

ROLE OF MUSIC AND DANCE IN EXPRESSING AND COPING MECHANISM OF EMOTIONS IN BENGALI CULTURE

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Abstract

Music and dance are inseparable parts of Bengali culture, through which a wide range of emotions found their way out to provide coping strategies to the people at large. This review article is aimed at exploring the visceral link between these two artistic expressions of Bengal with its relation to emotional expression and their contribution toward well-being, both to the self and society. Bengali music, particularly Rabindra Sangeet, Baul songs, and folk traditions like Bhawaiya and Bhatiali, has a rich fund of emotive narratives of love, grief, joy, and spiritual longing. It provides a medium of expression – not just self-expression but also an expression of a common cultural language in which individuals communicate and actualize their feelings. Therapeutic elements are present as it could be used in therapy. It is in Rabindra Sangeet that melody and lyrics have been used to soothe psychological ailments and bring about calmness in times of grief and anxiety. Indeed, this very fact has also been portrayed through rites, ceremonies, and religious functions; music has been coupled with emotional discharge, social bonding, and spiritual elevation. Another important aspect in Bengali cultural life is dance, which enables people to express their feelings through postures and bodily movements. It is through classical dances like Kathak and Bharatanatyam, both in their traditional and more contemporary expressionist techniques of expression, that emotional and social colors of Bengali life are represented. Furthermore, the performances

were an expression of what the performers themselves were feeling, and thus the audience was taken into a shared experience, socially and culturally identifying themselves with each other. The research also investigates how different art forms serve as coping mechanisms within the Bengali community. The musical and dance performances are all part of the collective celebration of festivals, hence constituting a form of collective coping mechanism through which people from that community overcome the emotional ups and downs of life. By combining literature with cultural studies, this review aims to identify the centre of music and dance in the emotional landscape of Bengal, while highlighting their functions as instruments of expression and therapy. These two art disciplines have become so deep-rooted in Bengali life that they seem to act as channels for expressing and overcoming emotions, thus helping to strengthen the social and emotional fabric of Bengali society.

Keywords: Dance, Music, Bengali culture, Emotional expression, Coping mechanisms, Rabindra Sangeet, Baul songs, Folk traditions

Introduction

This is a pride long cherished in Bengali culture: its rich and diversified traditions of musical and dance presentation. These are factors that form the identity and the emotional landscape of this region. These art forms have transcended performances through centuries and have become integral components of social and ritual and festival-related life. These range from the finest classical Rabindra Sangeet, which so perfectly fulfils all the vistas of philosophical and emotional depth that characterize Rabindranath Tagore's works, to the lively rhythms of folk dances like Baul, Jhumur, Kirtan, and Bengali elements of music-wearing a cultural face everywhere. This tradition happens to be an expression of joys that evoke historical events too. They are a quintessence of despair, so human, collective, always finding voice.

After all, the importance of music and dance shouldn't be something meant to entertain them, nor express their culture. Bengali life, on a whole, is very closely linked with their

emotional and spiritual well-being. Bengali music has its very numerous forms-classical, folk, and devotional-but in many cases, is a reflection for introspection and healing and self-reflection. Whether it is the soulful melodies of Nazrul Geeti-that sing rebellion and spiritual fervour-or the tranquil harmonies that Bhatiyali folk songs sung by boatmen rowing on rivers portray, these musical forms have thus provided an outlet for people to process that complicated mix of sorrow, joy, love, and longing that they harbour within.

While almost exclusively staged on festivals and sacred celebrations, entirely physical dance forms outline the expression of emotional states as well. The Manipuri and classical traditions embody mythological stories and the experience of emotional states through the entire body and thru rhythmic vocalizations, affecting the performers almost as much as they touch the hearts and souls of their audience. For while music and dance may take the easy form of a collective experience, it is gathering to make a point of expressive celebration or communal reflection that assumes mournfulness.

Besides all these traditional uses of music and dance, in contemporary Bengali society, they have evolved to meet the needs of the problems of modern life. As changes in modern life within the context of these urbanization and technological changes; further social revolutions have altered, so have the potentialities of therapeutic arts: no longer cultural artifacts but a coping mechanism that helps in every individual and community to work with stress, anxiety, and despair. Other studies indicated that listening to music and dancing frequently activate psychological strength since they promote peace and sound mental wellness. However, folk practices of the old ways are implemented in the countryside to eliminate the psychology of desolation and fear. In the city, however, music therapy and dance therapy have become an additive tool since it has changed to be used as another form of therapy for depression, PTSD, among other psychological disorders.

