

Artisans in the System of Social World: A Conceptual Analysis of Sociology of Artisans with Reference to Indian Society

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Abstract- The concept of Sociology of artisans emerges from the coalescence of Sociology i.e. study of society, and Artisans, considered as the dominant producers of the society. They used to make products or goods for daily needs of the people with their own hands, while enjoying their own creativity and talent over the time. Artisans have their vital contribution even in mechanism of various cultures and traditions in the history of Indian society. The contribution has been similar in all over the world and this has attention of various sociologists to show their ardent interest in framing the sociological aspects to study this important section of the society. This resulted in concocting the concept of 'Sociology of Art and Artisans' shedding light on the importance of art and artisans in the society. Thus, the paper seeks to attempt a conceptual analysis of Sociology of Artisans, with reference to functionalist perspective explaining the role of social structures in shaping the artisan's work and their adjustments in Indian society.

Key Words: Artisans, Society, Sociology, Art

Sociology of Artisans

Artisans are the workers who are skilled in making things with their hands and who get involved into trades using their skills of installing things. Along with their manual capabilities, they may use various equipments, machineries and tool to give it a finishing touch and bring it into the market. The term artisan has been derived from French word 'artisan' and Italian word 'artigiano.' Probing into their significant importance in the society, many sociologists have uncovered a separate stream of sociology i.e. 'Sociology of Artisans'. "The study of artisans has been undertaken largely in the disciplines of History, particularly Social and Economic History, and Secondarily Social Anthropology" (Koniordos M. S., 2001).¹ Several writings over the issue that sociologists might regard as- politics, family, morality, religion, traditions, customs, norms etc., gave rise to theological studies, where expression over these issues included emergence of various art forms like drama, literature, paintings, architecture, etc. Adding into it, the functionalist perspective of sociology relevantly determines how society and artisans are relative to each other because of the functional importance of art.

Functionalist Perspective

The Functionalist perspective is a macro-level paradigm that describes large-scale processes. The perspective grew from the writings of Herbert Spencer, a biologist and an English Philosopher who compared the society with an organism. According to Spencer, just as various organs work together to maintain the functioning of a body, society's functioning also requires all the social institutions to work consistently together. "Many functionalists argue that social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system and that a change in one institution will precipitate change in other institutions" (Singh. M, 2018).² From the Functional perspective, it can be said that India has a history of diverse and traditional Artisan products. The traditional Indian craftsmanship is so exquisite and unique that India has been known to other countries on the trade route more by its traditional art products than by art, religion and philosophy (Saraf, T.J.,1991).³ The Artisan sector has been an important part of the Indian Society, both from the macro (by contributing to economy through trade) as well as the micro perspective (because of its employment potential). Besides, an artisan, by maintaining cultural values in his work, is not only continuing the occupational structure, but is also preserving the identity of the society. Durkheim (2013)⁴ also establishes the functional importance of the artisans as elaborated in his work, 'The Division of Labor in Society' in which he postulated division of work and specialization as the basis of social solidarity.

Durkheim proposes that whereas in primitive societies it is the ‘collective conscience’⁵ that forms the basis of social solidarity (mechanical solidarity), it is ‘functional interdependence’⁶ that forms the basis of solidarity in modern complex societies (organic solidarity). Organic solidarity employs social differentiation and inter-dependence of people for work in the society. This, as Durkheim implies, is necessary for social coherence; it establishes the functional importance of every individual in the society including artisans who inevitably work in their own separate fields. Artisans such as potters, carvers, entertainers, weavers, or dyers, etc. have their own eminency in functional differentiation for persisting solidarity. Different fields of such creativity when brought into work through specialization, bring about social co-ordination and lead to solidarity.

Artisans and the Social System

The notable contributions give a sociological significance to the concept of artisans, providing better understanding on the relationship between them and the society. It also elaborates the idea of social nature of art and the importance of its study in sociological manner. The study of sociology of art and artisans has been undertaken from time to time in understanding the philosophical explanations. In order to promote culture, artisans are embedded in systems of their social world. Art for them is viewed as an expression of their social nature. According to Becker, the world of art comprises “all those people and organizations whose activity is necessary to produce the kinds of events and objects which that world characteristically produces” (Becker, 1976).⁷ Artisans and artists’ social relation, and social interaction are the factors responsible for shaping their opportunities for doing innovative work. Sociologists thus focus upon ‘art worlds’, as a primary unit to analyze the creative logic of artists and artisans. Sociological understanding of art world encourages innovation of work and strengthens the control of the actors (artists and artisans) in art world over their political and material environments.

