
Sacred Music as Social Capital: Lessons from the Jagannath Tradition for Community Cohesion and Cultural Sustainability

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Abstract

Sacred music has historically served functions that extend beyond ritual performance, contributing to social cohesion, cultural continuity, and the transmission of collective knowledge. While previous scholarship has examined the Jagannath tradition from historical, religious, and cultural perspectives, limited attention has been paid to its role in generating social capital within communities. This conceptual paper explores the relationship between sacred music and social capital through the lens of the Jagannath tradition of Odisha, India. Drawing upon the theories of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (2000), together with scholarship in ethnomusicology, community music, and cultural sustainability, the study proposes that sacred musical practices associated with Lord Jagannath foster trust, reciprocity, shared identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission. The paper employs a qualitative conceptual methodology based on thematic analysis of existing literature to identify the mechanisms through which sacred music strengthens community participation and preserves intangible cultural heritage. The study further argues that the Jagannath tradition provides an internationally relevant model for understanding how community-based musical practices contribute to sustainable cultural development in an era of globalization. The proposed conceptual framework has implications for music education, cultural policy, heritage management, and community development, while offering avenues for future comparative research across sacred musical traditions worldwide.

Keywords: Sacred music, Social capital, Jagannath Tradition, Odishi Music, Community Music, Cultural Sustainability, Intangible Cultural Heritage

1. Introduction

Music has long served as a powerful medium through which societies express belief systems, negotiate collective identities, and transmit cultural knowledge across generations. Beyond its aesthetic and performative dimensions, music performs essential social functions by fostering communication, reinforcing shared values, and strengthening communal relationships. Within this broad musical landscape, sacred music occupies a distinctive position because it is embedded in ritual, spirituality, and collective memory, thereby functioning not only as an artistic expression but also as a mechanism for sustaining social cohesion and cultural continuity (Small, 1998; Turino, 2008).

The growing concern over the preservation of intangible cultural heritage has renewed scholarly interest in understanding how traditional musical practices contribute to sustainable community development. The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage recognizes performing arts, rituals, festive events, and oral traditions as living cultural expressions that derive their significance from continuous transmission within communities rather than from their mere historical existence (UNESCO, 2003). Consequently, sacred music has increasingly been examined not only as a religious phenomenon but also as a dynamic social institution capable of preserving indigenous knowledge systems, strengthening cultural resilience, and promoting intergenerational learning.

The sociological concept of social capital provides an appropriate theoretical lens for examining these broader functions of sacred music. Social capital broadly refers to the resources embedded within social relationships that facilitate cooperation, trust, reciprocity, and collective action (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Unlike economic capital, which is accumulated through financial resources, or human capital, which emphasizes individual skills and education, social capital derives its value from networks of relationships, shared norms, and mutual obligations that enable communities to function effectively. Communities possessing strong social capital often demonstrate higher levels of civic engagement, cultural participation, collective problem-solving, and institutional trust (Putnam, 2000).

Although social capital has been widely investigated in disciplines such as sociology, education, political science, public health, and community development, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how sacred musical traditions generate and sustain social capital. Music is inherently a collective activity that encourages participation, emotional synchrony, cooperation, and shared symbolic meanings. Participatory musical practices, particularly those embedded within religious traditions, create opportunities for repeated social interaction that strengthen interpersonal trust and reinforce collective identity (Turino, 2008). Similarly, Small's (1998) concept of *musicking* argues that the significance of music lies not merely in musical compositions but in the relationships established among performers, listeners, and communities through the act of participation itself. These perspectives suggest that sacred music functions as an important social process capable of producing durable networks of reciprocity and belonging.

India offers numerous examples of sacred musical traditions that continue to influence community life despite rapid modernization. Among these, the Jagannath tradition of Odisha represents one of the oldest continuously practiced living traditions in South Asia. Centred on the worship of Lord Jagannath at Puri, this tradition integrates ritual performance, devotional singing, temple ceremonies, festivals, pilgrimage, and community participation into a comprehensive cultural ecosystem. Musical expressions such as Odishi music, *bhajana*, *janaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *chhanda*, and other devotional compositions accompany virtually every significant religious observance within the Jagannath tradition, making music an inseparable component of spiritual and social life. These practices extend beyond the temple precincts and continue to flourish within households, village communities, monasteries, educational institutions, and cultural organizations

throughout Odisha.

One of the defining characteristics of the Jagannath tradition is its remarkable capacity to facilitate participation across diverse social groups. The annual Rath Yatra, daily temple rituals, congregational singing, devotional festivals, and numerous community celebrations bring together priests, musicians, artisans, devotees, volunteers, pilgrims, and local residents in collaborative religious activities. Such repeated interactions generate networks of familiarity, trust, cooperation, and shared responsibility that closely correspond to the characteristics of bonding and bridging social capital described by Putnam (2000). Simultaneously, the oral transmission of musical knowledge from senior practitioners to younger generations strengthens cultural continuity while preserving musical traditions that might otherwise face gradual decline under conditions of globalization and changing cultural consumption.

