Chapter 5

The Artistic Personality: Prominent traits of artists

5.1 Context for this discussion

While going through the literature relating to mental ability, it became clear that through the decades of research, the line separating mental ability from affect and personality has got blurred. For example, Emery (1989) concluded that belief is a pivotal component of artistic thinking. Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2004) said that art judgment might comprise cognitive and non-cognitive elements. Ruthsatz et al. (2008) found that the predictive power of general intelligence for musical achievement increased substantially if domain skills and practice were added to the equation. This incursion of non-cognitive aspects into cognitive functioning was one of the reasons discussed in the literature review for the difficulties faced by researchers in identifying clear links between artistic ability and other mental abilities. More and more, we find that it is difficult to study artistic ability in isolation. The inquiry in this research was into the artistic mind. But in the previous chapter on the artistic mind, the nature of any intelligence itself included interest/preference, and opportunity in addition to pure ability. There were many other personality-related factors that also surfaced in the narratives and the biographies which were as important to defining the artist. Gardner (2008) says about the Creating mind, ‘…But I have come to believe that personality and temperament are equally and perhaps even more, important for the would-be creator (than knowledge and cognition). More than willing, the creator must be eager to take chances, to venture into the unknown, to fall flat on her face, and then smiling, pick herself up and once more throw herself into the fray.’ That this is probably true of the artistic personality also has emerged through this research.

At the beginning of this research project, I had steered clear of the literature on topics related to and overlapping artistry – such as creativity. The study of creativity is much wider than the study of artists. It includes, but is not limited to the study of the creative process, the creative product, the creative person and the creative environment. The domains it spans are not limited to the arts but envelop almost every field of human endeavor. Further, the study of creativity could involve everyday creativity as used by almost all people in their daily lives or exceptional creativity which moves an entire domain of human understanding forward as it were. At this point in the research, where I wish to share the themes and patterns around the artistic personality, I find the need to refer to some of the literature on creative personalities as a lot of the factors that emerge are the same. In a way, it appears that while the artistic mind is distinct (as outlined in the previous chapter using MI profiles) the artistic personality seems to be a sub-set of the creative
personality. The results of a study by Ivcevic and Mayer (2006) explain how this may be possible. In their study of undergraduate students in New Hampshire they found five clusters of people in their sample:

i. The *Conventional* people who scored below average scores on creative lifestyle, artistic creativity and scientific/ intellectual creativity (this was the second largest cluster in their sample)

ii. The *Everyday Creative* people who scored above average on creative lifestyle, but below average on artistic and intellectual creativity (this was the largest cluster in their sample indicating that everyday creativity is quite a common phenomenon)

iii. The *Artists* – who scored high on creative lifestyle as well as artistic creativity but low on scientific creativity

iv. The *Scholar* – who scored high on creative lifestyle and scientific creativity but low on artistic creativity

v. The *Renaissance People* who scored above average on all three types of creativity (this was very rare – only six people in a sample of 416)

Further, the found that the Artists were different from the others on the aspects of “creative role” (they see themselves as artists), trait hypomania (a combination of euphoric affect and energy level), openness to experience (taken from the Big Five theory), intrinsic motivation (enjoyment and challenge in the work) and intellectual curiosity and persistence (preference for new and complex material and persistence in the face of obstacles). In their research, the Artists group was no different from the Conventional types and the Everyday Creatives on the aspects of monetary risk, divergent thinking, and non-conformity. Scholars scored very differently compared to the other three groups on these factors.

The artistic personality seems entrenched in the larger construct of the creative personality, and before I share the themes emerging from the interviews and biographies, I discuss below some of the prominent research pertaining to the creative personality. The brief literature review on the creative personality summarizes the contribution of some of the major thinkers in the field and outlines some important ways of thinking about creativity that are relevant to this particular research. In the following section, the themes and concepts emerging from the interviews are detailed with support from the biographic data. The concepts are linked through hypotheses about the way the artistic personality works, just as several hypotheses were generated in the previous chapter on the artistic mind.
5.2. Overview of research on the creative personality

Creativity as a subject has fascinated those involved in the study of psychology since the very beginnings of the discipline itself. There are several ways to approach the study of creativity. It has become traditional to consider creativity from four different points – person, process, product and environment, and when dealing with one aspect, one invariably touches upon the other three too (Torrance, 1993). The focus in this segment is on major contributions to the links between creativity and personality – i.e. the person. Table 5.1 captures the highlights of the earlier research on the creative personality.

Creativity in psychology has long been considered an expression of the unconscious. According to Freud, “Imaginative creation like day-dreaming, is a continuation of and substitute of the play in childhood.” (Thomson Eds. 1999). It allows the artist to express repressed or forbidden material in a sophisticated manner so that the personal note is eliminated; whereby others can also access their own fantasies through it and experience pleasure – for which the artist reaps their admiration and gratitude. He has won therefore through fantasy what he could earlier only win in fantasy – honor, power and the love of women. In the language of Jung’s analytical psychology (Thomson Eds. 1999), the creative process, which is a living thing independent of the creator – is called an autonomous complex. This is a psychic formation that remains subliminal until its energy charge carries it over the threshold into consciousness. The creative complex appears and disappears in accordance with its own inherent tendencies and quite independent of conscious will. The assumption is that the work of art has its source not in the personal unconscious of the creative mind, but in the collective unconscious – which is the common heritage of mankind. The person who takes to the back alleys of life for some reason or other, encounters those psychic elements that have been banished from the main road of the times he/she lives in, and these elements that are awaiting their chance to play a part in the life of the collective emerge through the artist’s work.

Apart from these early generic theories of human psychological functioning that addressed the issue of creativity, there are several scientists who focused specially on cognitive qualities in people including creativity. These views of creativity are more defined, measurable by clearly constructed tools. Guilford (1958) studied the intellectual abilities involved in creative thinking and was the first to operationalize creativity through a series of tests. He developed the concept of divergent thinking which he said involves ‘searching around or changing direction’, and although not all divergent thinking may be classified as creative, it is certainly understood to be a key component of creativity. His tests focus on various aspects of divergent thinking such as Fluency (number of ideas generated), Flexibility, Originality and Complexity/ elaboration. In addition to these intellectual aspects, his research also threw up several motivational and temperamental correlates of creativity. Specifically, he found that:
The Fluent thinker is more likely to be impulsive, self-confident and less neurotic.

The Flexible thinker is likely to feel the need for variety and enjoy reflective thinking.

The more Original person is likely to be self-confident and tolerant of ambiguity, enjoy reflective and divergent thinking and aesthetic expression.

An individual with low Originality is likely to be over-meticulous and feel a strong need for discipline and its enforcement.

He adds the disclaimer that these correlates emerged from psychological tests and that the relationship between these variables in real life might be quite different. Another major contributor to creativity is E. Paul Torrance, who created the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (1966). These tests develop on Guilford’s work and have been widely used to measure creativity.

In fact, the work by Torrance and his associates is probably the most systematic assessment of creativity covering several thousand school children. Torrance (1970) discusses some of the prominent studies that looked at individual differences in creativity among high school children. He describes a study by Holland (1961) which reported that creative students more often than not are only children, plan to get advanced degrees, have high scores on Independence of Judgment, Mastery, Deferred Gratification, Initiative, Physical Activity and Intellectuality scales and low scores on Responsibility and Status scales. While the students rated themselves high on Originality, Independence and Perseverance, their fathers valued Curiosity and their mothers were more agreeable than irritable. Another study he discusses by Parloff and Datta (1965) focuses on the most creative students from the Westinghouse Talent Search Competition, where they were characterized as more independent, autonomous, self-reliant, having broad interests, more efficient, clear thinking, planful, more perceptive, resourceful and rebellious towards rules and constraints, more imaginative and impatient and less like the typical respondent of the test. With reference to Getzels and Jackson’s (1962) study, he describes the creatives as enjoying risk and uncertainty, creating fantasy productions that use more stimulus free themes, unexpected endings, humor and playfulness. Drew’s (1963) Creative Intellectuals that he includes in his survey describes students with high achievement test scores, but with lower school grades than other groups. These students were not and did not desire to be leaders in the high school setting, they were fluent and original, often asking below the surface or in some cases even below-the-belt kind of questions. This group was found to thrive on free choice, and while they seem to care deeply about mankind, they rarely formed the usual teenage love attachments. They were more concerned with process than product and saw education as a continuing process. Citing his own earlier research with Dauw (1965, 1966), Torrance describes the creative students as more freedom oriented than control oriented. Among the creative students, the high originals were more concerned about ridicule, restrictions of freedom and pressures of time, whereas the high elaborators were more concerned about failure and inability to meet the expectations of their
parents/ peers. The former group tended to cope with this stress by changing projects while the latter group frequently resorted to withdrawal, sleeping, eating and drinking more than usual. All the creative groups expressed stronger creative motivations, a greater striving for excellence, a greater attraction to unusual jobs and more discontent when compared to a sample of unselected high school seniors.

