

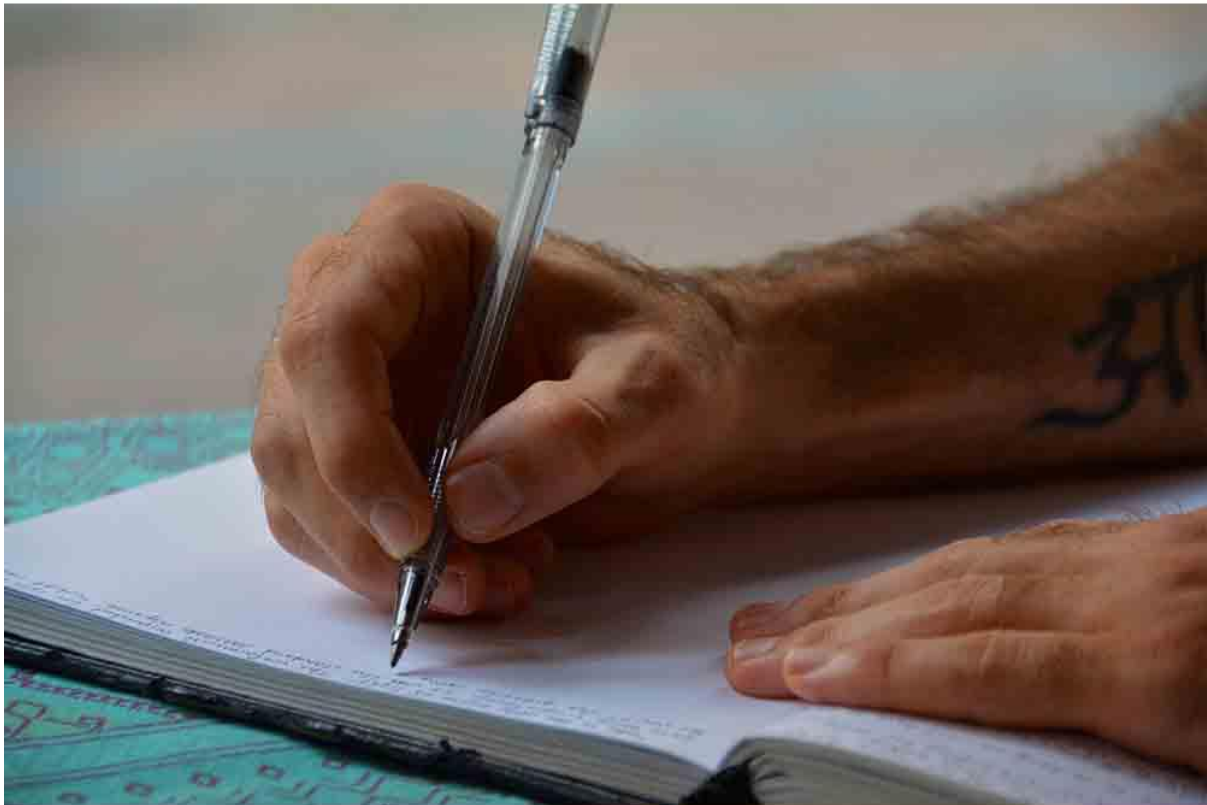
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Can the Aesthetic Experience be compared?

Abstract

Aesthetics is considered as the study of the beauty. Though Aesthetics as a study discipline started in eighteenth century, it could be noticed even before that in various art forms.. There are diverse theories of aesthetics. It was much dealt in the art forms like drawing, paintings, sculpture, architecture etc. But it was less explored in the field of drama which is generally considered as an important form of art. This paper is an attempt to connect the theory of aesthetic experience with drama. Both Aristotle's Poetics and Bharata's Natyasastra deal with the theories of drama and other forms of literature. This paper tries to compare the dramatic theories of Aristotle Poetics and Bharata's Natyasastra through the lenses of Aesthetics Experience. This paper is divided into four sections: first section deals with an introduction of aesthetics and how it can be dealt in the field of drama; the second tries to explore the aesthetic experience in dramatic theory of Aristotle Poetics; the third tries to find the aesthetic experience in the dramatics theory of Bharata's Natyasastra; the fourth section compares both the theories with respect to the aesthetic experience.