Existing scholarship on the Jagannath tradition has primarily focused on its historical evolution, religious philosophy, temple administration, ritual practices, literature, architecture, and musicological characteristics. Studies of Odishi music have similarly concentrated on melodic structures, compositional forms, performance traditions, and historical development. While these contributions have substantially enriched understanding of Odisha's cultural heritage, relatively few investigations have examined sacred music as a mechanism for generating social capital that supports community cohesion and cultural sustainability. Consequently, the broader sociological significance of the Jagannath musical tradition remains insufficiently explored within contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship.

Addressing this gap is particularly important in light of increasing international interest in community music, cultural sustainability, and indigenous knowledge systems. Around the world, scholars are examining how community-based musical traditions contribute to social inclusion, resilience, well-being, and sustainable cultural development. The Jagannath tradition offers an important case through which these broader theoretical debates may be advanced, demonstrating how sacred music can function simultaneously as religious practice, educational process, cultural archive, and social resource.

Against this background, the present study explores the Jagannath tradition through the theoretical framework of social capital. Specifically, it seeks to examine how sacred musical practices contribute to the creation of trust, collective identity, community participation, and intergenerational knowledge transmission, thereby supporting the long-term sustainability of cultural heritage. By integrating insights from sociology, ethnomusicology, community music, and heritage studies, the paper proposes a conceptual framework positioning sacred music as an active generator of social capital rather than merely an expression of religious devotion. In doing so, it contributes to the growing international discourse on the role of traditional musical practices in promoting socially sustainable and culturally resilient communities.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Sacred Music as a Social and Cultural Institution

Sacred music has historically transcended its liturgical function to become a vital medium for preserving cultural memory, reinforcing collective identity, and facilitating social interaction. Across religious traditions, musical practices accompany rituals, festivals, pilgrimages, and communal worship, thereby creating spaces where shared beliefs are expressed and transmitted across generations (Becker, 2004; Small, 1998). Rather than being viewed merely as artistic performances, sacred musical traditions constitute living cultural practices in which meaning emerges through participation, performance, and communal engagement.

Small's (1998) concept of *musicking* fundamentally reoriented music scholarship by arguing that music should be understood as a social activity rather than an isolated artistic object. According to this

perspective, every participant—including performers, listeners, organisers, and community members—contributes to the creation of social relationships through musical participation. Similarly, Turino (2008) distinguished participatory musical practices from presentational performances, emphasizing that participatory music prioritizes collective involvement, social bonding, and shared experience over technical virtuosity. Sacred musical traditions generally align with participatory performance, where community engagement becomes as significant as musical excellence.

Ethnomusicological scholarship has consistently demonstrated that music functions as a cultural system embedded within broader social structures. Merriam (1964) proposed that music should be understood through its concepts, behaviours, and sounds, thereby highlighting its inseparable relationship with society and culture. Blacking (1973) further argued that music represents "humanly organized sound," suggesting that musical practices reflect the values, relationships, and social organization of the communities that produce them. These perspectives indicate that sacred music serves simultaneously as artistic expression, cultural archive, and social institution.

Within the Indian context, sacred music occupies a central position in devotional traditions, where musical performance is integrated into everyday religious life. Temple rituals, congregational singing, seasonal festivals, and pilgrimage traditions illustrate how music strengthens emotional attachment to religious communities while preserving cultural continuity. Such traditions demonstrate that sacred music performs educational, social, and cultural functions extending well beyond ritual observance.

2.2 Social Capital: Concept and Dimensions

The concept of social capital has emerged as one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for understanding how social relationships facilitate cooperation and collective action. Although scholars differ in their definitions, they generally agree that social capital consists of resources embedded within social networks, shared norms, trust, and reciprocal relationships that enable individuals and communities to achieve common objectives (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources associated with durable networks of institutionalized relationships. His perspective emphasized the unequal distribution of social resources and the ways in which individuals mobilize networks to obtain social and cultural advantages. Coleman (1988), by contrast, focused on the functional role of social capital, arguing that trust, obligations, shared expectations, and information channels facilitate coordinated actions that benefit both individuals and communities.