In the process of lessening the effectiveness of art world, Haskell (Haskell, 1980)⁸ has given one of the important classical studies of patronage system. Art Patronage is a system of support and encouragement in the form of privilege or financial assistance provided to the art workers. Then wealthy popes or kings, perhaps, provided this, to various artists and artisans. Haskell explored the intersections between role of patronage system in shaping market structures and efficiency of artistic programmes for Baroque style in Italy.

Another sociological work based on the production perspective of sociology of artisans was propounded by Baxandall (Baxandall, 1980)⁹, who suggested monopolization of work. He studied the changing status of sculptors into wood sculptors in early modern Germany. In order to break the constraints of an Oligopolistic guild system, some careful measures have been taken by artisans with consideration to the strategies of marketing and conditions of trade. He had given the idea of creating monopolies through ‘vertical integration’, which implies control over all the stages of production patterns and, ‘horizontal integration’ of control over production patterns in the entire region. This emphasized the need to differentiate the work of artisans, create distinctive individual style of art and productivity, and then to monopolize it further. He argued that, only “outstanding individuals”¹⁰ produce “very good works of art...complex and co-ordinated enough to register in their forms the kind of cultural circumstance sought here” (Baxandall, 1980, p. 10).¹¹

Another classic sociological study on art market is by White and White (White & White, 1965)¹², reviewed by Nicholas Green (Green, 1987)¹³, describing the nineteenth- century French Art market. The study emphasizes upon the nature of the role of artist, embedding the developing cultural discourses within. It also reflects on art criticism as the new promotional culture in the art market.

The mode of production and traditional conditions of work gave artisans chance to express their social nature. Sokritis M. Koniordos (Koniordos S. M., 2001)¹⁴ has greatly contributed in detailing the sociology of artisans in which he has talked about their complex and expressive role that helped in the expansion of manufacturing sector before industrialization. It was the triumph of capitalism, and inventive measures of factory-based production that resulted in the demise of their stratum.

Regarding the cultural explanations for art and world of artisans, Indian Sociological thinkers like Yogendra Singh (Singh Y. , 2012)¹⁵, has also provided inputs on the developing sociology of art. He gave his views on the effects of caste and class system on modes of production and division of work in society. These social structures play roles in guiding two types of leisure i.e. Folk and Elite forms. The folk tradition determines the lifestyle and work patterns of artisans and laborers. He further argued that modes of production and ecology are linked with leisure in traditional society. The leisurely urges of people in traditional society were the reason behind the disclosure of the work/talent of the artisans. He also described the

latent functions of art i.e. the utilitarian perspective of art. According to Yogendra Singh, such leisure activities witnessed changes due to the commencement of modernization and industrialization in India. Till then, the mode of production and leisurely patterns of art had remained unchanged.

Since India has been the centre of various cultures and tradition with abundant heritage, it is necessary to understand the social system of artisans as the chief contributors of the same.

References

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2. Singh, M. (2018). *Theories of Sociology*. New Delhi: Rajat Publications.
3. Saraf, T.J., Sampark. (1991). *In the journey of craft development 1941-1991*. New Delhi: Publication Division. P-52.
4. Durkheim, E. (2013). *The Division of Labor in Society* (2nd ed.). (Steven Lukes, Ed.). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Collective Conscience- It is a concept developed by Emile Durkheim in his work "The Division of Labor in Society". Collective conscience or collective conscious is a set of shared belief, ideas and moral attitudes of a group or society. It operates as a force within society that constitutes to shared understanding of social norms by the people in society.
6. Functional Interdependence- With this, Durkheim implies to the dependence individuals have on each other in more advanced societies as a basis of social cohesion.
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9. Baxandall, M. (1980). *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
10. Outstanding Individuals- With Outstanding individuals, Michael Baxandall referred to the *Limewood sculptors* of the Germany in renaissance period. They were called outstanding because of their ability to work monopolistically and in their own unique style. (Baxandall,M. (1980). *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*)
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