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Ласанти Манаранджани Калинга Дона/ШРИ-ЛАНКА/***THERAPEUTIC VALUES OF TRADITIONAL HEALING RITUALS OF SRI LANKA****ШРИ-ЛАНКАНЫН САЛТТЫК АЙЫКТЫРУУ
ЫРЫМ-ЖЫРЫМДАРЫНЫН ТЕРАПЕВТИК БААЛУУЛУГУ****ТЕРАПЕВТИЧЕСКАЯ ЦЕННОСТЬ ТРАДИЦИОННЫХ ЛЕЧЕБНЫХ
РИТУАЛОВ ШРИ-ЛАНКИ**

Abstract. Sri Lanka is an island country in South Asia renowned for its centuries-old traditional healing rituals which promote both individual and community well-being. These practices can be broadly categorized into two types: small-scale indoor practices and large-scale outdoor practices. Rooted in oral traditions, they are deeply embedded in cultural beliefs, indigenous healing methods, and an ecological understanding of nature, all aimed at addressing both personal and communal needs. Due to modernization and urbanization, these rituals are now primarily practiced in remote areas and are rarely seen as a form of exhibition in urban settings across the island. However, their therapeutic value is increasingly recognized and respected by contemporary society. This paper is based on two decades of empirical research, employing qualitative methodologies to examine selected large-scale outdoor rituals. It explores the cultural elements, indigenous healing methods, and artistic expressions interwoven in these rituals, emphasizing their therapeutic significance through the lenses of community music therapy and medical ethnomusicology.

Key words: Sri Lankan healing rituals (Bali & Tovil), Holistic healing, Community music therapy, Medical ethnomusicology.

Аннотация. Шри-Ланка - Түштүк Азиядагы арал өлкөсү, анын көп кылымдык салттуу айыктыруу ырым-жырымдары менен белгилүү, ал жеке адамдын да, коомдун да жыргалчылыгына өбөлгө түзөт. Бул практикаларды жалпысынан эки түргө бөлүүгө болот: чакан масштабдагы ички практикалар жана чоң масштабдуу сырттагы практикалар. Оозеки салттарга негизделген, алар маданий ишенимдерге, жергиликтүү айыктыруу ыкмаларына жана жаратылышты экологиялык түшүнүүгө терең сиңип калган, мунун баары жеке жана коомдук муктаждыктарды чечүүгө багытталган. Модернизацияга жана урбанизацияга байланыштуу, бул ырым-жырымдар азыр биринчи кезекте алыскы аймактарда аткарылат жана сейрек аралдын шаарларында көргөзмөнүн бир түрү катары каралат. Бирок, алардын дарылык баалуулугу азыркы коом тарабынан барган сайын таанылып, урматталууда. Бул документ эки он жылдык эмпирикалык изилдөөгө негизделген, тандалып алынган масштабдуу сырткы ырым-жырымдарды изилдөө үчүн сапаттуу методологияларды колдонуу. Ал маданий элементтерди, жергиликтүү айыктыруу ыкмаларын жана бул ырым-жырымдар менен байланышкан көркөм сөз айкаштарын изилдеп, жамааттык музыка терапиясы жана медициналык этномузыкалогиянын линзалары аркылуу алардын терапиялык маанисин баса белгилейт.

Негизги сөздөр. Шри-Ланканын айыктыруу ырым-жырымдары (Бали жана Товил), Бирдиктүү айыктыруу, Коомчулук музыка терапиясы, Медициналык этномузыкалогия.

Аннотация. Шри-Ланка — островное государство в Южной Азии, известное своими многовековыми традиционными ритуалами исцеления, которые способствуют как индивидуальному, так и общественному благополучию. Эти практики можно в целом разделить на два типа: мелкомасштабные практики в помещении и крупномасштабные практики на открытом воздухе. Укорененные в устных традициях, они глубоко укоренены в культурных верованиях, традиционных методах исцеления и экологическом понимании природы, все из которых направлены на удовлетворение как личных, так и общественных потребностей. Из-за модернизации и урбанизации эти ритуалы в настоящее время в основном

практикуются в отдаленных районах и редко рассматриваются как форма демонстрации в городских условиях по всему острову. Однако их терапевтическая ценность все больше признается и уважается современным обществом. Эта статья основана на двух десятилетиях эмпирических исследований, использующих качественные методологии для изучения выбранных крупномасштабных ритуалов на открытом воздухе. В ней изучаются культурные элементы, традиционные методы исцеления и художественные выражения, переплетенные в этих ритуалах, подчеркивая их терапевтическое значение через призму общинной музыкальной терапии и медицинской этномузыкалогии.