Putnam (1993, 2000) expanded the concept into the realm of civic engagement by distinguishing between bonding social capital, which strengthens relationships among individuals sharing similar identities, and bridging social capital, which connects diverse groups through cooperation and mutual trust. Bonding social capital reinforces solidarity and emotional support within communities, whereas bridging social capital promotes inclusion, collaboration, and social integration across different social groups. This distinction is particularly relevant for understanding sacred musical traditions, where religious participation often strengthens internal cohesion while simultaneously fostering broader community engagement during festivals, pilgrimages, and public performances.

The application of social capital theory has expanded across education, public health, governance, disaster resilience, and community development. Increasingly, scholars recognize that cultural participation—including collective musical activities—can generate trust, reciprocal relationships, and civic engagement that strengthen community resilience and long-term sustainability.

2.3 Community Music and Informal Learning

Community music has gained increasing scholarly attention as an approach that emphasizes participation, inclusion, accessibility, and lifelong musical engagement rather than formal instruction alone (Higgins, 2012; Veblen, Messenger, Silverman, & Elliott, 2013). Unlike institutional music education, community music is typically situated within cultural, religious, and local contexts where learning occurs through observation, imitation, collective participation, and shared practice.

Informal musical learning has been recognised as a powerful mechanism for preserving traditional knowledge systems. Musical knowledge transmitted through participation allows learners to acquire not only technical skills but also cultural values, ritual meanings, and social responsibilities. Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice provides a useful framework for understanding such learning environments, arguing that knowledge develops through active participation within communities engaged in shared practices.

Sacred musical traditions exemplify this process of informal learning. Individuals often begin participating as observers before gradually assuming increasingly active musical and ritual roles. Such participation facilitates the transmission of repertoire, performance conventions, religious symbolism, and cultural identity without reliance on formal educational institutions. Consequently, community music serves as an important vehicle for sustaining both musical traditions and social relationships.

2.4 Sacred Music and Cultural Sustainability

The concept of cultural sustainability has become increasingly significant within heritage studies, emphasizing the preservation and continued vitality of cultural practices that contribute to community identity and well-being. Rather than treating heritage as static artefacts, contemporary scholarship recognises that living traditions survive through continuous practice, adaptation, and intergenerational transmission (Soini & Dessein, 2016).

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) identifies performing arts, rituals, festive events, oral traditions, and traditional craftsmanship as essential components of intangible heritage requiring community participation for their continued existence. Unlike tangible monuments, intangible heritage remains viable only when communities actively practise, reinterpret, and transmit cultural knowledge.

Sacred music represents one of the most enduring forms of intangible cultural heritage because its survival depends upon collective participation rather than institutional preservation alone. Festivals, ritual performances, congregational singing, and devotional gatherings continually recreate musical traditions while reinforcing social relationships among participants. Consequently, sacred music contributes simultaneously to cultural sustainability and community resilience.

2.5 The Jagannath Tradition: A Conceptual Context

The Jagannath tradition of Odisha constitutes one of India's most vibrant living religious and cultural systems. Music occupies a central position within this tradition through temple rituals, devotional singing, seasonal festivals, congregational worship, and the annual Rath Yatra. Musical genres associated with the Jagannath tradition—including *bhajana*, *janaṇa*, *kīrtana*, *chhanda*, and Odishi devotional compositions—serve both religious and social functions by encouraging widespread participation among devotees.

The existing scholarship has primarily examined the Jagannath tradition from perspectives such as religious philosophy, temple administration, literary heritage, performance practice, and musicological analysis. Although these studies provide valuable insights into the historical and artistic dimensions of the

tradition, comparatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding how sacred music generates social relationships, collective trust, and community participation.

Viewed through the framework of social capital, the Jagannath tradition presents a compelling example of how sacred musical practices strengthen bonding relationships within devotional communities while simultaneously fostering bridging relationships among pilgrims, visitors, volunteers, musicians, artisans, and local residents. Such interactions facilitate cooperation, shared identity, reciprocal support, and the informal transmission of musical knowledge across generations.

2.6 Research Gap

The review of literature reveals three important gaps. First, existing research on sacred music has predominantly focused on theological, historical, and musicological dimensions, with comparatively limited attention to its sociological functions. Second, although social capital has been extensively examined in education, governance, and community development, its application to sacred musical traditions remains underdeveloped. Third, studies on the Jagannath tradition have rarely integrated theories of social capital with concepts of community music and cultural sustainability.

Accordingly, this paper addresses these gaps by proposing a conceptual framework that positions sacred music within the Jagannath tradition as a generator of bonding and bridging social capital, thereby contributing to community cohesion, informal musical learning, and the long-term sustainability of intangible cultural heritage. This interdisciplinary perspective extends existing scholarship by connecting sociology, ethnomusicology, heritage studies, and community music into a unified analytical framework.