Key terms: beauty, taste, aesthetic experience, aesthetic state of mind, aesthetic contemplation, catharsis, rasa.

I

Vincent Van Gogh, a Dutch painter says “If you truly love nature, you will find beauty everywhere”. Nature is considered as the mother of all beauty. So many things were learned, is learned and will be learned by observing the nature. Nature has natural beauty. Human intervened in to the nature and tried to imitate her by creating a manmade nature i.e. art forms. When human acquired language and the art forms, he tried to collage the natural beauty with his creative powers and made a manmade beauty. This manmade beauty can be seen in many art forms like, drawing, paintings, sculptures, and architecture etc. The study of beauty of any kind is generally considered as Aesthetics. The word "aesthetic" was first used by Alexander Baumgarten in his Reflections on Poetry (first published in 1735) as a reaction to the rational philosophy of Descartes and the mechanistic science of Newton.

Any artist’s work of art basically begins with his observation of certain phenomenon from his own experience. Artist, then contemplates about it. Slobodan Markovic´ concludes in his research paper that Aesthetic experience is specified as an exceptional state of mind which is qualitatively different from ‘normal’ everyday mental states. (Markovic 17). It can be inferred that an artist contemplation is different from the other contemplation. Artist contemplates to create some work of art. This kind of contemplation is called Aesthetic Contemplation. Paul Guyer, defines Aesthetic contemplation as “ a study of the perfection and pleasure in the exercise of sensibility for its own sake, as manifested in the production of works of artistic beauty” (Guyer 227).

Aestheticians try to find beauty in almost all the art forms. The value of beauty depends upon the creator and the receiver. George Santayana, an Aesthetician says

“Beauty is a value, that is, it is not a perception of a matter of fact or of a relation: it is an emotion, an affection of our volitional and appreciative nature. An object cannot be beautiful if it can give pleasure to nobody: a beauty to which all men were forever indifferent is a contradiction in terms.” (Santayana 43).

Baumgarten in his *Metaphysics* (1739) refers aesthetics as the “science of sensitive knowledge”: *Aesthetica est scientia congnitionis sensitivae*. An artist’s creative contemplation and presentation provokes the spectator’s sensitive knowledge into an aesthetic experience. Human existence and his relation with other things can be shown as aesthetics of existence by an artist. Foucault (1986) in the *History of Sexuality*, wrote about “aesthetics of existence” with regards to ways for accomplishing a harmonious and beautiful life. He refers to classical Greece’s ideal of self control and maintaining balance in life. Maintaining balance and harmony in life can be considered as how to control life. But aesthetics is something different.

Aesthetics is observed by different people in different ways. Collin Leath uses the term ‘positive experience’ to refer to any pleasurable experience, meaning any experience which makes an organism feel good and encourages it to continue or return to the experience which gives it pleasure. (Leath 113). When we analyse the above statements, it can be observed that most of the aestheticians have portrayed aesthetic experience as a feel good experience.

This paper argues that Aesthetic experience need not be always a positive experience or feel good experience. Let us look at the Baumgarten’s observation. Baumgarten believed the aesthetic value of a work of art could be determined by its ability to produce vivid experiences in its audience (Csikszentmihalyi 99).

There are so many types of art forms all over the world. They produce different sensual pleasure. One’s aesthetic experience may be different from the other. An artist

aesthetic state of mind is different from the other. An artist may produce a particular aesthetic experience for a particular audience and particular audience may receive a particular aesthetic experience. Further section of this paper tries to bring the aesthetic experience suggested by Aristotle.

II

In the course of human evolution, certain sympathy as well as animosity developed among humans. The concept of tragedy was developed based on the sympathy towards the liked character. Brain Vickers in his book *Towards Greek Tragedy* argues that the “Greek Tragedy is essentially a representation of human suffering, and of the causes and effects of it; and that within and without the play this suffering produces in humane characters or in humane spectators the feeling of sympathy for the sufferer” (Vickers 52).

