

THE IMPACT OF RAMINDRASANGEET ON THE PROBLEM BEHAVIOR OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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Abstract:

Music has, undeniably, a positive and conducive impact on the perturbed human mind. Using this very trait of this art form, the therapists all over the world treat their patients with music through music therapy. Rabindrasangeet, the songs written by Rabindranath Tagore (the poet laureate) mainly in Bengali and later translated in different languages of India and the world, is a very popular form of music among the Bengalis in the eastern part of India. It is often used to treat patients with mental disorders like Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) through the already established therapy called Rabindrik Psychotherapy. However, till date, there exists no such treatment to reduce the anxiety level and modify the problem behaviours of special needs individuals. The researchers conducted 3 case studies of three special needs individuals based in Kolkata and Mumbai, India. Owing to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, they carried out semi-structured telephonic interviews of the mothers (primary caregivers) of these individuals, a private music teacher, a special educator and two music teachers attached to a special school in Kolkata to investigate the impact of Rabindrasangeet on the problem behaviours of these challenged individuals. It was found out that the soothing tune of this genre does play a positive role in bringing down the anxiety level and problem behaviours like self-hitting, self-biting, aggression etc. These individuals experience a calming effect on their mind and a subtle joy while listening to Rabindrasangeet and exhibit socially acceptable behaviours.

Keywords: Rabindrasangeet, Special needs individuals, Problem behaviours, Music therapy, Rabindrik Psychotherapy

Introduction:

According to Shakespeare, music is such art that dispels the "grief of heart" (Henry VII) or music oft hath such a charm/ To make bad good (Measure for Measure). It is universally acknowledged that music has a beneficial impact on the human mind and behaviour. Naturally, this art form, consisting of sound and rhythm, has been employed all over the world to soothe the perturbed human mind and modify human behaviour through music therapy. Several studies have been conducted across the world pertaining to music and its positive influence on individuals with challenges (both physical and mental) and individuals with typical development. In the paper "Use of Music in special Education and Application Examples from Turkey", Eren (2013) cited an example where 4 pre-school kids with autism learned various concepts pertaining to colours and emotions after being exposed to music activities twice a week for a year. Batabura & Maniam (2019) in their work "Enhancing Creativity through Musical Drama for Children with Special Needs Down Syndrome in Education of Disabled Children" found out that musical drama could improve language skills, communication skills, memory and storage of information in children with Down Syndrome. Again, Stratford & Ching (1989) in their study

"Responses to music and movement in the development of children with Down's Syndrome", pointed out that music and dance movements had a congenial impact on the development of the special needs children. Bharathi, Venugopal & Vellingiri (2019) in their work "Music therapy as a therapeutic tool in improving the social skills of autistic children" revealed that music therapy for three months could improve the social skills of the 54 children with mild to severe autism (taken as sample) such that they could communicate, understand, respond and interact with their peers in a better way. Jellison & Gainer (1995) conducted a case study of a child with special needs for one year in both music education and music therapy settings to examine the special child's behaviour. They concluded that music therapy produced better result than music education. Rates of individual correct responses were higher in music therapy than in music education. However, in both cases, the child exhibited less aggressive behaviour as compared to non-musical environment. Mitchell, E. (2016) revealed that English music therapists accepted that musical experiences in the form of therapeutic music education produced personal growth along with musical growth in their clients. In the book titled Music Therapy in Schools: Working with Children of All Ages in Mainstream and Special Education (2012), Bruce, A. & High, S. in Chapter 4 (Multiple Views of Music Therapy), have talked about a 5-year-old girl with cerebral palsy and severe learning disabilities. She does not use any language and whose exposure to music in her school in therapeutic setting improves her vocalisation, interaction and communication skills. Again, Daveson & Edwards (1998) revealed the wide use of music in medical and educational institutions, both special and regular, in Australia. Berger, D.S. (2002) has shown very aptly that music therapy is, indeed, very effective for children with autism spectrum disorder because communication with these children via music works better than communication through words. Berger also mentions that music stimulates the brain to produce remarkable results. Lloyd, P. in his book Let's All Listen: Songs for Group Work in Settings That Include Students with Learning Difficulties and Autism (2007), has compiled 46 songs for especially children with special needs who have problems in communication, based on the principle that music improves and enhances the communication skills and social interaction in students with learning difficulties. The use of Rabindrasangeet in music therapy Rabindrasangeet is a very popular form of music in Eastern India, It is a body of songs written by the poet laureate, Rabindranath Tagore (the first Asian to win a Nobel Prize in literature in 1913). The songs are written mainly in Bengali that depict the entire gamut of human emotions. Almost every Bengali is fond of this unique genre. Whether in deep agony, sorrow, joy or ecstasy, the Bengali heart clings on to Rabindrasangeet. Naturally, this Bengali art form has also been adopted for promotion of mental health and well-being among individuals in Rabindrik Psychotherapy, an already established therapy for treating patients with mental disorders. In "Effectiveness of Rabindra Sangeet and Rabindra Nritya on level of stress among mothers of children with ASD" (2020, February), Mandal, Mondal & Bishnuroy have shown that by exposing the mothers of children with autism spectrum disorder to Rabindrasangeet, the stress level could be reduced. They have opined that Rabindrasangeet are the eternal songs created by Tagore that act as a mediator "to feel deeply the inner and inner core of consciousness" Acharya & Tarafdar (2019) conducted a research (tools used: a close-ended questionnaire and Beck Depression Inventory) and found that the songs of Tagore drove away tension and depression and lowered the anxiety level among the 200 adolescents of both the genders, aged between 16 and 18 years. In another work titled "Study of the effect of music on IIRV signal using 3D Poincare plot in spherical coordinates-A signal processing approach" (2015), Das et al. have revealed that Rabindrasangeet may be used as a tool to deal with different medical problems such

