

Short Communication

ILLUSTRATION OF MENTAL THERAPY IN BAUL CULTURE**¹Dr. Arpita Chatterjee****Founder Director, International Institute for Alternative & Complementary Therapy (IICAT); Associate Professor and Head, Department of Botany, Barasat College, West Bengal, India.****ABSTRACT**

Bauls are an order of musicians, who played a form of music using a khamak, ektara and dotara. To be a Baul, they must learn by experience self-realization, sadhana. While singing the Baul plays a one-stringed plucked drum called the ekatara. This instrument symbolizes union of the body (deha) and the mind (mana). The Baul song comes completely from their heart and while singing become one with the Supreme Being within him. Bauls are basically philanthropists, the root of their philosophical theory rests in a deeper complex psychological consciousness. They play a major role in inculcating a feeling of nationalism, pride in our motherland, self-esteem and self-confidence. When the Bauls have achieved the highest level of control, which is done through their breathing, they are able to pursue more in their sadhana.

Keywords: Bauls, self-realization, psychological consciousness, self-esteem, self-confidence.

INTRODUCTION

The word 'Baul' comes from Sanskrit 'batul' meaning divinely inspired insanity. Bauls are a group of Hindu mystic minstrels. They are integral parts of many districts of West Bengal as their footsteps dot the muddy village lanes of Bankura, Birbhum, Burdhaman, Nadia, Dinajpur and Murshidabad. The Bauls of Bengal are people who practice the Baul religion [1]. They were an order of musicians in 18th, 19th and early 20th century India, who played a form of music using a khamak, ektara and dotara. Baul philosophy is mostly known for the songs that the Baul people sing; in the Samsad Bengali – English Dictionary the definition of Baul is “one of a class of Hindu stoical devotees singing songs in a special mode illustrating their doctrine” (Thielemann, 2003).

BOUL CULTURE AND SELF-REALIZATION

To be a Baul requires not only study, but an immersion in the knowledge acquired (Thielemann, 2003). In order for the Bauls to be consumed with this knowledge, they must learn by experience. The most important aspect is self-realization, sadhana (Kaun, 2009). The Bauls are able to share and attain sadhana through music, which people hear and therefore relate to them. The Baul song comes completely from their heart. Through this song they can express their feelings and forget everything around them [2]. When the Baul becomes engrossed in the song, nothing else around him matters. This is because while singing he has become one with the Supreme Being within him. The Baul people are mostly known for singing because singing is one way in which they project their beliefs (Thielemann, 2003).

The main component of the Baul religion is the true divinity. The Bauls believe that the human body is the temple of the gods, so they must take care of and properly cultivate their bodies. Before one can unite with the Supreme Divinity, his soul must be completely purified. A person must be purified through body and heart; means of attaining this includes having good thoughts, company,

conversation, and environment. One must also completely give up his ego. The main goal for a Baul adherent is to surrender himself to the divinity within himself. Once the human and Supreme Soul has united, he or she is able to attain infinite reality; this is Baul sadhana (Thielemann, 2004).

THE BAUL IDEOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY

They are free wanderers and detached from the bondage of society and family. The Bauls, through their ideology, song and dance spread the message of peace and universal brotherhood. They travel in search of the internal ideal, “maner manush” (the man of the heart), who dwells within the human heart. The Baul religion is a combination of Hindu and Islamic beliefs and is based on the Upanisads and the Vedas (Capwell, 1974). They are thought to have been influenced greatly by the Hindu tantric sect of the Kartabhajas as well as by Sufi sects [3]. The Baul music had a significant influence on Rabindranath Tagore. Bauls are basically philanthropists, the root of their philosophical theory rests in a deeper complex psychological consciousness. When they move from village to village in rural Bengal among the illiterate village folk, their song and dances inspire others. They play a major role in inculcating a feeling of nationalism, pride in our motherland, self-esteem and self-confidence. This is indeed a psychological therapy for mental health, and it is proved during the Indian freedom struggle.

The Bauls are always trying to achieve sadhana; and by singing, dancing and playing their instrument, they are able to perform his sadhana. The Bauls believe that worshipping alone is a form of selfishness, because it is not universally shared. Therefore, an act of devotional selflessness can be found in the Bauls interaction with the surroundings and audience. Being unified with all is very important to the Bauls and singing is claimed to unify all individual aspects into a whole. When sound (svara brahma), rhythm (tala brahma) and speech (vakya brahma), combine to make music, it becomes the highest point of emotion and at this point it has gained full strength and that is when everything is united (Kaun, 2009).

