

Therapeutic Aspects of Indian Classical Music

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A global tool of transcendence, music's therapeutic benefits are receiving a great deal of attention. Music is sound and the sound is rooted in vibration. Healing with sound is immensely popular and well documented as an effective holistic treatment. Musical sounds unleash knots created on our body sensory organs caused by the routine exertion and yields pronounced, calm, and balanced life. Treatment by listening to music leads to enhanced and thinkable brain. Through musical involvement in the therapeutic context, patient's abilities are strengthened and transferred to constructive areas of their lives. Music therapy also provide avenues for communication that can be helpful to the introverts, who constantly repress their emotions.

Dr. Tony Cicoria, a well-regarded orthopaedic surgeon and a former football Player, *actually* embraced death and returned to life, after being struck by the lightning while talking on the phone. This robust fellow developed several neurological syndromes as explained in the book *Musicophilia* by Dr. Oliver Sacks. "I saw my own body on the ground. I said to myself, 'Oh shit, I'm dead.' ... Then—slam! I was back." recalls Dr. Cicoria, while reminiscing the incident.

A couple of weeks later, although his memory problem persisted, life still returned to normal when suddenly in a few days, his insatiable desire to listen to the piano music aroused. He listened seriously for hours. He felt completely mindful and free from the disturbing past when eventually, he started to teach himself to play piano. In the third month after being struck, Cicoria was inspired, even possessed by music, and scarcely had time for anything else. Some years passed, he continued to work as a surgeon, but his heart and mind was now centred on music. He met a fearful motorcycle accident meanwhile, but made a complete recovery through his piano-playing and was back at work in two months.ⁱ

Music and the human body

It is known that approximately 70% of the body is water and sound travels faster in water than the air. Therefore, inculcating sound vibrations for healing is becoming essentially credited. In addition, there are seven glandular systems in our body and musical notes are also seven. Each note has a unique vibration which stimulates the energy centres and subsequently our body.

What is Music Therapy?

Human beings are innately musical beings. Music cannot be dissected from their lives and as a result, this innate quality helps a person to heal from several physical and mental degeneration (diseases). According to Kenneth Bruscia, in her book, 'Defining Music Therapy', "Music therapy is a systematic process of intervention wherein the therapist helps the client to promote

health, using music experiences and the relationships that develop through them as dynamic forces of change.”ⁱⁱ

Music therapy is a scientific method of curing diseases through the power of tunes. According to Gujral (2003), it is prescribed use of music, to stabilize the physical and mental health of listeners. “The sonic patterns of musical currents are recorded with the help of oscilloscopes and the pitch, amplitude and wavelengths of the constituent sound waves are analysed in the laboratories of Brahma-varchas, which helps in studying the effect of music in stress management.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Living organisms show sensitivity to specific radiant energies, be it acoustic, magnetic, or electromagnetic. As a result, musical tunes could certainly be gauged on emotions and mind. Thus, it is used as a tool to control the physiological, psychological and even social attitude of the patients.

“Music therapy is the skilful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Music has nonverbal, creative, structural, and emotional qualities. These are used in the therapeutic relationship to facilitate contact, interaction, self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication, and personal development.”^{iv}

Researches in MT Field

Researchers have explored several evidences on how musical vibrations are essential for us, especially in this frustrated world. One interesting experiment (Japan, 1990) was based on the water-crystals. Two tumblers of water were kept in two different rooms, of which one room was fulfilled with loud noise and hullabaloo, whereas the other one received musical beautifully-organised cheerful, soft tunes. Researchers explored that the room having noisy sounds or hullabaloo had dispersed, haphazard, and chaotic water-crystals; whereas, the room having peaceful music had systematic, well-knitted, designs of water-crystals. It was concluded that water crystals united together, forming designs imbibed blissful musical vibrations. And so is our body. Musical tunes inculcate balance and stability in our body and heal us from within. “The chanting of the lone syllable even helps control pulse, and blood pressure, relieves stress, and controls the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, endocrine and the nervous system.”^v

“Dr. Herbert Spencer experimented with the people suffering from high and low blood pressure and found that fast melodies having sharp notes are effective in normalizing the blood pressure while slow melodies having soft or *komal* swaras are helpful in lowering the BP.” Thus, Ragas like *Asawari* and *Malkauns* works as a healer for BP patients.”^{vi}

Music & positive vibrations

“I work with a 34 years old female who was involved in a car accident,” Dr. Michael Migliore, a music therapist at Western State University, shared an interesting experience, “During our once a week and an hour sessions, we work on a drum set. The goals were to improve concentration, memory and coordination. During the session I can visibly see the change in her posture which becomes more erect and her facial gestures which turns to smile.” Listening to music often balances our hormones and directs one towards optimism.

