

## Therapeutically Holistic Element In Tagore's Music

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Music is believed to have the power to 'warm up' the brain, so it is considered to be special and a class apart when it comes to healing of the mind. Music is known to strengthen the creative, right brain processes which are associated with spatial-temporal reasoning. It improves our concentration and intuitive leaps. Music helps us through challenging times while embracing feelings of sadness and nostalgia or even as a way to alleviate stress and anxiety.

“A musical person with a sound general education is an ornament to the society.” (Rao, 1997, p.14)

Music has the capability of performing very important functions like Happiness and Creativity. Music activates the frontal lobe of the brain, thus releasing dopamine in the same way, a drug would. Moreover, this whole process enhances abstract processing power, which means that the brain works better creating and solving problems. Also Music lifts us from our frozen mental habits and makes our minds move in ways they ordinarily cannot. Several studies have shown that music helps with several conditions including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

The researches have found that patients with dementia were treated with the help of team of musicians by transforming wards into live music venues where patients had the opportunity to sing, just listen or dance..The entire atmosphere was filled with happiness. These music therapy sessions made the whole ward come alive. This unique creative partnership benefitted a good number of patients suffering from dementia. This activity worked wonders.

The scientists today agree with the fact that different kinds of music can be holistically therapeutic. Sound has the power to shape and sculpt us - both inside and outside. Scientists have now begun to understand the reasons behind why a particular kind of music heals more than the

other. My this research paper is an extension in a way to my earlier one such research paper which aims to find out the inexplicit role played by music on the human psyche. This is where Tagore's music has been researched and proved to have therapeutically holistic effect on the human mind. The stammering patients have been treated with music sessions.

People actually derived strength from Tagore's songs . For Tagore, it was life influencing his art and for people like us it was art influencing our life. In fact, when we talk about therapeutically holistic healing , art is being used to heal life. It was all about drawing strength from Tagore's songs.To one of his songs, Tagore was so specific---Dipode more rukho karo, "never forget the lyrics of this song because these are like mantras",---he said this vehemently ,while Tagore was on his death bed .Tagore could do the self-healing through his own songs. He understood the entire process of the mind, first to encounter the difficult time and then observe the natural reactions that we would have after that encounter. Either, we let ourselves get depressed and be destroyed by remaining inert or bounce back from that terrible situation. The power to fight back physically and psychologically can be found in Tagore's music. He had gone through this challenging process again and again. Tagore pronounced it with so much of affirmation that people will always have to remember his songs,to draw strength in difficult times.

His philosophy made him unique and very special in his work. Some of the songs of Tagore are so useful for the purpose of holistic healing which he used to heal himself holistically. For example:

Ami jokhon cheelem ondho, Aaro aaghaat shoinemaar, Antara mamu bikashita karo, Bipade more rokkha karo.

These songs were his tools for therapeutically holistic healing for his ownself. He healed himself through his own words and music. Today Tagore has left a great legacy for the world to heal itself holistically while he left for the heavenly abode in the year1945,August 7,in the mansion Jorasanko(Kolkatta) where he was brought up.

**Keywords:** Holistic ,Therapeutic

Tagore as a child, was always surrounded by an artistic atmosphere at home because he belonged to a family of scholars and musicians. His early training in music was deeply influenced by the Bishnupur Gharana. Rabindranath grew up learning and absorbing the Dhrupads and Khayal (both forms of Hindustani classical music) traditions. His beloved brother Jyoti Dada (Jyotindranath Tagore) would create tunes on Piano and encourage young Tagore to compose verses to match the Raga-based melodies, hardly visualizing that this exercise initiated as a kind of playful exercise for the young Rabindranath, eventually would bloom into a genre in itself, known as Rabindra Sangeet.

Tagore's first trip to England in 1878, gave him the opportunity to be familiar with Scottish English and Irish music. Many of the western tunes attracted him like Robert Burns' Auld Lang Syne from which Tagore adapted

Purano Shei Diner Kotha. It's not just the tune that Tagore adapted; he also kept the essence of the song very much alive. Purano... like Auld Lang Syne talks of remembrance of old days and old friends. He also adapted other Scottish tunes such as

Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes to Koto Baar Bhebh Chinu (I frequently thought of losing myself) or the popular Phoole Phoole Dhole Dhole (The flowers that nod) from the Scottish Ye Banks and Braes.