Music is a way in which the Baul people are able to worship their inner deity and move closer to their ultimate goal of sadhana. Because the Supreme Divinity dwells within the hearts of men, sadhana (self-realization) as the greatest aspiration of the Bauls, is to become completely one with The One inside of them. Although it seems that plain singing is all that is needed to reach this great height of oneness, this is not the case [4]. It is very important that the singer be in tune and be completely focused on praising the divinity within him. If the singer fails to do either of these then negative forces are able to enter his heart (Capwell, 1974). Done correctly though, the Baul is able to show his worship to the Supreme Divinity within himself. Samkirtana is the congregational rendition of musical worship. This brings together many like-minded people to worship, which intensifies the devotion to the Supreme Divinity (Capwell, 1988).

UNION OF THE BODY AND THE MIND

The path to attaining sadhana is not easy, it takes much control and selflessness. One of the most important aspects of Baul sadhana is aropa sadhana (the fundamental process of implementation). This is achieved by mastering breath-control (Thielemann, 2003). Within this process there are three stages to perform: drawing the breath upwards, suspending it for some time, and finally releasing it again. There is a whole process on how one performs these steps which takes a great deal of strength and control [5]. The first step is called Puraka and it consists of using one's finger to close the right nostril and breathing in through the left, then switching and breathing in through the right. The next step, Kumbhaka, is when the Baul holds the breath within him by holding his nose and mouth closed with his right hand. The final step is Recaka, where the breath is released through one nostril. This is

a very specific procedure but it helps the Baul to gain strength to attain sadhana. The amount of time one is supposed to hold one's breath is not specified but being able to train and hold it for long periods of time shows that a person has full control over the vital air and his own inner strength (Capwell, 1974). Another aspect that goes along with the vital air is ajapa (the soundless incantation). After one is fully conscious of the supreme divinity within, this incantation is automatically pronounced while that person breaths in. When the Bauls have achieved the highest level of control, which is done through their breathing, they are able to pursue more in their sadhana.

While singing the Baul plays a one-stringed plucked drum called the ekatara. This instrument symbolizes union of the body (deha) and the mind (mana). The clothes worn by the Baul also symbolize unity. Their guduri is a dress that is made of many different pieces and colors of fabric that are sewn together. Each of the pieces is supposed to represent every caste and every religion and they are being brought together in unity and equality in the dress (Thielemann, 2003). Once the Baul has found his true self, a brilliant light shines before him. This light allows him to see everything within himself by illuminating the inner self. Man's own self is this light, it is atma (the self – illuminating human soul). To attain the spiritual goal of atma the Baul must have total knowledge of his body and must have achieved proper sadhana (Capwell 260). Also, for one to see their inner-self they have to tune-out everything outside of their own body.

This illustration is the same in music therapy, dance therapy and psychological therapy as in the Baul dance. In dance therapy the main goal is to meet one's feelings through the body and the mind, as it is believed that the body and mind are inseparable. Besides, in therapeutic events the therapists always try to convey good environments, good physic and good mental conditions to the clients. Moreover, breathing exercise is the initial phase in all the therapeutic sessions. Maximum emphasis is given on the realization of the self, that is self-empowerment. The Bauls touch similar emotional therapy for the good health of people as well as society. Thus, it can be concluded that the Baul dance holds the same spirit of physical and mental therapy as depicted by music therapy and dance movement therapy.

CONCLUSION

The Bauls of Bengal are people who practice the Baul religion and Baul culture. The Bauls are able to share and attain sadhana through music, which people hear and therefore relate to them. The main component of the Baul religion is the true divinity. The main goal for a Baul adherent is to surrender himself to the divinity within himself. The Baul religion is a combination of Hindu and Islamic beliefs and is based on the Upanisads and the Vedas. Because the Supreme Divinity dwells within the hearts of men, sadhana (self-realization) as the greatest aspiration of the Bauls. The path to attaining sadhana is not easy, it takes much control and selflessness.

REFERENCES

1. Capwell Charles H. 1974. The esoteric belief of the bauls of Bengal. *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 33(2): 255-264.
2. Capwell Charles. 1988. The popular expression of religious syncretism: The bauls of Bengal as apostles of brotherhood. *Popular Music*. 7(2): The South Asia/West Crossover: 123–132.
3. Kaun Emily. 2009. The baul religion. <http://www.mahavidya.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Kaun-Emily-The-Bauls-Yes.pdf>
4. Thielemann Selina. 2003. *Baul philosophy*. New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation.
5. Thielemann Selina. 2004. The baul singers of Bengal and their philosophy of humanity. *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society*. 35: 33-49.