Table 1. Major Theoretical Foundations

Theory/Scholar	Core Concept	Application	Used in Section
Bourdieu (1986)	Social capital as network resources	Explains relational resources	Literature Review & Discussion
Coleman (1988)	Trust and obligations	Community cooperation	Findings
Putnam (2000)	Bonding & Bridging capital	Community cohesion	Findings
Small (1998)	Musicking	Music as social activity	Literature Review
Turino (2008)	Participatory performance	Community participation	Findings
Wenger (1998)	Communities of practice	Informal learning	Findings
UNESCO (2003)	Intangible cultural heritage	Cultural sustainability	Discussion

Table 2. Research Gap Matrix

Research Area	Existing Focus	Limitation	Gap	Present Study
Jagannath studies	Religion, history	Limited sociological lens	Social capital unexplored	Links sacred music with social capital
Odishi music	Musicology	Limited community analysis	Music as social resource	Community cohesion

Social capital	Education, governance	Rare in sacred music	Religious music underexplored	Conceptual model
Heritage	Preservation	Limited role of music	Music-sustainability link	Integrated framework

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual qualitative research design to examine how sacred music functions as a form of social capital within the Jagannath tradition. Unlike empirical studies that rely on primary data collection, conceptual research seeks to extend existing knowledge by integrating established theories and synthesising evidence from diverse scholarly sources to develop new perspectives or theoretical frameworks (Jaakkola, 2020). The present study therefore employs an interpretivist approach, recognising sacred music as a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon whose meanings emerge through collective participation, ritual practice, and community interaction (Crotty, 1998).

Conceptual research is particularly appropriate where fragmented literature exists across multiple disciplines but has not yet been integrated into a coherent explanatory framework (Jaakkola, 2020). In the present context, studies on sacred music, social capital, community music, and the Jagannath tradition have largely evolved independently. By bringing these bodies of literature into dialogue, this paper proposes a conceptual model explaining the relationship between sacred musical practices and the creation of social capital.

3.2 Data Sources

The study is based exclusively on secondary sources drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, book chapters, conference proceedings, and policy documents. Foundational literature relating to social capital was reviewed from the works of Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Putnam (1993, 2000), while theories of music as a social practice were informed by the writings of Merriam (1964), Blacking (1973), Small (1998), and Turino (2008). Additional literature concerning community music, informal learning, cultural sustainability, and intangible cultural heritage was examined to establish the broader interdisciplinary context of the study (Higgins, 2012; Soini & Dessein, 2016; UNESCO, 2003; Veblen et al., 2013).

To contextualise the analysis within Odisha, a published scholarship relating to the Jagannath tradition, Odishi music, devotional performance practices, temple rituals, and cultural heritage was also consulted. The selection of literature emphasised academic relevance, theoretical significance, and direct applicability to the objectives of the study.

3.3 Literature Selection Strategy

The literature selection followed a purposive and thematic approach commonly adopted in conceptual research (Jaakkola, 2020). Relevant publications were identified through major academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and institutional repositories. Searches were conducted using combinations of keywords such as *sacred music*, *social capital*, *community music*, *Jagannath tradition*, *Odishi music*, *intangible cultural heritage*, *cultural sustainability*, *ritual music*, *informal music education*, and *religious festivals*.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed publications that made substantial theoretical or empirical

contributions to one or more of the following domains:

1. Social capital theory.
2. Sacred music and ethnomusicology.
3. Community music and participatory performance.
4. Cultural sustainability and intangible cultural heritage.
5. Jagannath culture and Odishi musical traditions.

Foundational works were retained irrespective of publication year because of their enduring theoretical significance, while recent studies were included to capture contemporary developments within music education, heritage studies, and cultural sustainability.

3.4 Analytical Framework

The selected literature was analysed using thematic analysis, an interpretive method widely employed for identifying recurring concepts, relationships, and patterns across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Rather than statistically synthesising findings, thematic analysis facilitates conceptual integration by organising evidence into meaningful analytical categories.

The literature was coded according to recurring themes associated with the objectives of the study. Five overarching themes emerged:

- Sacred music as collective participation.
- Sacred music and trust-building.
- Community identity and social cohesion.
- Intergenerational knowledge transmission.
- Cultural sustainability through musical practice.

These themes were subsequently interpreted through the theoretical framework of social capital, allowing the study to explain how sacred musical practices contribute simultaneously to bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

3.5 Conceptual Framework Development

Based on the thematic synthesis of the literature, a conceptual framework was developed illustrating the relationship between sacred music, community participation, social capital, and cultural sustainability. Conceptual framework development represents a recognised outcome of conceptual research because it enables existing knowledge to be reorganised into explanatory models that can guide future empirical investigation (Jaakkola, 2020).