Ключевые слова: Шри-ланкийские ритуалы исцеления (Бали и Товил), целостное исцеление, общественная музыкальная терапия, медицинская этномузыкалогия.

Introduction

Sri Lanka has a rich and diverse tradition of healing rituals, which can be compared to culturally embedded therapeutic practices found across the world - such as the Zaar in Egypt and Iran, Tarantism in southern Italy, Setsubun in Japan, and various healing ceremonies in Malawi, as well as in countries like India, China, Mexico, and beyond. These practices are all deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual worldviews, and often involve complex ritual performances that incorporate music, dance, trance and therapeutic intentions. Such cultural dimensions are integral and should not be disregarded, particularly within the evolving disciplines such as community music therapy and medical ethnomusicology. In the modern, high-tech world of the 21st century, traditional belief systems and cultural practices are sometimes perceived as obsolete. This perception clearly aligns with Brynjulf Stige's observation, "As a result of processes of modernization, social mobility increases, social networks change, and the traditional cultures of mutual aid have withered somewhat in most societies today" (2004: 109).

Music, dance and drama are firmly integrated with sociocultural practices, beliefs, and indigenous healing methods in both temporal and spatial continuum. They served and keep serving communities in eradicating, overcoming or minimizing social and psychological problems, dangers, and sicknesses. Ancient cultures as well as contemporary traditional cultures, non-western and western alike, inspire music therapists and medical ethnomusicologists to broaden knowledge about the complex nets of relationships that bring together cultural beliefs, music and healing. It is in concordance with Brynjulf Stige's notion, "history and heterodox non-professional practices of musical healing are important and valuable sources of influence

from which music therapists learn, consciously and unconsciously" (2004: 93) and Benjamin D. Koen and et al.'s notion, "nearly a century of ethnomusicological research into music and healing shows not only how culturally diverse practices of specialized music function as tools for therapy, but the music is most often practiced as a means of healing or cure - a way for a person or patient to transform from illness or disease to health and homeostasis" (2008: 6).

Brynjulf Stige claims that "music therapy cannot be developed as a culture-free discipline" (2002: 2). Florence Tyson who coined the community music therapy in 1973 focused on using music within community health services. Stige's idea that "health threats may not be individual, only that relational and communal aspects must be taken into serious consideration. The individual should be seen in relation to the collective, and vice versa" (2004: 96), aligns with Michael Rohrbacher's notion of "to maximize growth and learning rates, music becomes culturally embedded and serves as a rich source of positive human interactions ... (2007: 3). Such perspectives find strong parallels in the traditional healing practices of Sri Lanka.

Healing Rituals

For many centuries, Sri Lanka has been a predominantly agricultural society, and Sri Lankans have continued to depend on natural conditions and resources. Agricultural activities are planned according to seasonal patterns - such as the rainy or dry seasons - in relation to the sun, rivers, ponds, forests, and the availability of both human and animal labor. To maintain equilibrium and prevent disasters, people have traditionally relied on indigenous practices, including prayers to supernatural beings. Occasional changes in nature can disrupt daily life and compel communities to take action to restore a lost sense of order. In such instances, healing rituals are performed to overcome

difficulties, and people seek to fulfill three types of needs through these practices:

- 1) Personal well-being,
- 2) Communal well-being, and
- 3) Response to unexpected natural disasters or epidemics

Healing rituals in Sri Lanka are primarily engaged with the supernatural world to address various community needs and are structured

around three principal forces: gods, planetary deities, and devil spirits.