For about a decade, Tagore had to take care of his family estate in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Bengal), in the year 1891. Mostly he had to stay in the houseboat on the river Padma. The poor peasants of his estate gave him a new outlook towards his poetry and songs. His sympathetic attitude opened up a whole new world of creativity for him. The experiences helped him explore the unexplored dimensions to his creative art. He published several poetry collections, notably *Sonar Tori* (1894) and plays like *Chitrangada* in the year 1892. The Bengali folk music influenced Tagore immensely which led to the composition of many songs like:

Ebar tor mora gange baan eseche

(Now the tide returns to these dry banks),

Bhenge mor ghorer chabi

(Who will set me free) and many more.

Tagore had the ability to set words to classical tunes but at the same time Tagore had the sensitivity to integrate meaningful poetry giving supreme importance to melody as our Indian classical music is based on ragas which actually bring out the mood of the poetry. The perfect fusion of lyric and raga enhanced the beauty of Tagore's songs. In all his compositions, Tagore's intent was not to create new Ragas but to create melodies that did justice to the expressiveness of his poetry. His pure intention was to create soulful song by binding poetry with appropriate raga. Legend has it that Tagore's song inspired UstadAllauddin Khan to compose his favourite raag Hemant. A music book containing 2232 songs was combined in the Gitabitan----the entire collection of Rabindra Sangeet, so to say.

Tagore also had a big part to play in the Indian struggle for freedom. During the proclamation for the partition of Bengal, he wrote and composed many patriotic songs which were sung in the street processions, often led by himself. Through his music, he helped knit the country together to fight against the British colonialists. One of his songs, EklaCholo Re (Walk on, alone!) became the favourite of many Indians, including Mahatma Gandhi. Two songs composed by him:

Jana Gana Mana and Amar Shonar Bangla

have now been immortalised as the national anthem of India and Bangladesh (post Independence).

**“A musical person with a sound general education is an ornament to the society”. (Rao, 1997, p.14)**

We know that we all love to listen to music, why, right. It gives us pleasure for sure, whether it is by making us feel happy, oblivious, energetic or even help us through challenging times while embracing feelings of sadness and nostalgia. However, we do not bother to think about why and how music has been an integral part of our lives for centuries. We could simply dismiss its importance and merely draw pleasure out of it, but there must be something else to it, like healthy reactions or even physiological reactions.

Some researchers call it a ‘biological Luxury’. But there are many other factors in this luxury including pleasure, music as a way to help with social conventions, or even as a way to alleviate stress and anxiety.

To illustrate, evolutionary theories on the function of music lean towards the body and its reactions, and non evolutionary theories are more about the psychology behind it and more importantly cultural meaning.

Some of the most well known functions of music are :Happiness and Creativity

According to study by the journal Nature and led by Daniel Levitin, neuroscientist and author of the book “This is your Brain On Music: The Science Of a Human Obsession,” music activates the frontal lobe of the brain, thus releasing dopamine in the same way, a drug would. Moreover, this whole process enhances abstract processing power, which means that the brain works better creating and solving problems.

Therapeutically Holistic Effects

Several studies have shown that music helps with several conditions including Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s. According to Pianist Robert Jourdain in the book “Music, the Brain and Ecstasy: How Music Captures Our Imagination”, it helps because it “relaxes the cerebral

frozen mental habits and makes our minds move in ways they ordinarily cannot". And according to Jourdain, this works with everyone.

In 2011, a case study on music therapy was reported in an article entitled *Orchestra partnership with hospital sees increase in patients' wellness*. Nordoff Robbins and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra teamed up to support the patients and staff with dementia at a Bournemouth Hospital. Musicians from the Orchestra and therapists from Nordoff Robbins transformed wards for the patients into live music venues. Patients had the opportunity to sing, just listen or dance. They were joined by nursing staff, care takers and the families. Rachel Millman, Nordoff Robbins' Head Music Therapist in the South West explained, how during the music therapy sessions, the entire atmosphere was filled with happiness. The whole process brought a great sense of achievement, joy and focus into the patients' lives. Another staff member explained how it was during these music therapy sessions that the whole ward came alive. Nothing brought so much of liveliness to the ward as these therapeutic music sessions did. Around 150 older people with dementia benefitted from this unique creative partnership between Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Nordoff Robbins. So, this clearly shows - music therapy possesses power and works wonders.