This paper seeks to review the existing literature on the role of Bengali music and dance in the emotional resilience in contemporary Bangladesh society. More specifically, it

will focus on how these arts support mental health. To this end, the paper will explore the emerging role that these art forms take on in contemporary Bengali society, where rapid modernization and growing mental health issues have meant new interpretations and uses of these ancient traditions. The current paper aims to find the continued role that music and dance played in Bengali emotional and psychological life both historically and in current times.

Investigative Objectives

1. To explore the role of traditional and contemporary Bengali music and dance in emotional expression.
2. To assess the psychological and emotional benefits of engaging with these art forms as coping mechanisms for stress, anxiety, and grief.
3. To examine how music and dance contribute to communal emotional resilience, especially during

Literature Review

Emotional Power of Music in Bengali Culture

By any definition, music becomes an outlet to pour out the depth of emotions-the confluence that actually underlines the complexity of humanity. Bengali music thus comes more commonly in the most revered and studied forms, as Rabindra Sangeet, composed by the national poet and thinker Rabindranath Tagore. The lyrical value and depth that Rabindra Sangeet brings is something else because people ascribe their love, nature, loss, or soulful side of spirituality within a frame put across in these songs. Banerjee (2015) further asks how Rabindra Sangeet is sustained not only as an instrument of artistic expression but also as a release platform for audiences who have grievances personal or collective. The music composition by Tagore provides a channel of reflection as well as bonding to one's innermost emotions through the subtle play of melody and meaning intertwined with each other. About Banerjee, Rabindra Sangeet creates emotional strength according to the author. This is because of the fact that the interlocutor can be in a position to talk about complex emotions like misery and happiness. "Rabindra Sangeet

engages listeners in a meditative state when they attend festivals or when they experience personal pain,” writes Banerjee (2015).

On the other hand, Baul music also succumbs to contrasting but powerful emotional experience. This originates from mysticism and spirituality because Baul songs centre around transcending material concerns and finding divinity within oneself. Sarkar (2018) states that the psychological impact of Baul music may be described in words such as a psychological balm which may help to grapple with existential questions as well as deep emotional dilemmas. The unbridled and informal nature of Baul music opens up an area of emotional expression for listeners, as the focus on spiritual detachment and acceptance gives individuals a venue to let out emotional stress. Sarkar argues that Baul music opens up the public space of emotional expression, in which members of the group gather and transcend the monotony of daily life to reveal ties to a greater spiritual and emotive sense of existence. As Sarkar puts it, this catharsis creates resilience because the listeners are called to realize uncertainty and find peace in the impermanence of life (2018).

Besides that, researchers also mentioned curative properties of Bengali music for mental health. In an empirical study, Dutta (2020) used mainstream Bengali folk music, Rabindra Sangeet and Baul songs to ease the symptoms of depression and anxiety. As reported by her data, these genres of music aid manage emotions in making mindfulness and self-expression besides healing emotional hurts. According to Dutta, these music traditions control and therapeutic enable individuals to face their emotions thus leading to lower levels of psychological distress which subsequently leads to the positive outcomes of mental health according to Dutta (2020).

Catharsis and Activity of Emotional Purification through Dance

In Bengali culture, dance is a very important tool for emotional expression and catharsis. This is beyond mere performance form. In this classical form of Bengali dance, one can give an even structure to individual as well as collective emotions

by releasing his mind. Sen and Chatterjee (2019) have learnt emotional catharsis through Gaudiya Nritya, an ancient form of classical dance influenced by the Bhakti movement. This dance style, which replete with elaborate hand gestures and face expressions, abhinaya, utilizes the artists to depict a variety of emotions: from joy and sorrow to love and devotion. In this manner, Sen and Chatterjee term Gaudiya Nritya as the plot rich emotional expression event because it absorbs the emotions in the course of religious festivals-the collective performance of which helps the individuals and communities handle the state of mind. The findings were that Gaudiya Nritya empowered both performers and audiences to release their emotions in a serene and safe environment to obtain emotional comfort and psychological healing (Sen & Chatterjee, 2019).

In the same line, Dasgupta (2021) states that Manipuri dance holds inherent therapeutic potential. It is a classical form of dance characterized by fluid motion and graceful movements. Many mythological stories are narrated through Manipuri dance followed by stories of devotion, spiritual love, etc. According to Dasgupta, "In Manipuri dance, rhythmic and gentle movements bring harmony between the physical movements of the dancer and his emotions, which can keep emotional balance intact.". This synch creates meditative and therapeutic space for the performer in reconstructing emotions and gaining relief from tension. The emotional rewards of Manipuri dance are akin to the benefits of modern dance therapy, offering structured yet expressive outcomes of emotional tension, through which the performer or viewer can achieve clarity with their emotions as well (Dasgupta, 2021).

