

Aesthetic Pleasure: The Arts of Healing

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ABSTARCT

INTRODUCTION: Arts are creative things that provide aesthetic pleasure to the readers, viewers and audience. The joy can be experienced by listening to music, reading novels, watching drama and film, viewing paintings, sculptures and architecture. Such experiences add colors to life, transforms us from inside ourselves and then we derive pleasure from within, being independent of the external world. The involvement of an individual in the creation and appreciation of arts, heals their wounds from inside. The objective of this research paper was to trace the healing properties of arts. **MATERIALS AND METHODS:** This study used qualitative method for exploration of the research area. Artworks were primary sources whereas books and articles on arts and aesthetics were the secondary sources. **RESULTS:** Arts enhance the quality of life. Moreover, they have the capacity of healing mental and emotional wounds. When individuals have frustration, dilemma and confusion, they resort to music, fictions and films. Arts have rescued many from anxiety and depression. Practicing and appreciating arts like music, drama, dance, painting, sculpture or poetry provides rhythmic flow of imagination and allows one to forget the painful moments of life. These creative aspects of arts have healing properties. **CONCLUSIONS:** The creation and appreciation of art is one of the easiest, safest and most accessible means of healing ourselves from pain and suffering in the world. There is a need of application of art in healing patients.

Keywords: Art, appreciation, aesthetic pleasure, healing

INTRODUCTION

The Art is creation, and creation is new and innovative. We can compare our own experiences when we see a new thing and an old thing. What is our experience? When we see the new thing, it catches our attention, gives a sensation and we feel something new, the awareness of our existence. What about the old thing? Generally, we feel bored and we do not have the sense that the thing exists. The being becomes nonbeing. The thing does not exist in our minds. Art gives a sense of existence. Life becomes worth living. Art heals the wounds created by staleness, boredom, monotony and disillusionment [1]. Darkness rises to brightness, confusion comes to clarity and anger is postponed and pacified. We experience and collect the gems and genius through the exploration of art. The creation and appreciation of art does not only provide us inner transformation but also earns external respect and skills to deal with life and its practical problems.

The Greek philosopher Plato says, art is an imitation of nature. Art imitates both external

physical nature and human nature [2]. When we see the reflection of our nature in art and literature, we love to see it as if we are looking for our own image in the mirror [3]. Wherever we see a mirror, we are tempted to see our own image. We love ourselves overtly or covertly like the narcissus. Arts and literature are about ourselves, about human imagination, feelings and emotions. We connect ourselves with the imaginary world in art. Thus, they have healing properties. Creating and appreciating art is exploring and understanding the self.

Next art theorist Aristotle says, art is not only imitation of nature but also a creation of new things [4]. It creates beautiful things and imitates beautiful aspects of things but not the ugly aspects. Art emphasizes beauty and pleasure. In place of ugly things, the artist puts beautiful things. This is the creative aspect of art. It means the artist does not reproduce the real thing but creates new things. Life is the blend of pain and pleasure and despite the use of both aspects, a work of art suffuses us with satisfaction. While experiencing art, we may burst

into tears or laughter but in both cases, we experience joy and delight [4]. This rapture provides a sense of life. The art theorists of western civilization in the middle age state that, art is the symbol of trinity -- the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost [5]. It is not the reproduction of reality but the sign that signifies God and the divine world. It turns the stone into God and we worship the images and figures as divinity in the temple. Painting, sculpture, music and architecture create a spiritual ambiance from where we initiate the quest of invisible and intangible abstract power beyond. Such art works along with spirituality have provided consolation to the individuals who attempt to explore self and the infinite universe. The quest for spiritual power gives a purpose to live in the absurd world where we have been thrown without our wish.

