Music and Ritual Discourses on Music -5 by Prateeksha Sharma

Ritual is an innate part of the human life. Ritual whether in the form of an invocation, a sacrifice, a fast or a penance, a holy dip in a river, ringing the bells, a prayer or an *aarti* they all contribute to disciplining the mind to focus. Every spiritual and religious tradition uses music to help in focussing. Prayer brings the mind to a point of concentration, and in a one-pointed thought about the object of prayer. The object maybe the form of a diety or a formless entity, musical sounds help in making the mind still and gathering the thoughts from all the various directions the mind is usually scattered in. Therefore, spiritual music has its own special parametres and singers. When we go into a house of worship the sound of the music playing instantly snaps the chord from the noise of the world and introverts the senses.

In India, with its unique tradition of community singing in *bhajans*, *satsangs* and *sankirtan*music is the predominant element that unifies the consciousness of the participants. Even if people are unable to sing, for not knowing the language or the lyrics, they usually join in the community act with something as simple as clapping. Such community activities, which are a part of the life of a householder, especially in certain communities or the post-retirement phase

of life, are a prescription to stall the modern day affliction of alienation among the elderly; which often leads to mental, physical and spiritual decay. This kind of community musico-religious programmes are also a mechanism for those who are involved to remain active, busy and involved in a meaningful social exchange- by not being solely dependent on their families at all times. The greater is the social and physical involvement of an individual the less likely is the person to fall prey to degenerative diseases.

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