



Catharsis: Art Therapy and Psychological Treatment.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on explaining, Catharsis as a therapy. This paper is mainly concerned in co-relating catharsis with art and science, Catharsis is where art meets science. In modern era Catharsis is being used as a psychological treatment, our brain is divided into three parts namely-conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious; when unconsciously our mind gets purified at that point Catharsis is achieved. Freud used Catharsis first time in psychological context. He used method such as hypnosis to get relieved of complex emotions in our mind.

The first part of this research will give history of Catharsis, moving to Aristotle's concept of Catharsis, Effects of tragedy on the minds of people. Further this paper will talk about Catharsis in a psychological context. Many psychotherapists have related Catharsis with dense emotions of past experiences. Various case studies, articles and a work by Kate Chopin *The story of an hour* will be taken into consideration. Final part of the research will try to draw a clearer picture of Catharsis: Art therapy and psychological treatment.

KEY WORDS: Catharsis, psychological treatment, art therapy.

Catharsis is a Greek word (KATHARSIS) which means purification and purgation of emotions-particularly pity and fear. Catharsis relieves our mind from all the negative aspects of life. Aristotle was the first person to write about catharsis. He wrote about catharsis in the context of the tragedy. His idea about catharsis was related to purification of emotions.

Literal meaning of catharsis is "purgation". Since ages people seek help of arts such as poetry, drama or novels to find solace. There is an old saying that "Books are man's best friend". People find pleasure in arts; it has always helped people to overcome their complex emotions. Aristotle believed that catharsis and tragedy are the two sides of the same coin. As Aristotle has said "Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means: but they may also

result from the inner structure of piece, which is the better way and indicates superior poet"

What is experienced in such an excess of tragic. Suffering is something truly common. The spectator recognizes himself and his fitness in the face of power of fate. What happens to the great ones of the earth has exemplary significance. To see that this is how it is a kind of self knowledge for the spectator, who emerges with new insight from the illusion in which everyone else, lives (132, poetics)

Aristotle believed that when a person watches a tragedy in a theatre, pity and fear get evoked in him .He starts relating himself with the character. Psychologist gave it a name "Mirror Neurons". Empathy is aroused in audience towards the character they are watching. Aristotle never believed in happy endings, for him pity and fear evokes, when hero suffers. Due to mirror neurons, people sympathies towards tragic character. A study was held and it was observed that people sympathize toward tragic character they watch. In others, we relate with them and tend to get relieved after that, when we see similar instincts called identification .When emotions and feelings are pent up for a longer duration, they start decaying, similarly when we suppress thoughts our mind suffers.

Sigmund Freud discovered a therapy called *cathartic therapy*, in this process hypnosis was used to evoke repressed emotions. In the present scenario this therapy is used everywhere in the world. Patients are made to recall their past traumatic events, and they vent out their thoughts through verbal method, which help them to achieve catharsis. In 19th century Jacob Levi Moreno experimented with a group of patients. He told patients to express their problems through acting. He got immense success through this therapy. He believed that expressing thoughts in a group would help patients to get cured. He came up with two methods of this treatment one was psychodrama and another was socio-drama, in psychodrama the main concern was on an individual person and in socio- drama on the whole group. Moreno contradicted the statement of Freud, he could



not approve of verbal therapy. He believed that despite of interpreting dreams of different patients, we should try to make them dream again through their acting skills they can relive that moment again and can dramatize their past events. Even on meeting Freud he opposed him openly

I met Dr. Freud only on one occasion .It occurred in 1912 when ,while working at the psychiatric clinic in Vienna university .I attended one of his lectures .Dr Freud had just ended his analysis of a telepathic dream .As the student filled out he asked me what I was doing well Dr Freud I start where you leave off .You meet people in the artificial setting of your office ,I meet them on the street and in their room and in their natural surroundings ,you analyze their dreams , I try to give them courage to dream again. I teach people how to play God. (*Psychodrama*, 5-6).

Moreno believed in involving patients in all the activities .He generally take the director's seat and tell his actors to perform and vent out their emotions through drama .In such kind of treatment both mind and body are active, which makes it even more realistic .This method has dual purpose, catharsis is not only achieved by performers but by viewers as well.

Catharsis has played a prominent role in Greek tragedy since ages .In each tragedy the protagonist achieved catharsis: he became aware that his doom is near and now he has to face it, the same feelings get reciprocated in audience. Actor as well as audience experiences same fierce experiences and eventually purgation occurs.

Audience will only achieve catharsis only if they have been strongly attached with the characters, when catharsis is achieved body reacts in response of the mind for instance while watching a horror film people start hallucinating ,their body reacts to their mind ,while watching emotional scene tears come out of our eyes. All these are reaction to the action-shivering, crying, hysteric laughter and numbness .Tragedies of Shakespeare have aroused catharsis in audiences. There are other stories also that have aroused cathartic feeling in people.