Menen (2002) explains how scientists today agree with the fact that different kinds of music can be holistically therapeutic. Sound has the power to shape and sculpt us - both inside and outside. Some people feel lifted by listening to heavy metal or Gregorian chants while some by listening to reggae or jazz. But there is one composer whose work mysteriously rises above all the other forms of music in its power to heal the human body. The special ability of Mozart's music to heal the body is known as the 'Mozart Effect'. Scientists have now begun to understand the reasons behind why a particular kind of music heals more than the other. Some case studies of healing by Mozart's music are as follows:

- French actor Gerard Depardieu's stammer was cured by music therapy sessions of Mozart's music. Mozart string quartets are played into the city squares to calm the pedestrian traffic.
- In Northern Japan, Ohara Brewery has found when Mozart's music is played near the yeast, that particular yeast makes the best cake. The density of the yeast used for brewing traditional rice wine, which is a measure of quality increases by a factor of ten when the yeast 'listen' to Mozart.

Mozart's music is believed to have the power to 'warm up' the brain, so it is considered to be special and a class apart when it comes to healing of the mind. Gordon Shaw, a theoretical physicist and one of the Irvine researchers explains how complex music facilitates the brain and certain complex neuronal patterns involved in high brain activities like maths and chess. Music is an aural stimulation. Listening to Mozart helps 'organise' the firing patterns of the neurons in the cerebral cortex. Mozart's music is known to strengthen the creative, right brain processes which are associated with spatial-temporal reasoning. It improves our concentration and intuitive leaps. After the publication of the Irvin studies, a number of public schools played Mozart's music in the background. It was reported, there was an improvement in the attention span and performance of students. They concluded that Mozart effect exists and is real.

#### Special Features Of Tagore's Music

Tagore's music cannot be ignored ,claims Radice who has been based in London and studying the mood and melody of the songs of Tagore. While he wrote his article Indeterminacy In Rabindra Sangeet, he vehemently expressed how for two or three years prior to his writing this article ,he had the regime of listening to Rabindra Sangeet every morning. He would jot down the summary and meanings of the words of the songs on his card. Some of Tagore's songs are 'art songs' which are very popular and they are sung like 'pop songs'----stated by William.

I personally had the opportunity of spending quite a considerable time with some of the established singers of Rabindra Sangeet based at Kolkata ,shared that they have been using Tagore's music to heal holistically. One lady scholar became a case study of a person who had

been healing her emotions after the loss of her husband, with Tagore's music. Another family I interacted with shared that their daughter overcame a loss in her life and together they sing Tagore's music with utmost of devotion. Any event whether of sorrow or a celebration, is marked with Tagore's music and songs. He also shared how his mother laid stress on his learning Bengali so that he could be introduced to Tagore. His mother was forceful in wanting her only son to imbibe the deep philosophy embedded in Tagore's songs and also apply its meaning towards harshest of traumas which unfold in life howsoever innocent human beings are.

A singer of Rabindra Sangeet and a music therapist, along with his team based at Kolkatta, is doing a yeoman's service to the society of humans at psychiatry hospital, by using Tagore's songs to heal the mentally challenged. He said it with a note of conviction that Tagore's music kindled a candle by bringing harmony and rhythm back in their life. The Indian concept of nada chikitsa and nada yoga – union with supreme through nada are more comprehensive and complex as compared to western music, claims Khosla(2015), yet there is a dearth of research in this area. "Tagore's music is a religion to deal with the setbacks of life"---vouched by people who practice and listen to his music with all the devotion. Tagore's music is a religion for many people. It is a tool that helps them and assists them in being able to deal with the various setbacks in life. A lone widow mother with a small child and two old members of the family, had nowhere to go, had to be the man of the family so to say remembered the words of Tagore's song, at a critical juncture to overcome the hurdles peeping onto her face from several angles. Dipode More Rukho karo is the song which gave courage to her tired, broken soul.

In another true story, the young daughter going through a very harrowing heartbreak times was taught Tagore's song, Dipode More Rukho Karo. It was with this song that she began to show signs of recovery from the mess she was in. She would sing this like a prayer – morning and evening. The father explained her the power of the lyrics and this made all the difference as it worked like a medicine for her. She continues to rely on this song even today when she faces any challenging situation and needs some source to draw strength from.