Collective Emotional Coping Through Festivals

Bengali festivals-Durga Puja - are complex interfaces of emotional expression and healing. The collective emotional experience is composed of music and dance. Roy and Mitra (2018) derived insights from performances of music and dances during the Durga Puja in order to understand the role of the Dhak or bhajanais to evoke a gamut of emotions from reverence to joy, sorrow, and longing. This study reflected that

the rhythmic rhythms of Dhak, accompanied by joint singing of Bhajans, provided a setting in which participants could share and ventilate their feelings together. Such communally performed acts, as noted by Roy and Mitra, served as an avenue for reducing the burden of emotions while at the same time promoting social cohesion in terms of shared emotional resilience. They do this in drama and dance by engaging in a common form of emotional regulation, by spreading personal emotions and allowing these to flow within the overarching social context (Roy & Mitra, 2018).

Chowdhury 2020 Discusses Baul and Kirtan performances in the festivals and other social ceremonies. Baul and Kirtan are devotional song traditions that are generally sung in ensemble with various dance and rhythmic movements. Chowdhury's study not only indicates how such performances induce emotional contagion and entrainment among participants but also illustrates how emotions across participants in this music and movement demonstrate synchronization. The group psychological alignment enhances emotional discharge as it becomes a therapeutic field that the participants experience a deep sense of unity and, consequently, emotional healing. Chowdhury is explicit in stating that these performances are communal as they are enhancing not only social bonding but like communal therapy, where emotional burdens are shared and lightened through a collective expression (Chowdhury, 2020).

Psychological and Therapeutic Aspects of Music and Dance in Mental Health

Studies are being developed concerning the use of traditional Bengali music and dance for therapeutic purposes, and the appeal is rising from the background of mental health. Here, Ghosh (2019) describes how Rabindra Sangeet and classical dance can be integrated into clinical music and dance therapy to assist clients in recovery from anxiety, depression, and trauma. What is really beautiful in Ghosh's study is how art forms can create emotional regulation: making structured yet emotionally rich spaces for people to express pent-up emotions. She illustrates how both the narrative and emotive strength of Rabindra Sangeet in combination with

the expressiveness of the body in the art form of dance helps the sufferer psychologically heal by letting them express their feelings in a controlled environment. With the results by Ghosh, it seems like this is quite specific in helping a patient have feelings that are inexpressible verbally (Ghosh, 2019).

Moving on to the therapeutic effects, Mukherjee (2022) explains further neurosciences underpinnings which depict how music and dance improve emotional and cognitive performance. The author, Mukherjee discusses the neural synchrony which is coordination of the wave patterns of the brain through rhythmic, melodic presentation of music and similarly coordinated movement presentation in case of dance. In this sense, she advocates that active participation in these art forms with observational engagement elevates emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility. Mukherjee's work relates to the fact that these art forms activate key regions in the brain related to emotional regulation, memory, and social bonding; hence, they can be invaluable tools in therapeutic interventions with emotionally or cognitively challenged individuals such as mental health cases (Mukherjee, 2022).

Role of Music and Dance in Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly created a global mental health crisis for many, in which anxiety, stress, depression, and loneliness dominated the experience, while music and dance proved to be possible coping mechanisms that could provide emotional comfort and bonding in the face of physical separation. Digital dimensions created an easy way to express oneself emotionally, connect with others, and thus create communities around shared art forms.

Music played a great role in reducing stress and conserving emotional resilience. Studies like Mas-Herrero et al. 2020 showed that subject subjects are willing to suffer solitude and apprehension while listening to music. With the virtual concerts and socialization platforms, the possibility of sharing and enjoying music opened the way for imparting a sense of connectivity in distance.

Dance as an Embodiment of Emotion and Body Experience: The dance provided an opportunity to orchestrate releasing stress and reaching social bond. Tarr et al. (2016) demonstrate how communal dance shapes the emotional dimension. Digital media, like TikTok, allowed for dances to spread virally and aid in social emotional connection through the world, building virtual community, according to Zhang et al. (2021).

But over the pandemic period, music and dance slowly became helpful and essential instruments for well-being, intimacy, and mental health support.