Gam madu, Devol madu, Pūna madu or Pahan madu fall under the category of Madu Festivals. These annual ceremonies are dedicated to the goddess Pattini, whose cult is traditionally associated with the healing of contagious diseases and the alleviation of personal distress (Edirisinghe 1999: 45). Their aim is protection of crops and cows from epidemics, protection of

Key Forces in Healing Rituals

Gods related	Planetary Deities related demon related	Devil/
Madu Festivals	Bali Rituals Yakuma, Garā Yakuma Sanni Yakuma, Ira Mudun Samayama, Suniyam Yagaya, Maha Sohon Samayama, etc.	Rata

children from diseases and other calamities, and sometimes blessing for good harvest or call for rain.

The second major category, the Bali rituals, are dedicated to planetary deities believed to possess the power to bestow peace or good health, and is discussed in detail later in the paper.

A significant number of rituals in the third category are specifically intended for the invocation of devils. Some of these rituals are briefly discussed here. Among these, the Rata Yakuma - also known as Riddi Yāgaya, Kalu Kumāra Samayama, or Riddi Samayama—is a prominent ritual that addresses the needs of young women. It calls for Rata or Riddi devils, who are believed to operate under the leadership of Kalu Kumāra¹, who is believed to cause illness and psychological distress in women during the transitional period between their first menstruation and birth giving. The principal misdeed he does is young women's infertility (comp. Kōttagoda 1997: 12, 33).

Sinhalese peasant women believe that Kalu Kumāra resides in forests, streams, and other isolated locations in general, and that he has power to possess individuals - particularly women - who pass through such areas alone. However, he is not regarded as harmful to men (comp. Wijesekera 1987: 162). The ritual is also practiced when women of marriageable age, who for various reasons are unable to find life partners, develop fear of remaining single for the rest of their lives and consequently suffer from mental health issues linked to their status. It is commonly believed that newborn infants, pubescent girls, newly married women, and women who have recently given birth are vulnerable to the influence of Kalu Kumāra. According to Sinhalese farmers, this malevolent spirit is believed to cause physical illness, psychological distress, social alienation, or even diminishing a woman's perceived attractiveness. The primary aim of these rituals is to strengthen women's psychological resilience and alleviate unwanted fears and phobias. Similarly, newborn

¹The name *Kalu Kumāra* literally translates to "Black Prince" (*Kalu* meaning "black" and *Kumāra* meaning "prince").

babies often fall ill while adjusting to their new environment, including exposure to unfamiliar germs and bacteria. This can lead to parental anxiety, which, if prolonged, has the potential to result in psycho-somatic problems over time. In the central part of the ritual for infertile women, the healer first impersonates a pregnant mother and then treats a doll as if it were a newborn child - bathing it, dressing it, rocking it, and singing lullabies. Finally, the doll is ceremonially handed to the infertile woman. Through this process, the woman is believed to receive blessings and protection from the harmful possession of the Rata devils. The ritual fosters hope and emotional healing, empowering the woman to envision a future as a mother living a happy life, and to regain a sense of personal and social well-being.

Garā Yakuma or Garā Maduwa is an agricultural ritual called for two principal reasons: (1) removal of the influences of ās-vaha (evil-eye), kata-vaha (evil-mouth) or black magic influences, and (2) achievement of prosperity. The main practitioners are fishermen, who commence the ritual in sea-shore areas during the vārakan² periods (comp. Kōttagoda 1997: 19-21).

The Sanni Yakuma Ritual-also known as *Daha Ata*³ *Sanniya*⁴ - is performed to expel eighteen kinds of diseases possessed by Sanni devils. In the ritual, the dancers wear eighteen distinct masks, each representing a specific affliction. The masks are Amukku, Adbhuta, Bhuta, Bihiri, Deva, Gedi, Gini jala, Golu, Gulma, Jala, Kana, Kora, Maru, Nāga, Pissu, Pith, Slesma and Vāta. These ailments are believed to arise from imbalances in the three bodily humors, vāta (air), pita (bile) and kapha (phlegm)⁵. Moreover, M. H. Goonathilake claims that Sanni Yakuma ritual has potential to cure as many as 35 kinds of diseases (2007: 35)⁶.

The Ira Mudun Samayama ritual is performed to address afflictions believed to be caused by the devil Reeri, who is responsible for blood-related diseases. The term Ira mudun

yāmaya - with ira meaning "sun", ira mudun referring to the sun at its highest point (midday), and yāmaya meaning "time period" - denotes a time believed to increase blood circulation. In order to avoid possession by Reeri yakā⁷, rural communities traditionally refrain from bathing or travelling during the mid-day period (comp. Kōttagoda 1997: 15).

