



Fine Arts and Functional Art

Introduction

Historical background for these categories

A single glance at the art historical development from Prehistoric Period till the advent of Modern period will make it clear that art has been an integral part of the understanding of the world and development of religion, culture, process of nation formation in human history. It was never considered as separate then the other aspect of life. Art in those times was considered to be more a skilled work and thus the appreciation of those art forms was related to the other aspect of the life. So there was no distinction between arts, fine art, functional art, design and so on.

It is only with advent of industrialization when every labour was valued in money that the distinction between something which can be valued and something which is beyond the capacity of monetary value was discussed. Aestheticians like Immanuel Kant, Hegel (18th Century A.D.) were among the first ones who stressed that the beauty of art is related to 'disinterested pleasure', genius, mind, Idea, freedom of expression, creativity, originality.

There the art is not created for any monetary purpose but it is an expression of the human being's basic existence. Therefore it is Fine Art. Kant was the first one who distinguished Fine Art from Craft, Fine Arts from Science.



In later period the categories of art got more specified in relation with the skill, presence and absence of human figure, Ideation, progressive approach and glorification of the art and artist. Thus it established the whole concept of Modern art and in turn modernism in cultural field.

This distinction was very much Eurocentric only with the spread of western education system this distinction was introduced in the other countries like India, China, Japan, Africa, West Asia, Latin American countries.

What is Fine Arts

Oxford Dictionary definition of Fine Arts is “ [mass noun] (also fine arts) creative art, especially visual art whose products are to be appreciated primarily or solely for their imaginative, aesthetic, or intellectual content.”

From 17th century onward this definition of fine arts has been in vogue. Fine arts was always related to the aesthetical quality in Modern Period, as it was strongly believed that the perception of aesthetic qualities required a refined judgment usually referred to as having good taste, which differentiated fine art from popular art and entertainment.

Meaning of the word ‘Fine’ fine arts has more relation to the purity of the art practice not to the quality of the art work. The term ‘fine’ in fine arts is related more to the ‘final purpose’ which all the aesthetician has argued that is the ‘Object of Art’ itself. It is that object which is the end product of the aesthetic



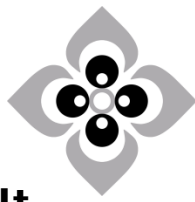
experience which is presented to the world only for the appreciation.

In education system 'Fine Arts' means a study of professional field of art. Under which a student will learn about the professional artists, advanced skills, execution of these skills through the conceptual understanding of art in general. This they will attend through the rigorous practice and understanding of the History of art and development of faculty of appreciation of their own field.

Different types of Fine Arts

The term first appeared in 1767 as a translation of the French word 'Beaux Art' which included the limited art forms, mainly visual arts like painting, sculpture, and printmaking. In France, in the mid-seventeenth century, the term "beaux art" was first used by writers such as Charles Perrault and Abbé Batteaux, while it was not until 1880 when the word "art" made its first appearance in an English dictionary. **Historically Fine Arts included broadly five forms of art "Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Music and Poetry" including the dance and theatre also.** Dance and theatre were considered to be the extension of the music and poetry only.

Hegel was the philosopher who first time divided these art forms in relation to the concept of 'Space and Time'. He particularly mentions that Painting, architecture, sculpture mainly visual art forms exist in space where as the art form like music, poetry exist in time. After Hegel this concept the **Fine Arts in divided into two categories i.e. Visual Arts and Performing Arts.**



Later with the advent of psychology and gestalt theories the field of Fine Arts got connected to the three types of Memories i.e. visual memory, word memory and sound memory. Thus the categories formed are:

Visual Art – Visual Memory

Literature – Word Memory

Music – Sound Memory

Dance/ theatre – Synthesis of all these memories

With technical development and other conceptual developments in arts now Fine Arts include various forms of art, these are:

1. Painting
2. Drawing
3. Sculpture
4. Printmaking
5. Mosaics
6. Calligraphy
7. Pottery
8. Photography
9. Art History
10. Art Education
11. Digital Art
12. Video Art



13. Performance Art
14. Music
15. Dance
16. Theatre
17. Architecture

Characteristics of Fine Arts

Creativity

As above discussed **the basic quality of Fine Arts has to be creativity**, that is the basic requirement which helps a person to perceive and direct them towards expression. **Creativity helps artists to generate new idea, and develop a new language to express oneself. Creativity is also related to uniqueness of the expression and originality of the idea.** Therefore creativity is discussed as an act, idea or product that changes an existing value system.

