

TAGORE AND MUSIC THERAPY

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Abstract

This research paper Tagore And Music Therapy, the discussion draws on literature which has dealt with the identification of the universally accepted healing nature of music, relevance and growing importance of music therapy because of the upcoming field of ‘holistic healing’ and the power of Tagore’s music. This research provides important pointers on how pleasing sounds heal, how music has the power to influence our state of feelings, evoke emotional responses and how Tagore composed music which has seen innumerable number of people through personal crisis in their life. His music has healed them and provided them with strength and courage in the difficult times of their life – when their sense of faith and hope were low. My research aims to find a relationship between music therapy and Tagore’s music. The focus would be to look at why and how, Tagore’s music is therapeutic and how and why it has helped people to emotionally sail out of difficult times in their life by healing them. The choice of my methodology also developed itself as I interacted with people who have understood Tagore, his music, his philosophy and applied it to their life. The research questions were also developed in this manner. I have discussed the effectiveness of music therapy in different settings. I have also discussed literature on the therapeutic qualities of Tagore’s music by drawing out recent interdisciplinary scholarship combining literature from different sources.

Tagore and Music Therapy

Rabindranath Tagore is the cultural icon of India. He was the first Indian to receive the Nobel prize in 1913. Growing up in India, Tagore practically had no communication with the outside world. In this state, at the age of eighteen, Tagore was sent to England by his father to become a barrister. As Tagore recalls his experiences, it was quite a challenge for him to stay afloat in that state. But since his sister in law was in Brighton, he could weather the first shocks of being in an alien land under her shelter. His journey in England began in this manner and so did his love story with music that he created so passionately (Dutta and Robinson, 1996).

Tagore’s music can be used as a tool for music therapy because he developed the depth and profoundness in his philosophy which he could share with everyone through his songs. His love for music grew when he was in London, far away from his homeland. Tagore expresses how London is one of the most harsh places to be in, for a stranger, especially in winters. At the time when he came to London, he knew no one, nor could he find his way out in the city. He sat alone at a window, looking at the outside world. The room that Tagore was staying in, was scantily furnished, but there happened to be a harmonium which he used to play after the daylight came to its untimely end. Sometimes, he explains, Indians would come to see him and though his

acquaintance with them was but slight, when they wanted to leave, his heart wanted them to stay because he was lonely. Music was his only companion, so to say in those times when he, all by himself, to deal with the strangeness and newness of the whole environment. This is where he developed a very special relationship with music that can be seen in all his works.

Tagore had an upbringing which was made of lot of colourful and artistic influences, with exposure to Indian and Western forms of music - all together. His exposure together with a life in which he faced lots of hardships, gave him the ability to develop a very profound philosophy. He found a way to heal his own self and his own soul with his work in music. If it were any other man, he would have probably broken down badly because of everything that life was giving him but Tagore was not meant to break. Instead, he created such a huge collection of work which could inspire generations to come, give them hope in times of despair and give their mind the strength it needed in a particular moment.

In the music that Tagore created, he beautifully combined the different elements of the Indian ragas and created the mood that he wanted to create and the power he wanted to lend to those lyrics. He understood the importance of the combination of different types of notes and the effect that could have on a person and his feelings. An incident that Tagore shares, suggests and proves the same. He explains how during his entire stay in England, he mixed up with very many different kinds of people. He happened to get acquainted to a widow of an Anglo-Indian high official. An Indian friend of hers had composed a doleful poem in English in the memory of her husband. The composer had indicated the dirge to be sung in *Raga Behag*. One day, the widow entreated Tagore to sing the composition to which Tagore said, “no one except me could realise the painful combination that those verses made with *Raga Behag*.” Here Tagore exhibits his understanding of the effect that different combinations of notes could have with specific lyrics. This is the understanding, intuition and inner knowledge that Tagore used in his songs to give them the power that they have (Tagore, 2008).

“The West has very good reasons to be grateful to Tagore for having enriched them with what I feel is one of the world’s greatest song traditions.”(Pritchard, 2012).