Barron (1966) in a study of fifty six professional writers and ten creative writing students outlined the components of the creative writer’s personality. His data showed that creative writers possessed superior verbal intelligence compared to captains in the United States Air Force\(^1\), high scores on the Barron-Welsh Art Scale (although lower than visual artists and creative architects), and gave significantly more original responses on the Symbol Equivalence test compared to any other group. They also had high scores on the pathological indices of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and on the California Psychological Inventory, they scored high on flexibility, self-acceptance, social presence, achievement through independence and psychological mindedness. They scored low on good impression, achievement through conformance, communality and socialization. An unusually high number of creative writers (40%) also reported experiences of mystic communion with the universe. In terms of motivation, there seemed to be some more philosophic purpose to their work, as it emerged through projective tests such as the TAT and the Rorschach.

Almost without exception, they suffered hardships which included criticism from family and friends, intense self-doubt, financial adversity, sacrifice of important relationships and even public censure or ridicule. Although the mature writers were mostly past this stage during the study, some of them still did odd jobs to make a living like the writer who was working in a gymnasium or occasionally as a dockhand, and another who made a living typing term papers for undergraduates. At the other extreme, some novelists were earning in millions, but for all of them the financial question was secondary. All the groups of creative individuals that Barron and his colleagues studied earned their lowest scores on the economic scale of the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey scale of values. Barron therefore concludes by saying that creative writers are those whose dedication is a quest for ultimate meaning, and in that they are no different from creative individuals in all walks of life.

Barron’s (1972) book The Artist in the Making is a major contribution to the understanding of creativity, especially of the personality correlates of creativity. Barron and his colleagues collected a large amount of data from groups of artists in different disciplines. Their approach is psychometric and the findings echo a lot of the points discussed above in the case of the creative writer.

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\(^1\) This he says is attenuated by the fact of a homogenous sample – when creativity ratings are obtained of a highly select group, then the correlation with verbal intelligence is zero.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect of personality</th>
<th>Summary of research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity as an expression of the unconscious</td>
<td>Freud spoke of creativity as personal wish-fulfillment through fantasy whereas Jung spoke of creativity as an expression of the collective unconscious (Thomson Eds. 1999)</td>
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</table>
| Personality traits of creative people | - Creativity positively related to impulsiveness, self-confidence, need for variety, reflective thinking, tolerance of ambiguity, and negatively related to neuroticism, over-meticulousness, need for discipline (Guilford, 1958)  
- Creative intellectuals more fluent and original and thrive on free choice (Drew, 1963)  
- Creative people score high on Independence of Judgment, Mastery, Deferred Gratification, Initiative, Physical Activity and Intellectuality scales and score low on Responsibility and Status scales (Holland, 1961)  
- Creative people more independent, autonomous, self-reliant, having broad interests, efficient, clear thinking, planful, perceptive, resourceful, rebellious towards rules and constraints, imaginative and impatient (Parloff and Datta, 1965)  
- Creatives enjoy risk and uncertainty, creating fantasy productions that using more stimulus free themes, unexpected endings, humor and playfulness (Getzel’s and Jackson, 1962)  
- Creative students more freedom oriented, greater striving for excellence, greater attraction to unusual jobs and greater discontent (Torrance and Dauw, 1965, 1966)  
- flexibility, self-acceptance, social presence, achievement through independence and psychological mindedness. They scored low on good impression, achievement through conformance, communality and socialization (Barron, 1966)  
- exemplary creators are self-confident, alert, hardworking, unconventional, and committed obsessively to their work (Gardner, 1993)  
- 10 characteristics present in creative people in a sort of dialectical tension: energy-rest, smart-naive, playfulness-discipline, fantasy-reality, extroverted-introverted, humble-proud, masculine-feminine, rebellious-conservative, passionate-objective and suffering-enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996)  
- Willingness to overcome obstacles, take sensible risks, tolerate ambiguity, grow into the next idea and belief in oneself (Sternberg, 2006)  
- Reserved, tough-minded, experimenting, self-dependent (Pathak, 1989)  
- Social adjustment, personal adjustment, achievement motivation and extraversion greater for creative students while general anxiety and exam anxiety was lower (Rethi Devi,1993) |
| Motivation | - More philosophic purpose to the work of creative writers and the financial question was secondary (Barron, 1966)  
- Intrinsic motivation – it is not that they find all the tasks enjoyable as they decide to find something interesting about it (Sternberg, 2006)  
- High creatives have more theoretical (abstract, intellectual) values and significantly higher scores on aesthetic value (Pathak, 1989) |
| Creative achievement | - Originality is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for creative achievement and psychotism is an important link between the two (Eysenck, 1993)  
- Creative achievement possible only after committing to a domain and putting in several years of hard work (Gardner, 1993) |
| Life circumstances and choices of creative people | - Creative students are often only children, plan to get advanced degrees with fathers who value curiosity and mothers who are agreeable (Holland, 1961)  
- Creative intellectuals display high achievement test scores, but lower school grades, do no desire to be leaders, cared deeply about mankind, rarely formed teenage love attachments, more concerned with process and saw education as a continuing process. (Drew, 1963)  
- Creative writers suffered hardships including criticism, intense self-doubt, financial adversity, sacrificed important relationships (Barron, 1966)  
- Creators went through periods of great creative tension and periods of despondency, depression or even nervous breakdowns (Gardner, 1993) |
It has however been criticized for being static, not throwing much light on the process of becoming an artist despite the use of interviews in addition to the personality tests. In addition, it has been described as reporting a great deal of valuable data, but not rooted in any theory, so that the interconnecting links in the data are not explored (Beittel [1973], Ennis [1974]). This is of course, one of the pitfalls of the psychometric approach, but there is no denying Barron’s contribution to creativity and the study of the arts.

Eysenck (1993), on reviewing earlier studies that examine the distribution of originality as trait and the distribution of creative achievement says that the originality distribution is normal, whereas the creative achievement distribution is J shaped, indicating that the top few people in a domain are the ones who are most prolific, contributing several times more than their colleagues at the bottom of the spectrum. The interpretation he offers for the relationship between originality and creative achievement is that originality is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for creative achievement. The bridge between the two, he says comprises of cognitive variables, personality variables and environmental variables. In terms of these bridge variables, Eysenck argues that creative individuals tend to be high on psychoticism (a dispositional trait underlying the development of psychotic symptoms). He also cites evidence to say that creative people tend to be lower on the Extroversion scale and higher on the Neuroticism scale compared to their less creative counterparts. This is not to say that they are mentally unwell. Instead, it implies certain behaviors on the part of these people such as being independent, less conforming, more impulsive, less socially restrained, impersonal, egocentric, tough-minded, etc. He also says clearly that psychoticism by itself will not make an original person achieve creative output. There are many other factors including intelligence and skill in the arts/ sciences required to produce that output, but the ‘P’ score is an important link in the chain.

Gardner’s (1993) conceives a triangular dynamic relationship between the individual within himself/ herself (Relation between the Child and the Adult Creator), between the individual and his/ her work (Relation between the Creator and His or Her Work) and between the individual and society (Relation between the Creator and Others). This concept builds on Csikszentmihalyi’s earlier work which cites the relationship between the creator, the domain and the field. Based on his analysis of seven creative geniuses (Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Eliot, Stravinsky, Graham and Gandhi) Gardner says that each of them had distinct intellectual strengths – Freud and Eliot were scholastic in their turn of mind, whereas Picasso was weak at academics. His strength was spatial and bodily intelligence while Graham seems to have broad intellectual strengths that she only fully applied in her dance. Gandhi and Stravinsky seem to have been indifferent students, but their average performance could be attributed to lack of interest. The common thread that Gardner finds among six of these seven individuals is that they became distinguished in their fields only after committing to a domain and putting in a good deal of work and time; Picasso being the only one who came close to the concept of a child prodigy. With regard to their personality, Gardner
says that the findings seem to conform to earlier research according to which exemplary creators are self-confident, alert, hardworking, unconventional, and committed obsessively to their work. Social life or hobbies are almost immaterial representing very little of the creator’s work time. Gardner cautions against viewing this description too positively since self-absorption merges with egotism and narcissism among other problematic personality variables. Another notable characteristic that he describes is the special amalgam of the childlike and the adult-like. In some cases this childlike feature is positively tinged due to the innocence and freshness of the idea/expression, but in other cases it could be negatively tinged such as when the feature is selfishness or retaliation. Other personality features that Gardner highlights pertain to the display of emotion – some of the individuals like Picasso, Graham and Freud being direct while others preferred to express through their work – such as Eliot, Gandhi, Einstein. Virtually all the creators studied went through periods of great creative tension, when they were ‘under siege’, and went through periods of despondency, depression or even nervous breakdown.