The Sūniyam yāgaya, also known as Sūniyam kāpilla, is a ritual performed for removal of harmful afflictions believed to be caused by individuals seeking revenge. The term sūniyam refers to deadly afflictions caused by black magic (Zoysa 1949). The ritual is called for when individuals experience continuous misfortunes, illnesses, or dangerous situations that do not respond to medical treatment. Sūniyam yakā is not considered a harmful devil; rather, he is seen as a protective force who assists neutralizing the effects of black magic and envy - particularly when such negative energies are directed toward a person's happiness, prosperity, wealth, or fame (comp. Kōttagoda 1997: 64).

The *Bali* Ritual: A Major Healing Practice in Sri Lanka

The two main traditional healing rituals aimed at addressing psychosomatic problems in Sri Lanka are known as Bali and Tovil. This section of the article focuses on the Bali ritual and explores its therapeutic value. The Bali ritual is dedicated to planetary deities and gods who are believed to possess the power to bring peace and good health by removing illness, misfortune, or malevolent influences from an individual, as previously mentioned.

According to Sri Lankan astrologers, planetary deities can strongly influence human lives. Depending on their timing and positioning, these effects can be favorable, unfavorable, or neutral. The purpose of the Bali ritual is to bless and protect either an individual or a community by removing the malign influences (comp. Dissanayake 2007: 50, Premakumara De Silva 2000, Wijesekera 1987)⁸. An astrologer is consulted to diagnose the problem based on the

²*Vārakan* refers to stormy weather with raging sea, which prevents fishermen from doing their job (Zoysa 1949: 1647).

³The term "Daha-Ata" in Sinhala refers to the number eighteen.

⁴The term "Sanniya" refers to diseases, illnesses or ailments.

⁵A detailed account of this can be found in Kalinga Dona (2009).

⁶This is the third edition (print) of the book originally published in 1964.

⁷In Sinhala, the term Yakā refers to a devil/demon or a malevolent spirit.

individual's horoscope. Deities associated with the planets are represented by images molded from clay. Music plays a central role throughout the all-night ritual. Chanting, singing, and the sounds of musical instruments such as sak (a conch shell), drums, hand-bells, and anklets serve as a medium of connecting the planetary world and human world. These auditory elements are further enhanced by dance, drama, painting, sculpturing, and other performing arts. At the end of the ritual, it is believed that the patient receives blessings from the planetary deities, symbolized by a sacred thread (pirit huya) tied around the wrist. Once the ritual is complete, the molded planetary images are destroyed, marking the symbolic end of the planets' malefic influences.

Even though the majority of Sri Lankans practices Buddhism, this does not exclude the presence of other beliefs, practices, or religions. Farmers, in particular, often keep the inherited animistic beliefs to find solutions for their day-to-day problems, sometimes giving them a Buddhist surface. As a result, each ritual begins with paying homage to the Buddha, Dhamma (the Buddha's sacred teachings), and the Sangha (the community of Buddhist monks), in the hope of receiving blessings from the Triple Gems.

In Sinhalese rituals, the sound of drums - always more than one, commonly three or more - along with the mingling sounds of anklets, hand-bells, and a sak, create a distinctive soundscape for the healer, the patient, and the participating community members. This musical environment is considered central to bridging the human and supernatural worlds. This ritual event provides for the participants an extraordinary opportunity to harmonize their bodies and minds throughout the night-long ceremony. The unique sound environment - characterized by repetitive drum patterns - can, in a sense, be compared to the undisturbed mental flow experienced during meditation.

