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# Sociology of Music: Cultural and Therapeutic Aspect

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| Article Information   | Abstract   |
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| <p><b>Article history:</b><br/><i>Received: 10.03.2012</i><br/><i>Revised: 12.09.2012</i><br/><i>Accepted: 20.09.2012</i></p> | <p>This paper is an endeavour to explore the possibilities of Music Therapy, as an allied branch of mainstream medicine and thereby highlighting its functional aspects. It is an effort to realize the importance and significant contribution of music and dance in the healing process of an individual, as well as of society. This paper undertakes the issues of frustrations, stress, aggression, distress prevalent among the masses; how music gives them solace and provides a medium by which members of society can release their long contained feelings and emotions, thus acts as a rescuer of a society from a pathological state.</p> |
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### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Max Weber in his analysis of rationalizing attitude and tendencies of western society, argues that society goes to the extent of rationalizing each and every aspect of life, that it has even rationalized the cultural aspect of society i.e. 'Religion' and 'Music'. Protestant Ethics and development of capitalism is a consequence of this rationalization process. "Weber in his analysis mentions about the meticulously tempered scale of modern music and the synchronization and standardization prevalent in western music. Orchestra is a result of this rational outcome. Rationalizing tendencies of western society is also visible in western music. Weber in his writings on sociology of music, contrasted on the concise notations and the well-tempered scale of modern music-the rigorous standardization and coordination that governs a modern day

symphony orchestra - with spontaneity and inventiveness musical systems of Asia or non-literate tribes" (Coser, 1977:233-234).

Rationalization process as an outcome of scientific world view, subsumed each and every domain of human endeavour, and in this reference it is worth mentioning that music as a result, is not merely associated to the logical aspect, but has some medical connotations too. Music as a discipline is both art and science. Creatively speaking, it is an art (singing, dancing, instrument playing etc); and when we start visualizing it on the notion of its effect on our mind and body, it falls in the category of science. Effect of music on living beings, as has been observed, is diverse. Various researches, carried out on plants and animals showed that, music and sound has some correlation to the growth of plants and animals.

Considering music as a phenomenon and process, the cultural aspect of music gets intertwined with the therapeutic and scientific aspect, thus broadening the field of music. Methodologically speaking, music therapy involves a long process, incorporating, series of scientific procedures. Unlike other branches of Medical Sciences, particularly allopathy, it is an area which is largely related to mental process. It is associated to the psychological and pathological (mental and physical) aspect of human being. Offshoots of music, such as song, dance and instrumental music, all have positive and negative effects on the listeners, as well as on the performers. For some music has rejuvenating effect and for some it makes them more depressed and solitary.

Effect of music on the performers and the listeners vary, because notion of pleasure and pain differs from individual to individual; as for example, Ann Mitchell, wrote a paper on 'The Neurobiology of Music' which was based on the incidence of nervous breakdown of piano player, while he was performing, consequently he was advised by the doctors to stay away from the instrument. On the other hand for some, music is such a divine act, that it becomes a medium of conversation between God and the actor. Most of the poets of 'Bhakti Movement' like Nanak, Dadu, Surdas and Meerabai and singers of 'Sufi Movement', all communicated to God via this medium. Hence for them, music altogether had significantly positive effect.

Here it is pertinent, to mention, if we do not define the boundary and do not limit the music therapy as an episteme confined to the laboratories, the professional practitioner and self referral patients, then it would be easy to state, that whole society is a potential lab and each one of us, undergo the therapy, from the time we get up in the morning and when we go to sleep. Morning prayers, film songs, party dance, listening songs while driving a car or moving

in some public transport or watching a musical programme on television. All these trivial musical acts, some way or the other affect our mind and body; certainly they have some socio-psychological effect on us. Since Music Therapy is an 'expressive therapy' which involves interpersonal process and use of mental, physical, emotional, social, aesthetic and spiritual aspects, by the therapist, so as to help the patient to get over the disorders, which his/her body or mind experience. Now if we depart a bit, from this methodological aspect of Music therapy, then one can easily argue on the basis of earlier mentioned examples, we all undergo the therapy, all through the day, of course! *Inabsentia* of a 'therapist'.