Discussion

Psychological Theories on Emotional Regulation Through Music and Dance

Music and dance facilitate emotional regulation through several psychological mechanisms:

Catharsis Theory:

In music and dance form it is catharsis or the emotional release that people undergo whenever they hear or perform art. In this emotional release, it processes and solves inner tensions that people hold, and most times this is through a feeling of release or rebirth. Bengali culture, particularly with regard to the song Rabindra Sangeet by Rabindranath Tagore, seems to be a very useful tool for catharsis.

Most of Rabindra Sangeet or Tagore's songs often carry an inexpressible, indefinite sound, revolving around love, sorrow, longings, and spirituality. It is those sounds that one internalizes at a fantastic speed because they always go on to create a bridge between the artist and the listener; after all, this expresses the power of a variety of emotions-albeit joy, sorrow, or loss-through voice. End. Similarly, in Bengal, Gaudiya Nritya has represented itself to the world through sharp ornate gesture and facial movement expressions. Therefore, this is a common channel of communication on emotions by the actor to the audience. The ballets of such types would relate mythological or historical events, with which most of them are filled with emotions like love, devotion, anger, or glee.

By imbuing these emotions into movement, it is the performance and the performers themselves who cry out for catharsis of emotional tension but, simultaneously and more profoundly, truly need this catharsis from the audience; these well composed performances offer the emotionally safe and controlled space where emotions can be transferred and addressed and ultimately released, and therefore contribute toward achieving balance and resilience.

Emotional Contagion and Synchronization:

This would be the phenomenon of sending and receiving emotions between persons, therefore developing group emotional synchronization. Music and dance, especially in communal performances, can stimulate shared group experiences that bind together participants. In Bengali culture, people use the gathering context of Kirtan-a devotional song tradition often performed during religious or festivity gathering examples like this process.

Since them as they sing and dance together can then feel the shared emotions of devotion, joy or perhaps grievance. Whichever, the states of emotions of the participants would be harmonized by rhythm, tempo, and vibration of the music, this way a source of unity and emotional arousal. It would therefore very well serve to enhance emotional synchronization inasmuch as persons realize a pervasive sense of belonging, key to communal healing. The Baul tradition is one of the mystical examples of folk music: it places spiritual freedom and unity with the divine upon a pedestal. In this way, the Baul gathering often unites in an intimate space where music by simple instruments strikes deep emotions, deep to spirituality. When participants sing, clap, and sway to music, they exercise a kind of joint emotional catharsis.

Not limited to positive emotions, it even allows shared sorrowing or communal coping at every sign of loss or adversity. This confluence of emotions allows for the consortia attending Kirtan and Baul events in general to be more cohesive hence contributing to enhanced collective well-being and emotional resilience (Mitra, 2017).

Mood Regulation and Affective Arousal:

According to the arousal-and-mood hypothesis, music and dance can change or manipulate emotions by revving up or soothing the emotional centres of the brain based on tempo, rhythm, and style of performance. In the case of Bengali music, Rabindra Sangeet largely decides the mood regulating content. Melodic compositions of it mostly are rather slow or more thought-provoking and have the effect of relief and trance-like state on listeners' minds.

This soothing quality helps to lighten anxiety and diminish stress levels, thus contributing to emotional well-being. The lyrics, philosophical at times and introspective, call for reflection, which allows people to feel and express their emotions in a soft, non-invasive manner. On the other hand, dance forms offer Manipuri and Kathakali, together an apparently opposite mood control itself, as they stimulate affective activation by their rhythmic, dynamic movement of body. Such dance types, basically spectacular for their accurate steps and energetic footwork, heighten the levels of endorphins-the body's natural chemical messengers related to moods.

This makes them lively both in terms of physicality and the complex storytelling, which works directly on emotions by activating sectors in the brain that regulate feelings-a situation that would leave performers and audiences highly emotive. The dances have all the rhythmic movement- music, storytelling, and are a perfect means of raising moods, reducing stress, and making persons emotionally resilient.

Mindful Exercise:

Music and dance is also a mind power exercise in that it demands focused concentration and cultivates awareness of emotions. In Bengal, much more is made out of classical music, like the ragas, to bring the listener into a deep reflection of feelings. Ragas are actually the melodic structures that create moods or emotions; hence, any kind of listening or performance requires concentrated attention to the emotional subtleties of sounds along with the technicalities of performance.

This piercing awareness allows the individual to become more thoughtful of inner emotional states and, therefore, foster mindfulness and self-awareness. Similarly, the classical dances like Odissi and Bharatanatyam look towards this relationship between the mind and the body. The dancers must always think of their action, expressions and emotional content in the dance. These performances thus become more instinctive, offering clarity and symmetry inside their emotional balance because they have to stay present in the moment and become fully immersed in the dance.