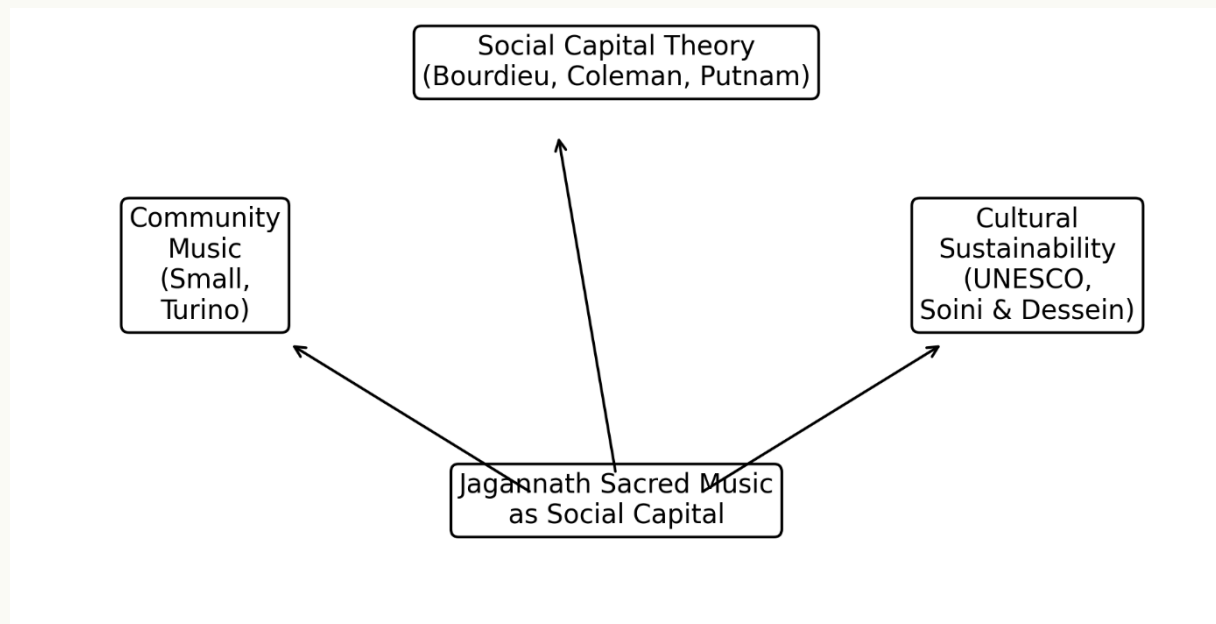
The proposed framework assumes that participation in sacred musical practices generates repeated social interaction among individuals and groups. These interactions cultivate trust, shared norms, reciprocity, and collective identity, which together constitute social capital. In turn, accumulated social capital supports intergenerational transmission of musical knowledge, strengthens community resilience, and contributes to the long-term sustainability of intangible cultural heritage. The framework therefore positions sacred music not merely as an outcome of religious practice but as an active social mechanism through which communities create and sustain cultural resources.

3.6 Trustworthiness and Limitations

As a conceptual study, the validity of the findings depends upon the quality, diversity, and theoretical integration of the literature reviewed rather than on statistical generalisation. To enhance conceptual rigour, the study draws upon established theories from sociology, ethnomusicology, music education, and heritage studies while integrating multiple scholarly perspectives into a unified analytical framework.

Nevertheless, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The study does not incorporate primary empirical data from musicians, devotees, temple authorities, or community participants. Consequently, the proposed conceptual model should be regarded as a theoretical framework requiring future empirical validation through qualitative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, surveys, or mixed-methods research. Such investigations would enable researchers to examine the applicability of the framework within the Jagannath tradition as well as its transferability to other sacred musical traditions across different cultural contexts.

Figure 1. Theoretical Integration Model



4. Findings and Conceptual Analysis

The thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests that sacred music within the Jagannath tradition functions as a multidimensional social institution that extends beyond religious devotion. Through regular participation in rituals, festivals, congregational singing, and devotional performances, sacred music contributes to the creation of social relationships, collective identity, and cultural continuity. The analysis identifies five interrelated themes that collectively explain how sacred music generates social capital and supports cultural sustainability.

4.1 Sacred Music as a Catalyst for Community Participation

One of the most significant contributions of sacred music is its ability to encourage active community participation. Unlike professional concert performances, devotional music within the Jagannath tradition is fundamentally participatory. Ritual singing, *bhajana*, *kīrtana*, *janaṇa*, and festival performances invite devotees to participate regardless of age, gender, occupation, or formal musical training. Participation itself becomes more important than technical excellence, thereby fostering inclusivity and collective engagement.

