1947, 1958); and more recent researches were those of Joshi (1985), Purohit (1988).

The respondent artists belonged to different age groups, ranging from 22 to 75 years. They were broadly categorized into three groups representing largely three generations of

artists.

Table 1 : Age group and sex of the respondent artists

Category	Age From-To	Males N = 47	Females N = 23	Total N= 70	Percent
Young Group	21-35 years	19	07	26	37.14
Middle Group	36-50 years	21	13	34	48.58
Senior Group	50 and above	07	03	10	14.28
Total		47	23	70	100.00

In choosing a career the family especially parents in India feel compelled to conform to the expectations of the society. Few decades back there was immense pressure on parents and children to take up science and join professional courses or streams like medicine and engineering to be considered successful and bright. Those who could not pursue it were deemed/termed as failures. In context of this background, the growing interest in professions such as fine arts evokes questions such as what has led to the rise in the interest in fine arts as a profession. Have the parents become more accepting of the career choice of their children in contemporary times?

It is important to recognize that family practices reflect and transmit the values of a culture and society. Therefore family support or family conflict is a necessary factor in the artist-etiology. To understand the various social trajectories of the artist toward their pursuit of fine arts it is necessary to examine encouragement, discouragement or neutral attitude of family members towards art as a career. Encouragement early in life, for majority of the respondents meant being praised, appreciated for their artwork since the childhood. Many also mentioned being taken for exhibitions, fairs and to the museums as positive reinforcements leading to them taking more interest in visual arts. A few respondents also recollected that they were asked by their parents with a lot of pride, to show their artwork to guests or /and relatives and this itself meant appreciation for their work. Artists voiced their feelings

regarding their parents' positive or negative attitude towards their decision to take up fine arts.

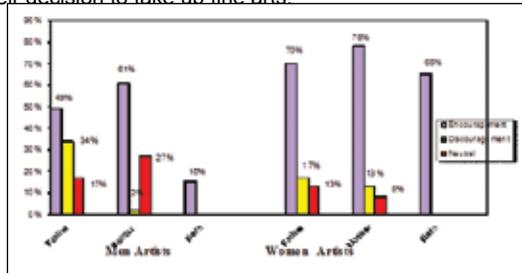


Diagram 1: Artists' parental approach to fine arts

Data Analysis

Artists' views regarding the parents' encouraging or discouraging attitudes towards their choice of fine arts as a profession.

- As shown in Diagram 1, sixty one percent of the men artists have mentioned that their mother was encouraging whereas forty nine percent of the men stated that their father was the main source of encouragement especially in formative years of their lives. Fifteen percent had mentioned both their parents as having encouraged them especially in the formative years in their art activities.
- Women respondents have received more encouragement as compared to men. Seventy percent of the respondents mentioned their father as encouraging and seventy eight percent of the female respondents mentioned their mothers as providing them encouragement in their art activity in the formative years.
- Thirty eight percent of the artists mentioned that their parents were positive towards any field of profession they chose. More than half of the respondents, who were encouraged, added that their parents were liberal and broadminded. This liberal attitude of the parents gave them the autonomy and hence they were permitted to make their own choice of the career. A few even mentioned that their parents knew that the respondent artists did not have aptitude for any other subject and hence the profession of fine arts would be appropriate for them.

In Indian society, parent's acquiescence plays a significant role in almost all aspects of their children's lives. This in turn is bound and influenced to a very large extent by social norms. It was not that the parents always supported the child. The respondents also mentioned the discouragement they received from parents.

- Nineteen percent of the respondents mentioned that their parents who initially nurtured and encouraged their interest in art began discouraging them when they realized or were informed by the artists that they would like to take up art as a profession.
- Seventeen percent of the men respondents said father was neutral and in thirty four percent of the cases father discouraged them. Twenty seven percent said mother was neutral. From amongst the women respondents in seventeen percent cases father discouraged and thirteen percent said father was neutral.

The cases wherein there was discouragement from the parents, the artists confronted their parents. They either had to convince them or confront and rebel till they got their way.

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Few respondents mentioned that they had to persuade and convince their parents to allow them to pursue educations in fine arts.

There were many ways through which the parents counteracted the decisions of their children to opt for fine arts as a career. The response to how were they discouraged was in many cases similar, such as parents trying to talk the artists out of choosing art as a career. In most cases the father seemed upset and artists had to make efforts to convince the parents of their choice of profession. The uncertainty related to the profession of fine arts was the chief reason for parents' dissuasion. Parents wanted their children to take up professions ensuring stable jobs with the promise of economic security. Many believe that indulgence in arts is for the affluent.

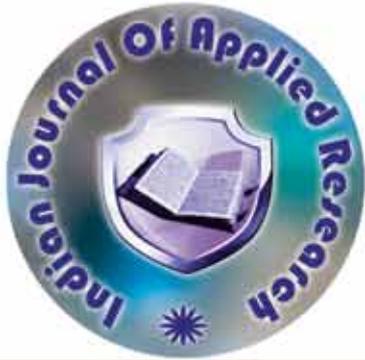
FINDINGS

- The senior men artists had to face some struggle to obtain familial acceptance. The acceptance was not easy to acquire as the times when they were young, fine arts was not a known a profession.
- For men, in general, there were different societal pressures to earn a decent living. They were expected to choose the more established professions. Many of them were forced initially to take up science or commerce.
- In comparison to senior and middle group of artists, the younger artist had it easy when it came to parents approach towards their choice of career. The pressures to take up lucrative professions other than art were also evident in their cases; however the growing appreciation that arts in general is showered with, made the choice a lot easier.
- Interest in art was encouraged till the activity was considered a hobby by some of the parents; however when it was thought as a serious profession there emerged a zone of conflict between the artists and their parents.
- In comparison to men women artists received more encouragement from both parents in the pursuit of fine arts. Women in general are encouraged to take up activities, vocations which are considered to be feminine and art and craft are considered to be such pursuits.

CONCLUSION

Today the perceptions of the family towards fine arts are changing. The symbols of success that our society cherished in the past are rapidly undergoing change today and parents are helping their children prepare for vocation in fine arts. This is evident from the numbers of art classes that have sprung up.

Over the past decades there is an increase in the number of occupations and professions that have proliferated in the India scene. Media has played a significant role in bringing about this change. Print or visual media plays a significant role in giving publicity to art works. The images relayed by print or visual media provide an impetus to the art industry. Advertising, film making, and fashion industry has made the artist an admired creative person. Contemporary world, more than ever in the last decade or so is witnessing commercialization of art and has created a boom for art market especially in the visual arts. In fact there are art funds in which people can invest – on similar lines like mutual fund. Thus in contemporary world, art and money are interlinked and interrelated due to which there is augmented interest amongst people to engage or indulge it art investment. Print or visual media plays a significant role in giving publicity to art works. This has enabled varied career options for youngsters today. Social processes of globalization, communication and media technologies in the dynamic, contemporary Indian society are instrumental in creating an atmosphere conducive to the development of fields such as fine arts.



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