Tagore’s music gives the world, the strength to be able to insulate oneself from the difficult times that one has to sometimes face in this world. The setbacks in life have to be dealt with courage and strength. Tagore was a very spiritual person. He combined spirituality with his music. Tagore’s education took place under his father who was a very spiritual person and was the founder of the Brahmo Samaj. The Brahmo Samaj was dedicated to bringing social reforms in the society at a time when the society was plagued with so many social problems and issues. Although Tagore had said that his songs are for the East and the paintings for the West but author Som (2009) explains *Gitanjali* had actually reached the West just when the West was looking for spiritual fulfilment. Tagore vehemently explained that the West could find the spiritual fulfilment in his songs. And because Tagore wanted to discover and search the deep spirit of man, he started his university which he truly hoped would become a link between the East and the West.

The aim of this Research Paper is to bring out the relationship between Music Therapy and Tagore’s music and discuss the reasons, qualities and elements behind the healing and therapeutic properties of Tagore’s music, focussing on a sample of people who have experienced its power and healing. The people whom I have spoken to as part of my Research project are the people who have actually used Tagore’s music and the power within its lyrics to sail

themselves out of the real life difficult situations that they have had to face. I aim to explore the qualities and attributes in Tagore's music that make his music therapeutic for the mind and the body.

Existing literature on Music, Music Therapy and Tagore's Music as a tool for self-healing When I talk about the literature on music, music therapy and Tagore's music, the discussion draws on literature which has dealt with the identification of the universally accepted healing nature of music, relevance and growing importance of music therapy because of the upcoming field of 'holistic healing' and the power of Tagore's music. This research provides important pointers on how pleasing sounds heal, how music has the power to influence our state of feelings, evoke emotional responses and how Tagore composed music which has seen innumerable number of people through personal crisis in their life. His music has healed them and provided them with strength and courage in the difficult times of their life – when their sense of faith and hope were low.

I begin with a brief overview of definition of music therapy, bring out the link between music and music therapy and then discuss unique qualities of Tagore's music which make it therapeutic.

Music Therapy

My research as mentioned earlier, aims to find a relationship between music therapy and Tagore's music. The focus would be to look at why and how, Tagore's music is therapeutic and how and why it has helped people to emotionally sail out of difficult times in their life by healing them. The choice of my methodology also developed itself as I interacted with people who have understood Tagore, his music, his philosophy and applied it to their life. The research questions were also developed in this manner. I have discussed the effectiveness of music therapy in different settings. I have also discussed literature on the therapeutic qualities of Tagore's music by drawing out recent interdisciplinary scholarship combining literature from different sources. To get down to my point of research I have conducted a total of 12 interviews. They all have been connected to Tagore for a long time, in different ways. Either they are themselves artists performing *Rabindra Sangeet*, have studied Tagore or have been connected to Tagore and his music through generations in their families. In the following section, I seek to discuss the reason behind my chosen method of analysing my research questions, which is interview.

Kolkata, the cultural capital of India is the city of Tagore. He was born at Kolkata. My project focuses on Tagore and life around him during the time he created his massive collection of songs. So, I chose to travel to Kolkata for my research so that I could visit his home at Jorasanko and also examine the different elements of the city, in the manner, literature describes them. Though Tagore was not allowed to venture out of his home boundaries too much but needless to say, it is the environment of the city that provided his home the climate which it had. While growing up at Jorasanko Tagore was influenced and shaped by all this it had. And these surroundings created the Tagore that we know of. I felt a little intimidated at the beginning because of me not being able to understand Bengali but my interviewees helped me immensely to overcome that barrier so I could understand the nuances and the important points that were essential for the wholeness of my research project.

It was important for me to visit Jorasanko, Tagore's residence, to be able to understand and make sense of how different things in the environment developed his mind and feelings. It

was an eye opener and extremely invigorating experience to understand his family settings and the way in which he grew up. The growing up years sculpted most of his work though the tragic personal experiences that he later had, ironically brought out the best bits of work from him, which we have inherited from him today.