Stuti, a Sitar player in the US is suffering from heart issue. “I mainly use my sitar for meditation as I find the sound of the instrument bringing healing to me. I take the sitar to beaches and parks out in hot or cold weather as I need the serenity of its sound because of my heart condition.”^{vii}

An incredible story must be narrated about how powerful music can be on reviving the plants to green, lush being from there barren state. There was a barren, infertile land of *Palankhet village* in India. Many steps were taken since years to make the land worth-plantation but of no use, until the establishment of music school near-by. As a result, the vicinity developed extensively within eight months and the land not only turned perennial and flowery but also became worth growing vegetables too.

Raga Chikitsa or Healing through Indian Music

Indian classical music is based on the raga system. Ragas form the core of Indian music thus, therapy performed through Indian music is also called Raga Therapy or *Raga Chikitsa*. Raga is derived from the Sanskrit root *ranja*, meaning to colour the mind with the sounds emanating from *Aum*. Raga Chikitsa refers to the application of the ragas to combat diseases of the body (Sairam, 2003). Patients are given some specific ragas to listen regularly for days. Repetitive audition of particular ragas is an effective treatment which leads to subside the mental disorders. The muscles, nerves and the *chakras* of the affected part are contracted when one impulse provides relaxation during the interval between two impulses.

Here are some of the examples of Ragas which are often used by therapists for healing the patients:

Raga Kafi imparts humid, peaceful and soothing moods within patients and alleviate anxiety and over-reactors. ***Raga Mishra Mand*** has a very pleasing refreshing light and sweet touch while ***Bageshwari*** arouses a feeling of darkness, stability, depth and calmness.

Music is considered the best tranquilizer in modern days of anxiety, tension and high blood pressure. Raga ***Darbari*** is considered very effective in easing tension. Raga ***Bhupali and Todi*** give tremendous relief to patients of high blood pressure. According to Mittal (2003) and Dr. Sairam (2006), Raga ***Ahir-Bhairav*** is supposed to give free relaxed feeling, mitigates dust allergies and skin diseases and good for arthritis. Raga ***Malkauns*** and Raga ***Asawari*** helps to cure low blood pressure.^{viii}

For heart ailments, Raga **Chandrakauns** is considered very helpful. Raga **Tilak-Kamod**, **Hansdhwani**, **Kalavati**, **Durga** evoke a very blissful effect on the nerves. For patients suffering from insomnia and need a sonorous sleep, Raga **Bihag and Bahaar** is effective and revitalizing. Raga **Kedar** cures common cold & cough, asthma, headache.^{ix} Raga **Hamsadhwani** is said to boost energy and improves vitality. The pentatonic notes structure and the limited renditions within the boundaries of S R G P N S, when heard longer activates the energy centres and results in rejuvenation.

Effect of Musical beats and rhythms on the Body

Music beats and rhythms have a very close relationship with heart beats. Music having 70-75 beats per minute equivalent to the normal heart beat of 72 has a very soothing effect. Similarly, rhythms which are slower than 72 bpm create a positive suspense on the mind and body since our mind anticipates that the music will speed up and this restored vitality gives a deep relaxation to the body. Rhythms which are faster than the heart-beats excite and energize the body.

Conclusion

Plethora of possibilities and researches still line up regarding the in-depth and logical explanation of music therapy, especially in the field of Indian or Raga therapy. Internationally, world music do try to represent the rational criteria and have arrived to a greater extent, unlike the Indian Raga therapy. The scientific temperament of *how do the ragas affect our system*, or *what happens inside the body while listening to the ragas*, *how a particular raga can heal a specific disease especially physical*: these areas are yet not authenticated or proved scientifically. This is the reason why general masses in India are unable to gain the sovereign trust on such treatment. Thus, this part of music has yet many domains to discover to create a new picture.

I would conclude my paper by a logical statement by Dr. T.V. Sairam,
 “It has now been recognised that ragas are not just mere commodities of entertainment; the vibrations in their resonance can synchronize with one’s moods and health. By stimulating the moods and controlling the brainwave patterns, ragas could work as a complementary medicine.”

Bibliography

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Music: Nectar Of Life by Acharya Shriram Sharma, Pg. 87
- ^{iv} Canadian Association for Music Therapy / Association de Musicothérapie du Canada Annual General Meeting, Vancouver, British Columbia, May 6, 1994

- ^v Performing Arts and Therapeutic implications by Tanvi Bajaj, Pg 29
- ^{vi} Music Aesthetics By Manorama Sharma Pg:148
- ^{vii} <http://www.medindia.net/patients/patientinfo/raga-therapy-for-healing-mind-and-bodyhealing-ragas.htm>
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- ^{ix} Medicinal Music, Chennai: Nada Centre for Music Therapy, T.V Sairam, 2004a