



An Introduction to Carnatic Music Therapy (CMT)

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ABSTRACT

Carnatic music is one of the oldest forms of classical music surviving in the world. This art form traces its roots to the vedic times and is considered a part of the samaveda. Carnatic music is an integral part of life in many households and is appreciated for its traditional value and melody. However, beyond being a form of entertainment, this musical form has been known to have therapeutic benefits and healing powers. The present review article introduces the reader to the essentials of music therapy, music medicine and the role of Carnatic music as an adjunct therapy for human diseases.

Key Words: *Music Therapy, Music Medicine, Carnatic Music.*



INTRODCTION

Music is one of the most popular performing arts. It has been regarded since ancient times as the best entertainment to mankind and is believed to touch the soul. Listening to music, learning, singing and composing music is a daily activity in many households. Music has been regarded as a therapeutic modality, in addition to being a form of entertainment. This application of music as a treatment measure to manage various ailments, has led to nomenclatures such as music medicine (MM) and music therapy (MT). While music medicine encompasses the practice of listening to prerecorded music according to a patient's choice or as per a prescription given by a clinician, music therapy is a more organized term referring to a systematic process¹. Music therapy involves the participation of a client/patient and a trained music therapist. In the process of therapy, the interaction between the patient and therapist is through oral discussions, counseling, playing and listening to live/prerecorded music and could also involve the use of musical instruments². Sometimes, music therapy sessions could also involve composition of music tailored/ customized according to the patient's need.

Despite being one of the oldest adjunct modalities for curing disease, the use of music therapy has not been completely understood and its beneficial effects have not been fully exploited by many clinicians. The main reason for this could be because; music therapy definition, protocols and application have not been thoroughly researched. Moreover, many clinicians believe that this therapeutic modality cannot be applied as the patient does not have a sound knowledge about music as an art form. In a country like India, despite the existence of several musical forms and premier musical institutions, music therapy has not received much attention as an alternative system of medicine. There are however, many studies on music therapy performed by Western researchers on patients with Alzheimer's disease³, cardiovascular disease⁴, hypertension⁵, anxiety⁶ and depression⁷ and patients with cancer pain⁸. These studies have proven beyond doubt that music administration to patients as an adjunct could facilitate in improving cognition, memory and could lower blood pressure, anxiety and provide pain relief.

India is a land of rich heritage and tradition with a glorious past. There are several music traditions such as Hindustani and Carnatic styles of classical music in addition to several folk music forms being sung and performed in the different Indian states. Indian musical forms are rich in both lakshana(theory) and lakshya(practice). The history of Indian music revolves not only around the evolution of composers and their compositions, but also on the development of various musical instruments. Many ancient treatises such as the Brhaddesi by



Matanga, Ragavibhodha of Somanatha, Sangeetha Sudha of the emperor Raghunatha Nayak, Chaturdandi Prakasika by Venkatamakhi and Sangeetha Sampradaya Pradarshini by Subburama Dikshitar have shed light on the lakshana and lakshya aspects of Indian music. Palm leaf manuscripts, paintings and murals in rock cut caves and temples, coins, sculptures and temple inscriptions clearly highlight the importance of Indian music. The history of Indian music can be sub classified into 3 eras, namely the ancient, medieval and modern eras. The ancient period of music has been known to exist from the prehistoric times to the period of Matanga, the mediaeval period is known to extend from the times of Matanga to Purandaradasa and the post Purandaradasa period is regarded the modern era of Indian music. While music in the ancient times was only considered as an accompaniment to dance, it was the medieval period that saw this art evolve as an independent subject with its own form. In India, it is noteworthy that from the past to the present, music forms a component in daily life of every Indian and serves as a medium for devotion and entertainment. It is noteworthy that music finds an application in every Indian ritual. In marriages, musical instruments such as the nagaswaram are played to create an auspicious mode. In temples, the bell ringing is performed during stipulated times of the day. Moreover, musical hymns are sung and played during ritual sanctification of the deity and during offering food also. Music is also a part of inauspicious events such as death where specific instruments are played and some hymns are sung to denote mourning. In south India, Carnatic music also called Karnatic music or Karnataka sangitha is a system widely practiced in the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Kerala and Karnataka. This musical form employs the use of 72 mela kartha ragas which are considered the basis of the classification of ragas/ tunes and a plethora of janya ragas, which are the offshoots of the parent mela kartha ragas^{9,10}. With the existence of numerous ragas as above mentioned, this musical form is not only multifaceted but could be regarded a therapeutic modality for disease management considering the fact that each raga could exert different and diverse effects on the human body. Moreover, it is believed that the tempo, rhythm and scale of singing could make the listening experience pleasant or unpleasant. In general parlance, Carnatic music is considered a very gentle and aesthetic art form that soothes the mind of the listener.

It has been already proven that sounds as tunes, could affect the mind and body and in turn could exert a healing effect on various ailments. In this connection, Carnatic ragas have been tested for their therapeutic abilities. It is noteworthy that neuroscience research on madhyamavathi and shankarabharanam, two well-known ragas has shown that these ragas have significant effects on electroencephalograms of human subjects even without music knowledge or training¹¹. The learning and repeated practicing of notuswaras, a typical musical genre has found to improve cognition, learning and memory of preschool children as evaluated by standardized indices¹². The therapeutic effect of Bhimplas, thodi and Hindolam



ragas on lowering heart rate and blood pressure has been documented in clinical setting¹³. The use of Ananda bhairavi for its pain allaying effects in terminally ill cancer patients¹⁴ and the antipyretic effects of the raga bhagesri¹⁵ are typical examples of Carnatic music therapy prescriptions with positive effects.

Considering the vast diversity and varieties of ragas used in Carnatic music tradition, it could be concluded that Carnatic music therapy research and clinical application is still in its nascent stage. Moreover, many clinical studies employing Carnatic music ragas as therapeutic modalities are not available. With the available literature in music and medicine, this collection of mini reviews attempts to give the reader a detailed outline and history of Carnatic music therapy. We also aim to elucidate the biologic mechanisms by which Carnatic music therapy could exert clinical effects. We will further explain the need of proper research models to study the effects of Carnatic music and will also attempt to devise a protocol for a Carnatic music therapy prescription for disease management. The review series on Carnatic music therapy is drafted with the sole aim of shedding light on this treatment as a form of alternative medicine and to popularize its use in India. We also aim to create awareness about this treatment form in clinicians and aspiring researchers. The present collection of reviews is a part of a research project named CMTAMD (Carnatic music therapy application in medicine and dentistry) comprising of a series of studies planned to explore the applications and therapeutic benefits of Carnatic music therapy in the fields of medicine and dentistry.

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