as stress management or hypertension. But can Rabindrasangeet be equally effective in reducing the problem behaviours of special needs individuals?

Objective: To investigate the impact of Rabindrasangeet on problem behaviours of special needs individuals.

Rabindrasangeet and its impact on special needs individuals Special needs individuals constitute one of the most marginalised sections of the Society in India. According to William Radice, the British poet, writer and translator who has studied the mood and melody of Tagore's songs. it is difficult for anyone to ignore Tagore's songs [as mentioned by Sugandha, T. 2020, June) in Tagore and Music Therapy The researchers, thus, have attempted to find out the impact of Rabindrasangeet on the problem behaviours of the special needs individuals, which hamper their learning process, through case studies of 3 individuals with special needs (cerebral palsy, ASD and PDDNOS), based in Koikata and Mumbai, India.

Owing to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic situation, the Teseachers conducted semi-structured telephonic interviews of mothers (primary caregivers) of 3 individuals with special needs, a music teacher imparting private music lessons to one of these special needs individuals at the learner's home and a special educator and 2 music teachers attached to a special school in Koikata.

Case study#1: The teenager from Kolkata who loves to sing and dance to the tunes of Rabindrasangeet This 14-year-old-girl with cerebral palsy from Kolkata is wheelchair bound and attends both a special school (Trun by a Non-Governmental Organisation) and a government mainstream (normal) school in the city. The mother sends her to the government school twice a week after attending the special school mainly to avail the benefits, especially monetary, that her daughter is eligible for. Presently, she is at the B-level (equivalent to standard 5) under NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling) in the special school. The mother reveals fhat her daughter has a good memory and loves counting numbers backward both in English and Bengali (mother-tongue). She has specch problem of moderate degree and problem in fine-motor too. Thus, she takes the help of her mother while writing. She had a convulsion attack after birth. At the age of six, she suffered from convulsion several times. After that she has not expericenced any. The mother believes that homeopathy treatment has stopped these convulsion attacks, However, she 1s presently not under any medication. Observing her inclination for music, espec lally Rabindrasangeet that her mother used to sing and play on the harmonium at home, the mother hired a private music teacher two years ago. The teacher comes home and conducts a class every week Tor one hour, The teacher reports that her special needs student enjoys her music classes and even starts dancing in her own way by clapping the hands when certain songs of Tagore are sung to her accompanied by a harmonium. According to the teacher, she does not adopt any special technique for giving music lessons to her challenged student. All she does is playing the songs of her student's liking several times so that she makes an effort to sing them. And she does make every effort to utter the lyrics. She loves singing "Alo amaar alo ogo alo bhupon bhora..." (Light O my light! This world is full of light..) and "Amra shobai raja amader ei rajar rajottay..." (We are all kings in our king's kingdom...). Tho mother scent the rescarchers a video clipping in which she is seen trying her very best to sing the latter. During the lockdown in 2020, she attended online music classes happily every weck for nearly an hour. Unlike the school online classes, she would sit all alone and sing with the teacher during the virtual music classes. Both the teacher and the mother are of the view that she waits eagerly for her music classes, Though she does not understand the inner meanings of these songs, yet she