People consider natural disasters or diseases not as a problem of an individual or of his/her family, but as a shared problem that requires the engagement of the entire community. Brynjulf Stige nicely explains this notion: »This is not to say that health threats

may not be individual, only that relational and communal aspects must be taken into serious consideration. The individual should be seen in relation to the collective and vice versa« (2004: 96). After discussing the matter with the healer, community members begin sharing responsibilities from the day onward until the ritual takes place, in order to support the affected individual or the community. Music-related communal rituals help cultivate peace, social harmony, strengthen family and community ties. They enable individuals and communities to move beyond their usual limits and to address their fears and illnesses more effectively by enacting the problems they face. In Benjamin D. Koen's words, "Throughout history, the potential transformational power of music and related practices has been central to cultures across the planet, and music has been far more than a tool for evoking the relaxation response" (2008: 12). In the Bali ritual, a distinctive, night-long soundscape is created, fostering a positive mood for the healer, patient, and the participating community. This musical atmosphere is considered central to the ritual, as it is believed to bridge the human and supernatural realms. In concordance with Loewy and Aldridge's claim that "music can link the mind to the breath and can at the same moment provide a release of tension, all within a framework of a structural support" (2009: 3), music-related healing rituals help Sinhalese rural communities to overcome biological, psychological, and spiritual problems.

Therapeutic Effects of the Bali Ritual

The therapeutic effects of the Bali ritual can be summarized in the following points:

1. Focusing the group's attention on a troubled individual helps that person overcome feelings of loneliness, ignorance, and lack of social understanding.
2. Getting rid of fears from public exposure to society helps building self-confidence through focusing the group's attention on a troubled individual.
3. Community members' shared involvement in preparing the complex ritual settings is widely understood as the maintenance of public harmony.
4. Social gathering enables the families to meet neighbors and other people, to

⁸For a more detailed account, see Kalinga Dona (2013).

communicate and share feelings, i.e. to strengthen social networks.

5. Observance of public appearance of otherwise unseen and feared supernatural beings helps people to get rid of their deeply rooted phobias.

6. Participation in a healing ritual strengthens the patient's mental condition and contributes to the removal of his or her psychically-based obstacles.

7. The healer's calls and offerings to gods and planetary deities culminate in blessings that bring relaxation and comfort to all involved.

8. Burning incense powders on pandam (lighted torches) create a mystic mood, which aims to divert the patient's attention from the sickness.

9. Burning of dummala (rosin), incense sticks, sandalwood, and the spreading of turmeric powder are intended to destroy germs and bacteria

10. Sitting on the ground throughout the ritual contributes to the restoration of the psycho-physical balance of the participants.

11. Continuous music creates a specific sound environment, which contributes to the positive mood of the patient.

12. Rituals treat the person as a whole, without taking the affected part of the body out of the total context.

Conclusion

According to Stuart Hall, "Culture is not a practice.... It is threaded through all social practices and is the sum of their interrelationships" (1980: 59). In that sense, multifunctional rituals of Sri Lanka serve as meeting points of music, dance, drama, sculpturing, and other art forms. These rituals not only express cultural beliefs but also play a vital role in restoring psychophysical balance in both individuals and communities. Their

musical component is reflected in Mercédès Pavlicevic and Gary Ansdell's notion that "Music and musicking is used to empower and enable others, 'balancing music's potential as integrative and subversive activity in relation to a community and society'" (2004: 25). Certainly, Koen et al.'s notions that "Beyond the multidimensional, evanescent and ineffable nature of music and sound phenomena, which seem to evade comprehensive measurement, the central reason that the modes of action of musical and related interventions often remain obscure, be they in the context of traditional, ceremonial healing or in clinical research and practice, is that music is a cultural phenomenon with infinitely diverse, power-laden meanings that are present at individual, group and global levels of culture" (Koen et al. 2008: 12-13) are highly applicable to Sri Lankan context as discussed in this essay.

Medical ethnomusicology is a multi-disciplinary field that brings together diverse cultural beliefs and perspectives on music and healing. Interest in this field is growing globally and Sri Lanka is no exception. This essay argues that rural Sri Lankan contexts have much to contribute to this field of scholarly interest and that its experiences have considerable potential in fertilizing knowledge and understanding about music and healing in the globalized world. As music therapist, Even Ruud aptly states, "music therapists have to come to realize that ill-health and handicaps have to be seen within a totality, as part of social systems and embedded in material processes. People become ill not only because of physical processes, but also because they become disempowered by ignorance and lack of social understanding" (2004: 11). Sri Lankan healing rituals offer a holistic approach that addresses not only physical ailments, but also the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of well-being.

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