Turino (2008) argues that participatory musical performance creates environments in which social interaction takes precedence over artistic perfection. Similarly, Small (1998) conceptualises *musicking* as a relational activity through which individuals establish and negotiate social relationships. These theoretical perspectives are particularly relevant to the Jagannath tradition, where sacred music serves as a shared cultural practice rather than an exclusive artistic performance.

Community participation becomes especially visible during the annual Rath Yatra and associated festivals.

Devotees, musicians, temple functionaries, artisans, volunteers, pilgrims, and local residents collectively engage in devotional singing throughout the celebrations. Such repeated participation strengthens interpersonal familiarity and reinforces collective responsibility for preserving religious and cultural traditions. These interactions constitute the foundation upon which social capital develops.

4.2 Sacred Music and the Development of Bonding Social Capital

The literature further indicates that sacred music contributes significantly to the creation of bonding social capital. Bonding social capital refers to the trust, reciprocity, and emotional support that develop among individuals who share common identities, beliefs, and social experiences (Putnam, 2000).

Within the Jagannath tradition, devotional music provides recurring opportunities for individuals to interact through shared religious practices. Congregational singing creates emotionally synchronised experiences that reinforce mutual trust and collective belonging. Ritual participation encourages cooperation among community members while simultaneously strengthening shared cultural values.

Coleman (1988) argues that repeated social interactions create obligations, expectations, and trust that facilitate coordinated action. These characteristics are evident in sacred musical gatherings, where participation is sustained through voluntary cooperation rather than formal contractual arrangements. Bourdieu (1986) similarly emphasises that durable social networks constitute valuable forms of capital that communities mobilise for collective benefit.

The Jagannath tradition illustrates this process by integrating music into daily worship, seasonal festivals, and community ceremonies. Through repeated engagement in these musical practices, devotees develop enduring relationships that extend beyond religious settings into broader social life. Sacred music therefore functions as a mechanism for strengthening internal solidarity while reinforcing community resilience.

4.3 Sacred Music as a Source of Bridging Social Capital

While bonding social capital strengthens relationships within communities, sacred music also facilitates bridging social capital by connecting individuals from diverse social, regional, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. Putnam (2000) argues that bridging social capital promotes social inclusion by creating networks that transcend existing social boundaries.

The Jagannath tradition provides numerous opportunities for such interactions. The annual Rath Yatra attracts millions of pilgrims representing different regions, castes, languages, professions, and nationalities. Despite these differences, participants collectively engage in devotional singing, processions, and ritual observances. Sacred music functions as a common symbolic language through which diverse participants establish temporary yet meaningful social connections.

Ethnomusicological research has consistently demonstrated that music possesses exceptional capacity to facilitate intercultural communication and shared emotional experiences (Blacking, 1973; Merriam, 1964). Musical participation frequently transcends verbal communication, allowing individuals from different cultural backgrounds to participate collectively within ritual environments.

Consequently, sacred music within the Jagannath tradition performs an integrative social function by reducing perceived social distance and encouraging cooperative participation. These interactions contribute to the formation of bridging social capital that extends the social benefits of religious participation beyond narrowly defined community boundaries.

4.4 Intergenerational Transmission of Musical Knowledge

Another important theme emerging from the literature concerns the role of sacred music in preserving and transmitting musical knowledge across generations. Unlike institutional music education, many devotional

musical practices continue to be learned through observation, participation, imitation, and apprenticeship within families, temples, monasteries, and community organisations.

Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice provides an appropriate framework for understanding this process. Learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation, whereby newcomers gradually become active participants within established communities of practice. Sacred musical traditions exemplify this model because learners acquire musical repertoire, ritual procedures, performance conventions, and cultural values through continued participation rather than formal classroom instruction.

The Jagannath tradition maintains numerous opportunities for such informal learning. Young participants observe senior musicians during temple rituals, religious festivals, devotional gatherings, and community celebrations before gradually assuming more active musical responsibilities. This process ensures the continuity of both musical knowledge and associated cultural practices.

UNESCO (2003) similarly emphasises that intangible cultural heritage remains viable only through continuous community transmission. Sacred music therefore represents not only artistic heritage but also an educational mechanism through which communities reproduce cultural identity across generations.

4.5 Sacred Music and Cultural Sustainability

The final theme concerns the contribution of sacred music to cultural sustainability. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognises that sustainable development extends beyond environmental and economic considerations to include the preservation of cultural diversity and living heritage (Soini & Dessein, 2016).

Sacred music contributes to cultural sustainability by continuously recreating cultural practices through active participation rather than passive preservation. Festivals, rituals, congregational singing, and devotional performances ensure that musical traditions remain socially meaningful within changing cultural contexts. Rather than existing as museum artefacts, these traditions evolve while retaining their core symbolic significance.

