

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN THE INQUIRY OF SOCIOLOGY OF ART

The process of creation of art works is evident throughout history. Invention and creation represents a universal phenomenon of society and therefore they are amenable to sociological examinations. The relationship between society and the various art forms has been of scholastic interest in the past. However sociological approaches to understanding arts are as recent as the early nineteenth century. 'Seeing art 'in its social context' had a long pedigree in studies of art, by both sociologists proper, the 'proto-sociologists' who lived before an identifiable discipline called 'sociology' appeared in the later nineteenth century...(Inglis and Hughson 2005 : 19).

Some of the earliest attempts to unearth and examine the nuances of the relationship between art and society were in the Renaissance Age when art flourished in Europe and the intellectual fervor created a need for explaining various social phenomena. The former studies on art and literature that are recorded are those undertaken by Vico, Madame de Stael and Herder. According to the Italian philosopher and Scholar Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), artworks are expressions of mores and attitudes of the

group and not much depends on the personal outlook of the creator. Thus cultural factors were related to artworks and in Vico's view culture is the 'soul' of the society (*ibid*). This indicated that the culture was supreme and the artist who is the actual creator of art had little or no importance in the cosmic environs of the society. In 1800, Madame de Stael studied the influence of religion, women, race, climate, legal system and customs of particular cultures on literature. (Albrecht, *et al* 1970: ix ; Inglis and Hughson, 2005 : 19). J.G. Herder (1800) in his work tried to culturally contextualize art by trying to explain why certain forms of art flourish in particular cultural context and not others (Inglis and Hughson 2005 : 19). These works of understanding artworks in relation to culture were questioned, as the term culture would encompass a wide range of elements, at the same time it was also considered vague. Thus the key problem with such an analysis was the tendency to establish direct link between the wider cultural context out of which the artworks have surfaced and the artworks themselves.

Global contribution

Theoretical approaches

Researches in the field of Sociology of Art have drawn ideas and perceptions from varied intellectual traditions and interdisciplinary fields, such as, art history, cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology and media and communication studies. Theorizing about the relationship between art and society has expanded to diverse approaches. However there is no single theoretical framework, which dominates the field of Sociology of art in the recent times. In the past Dialectical and Marxist approaches have been extensively employed in the early nineteenth century for theorizing art and society relationship.

The following discussion focuses on the various theories and approaches employed by researchers in understanding and examining the art-society relationship, pointing out in the process their strengths and limitations in using them for the present study.

Dialectical Approach

Herbert Read's contribution to the field of sociology of art is his exemplary work, *Art and Society* (1956), in which he has employed the

dialectical approach and explored the link between society at a given period and its various art forms. He examined art in relation to magic, mysticism, religion and the transitions in society. According to him there is a necessity to distinguish between art satisfying practical needs (economic factor) and the ideological aspects (ideas) of art. In another comprehensive work, *The meaning of Art* (1968) Read has elaborated on various art forms of the world from the early cave drawings to the action painter Jackson Pollock and examines the various movements such as Gothic, Baroque, Impressionism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Tachism.⁷ Read while defining art states that all artists have the desire to please which means they have the same intention, and hence art can simply be defined as an attempt to create pleasing forms (Read 1968). This explanation would find little supporters today as contemporary art products can be beautiful or harsh; in fact some modern art is intended to have an unsettling or unpleasant effect. Read's argument culminates into the acceptance of contradictions which the artist has to reconcile in his creative position in the process of creation; as an artist has to bring about synthesis between practical needs and desires of the world on one hand and the world of dreams and fantasy on the other.

⁷ Explained in the glossary

Another noteworthy proponent of the dialectical approach is Arnold Hauser. His initial work is inclined towards Marxism. Hauser's *The Social History of Art* (1951) interprets art as an expression of class interests and ideals. However, his contribution to the field of sociology of art needs special mention as he advocates applying sociological method in interpreting art-society relationship. In his works, *The Philosophy of Art History* (1959) he has questioned the role of scientific history of art and put forward with conviction the indispensable role of sociological method in understanding proper history of art. In his other important publication, *The Sociology of Art* (1982), Hauser articulated the pertinent questions that arose in the field of sociology of art. While examining the interaction between art and society he aptly enumerates that 'art both influences and is influenced by social changes, that it initiates social changes while itself changing with them' (1982:89). However his analysis observes that art does not influence society as much as the societal influences get reflected in art. The plausible reason could be the cultural character of art which is not a priority for survival for people at large. People can indulge in art or any other cultural form only when there is economic surplus and they have leisure time to pursue artistic activities. Consecutively, societal influences on the art are more, as the art and the artists are influenced by society and therefore it is natural that they

draw inspirations for their art from their surrounding environment. For the present research this approach would become one-sided because it undertakes only one aspect and that is the relationship between art and society, forgoing the other important social factors that need a deeper investigation. Therefore attempt has been made not to forgo it completely and accept it wherever applicable.

Marxist Approach to art

There is a long tradition within the Social History of Art of interpreting art as an expression of class interests or ideals. In the nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels arrived at the interpretation of man from the standpoint of his active nature. According to them art like all other social phenomenon is determined by economic conditions. Thus art is one of the various 'superstructures', which is dependent on the independent and changing economic structure (base). According to Marx the economic production system determines the content of art as well as the art styles. Art from such an interpretation is viewed as an expression of specific class ideals and interests, which replace the traditional ideas of art as an expression of national or period spirit. In the initial period of the twentieth

century several art theoreticians tried to revive Marxian paradigm in understanding art.