likes their tunes, rhythms and beats. She prefers the rhythmic songs of Tagore to the slow-paced ones. She memorises the lyrics quite well. The mother opines that music, especially Rabindrasangeet, has a constructive impact on her daughter. It definitely reduces her anxiety level and problem behaviours. The mother takes recourse to playing Rabindrasangeet on cell phone whenever she has to leave the daughter unattended for her household chores. The daughter sits quietly and listens to the songs. Otherwise, she messes up the whole place trying to do things on her own. Also, according to the mother, while learning the lyrics and attempting to utter them, her speech has improved to a considerable degree.

Case study#2: The young man from Mumbai with a keyboard This 21-year-old young man with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) from Mumbai understands both Bengali, his mother-tongue, and Hindi, the language of instruction in school. He studied in a mainstream school in Mumbai till class 12 and completed higher secondary examination under NIOS (National Institute of Open Schooling). Presently he goes to a vocational centre. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic scenario, he is staying indoors and learning computers online. The mother says that he has been learning keyboard since he was 8 years old. The music teacher, a non-Bengali, comes home to give him lessons on keyboard playing. The mother reveals that her son, though verbal, does not converse spontaneously. His communication through spoken words is only need based. However, he has a strong liking for music. He listens to different genres of music including Rabindrasangeet and plays them on his keyboard at a specific time (between 4.30pm and 8pm) during the evening. This gives him satisfaction and also calms him down when in anxiety. However, according to the mother, he is not hyperactive. The mother points out that whenever her son experiences high anxiety level he starts playing the keyboard to soothe his disturbed mind. Though he does not prefer the melancholic tunes of certain Rabindrasangeet, he likes the 'happy' songs by Tagore which have beats and are rhythmic. In fact, he switches off the sad numbers by Tagore. The mother recalls that her son, at the age of 3 years, used to cry the whole day and then it was music particularly the Rabindrasangeet: "Akash bhora /Shurjo tara..." (The sky full of sun and stars...) that played a great role in calming him down. It played a significant role in reducing and modifying his problem behaviour of crying and throwing tantrums. At present, the father plays Rabindrasangeet besides Western classical like Mozart during night. Such a musical environment, as pointed out by the mother, has a positive effect on her son's overall mental health and keeps his anxiety and stress level low. The mother says that her son is under homeopathic medication which she opines has no side effects as such and it gives her peace of mind because there is no cure for ASD as of now. On contacting the mother two months after the interview, the researchers learnt that both the mother and her son were lockdown with COVID. So, no further communication could be made.

Case study#3: "The young man from Kolkata who loves singing and listening to Rabindrasangeet This 21-year-old Bengali young man from Kolkata exhibits certain traits of autism and has been diagnosed with PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified). He has delayed developmental milestones and balance problem while walking. He wears a pair of leather-made special shoes to school, given by the school authority. He has flat feet and these shoes aid him in stepping and climbing up the staircase. The mother reveals that from the age of 1 year 3 months, her son experienced several convulsion attacks that worsened her condition. That last convulsion was when he was 11 years old. Presently he takes 3 types of neurological medicine at different times of the day. Though verbally, he is quite strong, yet he has severe fine motor problem and cannot write. He does not show any interest in functional

academies and is at pre-vocational level in the special school that he attends in the southern fringes of the city, However, he has a strong liking for music. The mother, a trained singer, is of the view that he has inherited his love for music from the family, in which every member sings and takes keen interest in music and Tagore's songs. The family runs a music school too. This young man loves to sing the very popular Rabindrasangeet "Puranoshei diner katha bhulbi ki re hai. (How can you forget the memories of yesterday?/..). The mother says that most of the time she has observed him singing this song when sitting alone. He also likes to sing "Boroasha kore eshcehhi go kachhe deke lou." (have come to you with great hope, so take me close to you, mother). He possesses a very sharp memory, remembers the lyrics very well and even identifies the songs by their tunes.