Imagination

As the field of fine arts is related to the creation of an image thus imagination becomes the basic aspect of fine arts. In Fine arts image is created through words, sound, body movements, lines, colours and so on. For this one has to have a capacity to imagine and develop a language beyond the imitation of the nature. Thus here the meaning of Imagination is the process of image creation, selection and execution.



It is best said by Wordsworth (famous British Romantic Poet) that, “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful Imagination” while describing poetry.

Expression

Definition of Fine arts is very much based on the idea that human being has faculty to feel and express abstract ideas which are beyond the basic needs of survival. Thus the need to express and create art became the basic human trait. **In the field of fine arts the artist expresses his/her own emotions in a unique manner which has an individualistic interpretations and observations.**

In Fine Arts emotions are expressed through the gestures, postures, facial expressions, colours, change of pitch in volume and colours, movement of lines, use of space and through the manipulation of the medium also.

Originality

Originality basically means a kind of work which is neither copied from anywhere, nor based on any other work. **Originality is a prerequisite quality for calling any object as work of art.**

Expressed Idea in any form of art has to be an original idea than only it is considered as an artistic expression. **In fine arts originality is related to the personal expression, stylistic aspect of each individual and**



extension of the meaning of an idea beyond the existing interpretations.

Earlier originality was also related to the creation of original images but in present time when one is bombarded with so many of images it is very difficult therefore it is now shifted to the originality of the personal interpretations of those images.

Purpose of Fine Arts

The purpose of the fine arts is in first place to create an object of art itself. That is what is related to the purity of the field of art and the meaning of 'Fine' in fine arts. This aspect only developed after 18th Century before than that the purpose of art was in spreading of the different aspects of religions, to portray the Imperial power, to decorate the palaces, religious places and so on.

After 18th Century the purpose of fine arts became to create an art object which will enhance aesthetical and philosophical faculties of the audience. With the advent of museum the purpose of art became to elevate the cultural aesthetics.

After the advent of modernism in art artist's personal expression on the different aspects of the world is also considered as the purpose of art that's why the idea of 'avant garde' came in vogue. **Avant Garde refers to the people or works of art which represents experimentation, innovation and pushing off the boundaries and reject the accepted norms.** It is also related to the forceful social or political edge.



As the definitions of the artists got related to the concepts like 'flaneur', dandy, the purpose of fine arts got related to the question that why one artist wants to paint certain issues and what are the purpose of those art works. Therefore the two types of thinking developed in the field of art and art history i.e.

- 1. Art for Art Sake : that means the only purpose of art is to create a work of art.**
- 2. Art for Social Cause: that means art has to have a role in changing the society. Thus the purpose of art is here related to the sociological development.**

In 19th century with advent of utilitarianism, psychology, pedagogy the purpose of art also got related to the field of education. The field of art education or art integrated education started stressing on the concept of education related with 'multiple intelligence'. With this developed the concept of education beyond logic and linguistic knowledge system and concentrating more on the problem solving capacity through different knowledge domains like rhythm, spatial and kinesthetic.

In recent the time the purpose of fine arts has shifted to the expression of identity of an artist, interpretation of the space in which fine arts is presented, critique on the knowledge transmitted from social institutions, cultural institutions, and art institutions and so on. This has also developed the critique on the basic distinction between Fine Arts and functional arts.



Fine Arts and Visual Culture

In recent times in educational field various institutions have opted for study of visual culture than the study of art. This has developed a serious discussion on the interpretation of images, creation of images and its difference with decoding of the meaning of an image. Because the study of fine arts involves the depictive and expressive qualities of a work of art and the visual cultural studies decode the images through other literary, pictorial, informative and symbolic references.

Relationship between fine arts and visual culture is also related to the development of the concept of art as 'text' in Postmodernist discourse. Where it is considered that in this time of visual media a possibility to create an 'original' image and to maintain a purity of the fine arts has reduced tremendously. So a work of art can only become a reading of the existing visual images in the society. But this does not take in consideration the expressive manipulations of the material, colour, image, space, line and many other visual elements.

Fine Arts and its Market

Even though the field of fine arts is only related to the pure aspect of the creation of an art object slowly the valuation of the art object and its market developed in 19th Century Europe and has flourished into a huge field of marketing, art dealing, auction, patronization, collection, and so on.