Chinua Achebe in his novel *Things fall Apart* has successfully created a hero with appropriate tragic flaws. Throughout his life Okonkwo has suffered a lot; at the beginning we meet a hero who is quite successful and respected in his clan. His tragic flaw his aggression became the reason for his downfall. His fear of failure and masculinity made him inhumane .His soul was burdened; since a man don't cry he is not able to vent out his agony. His heaviness was becoming rigid day by day, his own son changed religion and people

were changing their ways of living due to the advent of missionaries .He at the end commits suicide

The first time catharsis evokes in the mind of reader is when he accidentally kills one of his clan's mates and he is sent for exile. Second time when he and his clan's mate try to throw white's out of their place, in all this process Okonkwo kills messenger of white's which make white's burn with fury and they order to murder Okonkwo. This makes readers feel pity for brave Okonkwo .He is helpless now eventually he kills himself .Many people who were colonized by the British can feel the pain. His death makes readers feel agitated. The final tragedy occurs when his own clan's mates are now not ready to cremate his body.

Why can't you take him down yourselves? He asked. It is against our custom said one of the men .It is abominate ion for a man to take his own life .It is an offence against the earth ,and a man who commits suicide it will not be buried by his clansman .His body is evil and only strangers may touch it. That is why we ask your people to bring him down; because you are stranger .Will you bury him like any other man? Asked the commissioner, we can not bury him only strangers can, we shall pay your men to do it. (*Things Fall apart*, 151)

Superstitions were making people blind, readers felt sympathy for Okonkwo who for all his life thought about his clan but now he is not even getting his last rites. Death of Okonkwo makes readers to filter their heart. They relate themselves with Okonkwo, the high headed man, for him failure was not even an option. Readers laugh when Okonkwo defeats another wrestler Cat, and cries when Okonkwo dies "The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading "Then they came to the tree from which Okonkwo's body was dangling and stooped dead" (*Things Fall Apart*, 151)

Traces of catharsis can also be seen Kate Chopin's the story of an hour. Mrs. Mallard, the protagonist of this story, she wants to get freedom from her marriage when she was told that her husband is dead she experiences joy instead of grief. She wants to vent out her grief by crying but is not able to do so. She feels trapped in her body. "She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair who has cried itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams" (*The story of an hour*, 211). These lines prove that how helpless she is in her life, she wants freedom, she want solace "Free body and free soul, she kept whispering". (*The Story of an hour*, 212)

In the end doctors said "she had died of heart disease" (*The story of an hour*, 212). From the last line it is evident that she achieved Catharsis by



committing suicide. There was a feeling of triumph in her death. Her soul got freedom of all the boundaries, the same impact was on the readers through her medium many minds got purified.

Art as a medium of catharsis:

Theatre has been the ancient form for the arousal of catharsis, in 19th century actors were not given dialogues they had to improvise as audience were more concerned about how much they could relate with the characters.

Stanislavsky was an actor, director and played an important role in 20th century theatre, he has contributed a lot to the theatres. He was a stern believer of method acting .His main point of view was that an actor should completely get into the shoes of his character, an actor should try to observe people around him and try to find their interest .An actor should observe people keenly, always have a role model in mind. He also made actors to recall their traumatic events of their life to make it look real.

Theatres are evolving with time, these days so many films are being made based on the real life events. We are living in a stressful atmosphere, theaters, films and television help people to overcome their problem and vent out their emotions. Painting has also played a very crucial role in evoking catharsis in people since ages, The first painting was made 40,000 years ago. At that people believed that by making pictures they can capture animal souls, though their meaning is yet unknown .In the modern era paintings are drawn to vent out frustration, grief and happiness of artist. There are many painters who can paint only when they are holding something inside them .The same impact is on the observer ,so many times we have seen people crying at an auction, this happens because painting is best expression ,the more artist has suffered that more that painting appeals.

Jean –Marc Calvet, painting completely changed his life, art actually saved this man's life .He was a drug addict, fugitive and had connections with underworlds, eventually he isolated himself .He locked himself in a villa for three months, he was on the verge of suicide but then suddenly miracle happened in his life, he discovered painting: cathartically he started painting on the walls an in this process of his anger vent out. "It was like I was vomiting non-stop ...I saw what was killing me" (documentary Calvet). Presently Calvet is a renowned painter .He sold his painting for 50,000.It is evident from here that how art and catharsis help people to live their life. This is how modern art came into being, after world war people were devastated there was blood shed and despondency, people were

infuriated their belief on religion was becoming faint, to overcome this state of mind people started painting ,they were using wild colors, expressive images it helped people to vent out their sufferings.