Within the Jagannath tradition, sacred music reinforces cultural sustainability in several interconnected ways. First, it preserves traditional musical repertoires associated with temple worship and devotional practice. Second, it strengthens collective identity through repeated communal participation. Third, it facilitates intergenerational transmission of musical knowledge. Finally, it encourages community ownership of cultural heritage by involving diverse stakeholders in its continued practice.

These findings align with international discussions on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, which increasingly emphasise community participation as the primary mechanism for sustaining living traditions (UNESCO, 2003). Consequently, the Jagannath tradition provides an instructive example of how sacred music contributes simultaneously to religious continuity, social cohesion, and sustainable cultural development.

4.6 Proposed Conceptual Framework

Based on the thematic synthesis, the study proposes a conceptual framework explaining the relationship between sacred music and social capital within the Jagannath tradition.

Participation in sacred musical practices serves as the initiating mechanism that encourages repeated social interaction among devotees, musicians, temple authorities, pilgrims, volunteers, and local communities. These interactions foster trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and shared norms, thereby generating both bonding and bridging forms of social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000).

The accumulation of social capital subsequently strengthens collective identity, enhances community resilience, supports informal musical learning, and facilitates the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge. These processes ultimately contribute to the long-term sustainability of intangible cultural heritage.

The conceptual framework may therefore be summarised as follows:

Sacred Musical Practices → Community Participation → Bonding and Bridging Social Capital → Collective Identity and Trust → Informal Knowledge Transmission → Cultural Sustainability

This framework extends existing scholarship by positioning sacred music not merely as an artistic or religious expression but as a dynamic social process through which communities create, mobilise, and sustain valuable social resources. Furthermore, although developed using the Jagannath tradition as the conceptual context, the framework possesses wider applicability for understanding similar relationships within other sacred musical traditions across different cultural settings.

Figure 2. Proposed Conceptual Framework

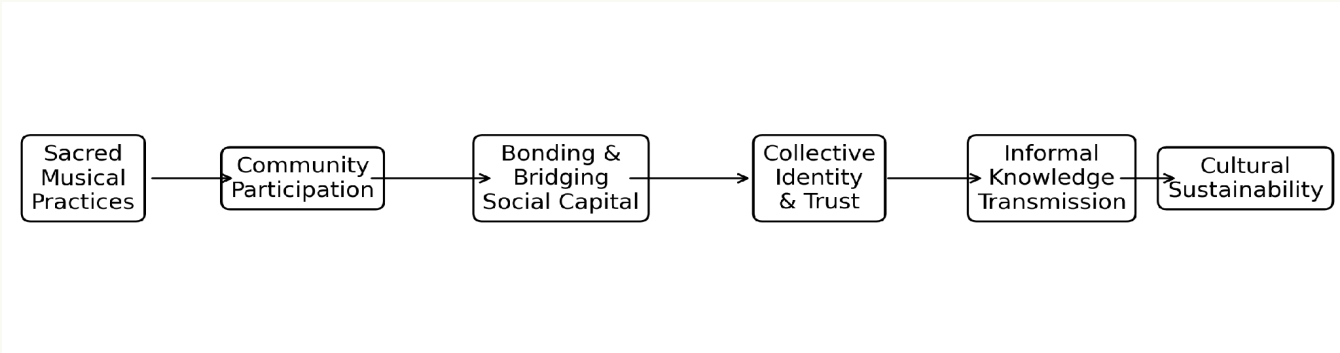


Table 3. Thematic Synthesis of the Literature

Theme	Key Supporting Literature	Contribution to Social Capital	Implication
Sacred Music as Community Participation	Small (1998); Turino (2008)	Creates repeated interaction and shared experiences	Strengthens participation and belonging
Bonding Social Capital	Putnam (2000); Coleman (1988)	Builds trust, reciprocity and solidarity	Enhances internal community cohesion
Bridging Social Capital	Putnam (2000); Blacking (1973); Merriam (1964)	Connects diverse groups through shared ritual	Promotes inclusion and cooperation
Intergenerational Knowledge Transmission	Wenger (1998); UNESCO (2003)	Transfers musical and cultural knowledge	Preserves living traditions

Cultural Sustainability	Soini & Dessein (2016); UNESCO (2003)	Sustains intangible cultural heritage	Supports long-term cultural resilience
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5. Discussion

The present study conceptualises sacred music within the Jagannath tradition as an important generator of social capital that contributes to community cohesion and cultural sustainability. By integrating theories of social capital with scholarship in ethnomusicology, community music, and heritage studies, the paper extends existing literature beyond traditional religious or musicological interpretations of sacred music. The findings suggest that sacred music should be understood not merely as an artistic or devotional practice but as a dynamic social institution that facilitates trust, reciprocity, collective identity, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

One of the principal contributions of this study lies in demonstrating that sacred musical practices function as mechanisms for producing both bonding and bridging social capital. Previous studies have established that social capital emerges through repeated social interactions characterised by trust, shared norms, and reciprocal relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The present conceptual framework extends this understanding by proposing that sacred musical participation itself constitutes one of the processes through which such interactions are generated. Within the Jagannath tradition, devotional singing, temple rituals, congregational worship, and public festivals create recurring opportunities for community members to engage collectively, thereby strengthening interpersonal relationships and reinforcing communal identity.