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) is another major contributor to the field of creativity research. With reference to the personality of the creative individual, he pulls together a lot of research to show that creative individuals tend to show opposing tendencies that are usually segregated in other people. Their personalities are complex and they contain contradictory extremes. There are ten characteristics that he says are present in the creative person in a sort of dialectical tension:

i. Energy – Rest: Creative people have much physical energy especially when they are pursuing their goals. At the other extreme, the same individuals are not always ‘on’; there are periods of withdrawal and reflection and they even sleep a lot. The key is that they seem to control this flow of energy instead of being led by calendars or clocks

ii. Smart – Naïve: On one hand, creative people seem to have a good measure of general intelligence. But they are also able to be childish in their curiosity. They manage to do well both convergent and divergent thinking, which are opposite ways of thinking

iii. Playfulness – Discipline: There is no question that a playfully light attitude is typical of creative individuals, but this is accompanied by a doggedness, a willingness to persevere and put in a great deal of hard work

iv. Fantasy – Reality: They are able to take a leap of imagination into a world that is different from the present, and this leap is accompanied by an ability to go beyond the present and create a new reality not only for themselves, but eventually for others too

v. Extroverted – Introverted: Usually considered dichotomous, both these characteristics are to be found in creative people. They value the time that they spend alone to develop their work, and are also able to interact enough with others to convince them about it

vi. Humble – Proud: They are well aware of where they stand, so while they take a lot of pride in their work, they also know the role that luck played in their accomplishments,
and the preference seems to be for looking forward to new challenges than dwelling on past achievements

vii. Masculine – Feminine: creative individuals are likely to be androgynous; having the strengths of their own gender as well as some of the strengths of the opposite sex as well. Therefore, they can be strong, yet nurturing, sensitive, yet rigid, dominant, yet submissive regardless of their own gender

viii. Rebellious – Conservative: It is not possible to be creative without first having internalized a domain, which requires conforming and following laid down rules. But they are also willing to take risks, to play a less safe game, so that something new may come out of their efforts

ix. Passionate – Objective: Most creative people are extremely passionate about their work. At the same time, they can be objective about it, evaluating its strengths and weaknesses at a distance

x. Suffering – Enjoyment: Their openness and risk taking often exposes them to pain and criticism, yet when a creative person is working in his/ her area of expertise, worries and cares fall away and he/ she experiences a state of bliss

According to the investment theory of creativity developed by Sternberg et al. (Sternberg 2006), Creativity (with a capital C) requires a confluence of six distinct but inter-related resources:

i. Intellectual skills/ intelligence
ii. Knowledge – which can both enhance and inhibit creativity
iii. Thinking styles – which is a preference to think in new ways
iv. Motivation – intrinsic motivation being the hallmark of creative people. It is not so much that they find the tasks they undertake enjoyable as much as they decide to find something interesting about it
v. Environment – that is supportive of creative enterprise
vi. Personality – including
   a. willingness to overcome obstacles
   b. willingness to take sensible risks
   c. willingness to tolerate ambiguity
   d. self-efficacy, belief in oneself
   e. willingness to grow or move on to the next idea

These six factors interact in a complex manner – there might be threshold requirements for some such as knowledge, compensation for lack of one (say environment) by another (motivation), and multiplicative effects of one factor with another may operate.
Creativity research in India has been active, although a lot of it is derivative, based on the work of western psychologists such as those mentioned above. It would be difficult to find a piece of research that does not draw on the work of Guilford or Torrance and more recently Sternberg, Gardner or Csikszentmihalyi. This is understandable given the roots of the word ‘creativity’ are steeped in western philosophy and religion. Creativity is seen as having divine origin and it was during the Age of Enlightenment that focus shifted to individual creativity (Niu and Sternberg 2007). Novelty is very much a part of this new definition of individual creativity. An investigation into the Chinese lexicon by Niu and Sternberg showed that the word for creativity in Chinese, ‘chuang zao li’ appears to be a translation from the English and not very prevalent in use until the late 19th century. The early Chinese believed in ‘natural creativity’ instead of divine creativity and the origin of everything is attributed to changes in the yin-yang balance. An alternate Chinese theory looks upon the Five Agencies (water, fire, wood, earth and metal) as important in the creation process.

Similarly, the closest word in the Sanskrit based Hindi language for creative is ‘Srijanatmak’ or ‘Rachnatmak’, ‘Srijan’ or ‘Rachna’ being the root word meaning creation. The closest single word for creative person is ‘kalakaar’ meaning artist. Traditional Indian philosophy, like Chinese philosophy, does not give too much importance to creating. Instead, the emphasis is on discovery and consciousness both in the sciences and the arts. The idea here is not to delve deeply into the etymology of creativity and related words. It is to find an explanation for the predominance of the western individualized view of creativity, even in studies conducted in India. Given the origins of the concept, it is natural that research studies in India also follow the line of western research. In trawling through the literature, a couple of Indian studies I chanced upon, which are relevant to the discussion on the creative personality, are described below.

Pathak (1989) in a quantitative study done on 408 undergraduate students in Patna using Wallach-Kogan’s battery of creative instruments and the 16PF, found a statistically significant correlation between creativity scores and the tendency to be reserved. He also found that the high creative subjects were significantly more tough-minded (which contrasts earlier findings on this relationship which suggest that creative individuals are more tender-minded), more experimenting on the conservative-experimenting factor, and self-dependent as against group-dependent. Further, he found no difference in the home, health, social and emotional adjustment of the creative students compared to the low creative students. Interestingly, there was a difference in educational adjustment, with the high creative students leaning towards poorer adjustment. This relationship was found to be dependent on intelligence, which makes sense in an educational environment that focuses more on intelligence rather than creativity. Pathak in his study considered the relationship between creativity and values and found the high creatives to have systematically more theoretical (abstract, intellectual) values and significantly higher scores on aesthetic value. There was no impact of background factors such as birth order, parent’s income,
and parent’s profession. A larger proportion of the high creative students (140) belonged to the humanities and came from upper castes (139). This finding however has to be tempered by the fact that majority of the students who participated in the study were from the humanities (250) and the upper castes (268).

Rethi Devi (1993) found that four personality variables correlated positively with creativity. These are Social Adjustment, Personal Adjustment, Introversion-Extroversion, and Achievement Motivation. Another two variables General Anxiety and Examination Anxiety correlated negatively with creativity. The first four variables significantly discriminated between the High Creative, Average Creative and the Low Creative groups. This study also was conducted in an educational context among high school students in Kerala. Like the two studies quoted above, a majority use definitions and tools that come from Western thought. There are a few researchers of late developing theories of creativity grounded in Indian philosophy, but as yet it is in a stage of development and the body of knowledge surrounding these theories need a lot more data and debate before questions get clarified. An example of some recent work in creativity is quoted below.

Panda (in Cornellisen, Misra and Varma Eds. 2011) discussing the question of whether the Indian artist a lone genius says that in Indian texts, the artist has been variously referred to as a *sadhaka, mantrin or yogin* (someone who perseveres towards spiritual insight, a seeker). The artist is expected to proceed to a solitary place and follow certain rituals rigidly so as to contact the psychic truth within, engage with imagination and harness intuitive knowledge. The Indian view of creativity has always emphasized the intuitive and imaginative aspects of the process. In that it is similar to the western view of the ‘lone genius’. However, in the western conception, ‘social’ is treated as the binary opposite of ‘lone’, which is not the case in the Indian idea. The Indian view of creativity, she says, incorporates the individual, spiritual and social aspects as a fusion. The Indian notion of creativity emphasizes relational, social and interpersonal aspects rather than cognitive, analytical and utilitarian as in the case of western theory. The same issues that surround the study of psychology in India and views on intelligence, discussed earlier in the literature review, apply to the study of creativity. Can we refer to the Vedic view and call that Indian? How applicable is that in today’s context? In an urban context, where the current generation of people has almost without exception been exposed to a western education, will traditional notions of creativity persist? Anchoring the Indian view of creativity itself is going to take several more cycles of knowledge generation, sharing and application. Add to that the fact that the method of sharing knowledge through print is a fairly recent trend in India, our tradition being a predominantly oral one, it explains why our notions of creativity in the research context are still in flux, and they are now being discovered/developed in contrast to the Western tradition. For the moment, we park the discussion on creativity here and take a look at the data which echoes a lot of the same personality factors that have been highlighted in the available literature.
5.3. Themes emerging from the data

The concepts that emerged in the data pertaining to the artistic personality by and large had to do with personality traits of the artist. The one theme that did not fit into the same category as traits had to do with identity and has accordingly been dealt with separately. Identity of the creative person is not something that earlier research seems to have addressed directly. Perhaps the unstructured nature of this inquiry was instrumental in permitting this theme to emerge. The data does not contradict what the literature says about the creative personality, but I believe what it contributes to understanding the artist’s identity is something new. The first part of the discussion covers the matter of artistic identity and the latter part discusses the personality traits that emerged from the data. The interview narratives are used as a primary data to build the construct and data from the biographies is used to support the categories that emerge.