Validity or invalidity of arguments and actions is another matter, but we safely can say that paintings and sculptures of divinities in temples have assisted many people to heal their wounds. Renaissance critics state that art provides aesthetic pleasure while teaching moral lessons to the readers and audience. By reading the *Ramayana*, we learn many things and at the same time, we get joy and delight [5]. When we are confused, we do not know what is right and what is wrong. Some dramas and literature show us the proper way of life. After going through the works of art, we are able to make better choices in life [6]. We gain self-respect that we have done the right things. In addition to relish, arts enhance the quality of life.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research area of this study was art and creativity that was studied from the perspective of healing through aesthetic pleasure. The study takes qualitative method of research, since the effects of art on the viewers, readers and audience are varied and the responses are multiple. The aspects of healing and pleasure may differ from person to person. Subjective responses and judgments have an impact on the formulation of the thesis statement, despite the necessity of persuasive argument and evidence. Books on aesthetics, arts and art history and journal articles were the secondary sources which were used to create the background of this study and make a brief survey

of aesthetics. Artworks themselves were the primary sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The creation and appreciation of arts provides aesthetic pleasure that heals our visible and invisible wounds. By going through the beautiful fiction, we visit interesting characters, events and fascinating places. This gives a sort of sensation to our minds. Of course, it heals our troubled minds. In addition to this, it reduces even physical pain and discomfort. Perhaps, all of us have experienced the impact of music in our lives. Some people listen to music while sleeping. Some people listen to music while walking and working in the field. Why do they do so? Of course, for pleasure. This pleasure make our toil easier and pass quality time. Also, the harshness and troubles are decreased. Aristotle talks about tragic drama. He says that tragic drama arouses pity and fear in the viewers through the characters and events and provides them catharsis or purification to the viewers [4]. The protagonist of the tragic drama is from the higher class or the family of aristocrats. He has many good qualities of a human being but few flaws in his character. The viewers identify themselves with the protagonist. He falls from his position due to his flaws. He fails in his mission, is wounded or dead. The effect of tragedy is high because the hero falls from height and the sound is louder. The fall of poor or lower-class characters is less effective. The audience shows their sympathy for the tragic hero and pity him. The viewers have fear that such tragedy may fall upon them as well. The viewers virtually suffer like the tragic hero [4]. They have real experience without real events, that is, acting in the theatre. The emotions of pity and fear within the viewers arouse and get exercise and ultimately provide catharsis or purgation to the audience. They feel suffused and refreshed and their emotional troubles and discomforts are washed away in the viewing experience [3]. Healing the mental wounds, the tragedy enhances quality of life. The emotions of pity and fear, which we attempt to avoid in real life, are rarely experienced. These emotions are experienced through the arts. Emotional and mental exercises are as important as physical exercise for good health. For Romantic artists, art is the expression of inner feelings and imagination. English romantic

poet William Wordsworth [7] states that, art is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings recollected in tranquility. Artist does not decide to create art but he is compelled to create because of his inner feelings. The feelings are released spontaneously and the release provides relief. When emotions are not expressed, there is a sort of discomfort and restlessness in us. The creation of art transforms discomfort into comfort. Hegel argues that art helps for realization of universal spirit or Brahma, the ultimate goal of a *sadhaka* [8]. Consciousness and matter are two aspects of reality that have a dialectical relationship.

The consciousness or spirit has been blended in matter or body and it has become invisible and hidden within the thing. The goal of human life is to separate consciousness from the body and then to realize the conscious (idea). When we realize this, we experience that the entire universe is a single living organism. An artist paints the picture of an elephant, the physical matter with a heavyweight. The visual representation on the canvas is not the physical elephant but the idea of the elephant. Visual art has separated the spirit from the physical matter. The idea exists in itself. The work of art teaches us to realize the universal spirit. After this enlightenment, there is no duality in subject and object, you and me. Such experience resolves the conflict in the world, and this ultimately heals our troubled existence. Emanuel Kant states, that art has purposiveness without purpose [9]. It means that having no worldly and pragmatic purpose is the sole purpose of art. Art is not created to get things done or provide moral lessons to the readers and audience. It is not useful as everyday things. The only purpose of art is to provide aesthetic pleasure. What matters in art is the beauty that provides a sense of beauty or sublimity. It provides us freedom from pain and suffering for some time. The anxiety and disillusionment of life vanish for some time.