Such practices can foster higher emotional self-regulation and resilience through mindful development, which can lead to the holistic management of stress, anxiety, and other mental health-related problems.

Cognitive Theories and Neural Synchrony

It has also been shown that neurosciences studies regarding music and dance stimulate areas of the brain. In this regard, the specific focus given to how the coordination of movements in the case of dance and the oscillatory rhythms of music contribute to neural synchronization during cognitive operations. For example, rhythmic musical elements modulated the synchronization of brain wave activity, which should positively influence memory, attention, and emotional regulation.

But this coordination proves most fruitful for those who musically trained and regularly listen and dance, since such improves cognitive flexibility as well as emotional intelligence. • For instance, studies have shown that individuals who experience music-making-from listening to it or through musical education-show higher emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is the ability of a person to recognize and accurately label emotional states, as well as to regulate emotional responses. Similarly, dance engages the coordination, rhythm, and expressive movement of the body. It enhances cognitive flexibility-the ability to make adjustments to change in states of emotion and external contexts.

These cognitive effects, therefore, add not only to emotional strength but also to the enhancement of the overall psychological state. The neural involvement supports both therapeutic and cognitive elements in interacting with music and dance, (Thaut & Hoemberg, 2014), (Papatzikis, 2020).

Modern Variation and Technological Environment:

This brings about the growth of Bengali music and dance under modern expressions with the digital world. New, modern, fusion genres of Rabindra Sangeet with western pop and jazz or contemporary dance styles that integrate something from the old, well-known Bengali dance show a great interest for such newfound artistic expressions among the young generations.

Such democratizing forces also reached the field of Bengali music and dance via social media and streaming applications, reaching out to citizens across the globe. Online events, including Durga Puja celebrations, are perhaps one way in which emotional connections between individuals were kept alive during the COVID-19 pandemic; technology had successfully transformed participation into new meaning and dimensions (Das, 2022).

Music and Dance as Holistic Therapies:

Today, music and dances have been exhibited to contain several healing virtues. Inculcation in extended periods highly increases emotional control, cognitive practice, and mental well-being. Research findings have backed the overall change worldwide in mental health care remedies in which music and dances are used in holistic, non-invasive remedies. These forms- like Rabindra Sangeet and classical dance- can be used in reducing fear levels, providing mindfulness increase, and improving emotional intelligence (Koelsch, 2020).

Conclusion

Bengali culture becomes complete with music and dance because it denotes not only a symbol of artistic expression but also plays a very crucial role in balancing one's emotions and psychology. Rabindra Sangeet, composed by the noted poet Rabindranath Tagore, may well be said to be one of the

greatest utensils for meditation. Through its enthralling lyrics and melodious richness, it has offered a way to introspect, thus creating emotional catharsis, intellectual peace, and acting as a valuable source for personal emotional regulation. Gaudiya Nritya, on the other hand, is a classic dance form in the ancient tradition because it permits rhythmic physical expression in which one may find release from stressful situations by acting them out. Both these art styles have scope for healing but simultaneously continue to nourish the common sense of identity and emotional community of society. With inventions like digital streaming, and online dance tutorials, access to these cultures has expanded into an international arena. That is not only conserving their history but is also pushing through the progression of their ability to serve for healing purposes in contemporary society. In fact, virtual access to such forms of art has been found to be especially pertinent during periods of social isolation wherein it serves as an emotional lifeline for those seeking solace and resilience. Such practices are increasingly being recognized to harbor therapeutic potential within the world of mental health itself. Music and dance, both by their very nature, affect the mind and the body alike, thus contributing toward wholesome well-being. Because of that, they can very well fit into current care models for mental illnesses as noninvasive treatments, which largely depend on the culture. Thus, Rabindra Sangeet might be used in mindfulness-based therapy to make meditation easier. Similarly, the bodily expressiveness of Gaudiya Nritya may be accommodated within movement therapies like trauma or anxiety. Another possible avenue would be systematic studies into how these art forms might formalize in the treatment of mental illnesses.

There is an ever-growing need to scrutinize their specific emotional and cognitive benefits, including symptomatic relief offered from depression, anxiety, and trauma, as well as the enhancement of resilience. It will allow practitioners to tap fully into opportunities that such cultural traditions yield for holistic, culturally relevant approaches toward the regulation of emotions and mental health.

That is to say, music and dancing in Bengali cultures cannot be regarded as simple art forms; it is profoundly meaningful when regulating one's mind and psychology. Their introduction into the current parameters of mental health promises to be working toward emotional and cognitive well-being in an increasingly holistic, intervention-approaching world.

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