The best thing that I experienced during the entire journey was that, even during the process of my preliminary research, my interviewees were excellent in their thought process. They led me from one good point to the other – all this helping me to solidify my thoughts and notions about my research project. One of them, in fact, even said to me, “Tagore is going to become your religion in times to come, once you understand his work more.”

Uniqueness in Tagore’s music

Radice, based in London has been studying the mood and melody of Tagore’s songs. He claims that no person can ignore Tagore’s songs. At the time of his writing the article entitled, *Indeterminacy in Rabindra Sangeet*, he expresses how for two or three years prior to writing this article, he has been in the habit of listening to *Rabindra Sangeet* every morning. For each song that he listened to, he would write a summary, meaning of the words of that song, on a card. According to William, Tagore’s songs are ‘art songs’ which are so popular - they are sung like ‘pop songs’.

Prof. Debashish Raychaudhuri who is an accomplished *Rabindra Sangeet* singer based at Kolkata talked to me about how they have been using Tagore’s music to heal. I have also interviewed Dr. Gopa Dutta as part of my research. She is a case study of a person who has been healing her emotions and mind after the loss of her husband’s death, with Tagore’s music. Prof. Debashish Rauchaudhuri and his daughter have been singing Tagore’s music to help her overcome the trauma of the loss in her life. Prof. Debashish also shared with me how, at every event, whether celebration or sorrow, everything is marked with Tagore’s music and songs. He shares how his mother stressed on his learning Bengali so that she could introduce him to Tagore and also that he could imbibe the deep philosophy and meaning about life embedded in Tagore’s songs. Aniruddh Singha, who is a music therapist and *Rabindra Sangeet* singer based at Kolkata explained to me how he used Tagore’s songs to heal the mentally challenged at a psychiatry hospital. He said Tagore’s music helped harmony and rhythm come back in their life. Khosla (2015) claims, the Indian concept of *nada chikitsa* and *nada yoga – union with supreme through nada* are more comprehensive and complex as compared to western music yet there is a dearth of research in this area.

Music is an antidote to stress and tension of mind and body. It stimulates the senses and provides comfort to the mind. Good music acts as a strong de-stressor. Music acts as a therapeutic tool for different people in different ways. According to the American Music Therapy Association (2005), the definition of music therapy is as follows: “Music Therapy is the clinical and evidence based use of music interventions to accomplish individualized goals within a therapeutic relationship by a credentialed professional who has completed an approved music therapy program. Music therapy interventions can be designed to promote wellness, manage stress, alleviate pain, express feelings, enhance memory, improve communication and promote physical rehabilitation. The research in music therapy supports its effectiveness in a wide variety of health care and educational settings.”

A saying from the Vedas shared with me by my mother: “*Naach vidya sangeetat paraa*”
- The knowledge of music is the highest of all.

Bonny (1986) explains: “A definition of music therapy may help us delineate and clarify the use of music in healing. Music therapy may be defined as the systematic application of music as directed by the music therapist to bring about changes in the emotional and/or physical health of the person. As such, its functional rather than its aesthetic and entertainment aspects are emphasized.” The relationship that gets formed between the music therapist and the patient plays an important role in healing a person. It is important for the music therapist to understand the way in which music contributes to the healing process and it is on this basis that the effectiveness of music therapy is determined. The support that a person gets in order to be able to deal with one’s emotions, is one of the main purposes of music therapy and this gives birth to Music Therapy. Dr. Siegel and Solomon (2009) explain in their book which draws on cutting-edge neuroscience to help understand emotions better. Emotions can become powerful catalysts for bringing about transformations at the heart of the healing process within a person. Human beings are hard wired to connect with one another and emotions connect all of us. It is because of outflow of emotions that it becomes all the more important to regulate our emotions in a healthy manner for our own sense of well-being.