Song and dance are the integral part of our social and cultural life. There are songs for every human expression and occasion. If we broadly categorize them, they can be listed as follows:-

- Songs of happiness and humour.
- Songs of melancholy and mourning.
- Songs of rejuvenation and rejoice.
- Songs of revenge and rebel.
- Songs of aggression and anger.

The category of songs which a society produces is an indicator of socio-psychological pattern of a society. As an illustration, a society which produce more of a devotional songs, is a society which is said to be heading towards ideational culture (e.g. Indian society), where as society which produce more of songs of revenge and aggression, enroute to sensate culture (e.g. American society). While elaborating the sensate culture, with respect to effect of music, America's popular music and rock music is often criticized for creating a destructive society. "...youths involved with metal music have greater tendency than those not involved to engage in life risking or reckless behaviour, such as drunk driving and assault." (Arnett, 1991).

It is observed, that 'metallic music' is characterized by "pounding beat, high pitched vocals – that are either loudly sung or shouted and distorted electric guitars that provide metallic sound. It is to most adult listeners, painfully loud and very aggressive (Trzcinski, 1992:13). This pounding music and loud noise harp the mental nerves and raise the secretion level of 'adrenaline' (major stress hormone), consequently it creates stress in the body and mind.

However the quantitative and qualitative researches have indicated that on an individual as well as on society, music has more functional effect, rather than dysfunctional effect. As for example in United States of America, music as classical method of punishment is used to punish the teenagers, if they are caught for reckless driving or something similar to it. It is also used as a therapy to reform criminals. Robert Burton, way back in 17<sup>th</sup> century wrote in his book –'The Anatomy of Melancholy' how music and dance can be critical in treating mental illness, behavioural and emotional disorder.

The functional aspect of music also indicates that it can act as a 'vent' for long contained distress in a positive manner. In this regard, Indian society is a best illustration. Indian society is a society which is by and large dominated by patriarchal values, where women in all areas experience subservient positions. Even folk songs and film songs represent this social value, like 'Devi ke Geet' where a woman asks the Goddess to give many male members to her family (.....*mangun vardana devi ke mandir ke bhitar, mangun main pancha saat balak so pancha saat balaka aur kanya ek devi ke mandira ke bhitar*.....) This song maintain the status quo in the society, where woman herself accepts her socio-psychological position within the social structure.

Now in sharp contrast to the above mentioned example, there is a song, where

woman challenges the status quo as well as patrilineal system, which allows child to automatically have father's name, although woman bears the pain of child birth – ".....*dard hamane uthaye sainya ke lala kaise kahaye, aao meri sasu palanga chari baitho,iska nyaya karo, sainya ke lalna kaise kahaye*.....". There has also been norm in Northern Indian villages to have songs for every occasion, like songs sung during the child birth and songs sung while performing daily domestic chores. It is also interesting to mention here, in a society where there is a tradition of treating a groom side with lot of respect, is subtly and tacitly abused by the women of brides side through the medium of song, and in turn groom side taking no serious cognizance, regard it just a customary practice.

If we sociologically analyse the normative pattern of these songs, it can be argued that since Indian society is a closed society, and traditionally women are not expected to openly revolt against the social system or bring any kind of radical change, these songs act as a 'safety valve'. Functional Conflict viewpoint would regard these songs as a medium of release of pent up feelings, distress, discontent and frustration of the female members of the society. As, Sociologists might argue, that this social arrangement makes possible for a society to express indirectly, which in turn saves society from any kind of large revolt on societal level, as well as contains the disintegration of personality on individual level.

Nevertheless, in reference to the examples and illustrations mentioned in this paper, it establish an argument, that if music therapy is seen, as from the modernist standpoint, then considering it as an alternative medical science, will be a serious flaw, because it is a creative therapy and therefore it will have invariable results, which will be tested and questioned again and again by the scientific modern community of the world. Hence it is

required to view this stream, from the standpoint of postmodernist, as it claims, that world has not one reality but many realities; so allopathy vis a vis music therapy are one of the realities existent in the medical realm. Therefore it is required to regard it not as an alternative medicine but as an allied stream to mainstream medicine.

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