Antal's *Florentine Painting and its social background* (1948) in which he studied the Italian art of fourteenth and fifteenth century, is one such attempt but his ideas have been criticized for the fact that art is not merely an expression of class ideology but an operative system of representation, which acts reciprocally on society with its own specific effects (Tanner 2003:36). Another well-known sociological exponent of such a perspective is Lucien Goldmann says Tanner. Lucien Goldmann's empirical work was mostly on French literature, he also occasionally wrote about art. He stated that classes were the bearers of 'ideologies', partial and often not fully coherent views of the world determined by class position in social structure. It was only in literature, and art, that such partial ideologies might be translated into coherent and systematic worldviews, realizing the full potential of a class-based ideology. In this respect, art and literature maintained some autonomy from their social base, and a creative capacity, in so far as it was only through such expressive forms that groups might become fully aware of their own potential as a class. The ideas of Goldmann try to relate the content of literary work to the social

characteristics of the class that is assumed to be its privileged audience. This approach has been labeled as 'in its most caricatural form' by Bourdieu, who further states that such an approach makes the artists appear constrained by the milieu or the by the direct demands of a clientele thus confining it to the internal history of art and making it seem like reductive sociology (Tanner 2003: 97).

Louis Harap (1949) has also attempted to present certain principles of Marxist aesthetics in his 'Social Roots of Art'. According to Harap, mysticism, magic, totemism were the elements related to creativity and art in the primitive society. Further he states that, these elements result from the intricate interplay of forces both within and outside of art. For him, the source of all this complex activity lies in economic production (1949:15). Thus Harap emphasized on the production activity which echo the ideas of Marxist aesthetics. Similarly, other Marxist art theoreticians were, Paul Lafargue, Franz Mehring and G.V. Plekhnov from France, Germany and Russia respectively were who raised pertinent aesthetic questions. Plekhnov (1953) was the first Russian to apply the Marxist method to the study of origins of art, aesthetics and the relationship of art and literature to society. According to him, materialist conception of history is the only way in which

the origin and the development of literature and art can be understood. His efforts were to explain how art springs from the material, economic and social requirements of man. His scientific criticism placed in forefront an analysis of the relationship between men's mode of life and their aesthetic tastes, and also between social classes and the creation of art works. Lafargue's work focuses more on the relationship between art on one hand and social as well as class interests on the other. He also recognised art as a social phenomenon. Mehring like Lafargue saw art as a social phenomenon, and as a part of the superstructure, conditioned by class interests (Vazquez 1973). Ernst Fischer also used the Marxist approach in his work, *The Necessity of Art* (1963). He advocates that art was and will always be necessary to human existence thus giving another dimension to the debate on disappearance or the end of art which had commenced in Europe in mid nineteenth century.

The Marxian analysis of the interrelations of art and society was of value because it specified the particular aspect of a society that might affect its art and insisted on a continuous, dynamic interchange among all parts of that society. A host of scholars, representing a wide range of intellectual commitments to Marxist sociology, have adopted this point of view in studying art, and their views have been influential if not conclusive' (Barnett 1970 : 622).

Marxism overemphasizes on the economic realm and disregard the other aspects of social life. The approach undermines the importance of socio-cultural context within which art has developed and also underplays the influence of social phenomena even though the approach accepts its existence.

Neo Marxism and art

The Marxist approach reflects that economic forces shape the structures of art. Such an interpretation would find little support in contemporary art world, as the later school of thought gave a different view. The Frankfurt school is a school of neo-Marxist critical theory, social research and philosophy. George Lukas and his successors of Frankfurt school were particularly concerned with the idea of art as the last residue of human freedom. Art, they suggested, had the potentiality to perform a critical and hence emancipatory function in the development and transformation of capitalist society, in particular through 'realist' forms of representation which penetrated bourgeois ideology and revealed the truly exploitative and non-egalitarian character of modern industrial society (Tanner 2003 : 30). The current art scenario indicates that the art world is influenced to some extent by the economic market driven forces.

Nevertheless the truth is far from it, as along with this aspect, there is also a strong coexistence of aesthetic sense, spiritual and emotional relation, along with the rationale for the creation of art. Therefore it becomes mandatory for one to examine different dimensions for a comprehensive understanding of the interaction between various elements of art vis-à-vis society. Marxist approach reflects that controllers of economic forces shape the structures of art; however, such an interpretation would find little support in contemporary art world. Though the dynamism of global economy impacts upon art production it is not the only influence and hence Marxist approach would be inadequate for the present research.