When unable to sing tunelessly some of Tagore's difficult songs, he simply utters the lyrics as in poetry. The mother points out that he does this for the song "Chorono dhorite diyo go amare, nio na nio na shoraye. (Let me hold your feet, don't move them away...). The mother sent a video clipping to the researchers in which he is seen singing the Rabindrasangeet: "Aguner poroshmoni chhowao prane. (Touch my life with the fiery magical stone and purify my life...). She thinks that her son understands the meaning of these songs to a certain extent. At the age of ten, when he caught his mother crying and singing a sad song by Tagore, after his grandmother's demise, he asked her whether she was singing it out of pain and remorse due to his grandmother's absence. During the lockdown of 2020, he became hyperactive and aggressive and it was singing of Rabindrasangeet that significantly reduced his heightened anxiety level (caused due to the abrupt changes in his daily routine). Consequently, his problem behaviours like pinching others, hurling verbal abuses at others and repeatedly saying the same thing also have got reduced. Now he has adapted himself to the 'new normal' and attends online classes for two hours thrice a week. A talkative person that he is, he enjoys talking to his friends and teachers during the virtual classes. The problem behaviours, the mother points out, arise out of anger, frustration and inability to express himself fully in spite of being verbal. During the hot

summer days, when he usually becomes hyperactive, the mother takes recourse to singing of Rabindrasangeet that has considerably a soothing and positive impact on her son's mind. Conclusion From the above case studies of the three special needs individuals of both genders (2 male and 1 female individuals), of various age groups, it can be inferred that Rabindrasangeet plays a positive role in reducing the socially inappropriate problem behaviours of the special needs individuals. The opinions and views expressed by the mothers of the 3 special needs individuals, a private music teacher and the special educator and the two other music teachers, attached to a special school in Kolkata, further strengthen this inference. That language is not a barrier as far as music is concerned, is well-known, Rabindrasangeet or songs of Tagore can be used for modifying the socially unacceptable problem behaviours of the challenged individuals from both Bengali and non-Bengali background. Also, Debdulal Dutta Roy, the proponent of Rabindrik Psychotherapy, has aptly viewed: "Rabindrasangeet tunes (without the words) can help those who don't understand Bengali" (<https://tinesafindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolkata/rabindrasangeet-as-psychotherapy/articlestow/26480400.cms>). It may be pointed out that one need not actually understand the inner meanings and connotations lying within these songs as far as special needs individuals are concerned. The rhythm and the tunes matter a lot. Till date there exists no well-structured, holistic curative procedure" (in the words of Dutta Roy) like Rabindrik Psychotherapy, as far as treating the challenged individuals with Rabindrasangeet is concerned. Still several special schools and special educators in Kolkata take recourse to this very genre of music so as to produce a positive and conducive effect on special needs individuals of various age groups and of both genders (male and female) to lessen their anxiety level, to

reduce their problem behaviours and to help them manage their emotional disturbances. In fact, positive results are being obtained due to this practice and the music teachers and the special educators as well as the caregivers of the challenged individuals concede that soothing tunes of Tagore's songs, indeed, are helpful for modifying the socially undesirable problematic behaviours of their pupils and wards, thereby enhancing their attention level and learning process. These problem behaviours come in the way of their learning and education.

It may be suggested that further wider researches may be conducted in this field. Seminars, workshops and conferences may be organized on this topic to widen the scope of Rabindrasangeet as a tool for behaviour modification of the special needs individuals across India and other countries of the world. "The many facets of Tagore 's songs have already been explored. With the present study another new facet of Rabindrasangeet has been explored.

The researchers are optimistic that in the near future an established treatment through this popular genre and trained therapists will take shape that will be beneficial for the needs individuals, who have special largely remained neglected in the Indian society

Main subject matter

According to Robert N Bellah, religion is "an individual quest for meaning rather than a collective act of worship. Modern man has his own freedom than ever before to search for and construct his own ultimate meaning". (Bellah, 1976: 143). Religion influences our personal life. When the personal life of individual becomes candid and immaculate, the society benefits for its smooth functioning. According to Alfred North Whitehead, "Religion is what the individual does with his solitariness" – (Whitehead, 1926: 47). Each one of us does have a particular significant role in contributing to the richness and variety of the human society. We can mould the society only by making necessary transformation in individual men's hearts and minds. There can be no conflict in between the individual good and the social good.