Emotions in human beings have a style of expressing themselves physically and music is a language which relies on emotions. Music is a language of emotions. The process of performance takes the musician on a journey of imagination and his hands move and facial expressions change automatically as a result of reflex action. The movements are a direct expression of his mental state while he is performing. “It has been found quite possible to analyse a particular raga, examine its notes, and define the emotion it can give rise to.”

As explained by Walia (2014), *Kirtan* is an Indian word for chanting of mantras and singing devotional songs with rhythm in a group while concentrating on remembering the almighty are so popular today that a ‘*kirtan revolution*’ is taking place from New York to London to Tokyo. Pandit Vishwa Mohan Bhatt explains that this is happening because the rhythm along with *bhavas* (emotions) created by the different ragas in the music directly affects our mood and even the rate of breathing. Music therapist, Stuti Chandok explains that there is a great healing power in sound. *Kirtans* have the power in them to heal because they are sung in communities and also it heals as kirtan--community singing produces vibrations which are positive and this positivity has a great healing power. She explains, if they were sung on one-to-one basis, they would not have had the same effect. It is because they are sung in a group that there is a feeling of connectedness and this triggers a feeling of a dynamic well-being of all those who are singing.

Sounds, their healing effect and concept of holistic healing

It has been known for long, sounds have a healing effect on mind and the body. Sounds soothe and heal a person. For healing to take place with sounds, they have to be pleasant and musical. Sound of falling rain, waterfall, river and birds can all heal a person in different measure. Personality of a person is important here because it is on the basis of the personality - sounds appeal which heal an individual. Nature and nurture both play an important role in determining the kind of music that will heal.

Bonny (1986) explains that to determine exactly the type of music that has greatest healing properties, different variables within music must be delineated and how they affect different

people must be examined. He emphasizes how ‘habitual listening postures’ have much to do with final effects of music on the mind, body and spirit. Music has been known to be a ‘healing force.’ The trend for music therapy is becoming widespread because of holistic healing becoming important. During the process of music therapy, controlled music is used to connect itself with remedial and behavioural effects of music. Inpatient and outpatients with mental and emotional disorders, psychosocial problems, psychiatric illnesses and retardation are the ones who benefit from music therapy.

Nada moolamidam jagat, which means mountains, waterfalls, oceans, the different five elements, the flora and the fauna and everything around us is full of *nada* (sound), explains Ganapathy Sachchidananda Swami. All animate and inanimate beings on this planet are a manifestation of the energy principle. They all respond to sound waves. He mentions that the benefits of music therapy include relief from pain, discomfort and experience of the spiritual uplift on a holistic level. The process of being dedicated to *Nada Yoga* which is known as *Nadopasana* has spiritual dimensions to it. It assures peace of mind, alleviates depression, pain and suffering. The Indian concept of *nada chikitsa*, which is healing through *nada* (sound) is more complex because it deals with not just music but also several other allied aspects and interventions. In the Indian context, song, dance and instrumental music are called *Sangeetam*. The concept of *Nada Yoga* not only talks about external interventions that take place by a therapist but also the internal energy phenomenon or the sound which is inside an individual. The internal equilibrium is constantly set right by the sound inside our body. This is also believed to restore balance in mother nature, of which we are all a part of. *Nada* in all its forms is treated as energy and all rules that apply to energy are applicable to *nada* as well (Khosla, 2015).

Various studies have recognized that the rhythms of the body are related to the rhythms of the world around us. The three natural inescapable rhythms that we live in are the rotations of the earth, the moon and the earth around the sun. In a similar manner, the three basic environmental periodicities are daily, lunar-tidal and annual. Biological rhythms have different timing systems. “Bio-function works by oscillation: heartbeat, breathing, transmission of nerve impulses. These impulses are not related to the external time but have to do with the demands of the body tissues for oxygen,” explains Ayensu (1981, p.53).