Cultural Rationalization and art

Max Weber tried to understand the uniqueness of western rationalism and capitalism. *The Rational and social foundations of Music* (1912) was Weber's only major work in the area of art. 'Weber's primary concern was to discover why it was only in the west that rational calculable systems of harmonic and polyphonic music developed out of polyvocal music which characterized not only the west but other cultures such as ancient Greece and medieval Japan' (Tanner 2003 : 31). In the process of understanding this he explored 'the role of systems of notations in musical rationalization, the role

of religion in stereotyping and thus formalizing certain tone series associated with particular gods, the influence of the structure of guild organizations of musicians and the standardization of musical instruments' (*ibid.*). Although Weber never gave the same extended consideration to the visual arts, his research in the area of sociology of religion does briefly mention the social and cultural dynamics of artistic rationalization. Weber states that art or any other cultural phenomena has to be created and viewed pragmatically and rationally. This somehow restricts one's perceptions and further inhibits theoretical interpolations. It puts a stringent framework for the interpretations of art and society which if used might threaten to narrow the scope of such expansive study. Weber's ideas also revolve around the inquiry of why certain art forms arise in particular society and not others. We could accept this idea as societal forces do give an impetus to certain art forms. But such an approach is more suitable to varied art styles or art forms for instance folk art. Since the current investigation is not in line with this inquiry this approach is not amenable to the present study.

Social-Psychological Approach to art

Ernst Gombrich in his *Art and Illusion* (1960) puts forth a theory of the psychology of perception in art relating it to social aspects of learning.

The socio-psychological view of aesthetic experience is explained through use of a case study. His earlier work, *The Story of Art*, discusses the representational styles of art in history. In both works his focus is on individuals and he emphatically dismisses any influence of groups or group identities on art. The approach used by Gombrich gives us an important dimension especially with the attention on the artists and his art. However it is problematic to apply this attitude to the present study, as it would restrict and undermine the expansive role that society plays in the very genesis of art. Another concept of linking, psychology with art and society is that of Robert Witkin. His study, 'Art and Social Structure' (1995) tries to integrate aesthetic concepts of the critical idealist tradition in art history with the perceptual psychology, cognitive psychology of Piaget and elements of evolutionary theory of development. He argues that there is a correspondence between the 'level of abstraction' of artistic style systems and the level of abstraction of primary productive relations from society. Though one aspect of Witkin's idea is agreeable that is as the society becomes more complex the thought processes become more abstract, yet a divergent view could be that contemporary art forms oscillate between simple to highly complex, abstract forms, and therefore there is coexistence of multiple art forms in contemporary society.

Structuralism and art

Structuralism in sociology refers to any approach which regards social structure (apparent or otherwise) as having priority over social action. Claude Levi-Strauss used structuralist methods in the analysis of art. Structuralism provided a rigorous model for decoding cultural texts as languages with their own internal structure and coherence, irreducible to either external referents or to some expression of an underlying social base (Tanner 2003). Thereby, providing the basis of, rejecting the societal influence on art.

Phenomenology and art

Another approach in theorizing sociology of art is phenomenological sociology and the method of 'verstehen'. Janet Wolff in *Hermeneutic Philosophy and the Sociology of Art* used this approach for understanding sociology of knowledge, sociology of art and literature. In spite of advocating phenomenological sociology, she accepts that there are certain inadequacies in it, which she has supplemented by hermeneutic philosophy and ideology-critique. She emphasized the need of sociology of art at the level of meaning that should enable discussions about the works of art and their place in social life. Wolff states that 'Like society, art is a creation of

individual members, who are in many ways formed by society' (1975 : 7). This approach is more suitable for unearthing the meaning which underlies in art works and their linkages with the broader society. The present study requires a macro view of the art world and hence this approach is insufficient.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is a movement in painting, literature, television, films and the arts in general. It emphasizes on the importance of the unconscious, on free floating signs and images and a plurality of viewpoints. Post modernity is viewed as involving an end of the dominance of an overarching belief in 'scientific' rationality and a unitary theory of progress. Postmodernism is often opposed to modernism but both are best seen as artistic avant-gardes which have to separate themselves off from conventional artistic practice only to become conventional in time. Theorists of post modernity, Jean Baudrillard and Jean-Francois Lyotard claim that technologies such as computers, media, new forms of knowledge and changes in socio-economic systems are producing a post modern social formation. Post modern theory provides a critique of representation and the modern belief that theory mirrors reality (Ritzer 1996). This approach is

problematic as it is too vast and abstract. To condense one's research with postmodernist approach has to be done with the risk of appearing to be too abstruse.

The Social Conditions of Artistic Production

Pierre Bourdieu (1993) proposed a model of *artistic fields*. The concept of artistic fields is similar to other institutions such as economic, political, religious, intellectual that constitutes society. The key to Bourdieu's sociology of art is that the process of modernization has created increasing differentiation in societies and has transformed societies into networks of specialist fields of action such as economic, political, intellectual, art and so on. Thus modern society refers to a web of interconnected spaces or areas which together form a field of power (Fyfe 2000: 24-5).

According to Bourdieu some of the fields (*institutions*) are more autonomous than others and have their own set of rules and rewards without the interference from outside influence. He suggests that artistic fields are divided into different sectors for instance varied art forms, the networks revolving around these art forms and other such micro level groups within

the field. The particular divisions of artistic fields in a given society are conditioned by the nature of class relationships there; they are historically constructed, as are the ideologies, which are constituted in them. (Alexander 2003:285). This indicates that the nature of class relationships, history constructed so far and the ideologies constructed in history becomes the stimulating force on the artistic field.