The basic criteria for the valuation of the work of art was set as the aesthetical and charismatic power a work of art would create on the person who will possess it. It is more related to the emotional belonging of the possessor with the work of art and the artist. Thus it is more based on the cultural and historical value of a work of art not on the material, skill, time used in the creation of a work of art.

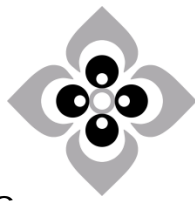
This has given rise to the other related field of studies like, curatorial practice, art management, art dealing and so on.

What is Functional Art

Functional art is basically considered as an art with utilitarian purpose. So it includes the functional objects that are of high artistic value and great craftsmanship. While the terms "fine" or "high" art typically apply to works that carry an intellectual and emotional sensibility, functional art infuses these aesthetic ideals into things that you might never have expected to view as art like knife, locks and so on.

The functional art object creates aesthetical beauty in the simple day to day life as it involves highest quality of craftsmanship. The functional art make us to rethink the way we look at the ordinary things by using the different material, different design, different utilitarian purpose.

Many time applied art and functional art is used as synonymously. As in both cases the design and



aesthetical qualities are applied to the everyday objects. The other term is also used is decorative art.

Different types of Functional Art

As functionality and aesthetical beauty is the basis of functional art it will include any functional object which is beautiful and have the perfect balance of functional purpose and aesthetical appeal.

Functional art will include:

1. Jewellery
2. Craft
3. Furniture
4. Knitting
5. Stitching
6. Fashion
7. Flower decoration
8. Automobile design
9. Pottery
10. Ceramics
11. Dress designing
12. Illustration
13. Advertisement
14. Book designing
15. Puppets



16. Shoes Design
17. Bag Designing
18. Weaving
19. Toy Designing
20. Textile
21. Wood work
22. Batik
23. Block print
24. Tie and dye

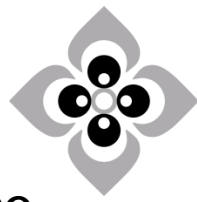
Characteristics of Functional Art

Utilitarian

Every manmade object has a purpose behind it as it is created by someone who has put his/her energy, time and expertise in its creation. This purpose is either related to the 'applied', 'utilitarian' or 'theoretical', 'conceptual'. **Utilitarian or applied purpose of any functional art object is the basic criteria to recognize it as functional art object.**

Here **the design is dependent on the utilitarian value of the particular object.** Issues like when it is used, why it is used, who will use it, for what purpose it will be used become necessary enquiries in creating the aesthetical quality of the functional art object.

Participatory act of a Culture



As every object of function art is related to the socio-cultural activities of human being therefore it involves in the participatory act of culture. It helps us to keep our memories alive and create new meaning for the coming generation. Let us look at the use of certain functional arts like pottery in the socialization, rituals, sacraments, daily life and so on. Even if with the introduction of the studio pottery it has become a part of home decorations then also we take out the pride possessions at the special occasions. Different rituals have different pots of clay, metal or ceramics. On day to day basis we use different pots different cooking purposes. These are the aspects which express the cultural values as well as create new meanings to those values.

Detailed understanding of material

Detailed understanding of material is the most important aspect of functional art as its creator has to know the possibilities and limitations particular material. This only will help a creator to decide upon the form and design of the object. Like in fashion design a designer has to be aware of the texture of the fabric, fall of the fabric to design a dress.

Understanding of a material also includes the social, economic and cultural meaning of the material also. Because in every culture each material has some symbolic meaning attached to it.

Mastery in technical skill

While designing a particular functional art object artist has to well aware of the technical aspect



involved in that particular medium. That's the main reason that most design curriculum stress on the hand on technical experience for the students either in studio or in different places.

Purpose of Functional Art

Basic purpose of functional art is to create a formal beauty in a commonplace object. Functional art object always co relates with the needs of the society and therefore they work on the unification form and function in their art objects.

Functional art objects also infuse the artistic quality in the industrialized, mass produced objects. Thus it also helps to create an 'aesthetic taste' in daily life. That's the main reason why after independence Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru concentrated more on establishment of 'Indianness' or 'National Identity' in design and craft. That culminated into establishment National Institute of Design, Crafts Museum, Cottage Industry and many more institutions.

Many of the design scholars stress that the functional art is the major aspect of a society to maintain the values hold important for 'good life'. Thus create a 'quality of life' beyond day to day survival issues.