The study also contributes to ethnomusicological scholarship by supporting the proposition that music functions as a form of social action rather than merely an artistic product. Small's (1998) concept of *musicking* emphasises that meaning arises through participation in musical events, while Turino (2008) argues that participatory musical performance prioritises social engagement over technical virtuosity. The Jagannath tradition provides empirical support for these theoretical perspectives by illustrating how sacred music creates shared social experiences that extend beyond religious observance into broader community life. Consequently, the social value of sacred music resides not only in the preservation of musical repertoire but also in its capacity to cultivate enduring social relationships.

Another important implication concerns the relationship between sacred music and informal music education. Unlike institutional music education, which often occurs within structured academic environments, musical learning within the Jagannath tradition is embedded in everyday cultural and religious practices. Individuals acquire musical knowledge through observation, participation, imitation, and sustained interaction with experienced practitioners. This process closely resembles Wenger's (1998) concept of communities of practice, wherein learning occurs through gradual participation within established social groups. Accordingly, sacred music may be viewed as an effective mechanism for transmitting both technical musical knowledge and broader cultural values across generations.

The findings further reinforce contemporary discussions surrounding cultural sustainability. UNESCO (2003) recognises that intangible cultural heritage survives only through continuous practice within communities rather than through passive preservation. Similarly, Soini and Dessein (2016) argue that cultural sustainability requires active participation, adaptation, and community ownership of cultural practices. The Jagannath tradition exemplifies these principles by demonstrating how sacred music remains socially relevant through continual performance during rituals, festivals, and devotional

gatherings. Rather than preserving heritage as static historical artefacts, communities actively recreate musical traditions in ways that maintain both cultural authenticity and contemporary relevance.

From an international perspective, the conceptual framework proposed in this paper possesses applicability beyond the Jagannath tradition. Numerous sacred musical traditions across the world—including Gregorian chant in Europe, Gospel music within African American churches, Sufi *Qawwali* in South Asia, Buddhist chanting in East Asia, and Indigenous ceremonial music in Australia, Africa, and the Americas—perform similar functions of fostering community participation, preserving cultural memory, and strengthening social relationships. Although these traditions differ in their theological foundations and musical structures, they collectively demonstrate the universal capacity of sacred music to generate social capital and promote community resilience. Future comparative research may therefore examine the transferability of the proposed framework across diverse cultural contexts.

The present study also offers practical implications for cultural policy and heritage management. Policymakers frequently prioritise the preservation of physical monuments while overlooking the social processes through which intangible heritage is sustained. The findings suggest that safeguarding sacred music requires continued support for community participation, intergenerational learning, local festivals, and traditional performance practices. Cultural institutions, educational organisations, and heritage agencies should therefore recognise community musicians, religious practitioners, and local cultural organisations as active custodians of intangible cultural heritage rather than merely performers of traditional music.

Furthermore, music educators may draw valuable lessons from the Jagannath tradition regarding the importance of experiential and participatory learning. Community-based musical engagement complements formal music education by encouraging collaborative learning, cultural immersion, and social responsibility. Integrating elements of community music into educational curricula may strengthen learners' cultural awareness while promoting inclusive and participatory approaches to music education.

Despite its theoretical contributions, this study has certain limitations. As a conceptual investigation based on secondary literature, it does not provide direct empirical evidence concerning participants' experiences within the Jagannath tradition. The proposed conceptual framework should therefore be regarded as a theoretical model requiring empirical validation through ethnographic research, interviews, participant observation, surveys, or mixed-method investigations. Future research may also examine the relationship between sacred music and measurable indicators of social capital across different religious traditions, thereby extending the interdisciplinary dialogue initiated by this study.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that sacred music constitutes a valuable social resource capable of strengthening community cohesion while simultaneously preserving intangible cultural heritage. By integrating social capital theory with scholarship in community music and cultural sustainability, the present study contributes a novel conceptual perspective that broadens international understanding of the social significance of sacred musical traditions. The Jagannath tradition thus emerges not only as a distinctive cultural heritage of Odisha but also as an internationally relevant model illustrating how music can sustain communities, reinforce collective identities, and contribute to socially sustainable futures.

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