Bourdieu also discusses about art which reflects the social origins and personal trajectory of a given artist. For Bourdieu, a work of art is not a solitary expression of an artists' genius neither is it only a reflection of that artist's social origins. Works of art, according to him are the result of the meeting of a habitus⁸. Habitus basically means the mental construct, which enables the artist to perceive and evaluate the social world. It basically refers to the socio-cultural context in which the artist lives, and therefore adapts similar dispositions like that of the society. This in turn influences the artists and their art.

⁸ Habitus –term used by Bourdieu referring to the “mental, or cognitive structures” through which the people deal with the social world. People are endowed with a series of internalized schemes through which they perceive, understand, appreciate , and evaluate the social world (Ritzer, George 1996:405)

The habitus, for Bourdieu, forms 'a durable and transposable structure of dispositions', a set of internalised 'practical taxonomies', modes of viewing the world and acting in it that have been 'picked up', 'incorporated', through the experience of growing up in and inhabiting a particular socially marked cultural milieu (Inglis and Hughson 2005:35).

Bourdieu has emphasized on both power relations and social construction of ideas within the field. Bourdieu's account of the historical emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production in nineteenth-century France thus involves taking into account a wide range of different historical and social determinants and analysing how such determinants are mediated or 'refracted' through the field of artistic production at a given historical moment (Lane 2005 : 41). Bourdieu's ideas though appear complex are of immense importance in the contemporary art world because according to Bourdieu the sociology of cultural products must take as its object the whole set of relationships between artists and other artists, and beyond them, the whole set of agents engaged in the production of the work, or, at least, of the social value of the work (critics, gallery directors, patrons, etc.) (Tanner 2003 : 97).

Production Approach

Howard Becker (1982) in *art worlds* put forth the production approach. His production approach examines the factors of creation, production and distribution of art. It tries to understand the relationships among creators, distribution networks, art works and society. According to him, 'All artistic work, like all human activity, involves the joint activity of a number, often a large number of people' (1982:1). Becker has also emphasized on support activities which some people must carry on such as art education, training, criticism, appreciation and responding to art works. His approach has similarities with that of Bourdieu. Sociologists like Bourdieu and Howard Becker analyze the social construction of aesthetic ideas and values. Both have focused on processes of creation or production, institutions and organizations (Zolberg 1990 : 4). The Production of Culture perspective apparently advocates that isolated artists, such as contemporary easel-painters, are deeply embedded in systems of social relationships.

Empirical Researches in Sociology of Art

There are a number of empirical works in sociology of art. The underlying factor in these various studies which have different interests and goals is that all of them are not based in the Indian context.

White and White in their book, *Canvases and Careers* (1965) provided a working example of how a changing art form might best be studied and understood within its historical and social context. They studied the nineteenth-century French art market. Their study also illustrates how factors such as means of exhibition and selling, and artistic 'supply' and 'demand' can have an effect on encouraging or discouraging particular styles of artistic practice.

Lane mentions the study of Bourdieu, *The love of Art: European art museums and their public* which is a statistical survey of attendance of European art galleries. Bourdieu has analyzed the social and historical determinants behind the radically different propensity of various social classes to visit art galleries and hence appreciate high art and culture. According to Lane, Bourdieu's survey revealed that those from working class or peasant backgrounds were less likely to visit the art galleries and this was due to the lack of knowledge about understanding the art. This also could be because they had little or no formal education in the aspects related to art appreciation (Lane 2005).

Another interesting empirical study was by Strauss (1970). Strauss explored in his study of the art school in Chicago and its students, the way occupational identities of fine artists, commercial artists and art educators are formed during the art school phase. His analysis was based on extensive interviews with seventy art students and graduates of Art Institute of Chicago. He tried to understand the interplay of students, school and art world relating it to the basic orientation of students pursuing fine arts, commercial arts and art education.

Marcia Bystryn (1978) has analyzed the postwar New York avant-garde⁹ art market as an 'industry system'. 'The focal organization of this system is the gallery, with artists as the 'input sector' and gatekeepers, such as critics and museum curators, as the 'output sector', filtering the products which reach the consumer or collector.' (Tanner 2003:70). Bystryn in the work goes on to describe a division of labor that exists between galleries dealing in cheap and unrecognized artists and galleries dealing in established artists, with distinctive selection, filtering and output process. Terminology such as input, output, gatekeepers have been disapproved of especially in the

⁹ It is a French term that represents something ahead of time, avant=ahead and garde=time. The term is usually applied to art or an artist who pioneers and experiments with new elements that shake off tradition and embrace Modernism, and are bold enough to shock the viewer.

context of creativity as the common opinion is that such terms give a mechanical feel to the creation of artworks.

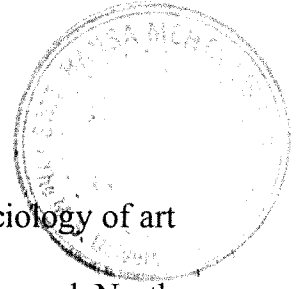
Another empirical study of eminence is Paul DiMaggio's (1986) construction of 'art world' in America's Boston city. He enumerated on how the difference between art world and other social spheres arose. His study revealed how in the earlier part of the nineteenth century varied cultural forms were available in a unified and not yet differentiated market place. But by the end of the century the upper class elites of Boston segregated the 'arts' from commercial market places and located them inside a network of non-profit corporations. Thus physically and symbolically 'art' and 'popular culture' were differentiated and separated within the cultural sphere.