5.3.1. Artistic Identity. One of the criteria for inclusion in the study was that each research participant be identified as an artist – by people in general, by art-related forums/ spaces, by critics, by the definitions of artistic domains spelled out by apex bodies for arts management, and most importantly by the artist himself/ herself. A question about this identity posed somewhere at the beginning of the interview session led to some interesting reflections. While the research participants acknowledged that they were artists, they still were reluctant to label themselves as ‘musician’ or ‘dancer’ or ‘poet’ and so on. Instead their identities were expressed in the present continuous using verbs or in terms of the domain that they practice in. Table 5.2 shows the verbatim phrases that the interviewees used to describe their identity.

Of the 21 participants, only Anjan (Photojournalist), Pavan (Cinematographer, Theatre Director) and Cyrus (Sculptor) have used definite labels by which to be identified. All the others describe their identities as a process rather than a fixed quantity. Contrast this to Sameer who describes himself as an engineer and Rajesh who says that he is an accountant. Sandhya is a little less categorical. She says, ‘I write, so I suppose I am a journalist…but I don’t see myself that way.’ While Rajesh and Sameer are clear that they are not ‘into the arts’, Sandhya, who is as yet only 27 years old, does not rule out the possibility of becoming an artist in the years to come. I do not believe that the artists were being unnecessarily humble in describing themselves. Most of the definitions that came up were the product of discussion, explanation and disclaimers. It is just that boundaries of their identities are really fluid. There seems to be a thin and porous veil between the artist and the art form, between the artist and the creative work that they do, between one kind of art that they practice and another, between their roles as artists and other roles that they perform in their lives.
Table 5.2: Verbatim phrases used by artists to describe their identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Identity</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Divya</td>
<td>Music and Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rajeev</td>
<td>Make positives out of negatives, photography is my way of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anjan</td>
<td>Photojournalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dinesh</td>
<td>Photography, a person of taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Venkat</td>
<td>Wannabe musician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Amrita</td>
<td>Identity is being recreated every moment, I have no boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Avik</td>
<td>Trained film-maker, do a lot of writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Pavan</td>
<td>Cinematographer and theatre director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Anagha</td>
<td>I write poems, I know myself as a seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Shiva</td>
<td>Plays mridangam, not mridangam artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Anurag</td>
<td>Run a design studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Neela</td>
<td>Have collaborated with Anurag for the last 7 years or so, Am a creative person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Prema</td>
<td>Pottery and ceramics is the course that I have done. I do a lot of designing with terracotta and a lot of work on the potter’s wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Soumita</td>
<td>Performing arts, Education, Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Siddharth</td>
<td>I write songs and I sing. I love performing especially my own songs with a band or as an individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Geeta</td>
<td>Flute, music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Gayatri</td>
<td>…I started performing again, but mainly I have grown a lot as a teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Soumya</td>
<td>Day job is education, but I also work in theatre… so Education and Theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Cyrus</td>
<td>Sculptor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Anil</td>
<td>Dance, Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Amey</td>
<td>Fine art…the drawing painting part has got stuck with me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the same time, it is not a weak identity. The picture that they have of themselves is crystal clear in their minds, which is reflected in the detailed explanations that they had to offer when describing this picture. Their identities as artists dominate the format of their lives and their relationships with others.

Even Soumita, who is pursuing a dual career, says, ‘Dance is not the center of my life, but I cannot imagine a life without performing.’ Geeta, who has faced conflicting demands from other roles such as being a wife and mother, says, ‘I congratulate myself on balancing between life and art…music has always come to my rescue in difficult times.’ This conflict of roles appears to occur only with female artists. Gayatri too had to take a break from her dance while her two daughters were young. Divya gets a lot of help from her parents and husband in dealing with conflicting role demands (her family sees her as an artist first, which is different than the other three women who married non-artists). Amrita, Anagha and Prema are married to fellow artists, and Neela is engaged to an artist too. Presumably, partnering another artist increases understanding and acceptance of the artistic identity and might reduce conflict in roles. Male artists, even those with non-artistic partners only spoke of the support extended by their wives to the practice of their art – such as Cyrus, Shiva and Amey who specially mentioned this point. Overall, a significant one third of the group (seven artists), were unmarried at the time of the interviews. The point here is not to highlight the gender differences in artistic identity. It is to stress the dominance of the artistic identity in an individual’s life. The identity is just as strong for
men and women. It is just that, understandably, this powerful identity produces more conflict for women than it does for men. Another important point about artistic identity is that it is chosen by the individual himself/herself, it is not a role prescribed by society or any external force. A more detailed exploration of this aspect is undertaken in the next chapter – the Artistic Choice. Based on the data we see that the artistic identity is fluid, continuous, powerful and self-defined, leading to the following hypothesis:

*Identity for the artist is more fluid than for non-artists. It tends to be expressed in processual terms or in descriptions of their artistic line of work rather than nouns such as “executive”, “soldier”, “scientist”, “accountant”, etc. It is continuous and self-defined. For the most part it dominates their overall sense of identity even where they perform other roles or even have other jobs or careers.*

A quick look at the data from the biographies also supports this although the data is very sparse and indirect. Bhimsen Joshi said during the later part of his life, about his being a musician, ‘I am still a shagird. I have a long way to go.’ He was born for music and identified himself with the process of music all his life. Kelucharan Mohapatra defines himself and his art more spiritually. He said, ‘I pray and others call it dance.’ For him too dance was the dominant theme in life despite being multi-talented as a musician, painter and generally in stagecraft. M.F. Hussain was another one born to his art. Legend has it that he never redid a brushstroke. His identity as an artist was so dominant, that there is little actual information on Hussain the man. There are rumors and hearsay about his life, but it has been difficult for biographers to work past his identity as an artist. For MS Subbulakshmi, music was her destiny. This she knew and accepted at a very young age and continued her daily practice rigorously well into old age. She only stopped public performances after the death of her husband Sadasivam in 1997. Her husband is reported to have said in an interview that even in old age, MS does her hours of practice everyday like a young student. When Mrinalini Sarabhai was five years old, she apparently told her mother, ‘I am a dancer’; not *will be* a dancer, but *am*. Only she and R.K. Laxman had clear labels for their identities (his specific ambition was to be a political cartoonist and he defined himself by his work).

As far as the other artists are concerned, there is no clear data on how they described their identities, but there is no doubt that their identities as artists dominated their lives. It was only through the lens of their art that they saw themselves, and for each and every one of them, as is discussed in the next chapter on Artistic Choice, we see that this identity was self-defined. This kind of energy required to define one’s own identity presumes an underlying set of traits that characterize the artistic personality. Independence emerged as a major factor in almost all the
artists. But consider that it is a cluster of related traits that we are looking at and it is easier to understand artistic behavior.

5.3.2. Personality Traits of Artists. The traits that came through the data include Independence, Dealing with Uncertainty, Variety-seeking, Pride, Flow-oriented than structure oriented, Tenacity and Challenge, among others. Each of these labels is not water-tight and some incidents that participants shared involve more than one personality trait. But to the extent possible, the manifestation of each one in behavioral examples is discussed separately for clarity of the concept.

Independence: This factor of personality has been variously labeled independent minded, anchored on autonomy or motivated towards freedom. I have chosen the term independence to represent best what I mean by this factor. Artists, as it emerged in this research, like in many other earlier studies quoted in this chapter, tend to function independent of social approval, boundaries, rules and limitations. Their energy is something internally generated and managed and one of the biggest motivators for them is to be autonomous, in control of their own time and space. There is plenty of evidence in each of the interviews and biographies for this characteristic of self-will and its closely related cousin, freedom/ autonomy. Consider the data points where this characteristic has become evident.

Divya: Music is of my own choice, not what I got from my parents. In a performance even while watching a dance, my attention goes more into the music.

Anjan: I stayed for 2-3 years in RR’s house. I used to go regularly to the NCERT library, read a lot of books on photography and made handwritten notes (explaining that he is a self-taught photojournalist). I started an ad agency and I used to take photos for it and even got work, but it was hard… (when later looking for a job) I went and met the head of this agency and I told him I run an ad agency too. And luckily that day our ad had come in the paper next to one of theirs. So I did not get internship there (laughs).

Dinesh: I had to learn it (photography) the hard way. Nobody can teach you photography. You have to learn it.

Venkat: I don’t want to do a corporate job. I recently got an offer (a full time role with the same company where he is one of the directors), but I turned it down.

Amrita: I was the first one in our family to leave home (to pursue studies/ career).

Avik: Because I went to Rishi Valley and stayed away from home I could develop my interests independently. Once I knew that (about film being so important) I began to do a lot of reading and self taught…I joined science in college, but the quality of teaching was not good so I shifted mid-way to arts.