The correlation between rhythms of the body and music serves as a basis for promising research into music’s healing effect on a person. This recognition is of great importance for the field of music therapy. The technique of entrainment utilizes these rhythms by causing periodic phenomena to “time lock”. For example, when the process of entrainment is complete, the periodic changes are caused by the musical variations. This happens when the tempo of the music is synchronized with the physical and the biological state. Both the tempo and the mood of music are utilized by entrainment to bring about a change in the mood and the rhythms of the body. “It is the heart that has trained the nervous system from infancy in rhythmic principles.” (Rao, 1916, p.32).

Medical practitioners using music as a therapeutic tool

The more recent coming up of the field of ‘holistic medicine’ has enhanced the importance of music therapy. Now music therapy has a position of greater acceptance. Holistic medicine considers the person as a whole and acknowledges that the total person – mind, body and spirit must be brought to the “healing table”. Here, music therapy can play a powerful role.

Bonny explains: Music is intimately involved in our inner and outer lives. He illustrates the characteristics of music which contribute to its therapeutic use: Music has the power to influence our feeling states and evoke emotional responses. It is used in marches, love songs and funeral dirges. Music is multi-dimensional and simultaneously provides meaning on different levels crossing through verbal barriers. It also evokes physiological responses. The newest research in brain hemispheric differentiation and triune brain (Pearce, 1986) explains the wide dissemination of sound phenomenon throughout the body. Research suggests that the production of morphine-like peptides or endorphins may be connected to certain musical experiences. Symbolic representation is stimulated by music. Kinaesthetic, emotional or visual images are a part of treatment in various diseases. The right selection of music can help in remembering the memories and enhance the flow of imagery and fantasy. The clinical situation and requirement of each individual determine the choice of music. Other senses in the body such as touch, taste, vision and smell are also enhanced by music.

For instance, Rosenfield (1985, p.56) explains, “We respond to music by a complex mix of psychological and physiological reactions triggered by numerous aspects of the music itself.” Rudyar (cited in Bonny, 1986, p.3-12) explains how usually drugs are used to control the bodily functions from ‘outside’ rather than appointing and employing an individual’s in-built, inner capacity for self healing and regulating oneself. Rudyar then mentions, how in this regard proper music can be the most effective addition. He also suggests how most thinking people who understand the power of music will agree with this statement.

Larry Dossey (1985) illustrates how most physicians believe that any disease in the body originates when the molecular breakdown takes place in the body. Hence, by definition, it is considered physical by nature. And when one thinks in this manner, it obviously legitimizes physicalistic approaches, i.e drugs and surgeries exerting actual physical changes are valued more than anything else. Other therapies which bring about behavioural modalities are valuable only to the extent they bring about some somatic changes: therapies that “make one feel better” are really said to “really not do anything” and are suspected fundamentally useless .

Whereas Michael Ruff of the National Institute of Health on the other hand mentions and reminds us of the fact that “psychological stress impairs the immune system.” Anxiety and stress increase the vulnerability of the body to disease. He mentions how emotions and feelings are fundamentally biochemical in nature and thus affect the immune system both directly and indirectly (Dixon, 1986, p.65).

In one of his lectures in a conference of Tagore, at the Dartington Hall, in the UK, Chopra (2011) mentions that emotional well-being is important for every human being. The mind and heart have to be in harmony with each other for the body to feel well.

Tagore’s music for music therapy

Tagore was a spiritual person who believed in the universe creating everything that was being created for us in the present moment. He believed in the philosophy of the *Upanishads*. He explains: “I feel strongly that this, for us, is the teaching of the

Upanishads, and that this teaching is very much needed in the present age for those who boast of the freedom enjoyed by their nations, using that freedom for building up a dark world of spiritual blindness, where the passions of greed and hatred are allowed to roam unchecked, having for their allies deceitful diplomacy and a widespread propaganda of falsehood, where the soul remains caged and the self batters upon the decaying flesh of its victims.” Tagore has been a great writer of songs as Singh explains, “I partly redeemed myself when I published a lengthy review of Radice’s earlier translations admitting that Tagore was indeed a great writer of songs.”