Let's examine the work *poetics* by Aristotle in the light of aesthetics. According to *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, *Poetics* by Aristotle is a short treatise on poetry, usually treated as primarily a work of aesthetic theory (Howatson 462). According to Aristotle, aesthetics of tragic experience one gets when one feels pity, and fear and hopes that nothing should happen to the *hero* of the play. Through this Aristotle argues *catharsis* is achieved. Feeling pity and fear towards a character depends on the construction of the events in a play. Greek tragedy was famous for this kind of plot construction. They successfully project an aesthetic experience to their audience by making them feel pity and fear.

Greek tragedy represents the human conflict, desires or goals, collisions between opposed values. The pity and the fear arise in the audience, when the object of the playwright becomes the subject of the audience. Tragedy will become aesthetic experience if that tragedy is received by the audience. Tragic aesthetic experience is transferred from the play to the audience if both have the similar aesthetic state of mind. If we examine the origins of the Greek tragedy, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, says “The only Greek tragedy

we possess is Athenian; for that reason it is known as 'Attic' tragedy (from the state of Attica, of which Athens was the chief city) (Howatson 574). If the Greek tragedy is developed from the city Attica, the aesthetic state of mind of the artist and the spectator need to be considered. Michael Walton says

Greek tragedy was an art form born two and a half thousand years ago from a culture whose values and concerns are no longer familiar. But because the playwrights were engaged in dramatizing human experience, because the gods and heroes who peopled the stage were 'examples' as well as characters, because the theatre of the Athenians was a place where ideas were translated into art, it is still possible, given favourable circumstances, for Greek drama to be seen as both alive and immediate (Walton 1).

By this it can be understood that the aesthetic experience of the tragedy of Athenian can be felt or experienced by others who are not necessarily Athenians.

III

The seed of Indian aesthetic experience is strongly seen in the Bharatamuni treatise *Natyasastra*. The theatre objective of the *Natyasastra* is to relish the essence of *rasa* by experiencing the aesthetics projected by a poet or a dramatist. *Natyasastra* aims to provide relief to the audience by making them experience different emotions. Entertainment is seen as an effect but not as a primary objective of the *Natyasastra*. The chief objective of the *Natyasastra* is to produce *rasa* among the spectator by making them experience the aesthetic experience of the poet or the dramatist and there by to realise the transcendent values. *Bharatamuni* tries this through the projection of the journey of the *Bhava*. *Bhava* follows a journey to become *rasa*. The journey include: *vibhava*, *anubhava*, *vyabharibhava* and *sthayibhava*. *Bharatamuni* tried to provide a parameter to each of the *rasas*. *Bharatamuni* provided the parameter to produce *rasa* by a complete understanding of the culture of his

time. Culture plays a key role in producing the *Rasa*. It is the culture which directs the journey of the *bhava* to reach the expected *rasa*. Culture varies from place to place.

The success of any *rasa* depends on the imaginative power of the poet or the dramatist and how he/she projects the journey of the *rasa*. Aesthetic contemplation of a poet or a dramatist paves the way to create aesthetic beauty. Dhananjaya, who has written *Dasarupaka* puts this as: “Anything, be it beautiful or ugly, dignified or despicable, or dreadful or of pleasing appearance, deep or deformed, object or non-object, whatever it be it, could be turned into *rasa* by poet’s imaginative power (Dhananjaya IV 85).

Dhananjaya stresses on the poets’ imaginative power. At the same time the spectators too should have an equal state of mind to receive the aesthetic experience projected by a poet or a dramatist. Vidya Nivas Misra puts it as

Rasa is the offering of the hindered self to the unhindered Universal Self. It is something far away from the world of common day passions, but not far away from individual passions, because it universalises passions. This universalisation is made possible through an adept experiencer and for that, as discussed earlier, the role of the *sahridaya* is needed. (Misra 117-118).

IV

If the experience of the creator of the beauty is understood or experienced by the receiver, the value of the beauty is appreciated by the receiver. In some cases the artistic beauty of the creator may not be perceived by the receiver as the receiver may be in inappropriate context or the context of the created beauty may be inappropriate to the receiver. This is accepted by both the aestheticians Aristotle and Bharata. It can be concluded that the aesthetic experience can be compared. If any aesthetic experience of the two different contexts or conditions is to be compared, one has to consider both side of the aesthetic state

of the mind of the artist and the spectator. Aesthetics of experience may be different from culture to culture, yet it can be compared if the *Sahridaya* or Spectator has vivid or wide aesthetic experience.

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