Art provides relief from melancholy and loneliness. When we read fiction, we enter the world of fiction. When we listen to a piece of music, we flow with the rhythm. When we watch film, we enter into the film itself. We take a tour of the virtual world and collect the gems of new experiences [10]. Sigmund Freud says, art is the expression of hidden desires [11]. The suppressed desires are gratified through the creation and appreciation of art. This saves us from mental disorders and madness. All living

beings have biological drives as hunger, anger, sex, etc. Some desires are fulfilled whereas some desires are not fulfilled. For example, hunger can be satisfied by eating food whereas the desire for sex cannot be satisfied so easily due to cultural taboos. Unfulfilled desires are hidden in our unconscious minds. It does not mean that they are dead. The desires in the unconscious mind are always attempting to be fulfilled. If they are not channeled in an appropriate way, the personality can be disturbed. Though it may be impossible to fulfill the desires in real life at this moment, they try to get fulfilled through the dream, tongue slips or arts. Our unconscious mind guides our creative activity. Our unfulfilled desires are sublimated and revealed in artworks [11]. We can find our heroine in the painting. We can wed our lover in fiction or a film. This is how suppressed desires are fulfilled.

Creative activity can be a form of therapy and treatment. Sigmund Freud employed arts and literature for psychoanalysis of his patients and their treatment on the basis of symptoms. Benedetto Croce argues, that intuition is expression and expression is art [12]. Intuition is a vision or the creative spark that flashes forth in our minds without our conscious effort. It shines within us like the morning dew with radiance. When this creative spark is organized and elaborated with other images, symbols, colors and lines, the picture becomes complete in our mind which is called expression. This gives a sort of comfort and satisfaction since it captures our vision. Susanne Langer argues, that arts express the things that language cannot [13]. Arts nurture our feelings and emotions. Our emotions are as important as our physical organs. Arts can be used in the medical field and can be applied for the treatment of certain mental and emotional problems. People can get relief from their painful feelings by playing with art materials like colors, clay, smooth pebbles, pencil, canvas and paper. Carson and Becker argued, that art therapy was an integral part of creativity in counseling patients [14].

The process of treatment and healing encourages creation, response, interaction and appreciation. Eliana Gil states, that in the case of a highly traumatized patient, the therapist needs to introduce activities to assist the person to transform the narrative into a productive aesthetic experience [15]. Pennebaker states that scribbling and writing

can be effective in emotional reparation and in reducing pain in illnesses [6]. The ideas in the reservoir get release through this channel which provides a sense of relief and refreshment lifting our feelings on the air [3].

Malchiodi points, out that interaction with arts, repairs and reshapes relationships through productive patterns in a cohesive form [16]. Johnson remarks, that artists have a "powerful vision" and creations emerge "for a reason" [17]. Art therapists try to connect to the patient's experience and inner experience. McNiff observes, that imagination is the healing element inherent in all forms of self-expression including painting, sculpture, music, dance and literature [18]. Arts can be used to respond to a wide range of disorders like anxiety, depression, loneliness and disillusionment. Art is an integral part of psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and psychological counseling in the process of treatment and healing. When counseling, conversations and talking treatments are not effective, the use of art and creativity are particularly helpful. Art amuses the audience and bring smiles to the patients [16]. Art therapists use arts for the treatment of paranoia, schizophrenia, psychosis and mental disorders. Arts includes sculpture, music, architecture, drama, dance, fiction, painting and poetry. Dance includes a range of different rhythmic movements in a pattern. Therapists motivate the patients to make movements and gestures to help bring positive change in their feeling. For example, when an individual is feeling low, humiliated and suffering from an inferiority complex, he/she appears smaller and weaker than he/she really is by shrinking body and hunching the shoulders. In this situation, the therapist may encourage him/her to stand upright to increase his/her self-respect and confidence [19]. Dancing helps people become aware of their emotions that they find hard to talk about and feel more comfortable with their bodies [20]. The systematic movement of body helps to express the inner feelings, emotions and motives. Music focuses on singing and playing a musical instrument for aesthetic pleasure. An individual composes and creates his own music or plays a piece of music that he enjoys listening to. The music that he composes, plays or appreciates depends on the patient's emotion, feeling, interest and desire. The patient need not be perfect in composing music and skillful to play musical instruments. The therapist watches

how the patient plays a musical instrument and responds to the given composition. He listens to the music composed by the patient and tries to understand his inner feelings and mood. He brings positive changes to the mood of the patient. The guided music by the therapist takes the person on the adventurous journey of unknown rhythm and when the patient returns from the musical journey, he feels refreshed and purified [6]. Music helps therapists to analyze painful feelings, emotions and memories of the patients that they feel difficult to share with others. The process of creation and appreciation facilitates expressing inner experiences. They connect to other people and make harmonious relationships [19]. Furthermore, music creates coherence and order in confusion and chaotic condition.