Anagha: On a Friday evening I was talking to AK and he said if a house is burning, you just get out (about quitting a teaching job), and so I did. I freelanced and did a lot of art-related writing.
Anurag: I have freelanced mostly…I always wanted to be by myself. Even when we collaborated, I used to do my own thing, even when not making money. Everybody assumed I would join engineering. There was lot of pressure, especially being the only boy child in the family – but I knew I was not interested. When I went to NID for interview..the place..I felt a sense of freedom. (That is why) I went to NID…I would like to do my own projects instead of only those commissioned by others/ clients

Neela: I did not want to do Fine Art (because of it being too rule bound and conventional). I heard that NID does not have exams. It was not a regular college experience. The environment was perfect. So I knew it was right for me

Prema: I wanted to be a doctor like my brother. But I did not really study in 12th. My father asked me if I was confident of giving the exam and I said no. so I went home for one year and wrote the exams only in the next year. Hostel experience was a must in our family after 12th, so we were responsible for what we were going to do in life...The first year in Pidilite as an employee was very frustrating, so I became a consultant.

Soumita: I have learnt from good Gurus but had to take complete charge of myself when I was 18-19 years old. That is when I started teaching. I thought I would make a career in Kathak, but it is very tough...they always want Guru to be along and I am very independent. Therefore dance as a full time performing career was not an option. In dance there is no guarantee that finances will be ok. I do not want to be financially dependent and I’d rather do it because I love it than for a return.

Soumya: I did not like the way the architecture course was taught so I dropped out…I am now developing a method, but I do not care for norms

Cyrus: Control over my time, personal life…the freedom is phenomenal (this is one of the reasons for which he became a full-time artist)...I have the privilege of not having a typical day

Anil: I spent 15 years at Nalanda, but I wanted to be a full-time dancer (so he left)

Amey: I felt that there was no one in the family who has done this. So each and every experience was new and even decisions were my own. I had no guide or promotional help...My focus is more on silhouette to show movement, hand gestures, etc. rather than through features (which was the fashion at the time he started)

Almost all the artists (the exceptions being Geeta and Shiva) were very clear that they never wanted to hold a regular 9-5 kind of job. Although some of them did hold salaried employment, it was temporary and invariably out of economic necessity. The earliest chance they got, the left their jobs to pursue their work. The reasons for this were often to do with wanting to control their own lives. Although Geeta, Shiva and Soumita (who works for her father’s institution) worked all their lives, they see their work as empowering, allowing them the freedom to pursue their art. As Shiva said, ‘I stayed (at SBI) for the sake of music.’ Freedom/ independence/ autonomy were therefore very important for all the artists interviewed. Even stronger data came through the biographies.

George quotes G Venkatachalam in his book to say that MS Subbulakshmi, at 13 years of age, ‘…was not a fragile child, but a strong silent girl….for a girl of thirteen, she had the will of a
woman of forty, and for a gay light hearted child of song, she was a bit self-willed and stubborn...she was no mere creature of her environment; she had an individuality of her own.' Years later, refusing a marital alliance for the second time, MS fled Madurai and came to live with Sadasivam (who was already married with two children at the time). Her move to Madras was followed by considerable domestic turmoil, involving police cases, even kidnapping and confinement, but she stood firm on what she wanted to do.  

Bhimsen Joshi knew his own mind whether on the personal front or the artistic one. His marriage to second wife Vatsala took place despite many objections from both families. It did not matter that one Guru proved unsatisfactory; he just found someone else. It did not matter that the tradition of his gharana (musical style) - the Kirana gharana to which he formally owes allegiance- dictated a particular kind of music; he sang what he chose to and how he chose to. He conducted experiments with Balamuralikrishna and MF Hussain and even sang in a duet with Manna Dey in the film Basant Bahar. It did not matter that India was under lockdown during the emergency, he still came to perform at a concert, inebriated. It was not so much that he was a rebel; he did not oppose tradition as much as function irrespective of it.

An early example of Kelucharan Mohapatra’s independent thinking was when he joined the local akhada (gymnasium) to learn Gotipua dance (a form of acrobatic and graceful dance) without the knowledge of his father. He trained there for three years or so until the age of nine when his father found out and put a stop to it. When he was 14, Kelu had a disastrous visit at his parents’ house. His father caught him with a pack of cards and thoroughly abused him calling him a gambler. The sensitive youth left the house at night and never returned while his father was alive. Kelu was a devoted disciple, even nursing his Guru Mohan Sundar Goswami through a severe illness. But he left his Guru due to an incident of misunderstanding. Defying his Guru’s censure against cinema, Kelu had gone one night to a screening of the film ‘Kangan’. Apart from having to face his teacher’s ire for disobeying orders, he was also suspected of theft by the family since he had the keys to the cupboard and was believed to be absconding. Devastated at being accused thus, he prostrated himself before his Guru and left his home forever.

M.F. Hussain’s work was unconventional challenging social and religious boundaries. He was not a rebel, but did things the way he wanted irrespective of prevailing mores. His distinctive appearance including going bare foot marked him as an eccentric, different from others around him. Friends recount how at his parties, they came across people from all strata; there would be

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2 The independence exhibited by MS in these instances is at contrast to her traditionalism and complete apparent submission to the will of her husband Sadasivam. At home, she was always the dutiful Hindu wife; simple, homely and always serving her husband. In an interview to Sruti Magazine, MS says about the role of Sadasivam in her life, ‘He has been everything for me since I came under his influence.' Perhaps her decision to marry was also a decision to surrender her independence in exchange for the protection of a man who cared about her welfare as a person and an artist.
critics, painters and even carpenters or other artisan. He is said to have made no distinction between people of all walks of life. They also tell about how he would fail to show up at his own exhibition or land up somewhere else where they were not expecting him. He seemed to follow his own mind, his own rhythm only. He said of his experiment with Bhimsen Joshi that it was not a very good piece of work. The painting was pre-sold, so there was not much to that. But he very candidly said that it was a failure, that Bhimsen sang and he painted but there was no connection between the two.

In contrast to his affection and generosity, Raj Kapoor was also a thorough egoist. He worked steadily towards whatever goal he had set his mind on – one of the first instances being where he confronted his father and refused to pursue formal education. As a child he was quite spoilt and always fought to get his way. Says Chandru Hingorani, ‘...he saw himself as supreme. He couldn’t believe he could do anything wrong. But after Joker, he was broken…’ He was eccentric and would turn up for the 9 am shoot at 2 pm keeping the entire cast and crew waiting. Similarly on one location shoot, he is said to have woken everybody up at 5 am and by the time they got ready for the shot, he was once more fast asleep. When Lata Mangeshkar was reluctant to sing ‘mein kya karun ram..’ in Bobby because of the double meaning in the lyrics, he was adamant that the song be sung as it is and by her alone. He had his way of course. RK was not past cajoling, persuading and making everything else subservient to the major goal of his cinematic vision.

When the editor of the Free Press Journal (his first regular job) asked R.K. Laxman to toe the line of the paper in the cartoon depictions, RKL handed in his resignation. In the Times of India, he worked as an illustrator, but wanted to be a political cartoonist. So one day, he boldly walked into the editor’s room and asked him if he could submit his cartoons to him only for his personal comments and feedback – this is how he finally got his break as political cartoonist for the Times. He recounts an incident where a veteran cartoonist advised him to drop the common man character about which RKL writes, ‘Not being in the habit of taking advice from anyone, I just carried on…’ During the time of emergency, he describes how he appealed to Mrs. Indira Gandhi about his plight as a cartoonist not being allowed to express his thoughts – for some time this worked and despite the general clamp down on the press, RKL was able to continue his work.

The biggest example of self will in Uday Shankar’s life was making the choice to leave painting and go on a dance tour with Anna Pavlova. He took a team full of novices on a tour of Europe the first time and by dint of his determination – he was himself instrumental in advising the musicians, designing costumes and sets and choreographing the dances – made the enterprise succeed in 1931. The one time his single-mindedness backfired on him was at Almora, when he insisted that his students join the Kalpana film project. It was one of the factors that led to the closing down of the center.

Control over their own time and resources, over their work, and over their relationships with others is an important part of being an artist. Freedom from structure, rules and external standards
is something they actively seek and design their lives for. In this research, there is no data comparing artists and non-artists on this variable, so it is difficult to say whether this is true only in the case of artists. Further, a values questionnaire or some other more structured data collection tool would probably help throw more light on this point. Since personality was not the main focus of this research, this aspect of investigation has to be left for some later study. However, the concept of independence and its properties as it emerged from the artists’ data has been summarized in Illustration 5.1.

**Illustration 5.1: Showing the conceptual properties of the personality trait of independence as it emerged in the artists’ group (interviews and biographies)**

*Dealing with uncertainty:* This variable is a combination of risk-taking and tolerance for ambiguity. Most of the artists interviewed have faced a good deal of instability in their lives, especially financial instability. More often than not, it was their choices that led to this kind of life. While they acknowledge that not all of it was pleasant, there seem to be no regrets about making these choices. Their statements are illustrative.