Historical Development in the meaning and field of Functional Art

As above discussed the whole **discussion about functional art started from 18th Century onward with the development of modern art, crafts movement, and the field of design.** In due course the meaning, concept and the field of functional art changed



continuously and the drastic change happened with the development of post modernism and the field of visual studies.

In Britain about 1840 the disastrous effects of industrial manufacture and unregulated trade had been recognised by the 1860s and 1870s that architects, designers and artists began to pioneer new approaches to design and the decorative arts. These, in turn, led to the foundation of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The two most influential figures were the theorist and critic John Ruskin and the designer, writer and activist William Morris. Ruskin examined the relationship between art, society and labour. Morris put Ruskin's philosophies into practice, placing great value on work, the joy of craftsmanship and the natural beauty of materials. William Morris stressed that the 'The artist should be a craftsman-designer'.

Art and Craft movement grew out of a concern for the effects of industrialisation: on design, on traditional skills and on the lives of ordinary people. In response, it established a new set of principles for living and working. It advocated the reform of art at every level and across a broad social spectrum, and it turned the home into a work of art.

So after this movement **the art and craft got directly related to the life of people in the form of design. This got more pronounced in 20th century after the establishment of Bauhaus School in Germany. The Bauhaus school was founded by Walter Gropius in Weimar.** The Bauhaus style became one of the most influential currents in Modernist architecture and modern



design. The Bauhaus had a profound influence upon subsequent developments in art, architecture, graphic design, interior design, industrial design, and typography.

The design innovations commonly associated with Gropius and the Bauhaus—the radically simplified forms, the rationality and functionality, and the idea that mass-production was reconcilable with the individual artistic spirit.

Many fundamental questions of craftsmanship vs. mass production, the relationship of usefulness and beauty, the practical purpose of formal beauty in a commonplace object, and whether or not a single proper form could exist, were discussed and became the focal point of the design education from the Bauhaus School onward.

Even if the concept of functional art developed from craft to the field of design in modern period and became a part and parcel of the study on what we call 'Modern Culture' the basic hierarchical relation between art, design and craft respectively existed. It was only questioned and critically rejected by the feminist artists like Judy Chicago, Miriam Schapiro (who incorporated craft techniques in their art works), feminist scholar Linda Nochlin through her article 'Why there have been no Great Women Artists?' and the artists from Africa, India, Australia and other cultures whose traditional art works were categorized as craft.

These all scholars defined this hierarchical relationship of art, design and crafts and thoroughly brought out the art field politics involved in these aspects. These studies clearly pointed out that how in Modernism the skill,



repetition, pattern making as the key aspects of craft and innovation, intellectualization, conceptualization became the key aspects of art and design and in turn the former become the feminine/ other culture's art form and the later become masculine/ center culture's art form. Therefore to question this categorization they started incorporating craft in the art works as well as the design and blurred these hierarchical relationships.

Functional Arts and Kitsch

In general terms Kitsch is defined as a form of art which has popular taste and is often of poor quality. The main quality of kitsch is considered to be the gaudiness and sentimentality.

Kitsch art has also been defined in 19th and 20th century art critical writing in connection to define what is 'Art'. It was also pitted against the 'Art' as it was catering to the popular taste not the aesthetic and philosophical demands fulfilled by 'Art', 'Fine Art'. Therefore in this context many of the scholars use functional art and Kitsch art as one and same. But every functional art form is not a Kitsch art just because it fulfills the popular taste.

Functional Art and the field of Design

Field of Design is a very new development in the field of art and it developed in the starting of modernism when the things were mass produced. **With the development of Art Nouveau and Art Deco in 19th Century the field of design got its quality and character.** It started in the field of architecture and interior design but later on developed in the field of dressing, vessels, textile



designing, automobile designing, book designing and so on.

Design is widely termed as applied art also that means applied aspect of the art in other field. **Bauhaus School of Design also established a concept that the 'mass-production was reconcilable with the individual artistic spirit'** and assigned creative aspect to the field of Design. Later on design became synonymous with functional art and sidelined its relation with the craft tradition. **Functional art got divided into 'machine made designed objects' and 'handmade craft objects'.**

Functional Art and its Market

Functional Art has a wide range of market as it is related with concept of 'good Living' where aesthetics sense in everyday utilitarian objects is important. This market involves various range of craft based markets, designer outlets, Co-operative societies those promote local traditional objects, cottage industries and so on.

Market of functional art also defines the cultural aspect of particular section of the society. Therefore it is an integral part of the 'Creative Industry'.