Visual arts use art media like canvas, paint, stone, clay, wood and paper to create works that express inner emotions, feelings and experiences of creators. The visual elements instantly attract the patients and provide a vivid impression on their minds. The shifting mind is concentrated on the lines, colors, images, textures and rhythm. Therapists and patients share feelings and respond to each other through images, shapes, colors and lines that they cannot do with verbal language [6]. They give importance to quick drawing and spontaneous painting to move the patient ahead for sharing emotions.

Drama can also be used for the treatment and healing of the patients. Appropriate practice can provide relief from pain, depression and anxiety. The patients tell their personal narratives to the therapist. He/She understands what happened to them in the past, traces the causes and effects that ultimately help to solve the problems. The narration and acting contribute to having the experience of catharsis or purification enriching the emotional state. Landreth argues, that it is highly useful for kids that do not have the clear verbal or language skills necessary for communication and sharing inner problems [20]. Expression through drama, role-play, movement and action can be a rewarding experience for the patients. Joseph Moreno says, that the use of narration and acting in drama restores mental health of the individuals [21].

Viewers are suffused by watching actions and acting in the drama. The therapists analyze and derive a lot from what the patients have created and responded to the creation [17]. They disclose

their desires, thoughts and emotions out of your mind in front of the therapist as a co-artist in the play. On the basis of expression, the therapist sets further course of treatment. For example, when a patient feels he is oppressed and dominated by others, he can act and play the role of an assertive and aggressive character in the drama. The weakness and flaws in the character can be repaired in the art that can ultimately help in real life. Levine remarks that "imagination is the central concept which informs the understanding of the use of arts and plays in therapy" [19].

Colors, canvas and clay stimulate us to play with things and disclose our desires and fears. Clay is highly helpful to adjust to our changing feelings because the shape of clay can be easily modified, changed and transformed depending on our mood and comfort. The appreciation of the artworks motivates and encourages the creator for a better life. McNiff states, that some therapists encourage client dialogues that include flexibility from talking to the painting and vice versa [18]. The ideas which are difficult to express in verbal language can be expressed through visual compositions. Florence Goodenough states, that children's drawings can be used to trace their cognitive development [22].

According to Fleshman & Fryrear, arts can be used to complement verbal therapy and other forms of healing [1]. Music has been used for therapy from early times. It was used to heal the wounded soldiers in World War I. The patients were cured through rhythm and melody when they responded to nothing else. It has the power to heal beyond our thinking. Arts have a significant role in the healing of mental problems. According to Fleshman & Fryrear, the Egyptians encouraged people with mental problems to engage in artistic activities five

thousand years ago [1]. Music has calming effects on the audience. Arts not only provide aesthetic pleasure but heal our visible and invisible wounds. They provide us a sense of meaningful existence. Going through a work of art purifies ourselves, providing refreshment and joy. By identifying ourselves with characters and situations, we are able to know ourselves.

CONCLUSIONS

Creative arts provide aesthetic pleasure that heals the troubled state of mind and experiences. The therapists use them as the means of healing in the process of counseling and treatment of the patients. Therapists use colors, images, narration and imagination to interact with the individuals. Both creation and appreciation of arts contribute to healing the patients. Their creations reveal their inner emotions and feelings, and the therapists get the clue about their problems. The client's responses to the artworks depict their personality, interests, desires and concerns. The interactions with artworks reduce anxiety and suffering by increasing self-respect and confidence. The use of art in healing is an age-old convention, yet in Nepal, the trend has not been established with a solid foundation with professional development in the field.

The techniques of healing through arts can add a new dimension to the process of cure, treatment and healing in the medical field. It has not only aesthetic aspects and beauty but also safe without side effects and health hazards. The healing power of arts with aesthetic aspects works like medicine in many patients. The process of healing is soothing and refreshing like visiting new places and people and listening to a beautiful piece of music.

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