David Halle (1989) combined iconography¹⁰ with sociological techniques of survey and quantitative analysis in his research. He conducted a systematic survey of samples of houses from upper-middle class, middle class and working class residential areas to examine the art they displayed in their homes. His primary findings indicated a very high level of uniformity in themes and iconography of visual images found in people's homes across

¹⁰ Art Historical term referring to the study of symbols in a work of art, and the investigation of their meanings in the social and historical context.

classes, and the meanings attributed to this iconography. Landscapes, for example, were the most popular subject matter for pictures in houses of all classes, and although people from an upper middle class much more often have abstract paintings than people from the working class, they read those paintings as imagery landscapes, suggesting a shared pattern of taste.

In contrast to the above mentioned work is the work of anthropologist Franz Boas on non-western society. Franz Boas in his *Primitive Art* (1972) criticized unilineal evolutionary theories arguing and substantiating it with empirical data about non-western art of indigenous people of the Northwest coast and the arctic. Boas has not attempted to define 'art' or 'aesthetic', though he mentions that all members of mankind feel aesthetic pleasure. There is also an ethnocentric bent in early works wherein terms 'primitive' have been used to refer to the people as 'backward' or 'inferior'. But Boas's empirical data is rich and gives ample insight into the culture of the indigenous people he studied. Thus cultural anthropologists explained the function of art as an organizing force, or serving a religious, secular or supernatural purpose among the early inhabitants.



The review till now indicates that works in the area of sociology of art are more in the context of western world-specifically Europe and North America. In past couple of decades there have been no significant sociological studies of art and artists of India. There are only few works in the in the field of sociology of art in Indian context.

Indian contribution

In India, from the early 20th century interpretation of Indian art was carried out by art historians, archaeologists, art critics and scholars which led to better understanding of Indian art. Scholars such as Ananda Coomaraswamy (1908, 1966), MulkRaj Anand (1933), Rabindranath Tagore (1961), Niharranjan Ray (1974), and C.Sivaramamurti (1978) gave insights into Indian culture, its arts and the Indian society. But sociological studies in Indian context, which would be of significance to the field of sociology of art are just a handful. In the book, *Towards a sociology of culture in India* (1965) an article by Egon Bergel 'Prolegomena to a sociology of art' raises pertinent issues related to the neglect of the field of sociology of art. According to him because of the difficulties, which this field poses, a systematic sociology of art is still not a reality.

Vinayak Purohit in his *Arts of Transitional India Twentieth Century*, volume 1 and 2 (1988) has analyzed various art forms in twentieth century India from a Marxist perspective. Volume 1-Social Dynamics and volume 2-Aesthetic superstructure and ideological organization are both massive and exhaustive works. They practically cover the entire twentieth century arts in India giving an insight into arts such as painting, sculpture, architecture, the performing arts of music, dance and the theatre including the literary arena of poetry, short stories, novels and the popular audio-visual media of films. For a student in sociology of art his expansive research gives insights into the varied art forms and their significance in the Indian context. Each of these arts can further be examined in contemporary societal context and have a encyclopedic scope of being dealt with individually.

D.P. Mukerji in his *Modern Indian Culture-A Sociological study* (1947) stated that modern Indian culture is a unique social phenomenon and the whole culture should be studied on sociological lines. His enumerated discussion on sociology of modern Indian music can form the basis for empirical research, also his chapter on revival of fine arts gives us an understanding of the place and emergence of fine arts in India. For Radhakamal Mukeerji,

the sociology of art reveals the organic place, functions and meaning of art in society. In his *The Social Function of Art*, he mentions that “artistic activity is dominated by the sense of norms and values, and these are largely of social origin. On the other hand, art as individual creative expression clarifies and in some measure reshapes and determines social values (1948:39).

Mukeerji stated that art if perfected would lead to life, mind and society being fulfilled and perfected. But an artist has a feeling of dissatisfaction, which leads him to create more. The above-mentioned works were related to theorizing about sociology of art.

An interesting research in the field of sociology of art is O.P.Joshi's *Sociology of Indian Art* (1985). Joshi's empirical research is important for a student of sociology of art as it gives a holistic picture of Indian art-artists and art public. O.P.Joshi has combined qualitative and quantitative research methods to give a holistic depiction of art and society in India. But his research focuses exclusively on the artists who have won awards at a national level. Also the research has not been able to look into the issues of gender as the sample did not represent female artists, and there was a tendency to assume that an artist would mean male artist. His research

sample consisting of award winners is insufficient since it does not represent all those artists who may not have entered art competitions or never won an award, as they are no lesser artists than others. Further his focus being on the most visible and successful artists do not represent the artist community as a whole. In Indian context the field of sociology of art is open to a whole range of inquiries and the need is to have a better understanding of the field with the foundation of theoretical perspective.

Approach for the present study

From amongst the divergent approaches, the Social production of art is an approach that signifies the societal role in the production of art. According to the approach social relationships and social interests shape opportunities for doing innovative work. They shape the success of the artists, the critical esteem they enjoy and the material rewards they receive for their work. This approach, rather than focusing on either individual artists or on objects, considers 'art-world' (the productive relation between artists, his /her art and the society) as its primary unit of analysis.

