

More Healing Wisdom from the East

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Raga -- Music Therapy

When we view the REALITY NATO and the US have given the World over the past decade, the character of this marauding evil becomes clear, no assistance required to determine the ugliness and homicidal EVIL . Yet WE subscribe, either by passive acceptance, DENIAL or COMPLACENCY! Choose well the REALITY and WORLD in which you would either live happily or die/suffer miserably. Withdraw your active and passive support from the evil American Empire and reject its poisonous ideology of inequality, death, greed, permanent war and destruction.

There are forces today -- Banking and Corporate -- that would enslave the entire world for their own perverse gain; we, the REAL force on this planet, should NEVER succumb to the imposition of senseless, civilian killing American TERRORISM.

India was once a mighty Empire, its influence extended throughout South East Asia down to Bali.

However, unlike Western empires, India neither 'conquered' with the sword or by economic means, instead it lavished it cultural splendour, wisdom and knowledge onto less developed nations, which for the most part were appreciative and very happy to accept an ordered, sophisticated, peaceful system.

India remains a treasure-trove of profound wisdom and helpful knowledge to this day. The following article only skims the philosophical foundation upon which this healing method is based. I hope it stimulates further study of the excellent healing and integrating system known as 'Nada Yoga' -- the Yoga of Sound.

Raga Therapy for Healing Mind and Body

by Lakshmi Gopal

There is a limited amount of scientific literature on the idea behind Indian classical music as a healing therapy. Its position in the genre of healing through music, though proven through the ages, has not been researched and applied as thoroughly and on the scale that it ought to have been. Every parent knows that soothing tones and sounds pacify even the most irritable of babies. Therefore, the primary proof of the efficacy of music or Raga therapy is the lullabies we sing to infants and toddlers. This is later heightened into Raga therapy for more mature perceptions of adults and adolescents. Practitioners of music therapy have living proof of the effectiveness of music in therapeutic applications on a daily basis. They treat conditions like stroke, brain injury, depression, autism, Alzheimer's disease and many others.

The therapeutic effect of ragas in Hindustani and Carnatic classical music is a time-tested one, described in the ancient system of Nada Yoga. It channelizes vibrations emanating from sounds to uplift the level of the patient's consciousness. Raga Chikitsa, an ancient manuscript in Tanjore's Saraswati Mahal Library built by Raja Serfoji, a

Maratha king, contains a treasure on ragas and spells out their application and use in fighting common ailments and diseases.

How does the system of Raga therapy actually work? A Raga is the sequence of selected notes (swaras) that lend appropriate 'mood' or emotion in a selective combination. It's a yoga system through the medium of sonorous sounds. Depending on its nature, a raga could induce or intensify joy or sorrow, violence or peace, and it is this quality which forms the basis for musical application. Thus, a whole range of emotions and their nuances could be captured and communicated within certain melodies. Playing, performing and even listening to appropriate ragas can work as a medicine.

To be rendered effective, Ragas are used in a combination with Ayurveda, the ancient science of Vedic healing. A Raga must be played or sung to a patient keeping in mind his/her physical nature of vata, pitta or kapha. The time assigned to the Raga during the day or night is also important. Moreover, it is to be seen whether the time of the day or night is naturally suited to vata, pitta and kapha.

Let's take an example. Early morning is the natural kapha time for Ayurveda. A kapha-type person should be treated to an early morning Raga like Bhairav, to cure physical imbalances. The later part of the morning and afternoon is pitta time. Raga Bilawal can be used during these hours to treat patients. Late afternoon and evening is vata time, when Raga Pooriya Dhanashri and Marwa can be used as a cure. It is very important, however, that the Ayurvedic constitution of the patient be kept in mind - as to whether he or she is a vata, pitta or kapha person.

The people at the core of this treatment would be the music therapist, the client, the clinical facility whether at home or in a hospital, and music providers. Music therapists interact with their clients and the use of music. They assess their clients and create a clinical plan for treatment in coordination with the team and client goals. This is what determines the course of clinical sessions. A music therapist works within a client-centered, goal-directed framework.

Raga therapy works in conjunction with a music therapist. The music therapist assesses the emotional and physical health of the patient through musical responses and then designs music sessions based on the client's needs. Music therapy works in a number of different ways as music helps the patient do different things and provides different benefits. Some of the ways in which music therapy helps patients are:

- * Keeping the patient's attention
- * Structuring time
- * Providing an enjoyable method of repetition
- * Helping memory
- * Encouraging movement
- * Tapping into memories and emotions

Dr Bhaskar Khandekar from Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) is the first modern music therapist in India. He started his practise in 1993. He uses selective music for selective diseases, helping patients improve their observable level of functioning and self-reported quality of life in various domains like cognitive functioning, motor skills, social and behavior skills by using music experiences in singing, song writing, listening to and discussing music, moving to music to achieve definite treatment goals and objectives.

Another famous music therapist from north India is Roop Verma. A professional sitarist, he uses the restorative power of music to maintain and improve emotional, physiological and psychological well-being in his patients. He uses pitch, tone and specific arrangement of 'swaras' (notes) in a particular raga that stimulates happiness, and alleviates and cures various ailments, inducing magnetic changes in the body.

Dr. Balaji Tambe has proved through his scientific research that Raga Bhupali and Todi give tremendous relief to patients of high blood pressure.

Clinical music therapy was started in 2005 at the Centre of Excellence in Delhi. Seven centres in and around Delhi treat people with the aid of music therapy. This has changed the lives of the clinically disadvantaged, especially those with autism or other mental and neurological behavioral disabilities. The Music Therapy Trust has successfully introduced clinical music therapy in India as a discipline.