A man is what he thinks. The social discipline should be such that it must provide the individual with the atmosphere and circumstances to think uprightly, which will not only help each individual to grow to his utmost but also would ultimately uplift the society. The beliefs and values of the society are often absorbed into the religion and ultimately that may become the morality of the society. In our traditional society religion occupies an eminent position in every arena of man's life, whether it be political, economic, educational, recreational, family life or social welfare. Thus Ray states, "There is scarcely a sphere of man's life that is left untouched by the conditioning effect of religious ideas" (Ray, 1948: 3). Gandhi says, 'Man without religion is man without roots. Therefore, religion is the basis on which all life structure has to be erected, if life is to be real'. [Gandhi, 1980:137].

The Modern Societies are undergoing a process of secularisation. It means the influence of religion in all areas of social life is steadily diminishing. According to Herberg, religion has become "a way of sociability or belonging rather than a way of reorienting life to God" (Herberg, 1960:137). It is thus frequently religiousness without serious commitment, without inner conviction.

We are facing a great cultural change. When we acquired a spectacular growth in economic prosperity and intellectual advancement by dint of hard work, it has turned to be the harbinger of the ruin of spiritual orientation of humanity. It seems we are at the brink of decay of traditional religion, morality and social order. Disintegration of faith cuts at the root of human unity. Our traditional values are fast disappearing. The crude ways of the fundamentalists bring in more

violence, oppression and cruelty. People are in a state of doubts and discord. Disintegration of faith cuts at the root of human unity. Modernism is a reaction against this traditional order. Consequently everything around us is unsteady and contradictory. We cannot deny that man has reached a highly advanced stage of development in most of his faculties, yet he is lacking in the integration of binding together of different elements to keep up an healthy balanced attitude in different spheres of his social life. The Court verdicts and the Legislative acts also play as an impetus in the social change. Legalising abortion, defining the rights of homosexuals, permitting pornography, liberalising divorce through 'no fault' laws, prohibiting prayer in the schools, etc. do have much impact in the cardinal virtues and moral concept in the social life and in the long run may affect the society deleteriously.

The recent Hindu-Muslim Communal conflict in West Bengal State massacring 9 persons on 2nd May 2003 (Manorama, 2003: 1) should be an eye opener to the diabolic and heinous ulterior motive and obverse effect of religion upon the society. On flimsy reasons one kills the other, forgetting they are brothers and sisters of the same Society and Nation. Thus in *Jnana-Yoga* we read as "And thus we find that though there is nothing that has brought man more blessings than religion, at the same time there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion.

Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion" – (*Jnana-Yoga, 1989: 375*). The Group identification on religious basis constrains persons to take factions in conflicts forgetting the aftermath consequences of it. When people are strongly committed to their religious groups and values communal commotion on religious grounds may be pungent and would be thrashing the peaceful life in the society.

Conclusions:

The significant cause of social disorders is an ultra sensitive and intolerant attitude of each religious faction towards the other. Each religious group considers itself as a separate group and not as a part of the national mainstream. Trivial individual selfish interests gradually take over the feelings of patriotism and nationalism. Moreover the religious, caste and communal feelings of common people are relentlessly exploited by the politicians for their selfish motives. Party tickets are acquired according to the communal characteristics of the regional constituencies. The religious bogey is moulded to let down the opposing parties. Instead of competing elections on issues such as unemployment, poverty or corruption, the political leaders manage dexterously the religious politics to their selfish ends at the time of election campaign. Indubitably we can infer that it is the disregard for genuine religious beliefs that is mainly responsible for the present mushy and maligned state of the society. All the religions teach tolerance, non-violence, love and universal brotherhood but the very precepts are defeated by the unenlightened bigots and such situations are exploited for political purposes without any compunction for acquiring power and pelf by some heartless elements. Thus we see that religion is the central stage where people are playing both integrative and disintegrative roles. The institution of religion is not scientifically studied with regard to its functions and dysfunctions to present social life based on empirical facts. This study is a humble attempt to find out the functions and dysfunctions of various religious forms of present day society.

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