Rajeev embarked upon his career with Rs.3500/- in his pocket. He left Jamshedpur and came to Pune to join an undergraduate course of his choice involving photography. He said, ‘I travelled without reservation, got off at Ferguson and asked people where to stay…’ Of his later career, he
shared, ‘I was back in Mumbai in the year 2000 and was not getting any work. Those were tough times. Somehow I got the money for a computer together and started sending my pictures to a wish-list of people that I wanted to work with…out of necessity I had to do all kinds of photo shoots and now I am known for being versatile’ (smiles at the irony).

Dealing with uncertainty is definitely part of Anjan’s job as a photojournalist visiting war torn countries and even having near escapes from death. He said that perhaps when he was younger, he would have been more likely to take risks. But now he only takes risks that he considers are absolutely necessary. Anagha and Anil both left steady teaching jobs to pursue their art full time. The uncertainty involved does not seem to have mattered very much, though I am sure they had to handle the problems that arose from it at the time. Neela said that she had not really thought about financial risk when deciding on her career. She said, ‘At NID, they were quite insistent that everything should have a logic, but it was never considered a commercially viable thing…it did not really filter through in my head…no context, so never knew there is a financial risk associated with it. I had no such barriers in my mind.’

After her degree at JJ School of Art, Prema primarily worked as a free-lancer and even taught at JJ and at Nashik for a few years. Now she has her own studio plus she works as a consultant for Hobby Ideas – a crafts retail chain store. She hopes that sometime soon, she can be a fulltime studio potter. When I asked her about the financial uncertainties involved, she said that even if she did not have a job, she would find a way to make pottery commercially viable so that the financial constraint is not really operative at all. Siddharth changed several jobs after completing his Masters. He worked on an oil rig, on a job editing academic papers and then went off to Muscat for about a year. It was there that he started making rough recordings at home and his plans of being a singer took definite shape. On his return to Mumbai, he started meeting directors for ad work and was during that period living off his savings from his Muscat job. He said, ‘When I got back from Muscat, I got in touch with people I knew from college, but no one was taking me seriously – those who became musicians were already well into it and I was new to the industry…slowly I got small gigs. Now I get 3-5 ad jobs in a month and a few live gigs. I have even sung for film a few times.’ Despite his life still being in flux, he is very optimistic and says that he feels very happy when during live gigs his audience even knows the words to some of his songs. Amey’s story is similar to Prema’s. He had no idea what direction his life would take after his education at JJ. He enrolled in the Masters at JJ primarily to continue staying in Mumbai and prepare for his launch as an artist. He says he completed 22 works of art during his MFA that he exhibited at Jehangir Art Gallery at a solo show the same year that he passed out. From then on his career as a professional painter began.

Dealing with uncertainty surfaced as a theme repeatedly with the biographies too. Running away from home was a life-changing step for the 11 year old Bhimsen Joshi. He literally left with just the shirt on his back and travelling ticketless and depending on the charity of fellow travelers
for food, he went in search of a teacher. He never hesitated to drop things where he was and go off into the blue somewhere else to pursue his dream of music. He was a known wanderlust, first travelling from one concert to another by train, then driving himself in his car and then later by air. In fact, this tendency to wander even earned him the nickname ‘Hawai Gandharva’. Having married twice, Bhimsen Joshi had two full households to support and this took a financial toll on him. But through it all, he continued to practice his art while maintaining a level of domestic peace.

When he was sixteen, Guru Dutt took up a job as a telephone operator in a mill, but in a month and a half, he abandoned his job (without even collecting his last pay) to join Uday Shankar’s dance troupe at Almora. He performed with Uday Shankar in several productions and returned to Mumbai in 1944 when the Almora center closed down. On his return, he hunted desperately for work and finally got his break. He entered films as a dance director, sometimes also doing bit roles and assisting the director with the film. His stint at Prabhat Studios in Pune, was also important because that is where he met actor Dev Anand who later gave him his first directorial project – *Baazi*, which was a great success. Although he was successful later in life, this initial period is marked by struggle and a good deal of instability on the professional front. On the personal front too, several strained relationships dominated his life.

When Kelucharan Mohapatra left Goswami’s troupe due to a disagreement, he found himself jobless at the age of nineteen. With no fixed source of income he worked as daily-wage labor watering and carrying sand for the maintenance of betel groves. This dim struggle for survival eased somewhat when he found a job in Cuttack with the Theatre Company of Kalicharan Pattnaik. His job was to help stage setting, act and play percussion instruments. His real break came with Annapurna B Theatres where he worked from 1946 to 1952. Here he distinguished himself as a dancer, percussionist and choreographer. Under the direction of Pankaj Charan Das (dance) and Durlav Chandra Singh (theatre), Kelucharan and his would-be wife Laxmipriya became famous for their performances.

M.F. Hussain’s work includes some of the most controversial artistic products of our times in India. His paintings of a nude *Bharatmata* and *Saraswati* and some of the scenes in his film *Meenaxi: Tale of Two Cities* courted much wrath from the public and politico-religious entities so that it finally led to his being exiled from the country of his birth. Should he try and return to India, his personal safety was in question. In the light of so much public information available on the controversial nature of his work and life, it is immaterial to talk of risk and uncertainty which was pretty much an everyday feature of his life.

Uday Shankar’s was a life fraught with highs and lows; financially and otherwise. He had to eke out a living in Paris by dancing with obscure cabaret dancers. He had to close down the Almora center due to financial burdens and his only possessions at the time of his death were reported to be a few trunks full of artistically designed costumes and musical instruments
gathering dust. As a dancer he was able to succeed only because he kept finding benevolent sponsors who loved his work and believed in him. Towards the end of his life, he even distanced himself from his family living a lonely life and dying practically alone. On the high end, he had tremendous success in his shows all over America and Europe, even in India. In a time where there were few stars, he was the best of them, hailed as the Nataraja of the 21st century for his exceptional gifts on stage.

MS Subbulakshmi took a leap of faith throwing in her lot with a much married Sadasivam, courting controversy and severing connections with her family in the process. Zohra Segal did all sorts of odd jobs including working in a store, and as a dresser in a theatre during her time in London so that she could continue to stay there and be involved in some way in the arts. Her life was fraught with uncertainty and she moved about quite a bit depending on where her work took her, but this seems to have been accepted by her as the way of things. Dealing with this kind of flux, willingness to gamble all for something that they believed in appears a marked characteristic of artists. The concept as it emerged in this study is captured in Illustration 5.2.

Illustration 5.2: Showing the conceptual properties of Dealing with Uncertainty as it emerged in the artists’ group (interviews and biographies)

There are exceptions. Shiva has worked with SBI all his life so that he can balance out the instabilities of a musical career and provide for his family. Similarly, Geeta and Soumita too have spread their risks by having parallel careers. Pavan does a lot of commercial work in cinematography that eases financial tensions that would otherwise be present and Cyrus left his work in architecture only after his career as a sculptor picked up. But even for these individuals, money is secondary. They have balanced the vagaries of an artistic life by using the counterweight of an alternate career. The pursuit of that career is not with the objective of earning a lot of money. It is so that they can concentrate freely on their art – a price of sorts for their freedom otherwise. Perhaps this indicates a greater preference for security than their other artistic
counterparts. But these are I believe exceptions to the rule. Only three of all the artists interviewed work in non-artistic domains (over a long period of time) as an alternate career. For Pavan and Cyrus, their alternate lines of work are not unrelated to their artistic calling and further, they are also subject to similar issues of ambiguity and risk. As Pavan said, ‘am not here for the money, but I fell in love with film-making. I think I understood it.’ Among the major names biographed, all the artists display willingness to deal with the uncertainties of their profession. Risk-taking and tolerance of ambiguity therefore are important traits of the Artistic Personality. An artistic life would not be possible with independence and risk-taking if it were not also supported by a great deal of tenacity and enthusiasm for pursuing difficult goals.

**Tenacity and challenge:** A willingness to surmount obstacles, never say die attitude, resilience; without these qualities, most of the artists on the list today would not have made it. A closely related trait is challenge, which encourages the individual to set such goals in the first place that are not easily achieved. It is tempting to say that the artists are achievement oriented. There is a lot of literature on the need for achievement originally outlined by David McCleland and his colleagues which suggests that those with a high need for achievement tend to set challenging, but reachable goals and have great persistence in getting to their objective. But the great amounts of risk-taking displayed by the group as a whole discourages that notion, for achievement oriented people only take calculated risk. Therefore, tenacity and challenge have been separated from dealing with uncertainty. The narratives are illuminating.