The production approach is nearest in explaining the broader impact of varied institutions keeping focus on the core art activity. This approach is

also suitable in culling out the interrelationships between the different elements of the art world. Hence, approach employed for the present study is the production approach and the theory of Reputations based on American sociologist Howard Becker's (1982) concept of *Art Worlds*. Production approach examines the factors of creation, production and distribution of art. It tries to understand the relationships among creators, distribution networks, art works and society.

For Becker arts are embedded in what he calls *art worlds*. An art world 'is the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that the art world is noted for' (Becker 1982; p.x). For Becker the conception of art is in the form of a collective action. For instance a painting to be created requires materials which are produced elsewhere, artists must have undergone the process of training, would have certain experiences which mould his thoughts and enables generation of certain ideas which are expressed in the form of a painting, the painting must also reach an audience for which it must be displayed in an exhibition or shown to an audience. Further for the viewers to visit the exhibition an art

gallery has to publicize the exhibition, and finally a buyer must pick up the painting for the artist to gain some reward for making it.

In line with Becker's idea this study also considers art as an activity. The artist has to have an idea, which is conditioned by several factors. This idea takes form through usage of certain types of materials, which also need to be produced. Artists need to sustain themselves as well as their dependents, while they are producing art and in order to make a living they may be in contact with the broader society. Artists also need to learn the skills and techniques of executing their ideas and requires support activities of criticism, reception and response. Thus there must be consumption or reception of the art being produced, which means an audience capable of identifying the work of art and responding to it appropriately. Finally, the art activity is seen to depend upon an anticipated stability in social affairs, which is ultimately guaranteed by the state and the prevailing social, economic and political systems. Becker's arguments revolve around the key point that art works are shaped by the whole system that produces them and it is not just by the people we think as artists (Alexander 2003 : 68).

Becker's account of reputations in art worlds that he labels as the 'theory of reputations' suggests that reputations arise and are justified because certain works of art indubitably display the exceptional qualities of their makers, be these of skill, insight, imagination, intellect or sensibility. Becker's view, however, is that reputations rests not on the evident qualities of works but on machinations of art worlds. Looking at reputations as social fact he points out its dependence on the efforts of critics and historians, a distribution and exhibition system, a market, the approval of relevant audiences and so forth: 'All the co-operation which produces art works, then, also produces the reputations of works, makers, school, genres and media' (Becker 1982: 362). According to Becker what counts as art and as great art is contingent upon historical, political and social circumstances.

Limitations of the approach

Becker's approach has been criticised for drawing heavily from the subfield of sociology of organizations, occupations and work, to an extent that it needs to consciously withdraw from escalating into sociology of occupations. It also tends to completely overlook what is special about art that it sounds like any other production, like shoes, clothes so on. Becker's approach has also been criticized for ignoring the meaning of art. Becker has

argued that 'sociologists working in this field are not much interested in 'decoding' art works, in finding the works secret meanings as reflections of society. They prefer to see those works as the result of what a lot of people have done jointly.

Peterson has further argued that one of the strengths of the approach is its 'nominalist' stance. He suggests that 'for the purpose of the inquiry at hand, there is nothing unique about any specific symbol system that prevents it being studied with standard social scientific methods' (1994:177). But Alexander refutes this and suggests that 'symbols are meaningful, and people feel strongly about the art forms sociologists study with such seeming dispassion. Treating art as 'nothing special' can threaten the partisans whose status is tied up with the 'specialness' of art.

In the present study some of these concerns are addressed. Firstly, though this study also uncovers aspects of art world and leans towards sociology of occupations there is a conscious attempt to move away from focusing just on the occupational aspects of the art world. Secondly, the view of Becker concerning 'decoding' the art works may partly be acceptable as the field of art has a multidisciplinary scope and there are other

fields such as art history and art criticism which would enable thorough deciphering of the artworks. But the present study has tried to seek explanations for the themes and subjects, which the respondents engage with. Thirdly, at the offset of the study there is acceptance of the existence of creativity, talent, skill and special capacity of individuals called 'artists'.