It is best to conduct music therapy treatment early in the morning, in the evening or at night. Long sessions, which may prove strenuous, should be avoided, the best duration being that of one hour. One should have a light meal before the session, as an empty stomach is not the physiological ideal. A workable duration for music therapy would be - two or three short sessions with breaks in between - the whole session totaling one hour.

RAS Therapy

Music therapists use techniques that stimulate brain functions - a common one being rhythmic auditory stimulation (RAS). This relies on the connections between rhythm and movement, wherein, the patient is stimulated to relax or move through the use of music of a particular rhythm.

Studies have shown that RAS therapy improves the walking speed of a patient by an average of 14 metres per minute, compared to standard movement therapy. It helps patients take longer steps. In one trial, RAS also improved arm movements, as measured by elbow extension angle.

Other Raga therapy techniques, including listening to live and recorded music, are employed to try to improve speech, behaviour and pain in patients with brain injuries; outcomes were mostly positive.

Depression Raga therapy has been the subject of study for reasonable period of time now. As one knows, music is a powerful form of expression that delivers messages by the combination of rhythmic sound and words. Raga therapy depression researchers are confident of the effectiveness of music in therapeutic applications.

Where do Music Therapists Work?

Music therapists work in a variety of different places. Some of those places include:

- * Psychiatric hospital, working with the mentally ill
- * Medical hospitals, working with all types of patients
- * Rehabilitative facilities
- * Day care treatment centres

- * Community mental health centres
- * Drug and alcohol programs
- * Nursing homes and senior centres, working with music therapy and the elderly
- * Correctional facilities
- * Music schools and ordinary day schools.

Hindu philosophy gives us an insight into the “feeling” nature of music and how deeply the human spirit affects and is affected by the outcome of a performance. Shyamali Sharma, a performing sitar artist and music therapist of many years says, “I can certainly attest to the fact that your personal feelings are projected on the audience tremendously, so much so that if you are upset, you should not play because everyone listening to your performance will be affected by your emotion. If you are overwhelmed with happiness, so will they be.”

There are 72 raagas, which are known as the Melakarta ragas (Parant ragas) from which other ragas known as the Janya ragas are obtained. Neural research proves that the 72 raagas can control 72 nerves in the human body. Singing or performing a Raga, when bound to its specifications (lakshanas) and with purity in pitch (swara shuddi) gives the performer complete control on the corresponding nerve. Ragas Ahirbhairav and Todi are prescribed for patients suffering from hypertension. Carnatic ragas like Punnagavarali and Sahana are useful to calm the mind and control anger.

Hindustani and Carnatic classical musical considers a Raga as depicting a specific mood. An appropriate mood has to be evoked in the listener’s mind before initiating musical treatment. For example, Kafi Raga evokes a humid, cool, soothing and deep mood while Raga Pooriya Dhanasri evokes sweet, deep, heavy, cloudy and stable state of mind. Raga Mishra Mand has a very pleasing, refreshing, light and sweet touch while Bageshwari arouses a feeling of stability, depth and calmness.

Ragas do heal when rendered properly, at the right pitch (saptak), with the true vaadis (a note that is most frequently used in a raga, such as ‘ga’ in raga Yaman) and samvaadis (a note that supports the vaadi, viz. ‘ni’ in raga Yaman) brought forth, and at the correct prahar (time). Even a single swar/note has immense strength. Stuti, a sitar player in the US is suffering from a heart condition. She says, “I mainly use my sitar for meditation as I find the sound of the instrument bringing healing to me. I take the sitar to parks and beaches out in hot or cold weather as I need the serenity of its sound because of my heart condition.”

Another musician of the Jaipur gharana who recently bought a rudra veena writes, “I myself have noticed great cardiac as well as psychological benefits from playing my recently purchased Indian classical instrument. I’m impressed by an often overlooked aspect (healing aspect) of Indian classical music. True intelligence resides in the heart.”

There are different types of music therapy that are used according to a patient's needs. Each patient is different and is assessed on an individual basis. Music therapy can be loosely divided into the following categories:

- * Music therapy to help develop communication, language and intellectual development
- * Music therapy as support, for people who are grieving, going through a crisis time or who are in pain

- * Music therapy to lower stress and tension
- * Music therapy as a motivation for rehabilitation
- * Music therapy to encourage movement
- * Music therapy as a means to identify with cultural and spiritual identity
- * Music therapy to assist memory and imagination.

The goals of Raga therapy are dependent upon the purpose of music therapy for each individual case. Drug and alcohol centers and schools may use music therapy and behavior changing may be an important goal. Whereas, nursing homes may use music therapy in more of a support role or to relieve pain.

Autism, a neurological disorder that affects normal brain functioning is usually noticed within 30 months of age. The worrisome syndrome had no treatment till now, when autism music therapy has emerged as a mode of treatment. Music therapy for autism is accepted as an intervention for autistic people since the 1950s.

Music therapy facilitates communication, both verbal and non-verbal. It helps generate creative self-expression and promotes emotional satisfaction. It helps patients' families learn alternative ways to interact and socialize. Composers in India and abroad are writing music nowadays, specifically for healing. They borrow from the sounds of nature, which are the original music - birds' calls, the sound of the wind, rhythms, the lapping of water.

Empirical studies have measured the effectiveness of Raga therapy in surgery, heart disease, pediatric oncology, elder care, and hospices. Physicians are increasingly recognizing it - there is calming music and energizing, happy music. Raga therapy, however, does not supplant medicine, but supports it.

More than 20 million people worldwide suffer strokes each year. Many patients acquire brain injuries that affect their movement and language abilities, which results in significant loss of quality of life. Patients, who have suffered such disabilities, respond to music with movement, however small, and become emotionally better disposed.

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