This is how people actually derived strength from Tagore's songs and this is how art influences life. For Tagore, it was life influencing his art and for people like us it was art



influencing our life. In fact, when we talk about music therapy and look carefully, art is being used to heal life. Somebody has produced a piece of music which is a piece of art and we are employing that piece of art to heal the real life of a person. In times of distress, what do you do? Where do you go? You try and look for relief from a place where you can draw strength from and for people like the interviewee's mother, it was all about drawing strength from Tagore's songs. In fact to this specific song, *Dipode more rukho karo*, when Tagore was on his death bed and he asked someone to recite the words of the song and that lady fumbled after a few lines, he said, "never forget the lyrics of this song because these are like mantras",— Tagore himself had said. See how he could distance himself from his work as if it is by someone else and at the same time he could do the self-healing through his own songs. He understood the entire process of the mind, first to encounter the difficult time and then observe the natural reactions that we would have after that encounter. Either, we let ourselves get depressed and be destroyed by remaining inert or bounce back from that terrible situation.

This process happens on two levels, mental and physical. This kind of development of pain is addressed by Tagore in his songs. The power to fight back physically and psychologically can be found in Tagore's music. He had gone through this challenging process again and again. Tagore pronounced it with so much of affirmation that people may forget everything else that I wrote in my life, but the Bengalis will always have to remember my songs from time to time. He had also said that his songs were for the Bengalis and the paintings for the West. He was way ahead in his modernity. The strong reason my interviewees' mother wanted him to learn Bengali was to get him introduced to Tagore and his songs. This was because of her own personal experiences of being able to draw strength from his songs during very awkward times in life (Debashish).

"*Rudra yatte dakshinam mukham, ten mam pahinithyam,*" – Tagore believed in the philosophy of the Vedas. He specifically believed in this shloka---'o the terrible one' referring to the times when one is in a problem and in a lot of danger and one thinks that God is showing his terrible, wrathful face to him. And the person is desperately praying to God to show him His mercifully kind face to him which is positive. He is begging for mercy to be shown to him and save him

from all the dangers of this world. May God always remain in a pleasant mood with him! It is this kind of philosophy which Tagore has weaved into his music.

Tagore's philosophy evolved from the terrible shocks life gave him. The feelings he expressed after his son Shomi passed away: "The night after Shomi passed away, I was travelling by the train. I could see that the world was flooded with moonlight. There was not a loss of sign anywhere. I could realise that nothing else is lost. Everything is there and so will be my life and the work I need to do."

My another interviewee further asserted that every occasion in their house begins with a song by Tagore. Gitabitan is like our *Gita* (holy book of hindus). They sing Tagore's song, *Antara mamam bikhshita karo, antaratarata he. Any and every occasion in their family begins with this song which is sung like a prayer. Our every performance, any concert begins with this song. Without any formal training in music, Tagore was one of the best composers in the world. His philosophy made him unique and very special in his work. Some of the songs of Tagore, are so useful for the purpose of holistic therapy which he used to heal himself. For example:*

***Ami jikhon cheelem ondho, Aaroaaghaat shoinemaar, Antara mamam bikhshita karo, Bipade more rokkha karo.*** These songs were his tool for self-healing. He healed himself through his own words and music.

My curiosity in Tagore's music has been growing in an exciting manner after conducting a literature review of different sources. Combining my own personal experiences of how people used Tagore's music as therapeutically holistic tool of holistic recovery from the traumas of life...for themselves or someone close to them. People have used Tagore's music as a tool to assuage themselves of critical and agonising times in life, "When the education in music goes hand in hand with the general education, the art will prove to be a blessing to mankind, and a source of comfort and pleasure to each and every man" (Rao, 1997, p.51). Mozart Effect has already been looked at so I wanted to look at the 'Tagore Effect' and explore the power of Holistic element in Tagore's music to heal our mind and emotions and be useful in therapeutically holistic healing. Hence, as a logical conclusion to my previous research, I shall be asking the following questions:

1 Why and how is Tagore's music holistic by being therapeutic?

2 What elements/qualities/attributes in Tagore's music make it holistically therapeutic?

My research project aims to find therapeutically holistic element in Tagore's music. The focus would be to look at why and how, Tagore's music is holistic and how it has helped people to emotionally sail out of critical times in their life by healing them holistically. I have discussed the effectiveness of holistic healing 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. The interviews were conducted on people who have been connected with Tagore for a long time, in different ways. Almost more than 12 persons I met were either artists performing RabindraSangeet or have been connected to Tagore for generations in their families in various ways. I chose to analyse my research questions through the method of Interview.