I was never a bright student of my school, my companions bullied me all the time so the result was I never enjoyed going to school. At the age of 34 I was imprisoned at that point of time my life had almost come to an end. My life in prison was dull until I started scribbling on walls .It gave me immense pleasure , I had never practiced this before , this was giving me cathartic vent .At first I felt furious and anxious but with the passage of time felt relieved of my burdens . After my release I spent most of my time in painting which helped me to become a better person .The person I was earlier was now dead, art changed my life to better. (Art and catharsis)

Art has changed many people's life, these days' doctors suggest traumatic patients to paint their suffering, this makes a person loose his sorrows and frustrations.



People use different methods to get their minds purified ,dance is one of such techniques to achieve catharsis, dance is without any verbal expression and can happen even in silence, communication can also be done through dancing .Dance gives voice to repressed emotions, mental power when coordinates with our body it gives rise to dance. Dance makes a person to release its complex emotions, dance helps to get out of metaphorical



bubble that hinders to express, and it breaks all the barriers and allows the soul to fly.

Choreography plays an important role in generating catharsis, choreographers tend to create story out of dancing, there is a hero and a villain. All the gestures have a certain meaning in it, dance can be used as to express wretchedness of the dancer, which is relatable to the audience.

Dancing is also used as a therapy in fading relationships of couples, psychologists first need to understand the problem between the couple then choreographer device movements according to their situation there after the sufferer has to let go off their problems through dancing, they have to narrate their whole story and in that process they achieve catharsis. Modern choreographers want to build a relationship with audience they want audience to experience catharsis. Famous choreographer Crystal Pite spoke about her choreography.

Humans move, our arms reach out knees collapse, our heads nod, our chest cave in our backs arch, we clench our fists, we jump, we shrug, we push each other away and for me this is language as much as it is action. This is what body says about need, defeat, courage, despair, joy, ambivalence, frustration, love. I think these images resonate meaningfully in our minds because we have felt these things so purely in our bodies. We have been moved, I am choreographers and I work with body because I am convicted about this (research paper generating catharsis through dance, ("conflict is vital" Crystal Pite)

Some psychologists observe their patients dancing and with the help of their dance moves they identify their cause of trauma, group dancing helps patients to overcome their trauma through this therapy co-ordination with group is observed. There are several patients who face problem in relying on the other person this therapy teaches them to trust.

In many Hindi films, when makers want to depict love they seek help of dance, in many yashraj banner films dramatic monologue is there when the protagonist dances to show their anger or tension. All these methods help in self discovery for example when we go to watch a film, the character similar to us help us to think upon our behavior. Tragedies since ages has played crucial role in catharsis, especially tragedies of William Shakespeare has always helped in evoking cathartic emotions.

Catharsis in King Lear

King Lear is a story of a haughty king whose misjudgment became the reason of his downfall his own children leads him towards despair. Audience evoked feelings of pity and fear for the

character of the King Lear so much so that later on many times writers tried to change its ending. Many critics argued that audience could have related more if the justice had been given to the King Lear.

In the stormy scene when king Lear is devastated and his condition is pitiable this scene evokes pity and fear in audience, in this scene Lear is no more a king his attire is more that of beggars, his conversation with Tom makes readers shed off their tears

Thou wert better in a grave than to answer with thy uncovered body this extremity of skies. Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou ow'st the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! Here are three on's sophisticated: thou art the thing itself. Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lending's! Come, unbutton hereby (King Lear, 10)

In the storm scene he gives up all his royal treatments and he torn his clothes which symbolize that now he has given all his luxuries to nature. King Lear by the end of the play realizes his follies however now its way too late.

King Lear was written by Shakespeare for James as he was the most arrogant king; there was a message in it that arrogance can become the reason of downfall for any one no matter who it is though people do not consider King Lear as a tragic hero as his mistakes lead him to there. King Lear was unable to bear the truth from his daughter Cordelia; his other two daughters flattered him and later on betrayed him.

Last scene of King Lear leaves a lasting impact on readers mind

GENTELMAN

...o, she is dead

ALBANY

Who dead? Speak, man

GENTELMAN

Your lady, sir, your lady.

And her sister

By her is poisoned. She confesses it (5.3 266-269)

King Lear leaves audience dumbfounded and their minds get washed after watching this tragedy and they leave a lasting impact on the minds of readers.

Art helps in calming unsteady mind, it helps a person to get over their perplexing memories, since ages art has played a vital role in engaging our mind in constructive activities and helps in venting out our complex emotions which is also known as catharsis.



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