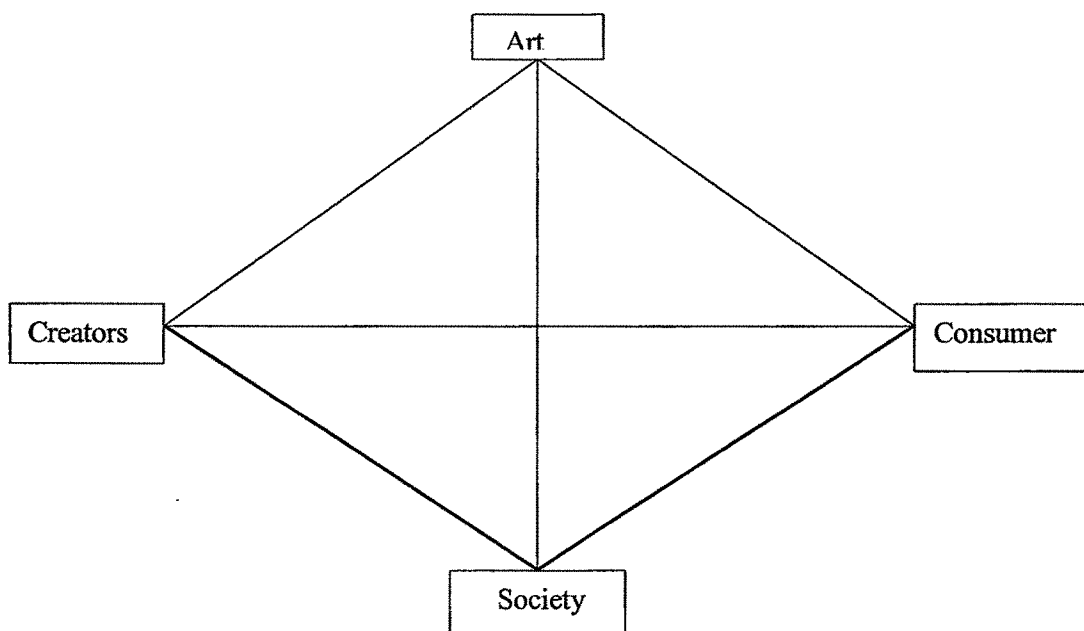
In this study, art and artists are not considered as variable either completely dependent or completely independent of society thereby avoiding reductionism. To get a better understanding of the data a sociological - artistic approach put forward by Bertasio and Marchetti has been taken into consideration. 'The sociological- artistic level of observation enables the achievement of proper balance between the traditional requirements of empirical sociological research and the necessity of effectively considering the autonomous role played by artists in the creation and realization of a work of art.' (Bertasio, D., and Marchetti, G.)¹¹

¹¹ This idea has been borrowed from Danila Bertasio and Giorgio Marchetti, Italian researchers from their article 'For sociology of arts and artists'. www.uniurb.it/imes/essad/essad2.html accessed on February 20,2003.

Conceptual Framework

For better understanding of the art, artist and society relationship a conceptual framework can be build around the already existing framework. To study the relationship between art, artists and society scholars have put forward conceptual frameworks and Wendy Griswold proposed the cultural diamond, which is presented in figure 1. Griswold's diamond is a kite like structure with the four corners representing artistic products (art), creators of art (artists), consumers of art (buyers and viewers), and the wider society . Further, all the four points are linked with six lines as in the figure and a relationship exists among these points. According to Griswold, all four points are important in understanding art.

Figure 1 : Wendy Griswold's Cultural Diamond

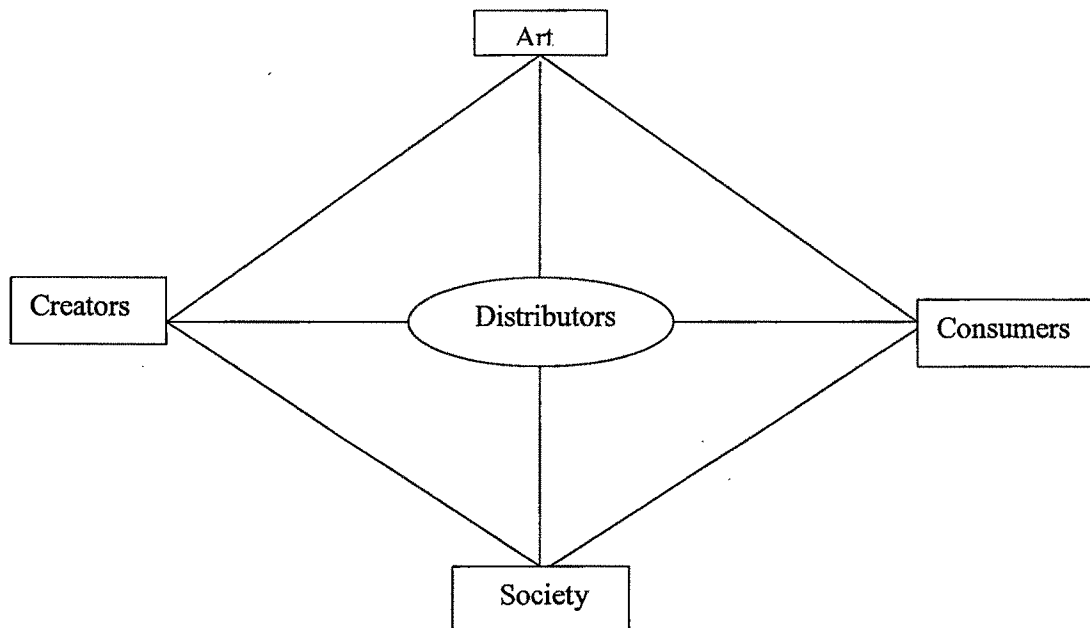


Victoria Alexander modified this framework and put forth a ‘Cultural Diamond’ that is presented in the Figure 2. According to Alexander,

Art is communication. Art has to get from the people who create it to the people who consume it. That is, art is distributed by some people, organization, or network ...the shape of the distribution system affects what kinds of art get distributed widely, narrowly or not at all. The simple diamond lumps the distribution of art objects together with artistic creation (Alexander, 2003:62)

This mediated structure (Figure 2) enables us to view and analyse the distributors who form the mediating layer between artists and consumers and also between art and society.