For example, some of the songs that are so useful for the purpose of music therapy are: *Ami jokhon cheelem ondho*, *Aaro aaghaat shoinemaar*, *Antara mamu bikashita karo*, *Bipade more rokkha karo*. Tagore used these songs to heal himself. They were his tool for self-healing. He healed himself through his own words and music.

Bipade More Rokkha Karo

Bipade more rokkha karo e nohe mor praarthana -

Bipade aami naa jeno kori bhoy.

Dukhyotaape byathito chite naai baa dile santanaa,

Dukhyey jeno karite paari joy.

Sahaay mor naa jodi jute nijer bol naa jeno tute -

Songsaarete ghotile khoti, labhile shudhu bonchona,

Nijer mone naa jeno maani khoy.

Aamaare tumi koribe traan e nahe mor praarthana -

Tarite paari shakati jeno roy.

Aamaar bhaar laaghab kori naai baa dile santana,

Bahite paari emni jeno hoy.

Namrashire sukher dine tomaari mukh loibo chine -

Dukher raate nikhil dharaa je din kore bonchona

Tomaare jeno na kori songshoy.

English Translation of the above song

Save me from all odds is not my prayer

That may I have the courage to face any event

You need not embalm the sad heart

That may I win over sadness

If aid is not in hand may my inner strength never break

In case of damage with the things around, subjected to humiliation

May I never take it as deficit.

You shall relieve me that is not my prayer

May I hold strength to relieve others.

You need not shed my burden and shower your empathy

May I always be capable of.

On the happy days my offerings to you submissively

On the suffering nights when the world is against

May I not lose faith on you. (*All about Rabindrasangeet, 2008*)

Tagore could compose the songs that he did because of his underlying philosophy of life and because of who he was as a person. As Yun-Shan explains in one of his articles, Gandhi had once appealed in all the Indian newspapers referring to Tagore's school at Shantiniketan: "Indeed, the *Gurudeva*, as he was known by all countrymen, should command all the monetary help that he needs. He has brought lustre to India." Yun-Shan goes a step ahead and furthers that Tagore has not only brought lustre to India but to the whole world.

Ghosh (2011) explains how Tagore's music is an original creation. Though it has been inspired by many different forms of music, it is still deeply different from every other form that it has been inspired by. As stated in *Tagore's Music*, Tagore did not make an attempt to create a new form in abstract music. Tagore brought music down from the pedestal of classical music and gave a mainstream form of expression to everyone. His music was something that masses in his country and the world could relate to and find an expression for their feelings through those words and songs along the course of events in their life. Here it is very pertinent to note that his music is so beautifully blended with the poetry of the words that it is impossible to separate the mood from the words and words from the tune.

Rabindra Sangeet has such a huge impact on the people all over the world, who are connected with his work and understand him as a person that every change of season, every feeling of human being, any festival, in sorrow or in joy, every and any event of life, has found an expression of itself in his songs and music. His songs are sung in religious gatherings and in concert halls. Every person in every stage of life finds an expression for his or her feelings in his songs, especially the lyrics of his songs.

Conclusion

To sum up, scholars explain, music and music therapy are gaining a place of increasing importance because of upcoming field of holistic medicine. Emotional well-being is important for physical well-being of a person. Feelings play an important role in maintaining peace in the body. Pleasing sounds heal a person from within by evoking certain emotions, which heal.

This internal mechanism is a shield to protect oneself from traumas and troubles in life. It adds to the mental robustness of a person - upbringing and enculturation are the determining factors here. It can be seen how, in the medical world, there has been a shift from only 'physicalistic and external medicine' to an 'inner' approach to healing.

Tagore's music is known to have a spiritual base to it, connecting with the universe. His music is a reflection of a person with extraordinary qualities. His work was embraced not only by his countrymen but by the entire world. His work has been a gift to mankind. Its influence continues to develop newer interpretations.

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