Amey said, ‘To be a fine artist itself is nowadays a challenge. One’s career is dependent on practical knowledge. Have to do 50-60 sketches a day just to make your hand free or your brain fresh. In a week, 2-3 landscapes for color knowledge, distance and perspective…there is pleasure also in it’ (smiles). Pavan was another individual for whom challenge was very important. He learnt tabla as a child and did well in the end of year exam, but never went back to the class after that. He won a Camel art contest and then stopped drawing. He would drop anything that he got good at. He said, ‘My Eureka moment was when I knew that I was born to be dissatisfied with myself.’ Shiva quoted several instances where people had not given him opportunities or treated him lightly and determined to show his worth, he worked to ensure that they reversed their opinion of him. He spoke of an incident when he was not given a chance to perform at Asthika Samaj, a temple in Mumbai, and then later he went ahead and performed with another musician anyway. ‘I had that fire, that I will play and show…’

Rajeev’s darkest time was when he went off to assist a senior colleague to start a school for photography and related arts in Ooty believing that it would help his career. But when the school started, he just found himself back in Mumbai and jobless, moneyless. He went through a very difficult time subsequently, but instead of packing up and seeking help from his parents of finding some alternate means of living, he sent out his pictures to all the people he wanted to work with and eventually even won representation by Getty Images, an international brand. Soumita’s most
difficult hour was on the personal front. Despite a bad marriage, she found the strength to come out of it and back into dance. She said, ‘Being back in dance helped me…it was then that I created *Nrityashakti* (a dance ballet) and *Nrityanjali* (her parent institute) became my focus area’ Siddharth’s career is only just on the upswing and he is hopeful for the future. But gaining entry into the music world after being away for so many years doing other types of work was difficult for him.

For Geeta, the challenge came in a friendly manner from her parents and siblings who would compete at home to identify ragas and have other music-related contests. Her turning point towards violin itself was driven by challenge. She and her sister used to learn the violin and there was only one violin at home because of which they would fight. She said, ‘I decided to play flute to the same level as she could do violin.’ And during the time that her sister was away in the holidays, Geeta set herself the task of mastering the flute, which she accomplished by herself. Even when she started performing, much after her marriage, she would take leave from office to practice 14-16 hours everyday. ‘It was 30 years of practice crammed into 2-3 short years…it was a question of challenge’ she shared. Despite a good start, Cyrus spoke of a time of about a year and a half when he did not receive a single order for his sculptures. Even then, he persisted as he ‘was very sure about it’. He says that from 1982 to 1993 he worked alone, right from scrounging for material to cleaning the rust, welding, cutting, grinding, and appointed helpers only in 1994 once he started getting large orders. He is still ambitious, ‘I want to make the world's tallest scrap metal sculpture that would make people realize what redundant machinery can do.’

Among the biographed artists too, examples of resilience and rising to the challenge are plenty. Uday Shankar’s first tour of America with Anna Pavlova consisted of performances that were all but ignored by the press, but the year and a half spent with her was valuable as he learnt a lot of things about administration and showmanship. On his return he found his father was moving back to India. But he elected to stay behind and despite lack of support and several setbacks, he pursued his dream. He recalls, ‘I was obliged to perform in rotten dirty haunts where all night long people were drinking and enjoying themselves. …there were times when my shoes had no soles and to ward off the cold I had to tuck newspapers inside my coat…I had to dance even when I had high fever and when my body was soaked wet with rain…but..I came to know show business in the raw.’

Kamala Das in her autobiography describes how her days were committed to housework. She married very early and had three children one after the other. But she would spend her nights writing. As a result, her health suffered and she had to be hospitalized more than once. Her writing especially about taboo topics such as her sexuality, her love affairs and her relationship with her husband, often courted controversy in public life and attracted unwanted attention in private life. But despite everything she was prolific in two languages both in poetry and prose.
Guru Dutt’s films have a lot of tragic elements in them which reflect the general mood of his life. There is heavy use of metaphor to communicate the ironies of life. A repeated theme that emerges in his work is the need to succeed, the frustrations of the journey and the corrupt materialistic world – e.g. Kagaz ke phool, Pyaasa. Long term friend and script writer Abrar Alvi says ‘…he had shades of Vijay (the hero in Pyaasa) and shades of Suresh (the hero in Kagaz ke phool)...if he hadn’t been such an introvert, he would be alive today.’ His interpretations of relationships also struggle between the romantic and the highly cynical – e.g. Mr. and Mrs. 55, Sailaab, Aar Paar. Dev Anand says about his friend, ‘he was a young man..he should not have made depressing pictures..’ But that was Guru Dutt’s métier, a reflection of his own personal challenges and frustrations and the struggle to supersede them.

For Bhimsen Joshi, going hungry on running away from home was just the beginning of his difficulties. In the process of seeking musical training, he was exposed to an unsparing life including rigorous physical training, music practice and performing household chores for the Guru, as was usual in the Guru-Shishya tradition. One of the chores he had to do was to fetch water in two large pots strung together on a pole that he balanced on his back. To his last day, he had the scars from this pole. He even worked for a while as a domestic help at Pahari Sanyal’s house as a means of staying in Calcutta. Perhaps due to personal problems, Bhimsen Joshi sank into alcoholism later in life, but managed with effort to pull himself free when it started affecting his music, which more than anything else demonstrates his resilience.

Kelucharan Mohapatra’s job at the betel groves was arduous no doubt. But he faced many more problems in life. He had to shift from his Cuttack house which he had himself built by hand, brick by brick, due to a family disagreement and re-started his teaching practice in Raghurajpur, near Bhubhaneswar. He went through two bypass surgeries but continued his dance unabated literally until his last days.

In 1937 M.F. Hussain migrated back to Bombay to seek his fortune painting. He initially got a job painting cinema hoardings. During the early days, he used to sleep on the footpath or any other place he could find. He often slept on the footpath outside Novelty cinema. Mehbooba Bibi took pity on him and asked him to stay in her house. MF fell in love with and married her daughter Fazila and moved into the Badr Baug chawl. By now he had stopped working for other contractors and started his own business “Maqbool Cine Painting Works”, but the money he made this way was not enough to support his rapidly growing family, so he started working in a toy factory, designing and creating toys. In this manner, he went through a period of struggle and it was only in 1947, ten years later that his work started getting recognized. His painting ‘Sunehra Sansar’ exhibited at the Bombay Art Society that year got a good review and this was soon followed by several shows that led up to his becoming the highest paid painter in India.

Mrinalini Sarabhai was one of the first high caste girls to take to Bharatanatyam in a time when the Devadasi tradition was being brought to the dust across the country. To enter the field at
that time was a difficult decision to make as society was against girls performing in public. She learnt from several different Gurus. Of her time in Tanjavur she wrote, ‘...those were desolate moments when I wondered what I was doing far from home, from Vikram, from all comfort and companionship’ and yet she pursued the dance. She reportedly postponed marriage to Vikram several times primarily because of her dedication to dance and the feeling that there was still too much to do before settling down. They only got married in 1942, when because of civil unrest Vikram’s parents insisted that he move back to Ahmedabad before things got worse in the country. Mrinalini had a major accident in 1942 soon after her marriage when during a freedom procession, a shell exploded in her face. It took an entire year to recover from this, but she did get back to dance.

If R.K. Laxman had given up the desire to be an artist because the JJ School of Art had rejected him, the country would have lost a first rate political cartoonist. In the early days, his work was also rejected by Indian Express and Hindustan Times, but he retained his dream. In the Times of India, he initially worked as an illustrator before he finally got his break as a political cartoonist when he was about thirty years old. His brother R.K. Narayan too suffered a lot of rejection when he was trying to establish himself as a writer. His first rejection occurred the same year that he started writing, when his composition ‘Divine Music’ was returned with a rejection slip from JC Squire. After depression lasting several days, he started sending his work out again to other publishers, without success. He later got a job with a school in Chennapatna, but he found the work there unbearable and finally quit once and for all after being asked to take a PT lesson for the boys. He returned to Mysore where he started writing ‘Swami and friends’ which was only published through the good offices of Graham Greene five years later. Meanwhile, RKN’s first work in print was a review of the book ‘Development of Maritime Laws in 17th Century England’. The same journal also accepted a short story, paying him nine rupees and twelve annas – which was his entire first year’s income through writing.

The hurdles that artists endure are not only of the type illustrated in these examples. They often have to face cynicism from their family, like R.K. Narayan did, criticism from the art world and even public ridicule. Guru Dutt’s Kagaz ke Phool was a commercial flop and so was Raj Kapoor’s Mera Naam Joker; both semi-autobiographical films in which the artists had invested of themselves. Kelucharan Mohapatra had to endure the shabby treatment he was given on several occasions when he used to give private dance lessons to students from higher castes. M.F. Hussain faced a lot of criticism for his films and Kamala Das for her bold writing. The point I am trying to make, is it takes a special kind of courage to pick yourself up in situations like these where seemingly everything is going against you, and return to the fray. Artists seem to have this factor, call it tenacity/ resilience/ rising to a challenge, in large measure. The concept of tenacity/ challenge has been described in Illustration 5.3 with its manifestations.
Illustration 5.3: Showing the conceptual properties of Tenacity/ Challenge as it emerged in the data (interviews and biographies)

Fluidity/ Flexibility/ Flow: This factor very closely resembles Jung’s description of a Perceiving person. Of course, here we are discussing traits and Jung spoke of a typology which implies dichotomy between Judging and Perceiving as two different ways of personal organization. It is also possible that many of the people interviewed are Perceiving types, which is why the theme has come up repeatedly. But we cannot confirm that without actually applying the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to the artist. What we can do is collate the observed data, which suggests a method of personal organization, a view of the world, of time and of goals as fluid rather than fixed. Artists appear to be open, more process-oriented rather than output oriented, more concerned with excellence than efficiency, and generally, sort of ‘going with the flow’ kind of people. In Jungs typology, Perceiving types are said to be at an advantage when quick changes in direction are required (Myers 1998). They are less stressed by lack of structure or sudden crises compared to Judging types who are more planful and structured. A similar advantage is evident here. It is probably this world view that allows artists to cope almost effortlessly with the kind of challenges that they have to deal with. There are several specific statements from the interviews which highlight this approach to life.