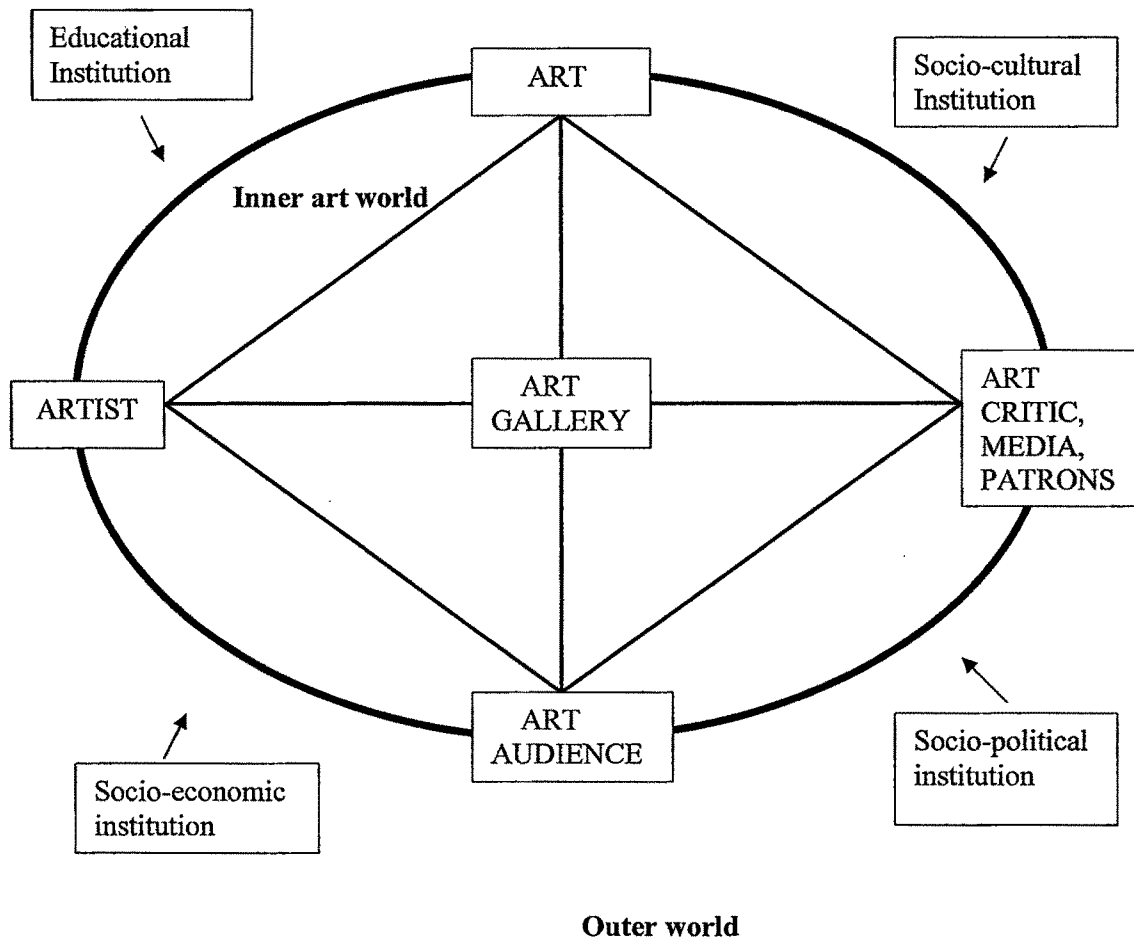
Figure 2: Modified Cultural Diamond by Alexander, V.



But this framework is further modified to explain the relationship between art, artists and society as the fact is art and artists are located within the social context and are influenced by the societal forces. For the purpose of the present study all the four aspects – art, artist, art audience, art critic/media and the distribution system have been focused upon but with some further modifications.

In the present study art refers to paintings, creators refer to fine artists, distributors are the art galleries and art dealers, consumers are the buyers and viewers and socio-cultural, socio- political, educational and economic institutions have been added as influencing the art world. The present study further modifies and adapts the framework put forward by Alexander, V. who adapted it from Griswold (1994, 1986).

Figure 3 : Conceptual Framework for the present study



This conceptual framework suggests that art, artist, viewers, buyers, distributors, art galleries and economic, political, educational and social institutions are all encompassed within the society. Artists are the creators of art and art also in turn affects the artist, both are products of the social

context in which they exist. Art and artist have a direct link with the distributors as they bring the art products for display through their art galleries to the interested audience, which would include patrons and buyers. The link between art and art audience is mediated through distributors, which are basically art galleries. The social, educational, economic and political institution indirectly influences all the elements in art world.

The Inner layer forms the core of the art world, in which each element influences and has relation with the other. In order to understand art and society researchers must take into account all the elements in the inner layer. Art is created by the artist which reaches the art audience through the distribution system. This distribution system interacts with the art critic/media in order to distribute the art works. It also influences the artist, and the art audience.

The outer world consists of the various institutions that have an indirect impact upon the elements in the inner layer. The socio-cultural institution refers to the familial, cultural elements. The educational refers to the educational system and patterns of training, teachers from school and college and the art educational institution itself; the socio-economic refers to

the global economy at the macro level and at the micro level the socio-economic status of the artists; socio-political refers to the interaction between the state and political outfits and their influence on the art world.