The concept of aesthetic enjoyment is as old as the creation of art-works, though it was recognised late as a distinct mental experience and designated the name of the Philosophy of the Beautiful as a distinct province of theoretical inquiry. The aesthetic enjoyment cannot be separated or dissociated from the fact of art-works. If there are works of art, it follows logically and naturally that they are appreciated as such and there are readers or spectators to enjoy them. Art and the enjoyment of art is as old as the civilization. So, when we attempt the task of tracing the concept of aesthetic enjoyment, we have to begin with ancient times. It is attempted not for mere antiquarian interest, but it is valued for its own sake in the surroundings of our present life, as it elucidates the value of beauty for human life.

The theory of Catharsis in tragedy propounded by Aristotle in the 'Poetics', and the theory of Rasa put forth in the 'Śātyakāstra' are two such attempts to describe the art-experience or the aesthetic enjoyment. As a student of English literature and philosophy, I became interested in the study of the concept of aesthetic enjoyment. My guide advised me to make a comparative study of these two cognate theories and thereby to understand the concept of
The theory of Catharsis, which flourished in the classical Greek, and the similar, but somewhat different, the theory of Rasa, that found its way in Indian Aesthetics are explained and compared analytically in this study. I undertook to study these two theories comparatively with special reference to the modern concept of aesthetic enjoyment, to see which theory has more affinity with the modern concept of Aesthetics. I have tried to put forth my conclusions and the arguments leading me to the view that I have presented in this study.

One must admit that in any such parallel study, the similarities are as important as the dissimilarities. They show that two different cultures, instead of springing forth from the basic different environment and temperament, share many concepts of art-experience or dramatic experience, ultimately contributing to world harmony.

At first, I have studied Aristotle's concept of tragedy laid out in his 'Poetics', to show how his theory of Catharsis is the logical outcome of his philosophy. Aristotle has formed his concept of tragedy from the historical evidences before him. All the great, Greek, Attic tragedies were
written before Aristotle was born (384 B.C. to 322 B.C.)
He studies tragedy with the biological relationship of the
organic connection of a part to the whole. As a statesman,
his concern is chiefly of social Good. As his critics have
pointed out, he is concerned with the true and the good in
his philosophy, as it was usual with the other philosophers of
his time. So his theory of Catharsis keeps in centre the
moral point of view. The dramatic experience of tragedy is
upheld because it serves a moral purpose. It is useful
because it purges the disturbing element of emotions and
feelings.

The theory of Rasa, as it is evolved in the tradition
of Bharata's 'Nāṭyaśāstra', describes the dramatic experience
in terms of Ānanda-pure bliss or enjoyment. The concept of
Ānanda is as old as Upanisads. Bharata and his commentators
point out that the main purpose of Nāṭya-drama is Rasa—
relish or savouring of emotions, portrayed in a drama and
this act of relishing is full of Ānanda-pure joy or bliss.

In this study, I have tried to understand the
theory of modern aesthetics or of aesthetic enjoyment in its
historical and philosophical aspects and then applied it to
these two theories of Catharsis and Rasa. My conclusion is
that Aristotle, true to his philosophy, gives his theory of Catharsis in tragedy, a moral and social purpose, while the theory of Rasa as it is developed by the text of the नात्यसाम्रा and its commentaries, principally, अभिनवभरती of Abhinavagupta, has evolved a whole philosophy of aesthetic relish or enjoyment as such.

This is not to say however, that Aristotle has not taken note of the pleasure which a good tragedy provides. He is very much aware of the power of the poets to arouse or evoke the emotions embodied in a good tragedy and the pleasure that we take in this 'mode of imitation'. But he bestows the high status of the 'Final Cause' to the moral and social purpose of a tragedy. Similarly, Bharata has taken note of the moral purpose of नात्य-द्राम, but for him the raison-de-art is Rasa-aesthetic relish or enjoyment. It is not my intention to point out which theory is superior to another, I am here simply to understand and not to judge them.

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