Anjan: I was in the process of photography and freezing that moment forever (This was in the context of career goals).

Venkat: I did not do anything to follow my goals (of being a singer or a badminton player), things just happened… I was always a part of IIT, sort of a Karmic connection, so I still continue…the business was their (brother and sister in law’s) idea; I just played along and became one of the directors. Academics was always something that we did (about his performance at school) …because of music we also did well academically…I knew how to ‘crack’ tests (and got through exams easily).
Amrita: …accepting the choice-less moments and building your strength from there is important – that is where intelligence comes in.

Prema: I only knew about painting, sculpture and architecture so in the JJ interview I said I wanted to study painting/ sculpture. During the foundation course, I had a chance to explore textile, painting, pottery and other courses and that was when I decided about pottery because I could relate to the medium. At that point, I did not think about future and things like that. I always wanted my own studio and wanted to conduct classes, but did not think about anything else.

Amey: My father’s friend was a teacher at Nagpur School of Art – they showed my work to him… him and my art teacher…they wanted to be sure that they can put me into the field (Amey himself knew very little about the field of painting when he started). Through their help only I got into it. (On asking about other subjects that interested him or any other career option, the conversation did not go ahead. He says that since painting happened, nothing else was really considered).

Anagha: Understanding a form is a lifetime of work…poetry was just happening constantly.

Siddharth: I was always one of the top three in my class. Since I was expected to do science, I got into it thinking I will figure out what to do later.

Geeta: I never wanted to be a musician. I just took up what came my way and then joined Indian Overseas Bank. I was beyond the age of competitions when I started performing. Flute was sought after for dance and so I started getting programs

Soumya: It took two years to decide (what to do when she dropped out of architecture). I looked for a course in children’s media but could not find, and I did not want to do a BEd or child psychology. So I did a Diploma at Saifi Institute for one year and then taught for two years at a school in Kemps corner where I could apply what I had learnt…my life has been more organic

Gayatri: When I came to Bombay, I started teaching at Khar and eventually my class grew…

This capacity to move ahead with very little information and be flexible to what the environment offers is also evident in all the biographies. Each of the artists set out on a career that was unstructured with no idea of what tomorrow would bring. There was no proper career path with steps that indicate clear designations with their specified duties and benefits. It was the sheer luck of so many factors coming together that made for their success. In the time that they worked, just before and after India’s independence, it was hard enough to even identify milestones of accomplishments and standards of success. There is very little direct data in the biographies to reflect on the personal organization of the individual artists. But it is also significant that there are no contrary data either. The highlights of the trait of flexibility/ flow are captured in Illustration 5.4.

This trait of flexibility along with independence, dealing with uncertainty and tenacity form a telling cluster, based on which is possible to visualize the Artistic Personality. While these were
personality characteristics for which there were many codes, there were some others that also emerged. The codes for those were fewer, not as consistent as, and were overlapping with some aspects of the four traits covered this far. However, since they emerged from the data, they are also included in the discussion.

**Illustration 5.4: Showing the conceptual properties of Flexibility/Flow as it emerged in the data (interviews and biographies)**

Additional traits: Artists, understandably, enjoy novelty and variety in their daily tasks, perhaps more so than non-artists. Divya spoke of how she used to not enjoy dance classes unless they were working on something new. Cyrus said that the main fun of being an artist is that no single day is like another. Venkat said that one of the main reasons that he joined IIT was for the extra-curricular activities like sports and cultural events. Rajeev shared that he never wanted to do any routine job, ‘I did not want to do what others do.’ Similarly, all the artists took a great deal of pride in their work, confident of their ultimate success and sure of the quality of their efforts. Prema was proud to say that the work she does on the potter’s wheel is contemporary andarty. Siddharth was very proud to talk about his hit songs. Geeta was especially pleased with the way she balanced her music and the rest of her life. Shiva was proud that he could play with ease for dance as well as for music concerts, which is not something too many accompanists do successfully and also that he can play without writing down the music. Many of the research participants who showed me around their workspace and shared their work did so with a lot of enthusiasm – like Cyrus, Amey, Prema, Dinesh. This sense of pride is probably closely related to the quality of authenticity. They were proud because their work represents truly the best of what they had to give. This came through in a few statements such as ‘Over time I realized that I don’t like compromising on my life’ (Siddharth) or ‘One of the songs was a hit, but I felt uncomfortable so did not capitalize on it’ (Venkat). On introversion-extroversion, the data is mixed. Some of the artists do conform to the idea of the lone genius. But several are interpersonally suave and gregarious in nature too. There are some who prefer working alone, but some others enjoy and seek out collaboration. Perhaps it is a reflection of Csikszentmihalyi’s dichotomous traits where artists manifest both extremes of introversion and extraversion.
The findings about the personality traits of artists are by and large in line with earlier research. Where I would like to take it forward is to say that it is not single traits but a cluster of them working together that best describe the Artistic Personality. When we use a psychometric tool that measures pre-defined qualities, we get an output that suggests that one group of individuals are higher on some measure than another, or that creativity is positively or negatively correlated with X personality characteristic. The advantage that we have had in this research is that we did not begin with any definitions that could limit our imagination about the Artistic Personality. As a result, it is possible to see the traits as overlapping. Many of the instances discussed in this chapter are indicative of more than one trait. We know from previous research that several factors discriminate between artists and non-artists. But based on the insights drawn from the data here, it is possible to extent the hypothesis to suggest that it is these factors working together that separate the artists from the non-artists. I have attempted to capture the complete concept of the Artistic personality in Illustration 5.5.

Illustration 5.5: Concept of the Artistic Personality. Construct of the Creative Personality adapted from Ivcevic and Meyer (2006), Traits of Artistic personality from field data

The traits combined with the fluid artistic identity, is what sets apart the artistic personality from other personalities. Is it possible that with this combination of variables one can only be an artist? Is it that this combination of variables is more definitive of the artistic than cognitive factors or environmental factors? This needs further investigation with artists and non-artists,
perhaps including individuals from other fields of creative endeavor like scientists. Hypothetically:

*The Artistic Personality is characterized by a set of traits including Independence, Dealing with Uncertainty, Tenacity/Challenge, Flexibility/Flow, Variety-seeking, Pride and Authenticity. It is the cluster of these traits together that better distinguishes the artistic group from non-artistic groups than any of the traits working alone.*

I have not tried to contrast the personalities of the artists with that of the non-artists studied. There is some evidence to show that Sameer tends to be independent, risk-taking and tolerant of ambiguity since he runs his own business. Rajesh in his own words has led a very job-oriented life, moving from one employment to another, and Sandhya is very young. Perhaps this lack of data is itself telling, but it would be unfair to conclude without proper psychometric measurement. Keep in mind that the objective of this research was not the Artistic Personality. The idea was to explore the Artistic Mind and the environmental factors that affect the choice to be an artist. Hence I did not invest in elaborate scaling for capturing personality variables. But if that is done in some later study, the hypotheses generated in this discussion can be tested.

**5.4. Chapter Summary**

In sum, the Artistic Personality appears distinct from yet allied with the Artistic Mind in its functioning. The characteristics that surfaced in this research are Artistic Identity, which is powerful, dominant, fluid and porous, and personality traits including Independence, Dealing with Uncertainty, Tenacity/Challenge, Flexibility/Flow and other characteristics. MF Husain is an example of an artist whose personality was so dominant that biographers had a tough time sieving through to the facts surrounding his life. M.S. Subbulakshmi had two siblings who had access to the same gene pool and a similar social milieu, but did not flower into musicians the way MS did. R.K. Laxman and R.K. Narayan have many brothers and two sisters, but only the two of them pursued an art as a life choice. Zohra Segal had many siblings too, but only she and her sister Uzra Butt entered the acting line. Uday Shankar was a success as a dancer, but his brother Ravi Shankar went on to even greater success in a different artistic domain – music. As Anurag said, ‘I am born a certain way and the talent is part of my personality. It is not that I am an artist because my mother used to paint. Instead that aspect attracted me because of the way I am.’ Perhaps that is where individual personality takes over in the making of an artist. A detailed look at the process by which individual artists chose to live artistic lives is discussed in the next chapter – the Artistic Choice.