Kolkata, the cultural capital of India is the city of Tagore where he was born. My project focuses on Tagore and life around him during the time he created his massive collection of songs. So, I felt immensely happy as I took the decision of travelling to Kolkata to interview and found it of utmost importance to visit his home at Jorasanko, to collect the first hand information 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 that it had. This is what Tagore was influenced with and shaped by while he was growing up at Jorasanko. And these surroundings created the Tagore that we know of. My inability to understand Bengali was seemingly becoming a hurdle to begin with but my interviewees were a great help and with their support it became joyful for me to overcome that barrier. The journey of understanding the nuances and the important points that were essential for the wholeness of my research project, was more flavoured.

I was fortunate to visit Jorasanko along with my family members. In the hindsight, I realize that it certainly was a life time opportunity for me. This was an exhilarating and quite a

compensating experience, not less than paying a visit to a pilgrim. It enriched my vision 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 an experience towards knowing his family settings in depth and the way in which he grew up. The growing up years sculpted most of his work though the tragic personal experiences that had later, ironically brought out the best bits of work from him. And that is what is our inheritance from him, we are proud of.

All my interviewees were very scholarly in their thought process which made my journey of research quite fulfilling. Their attitude of understanding led me from one good point to another—helping me to solidify my thoughts and notions about my project. Very emphatically, I was told by one of them, “Tagore is going to become your religion in times to come, once you have an in-depth understanding of his work”. I feel that I had actually been to a pilgrim by visiting Tagore’s mansion Jorasanko.

### **Choice of interview as methodology**

I chose interview as the technique for researching my project because it is a qualitative method of carrying out research. My research project relied on getting an in-depth view about my interviewee’s perceptions, views and feelings – I conducted semi-structured interviews. Although, I was following the interview guide most of the time during my research but still, I also kept forming new mind-set as I went along the research and interviewing process.

All my interviewees are people with diverse fields of knowledge and background, for this project close to my heart. Since Tagore’s lot of family was based in England and Tagore had studied there for a long time, I thought it more appropriate to consider both the links and knead them together and make it into a purposeful project. This seemed to be the reason good enough to choose from both London and India to get a fair view of information from both parts of the

world that have seen and encouraged important works of Tagore. My interviewees shared some of the songs, in particular which they found had a holistically therapeutic effect on them and had a great impact on the psyche of the person going through challenges of psychological nature which I have quoted earlier.

Tagore's music is truly a religion for people as his music taught the importance of the internal self-mechanism to be able to sail through life's different setbacks. Tagore's music with its therapeutically holistic element is a tool to assist people to develop this internal self-mechanism and use his music for self-healing the way he used it to heal himself through the tragedies of life. If it were any other man, probably he would have collapsed but Tagore was Tagore and he was not meant to collapse. He, instead, created a new wave of giving strength to oneself in every manner whatsoever. All my studies have found in Tagore's music an escape through the complexities of their mind, a power to be able to rely upon during trying times, a spiritual solace in the lyrics and compositions which are deeply embedded with life-saving philosophy. All of them have experienced the power of Tagore's music and have used it as a tool to come out of real-life difficult situations that they have faced by practising Tagore's music and developing a ritual around his works and compositions. Tagore's music can be seen as a very effective and an important tool in reducing the propensity to get mentally ill

### **Tagore's Abode Of Peace as his Legacy**

In 1901, Tagore founded an experimental school in rural West Bengal at Shantiniketan ("abode of peace"), where he sought to blend the best in Indian and Western traditions. With the aim of helping education go beyond the confines of the classroom, Shantiniketan grew into the Vishwa Bharati University in 1921, attracting some of the most creative minds in the country. Rabindranath spent the last 4 years of his life in constant pain and was bogged down by two

long bouts of illness. After an extended period of suffering, Tagore died on 7th August 1945, in the same mansion Jorasanko in which he was brought up. The day of his departure to the heavenly abode, is mourned across India even today as he has left an unforgettable legacy by way of poems and songs which keep him alive still.

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