



DEVISING THE CARNATIC MUSIC THERAPY PRESCRIPTION

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ABSTRACT

The use of Carnatic music therapy for human disease management has been experimented in the clinical scenario using only a few ragas such as Ananda Bhairavi, Shankarabharanam, Neelambari, Kalyani and Thodi, a few to name. However there exist numerous ragas still unexplored for their therapeutic benefits. Carnatic music therapy prescriptions should be designed based on nadayoga, ragachikitsa and an in depth understanding of Ayurveda. The analysis of the psychological status of the patient is also important to make a raga prescription. This review sheds light on how to use the various treatises to devise a Carnatic music prescription for a specific patient.

Keywords: *Carnatic music therapy, Tridosha, Ayurveda, Nadayoga, Ragachikitsa*

INTRODUCTION



Music therapy has been hailed one of the important alternative systems of medicine as per published literature. It can be considered a non-pharmacological modality of disease management as an adjunctive measure. In the global scene, Carnatic music therapy has not attained great attention even though it is an ancient art form. Carnatic music tradition originates from the Southern states of India and has been known to exist since vedic times. The vedic scriptures refer to music as a form of offering to gods and celestial beings. It is noteworthy that Carnatic music therapy has been used for disease management by the saiva nayanmars in the 9th century and by the composer Muthuswamy Dikshitar to cure stomach illness of his disciple Suddhamaddhalam Thambiappar in the 18th century. However, there is not much of recent research in the field of Carnatic music therapy compared to its Western counterparts which have proven to be a form of adjunctive management of various diseases and ailments.

The reason for scanty data regarding Carnatic music therapy is mainly due to the fact that research in this direction has not been performed in a systematic manner. It is noteworthy that music therapy is based on certain scientific theories and hypotheses. It is essential to understand the theories of music therapy and to couple this knowledge with principles of nadayoga, ragachikitsa and also Ayurveda. Hence an in depth knowledge of ancient treatises of music and Ayurveda with application of a modern research methodology would help us devise the correct Carnatic music therapy prescription for disease management. With the available background information, the present review will enlighten the reader on how to devise a Carnatic music therapy prescription for a patient with a particular disease and how to implement the same in the clinical scenario.

Scientific Types Music Therapy Practice

Most of the data available about music therapy and its practice emanate from the western world despite the fact that India has got a rich musical heritage. There are specific types of music therapy protocols which are practiced in the west and are mentioned below¹. These types of therapy should also be performed by Carnatic music therapists.

1. **The Bonny Method of Guided Imagery and Music:** This is a method in which music of a specific form and type devised by a therapist is played to a patient who listens to it and explains his feelings, perspective, imagination and sensory perception upon listening to the musical piece. Based on the patient feedback and comfort the music is titrated and given to him/her as a therapeutic modality for a stipulated time period.



2. **Vocal Psychotherapy:** in this form of music therapy, vocal sounds, natural sounds and breathing techniques are coordinated by a therapist considering the patients' health condition and this is further improvised.
3. **Community Music Therapy:** this is done by a therapist or group of therapists to induce changes at the societal and community level. A musical piece or group of pieces are played/sung by the therapists in big group gatherings. This method requires a huge audience and high involvement from every participant.
4. **Nordoff-Robins Music Therapy:** this method involves the participant playing 1 instrument while the therapist accompanies the participant by playing another string instrument / wind instrument. This methodology involves creative stimulation and is a useful modality in children with special needs.
5. **Cognitive Behavioral Music Therapy:** this approach involves listening to music either vocal/instrumental by the patient after understanding his/her need by the therapist.

An understanding of the various types of music therapy reveals that cognitive behavioral music therapy, Nord Off-Robins music therapy and community music therapy would find maximum applications in the field of Carnatic music therapy.

Clinical Applications of Nadayoga

Nadayoga as the name suggests is the yoga of sound. Music by itself is a concrete form of sound energy. Vedic literature and ancient treatises have clearly mentioned that the nada or sound of music through the raga medium opens up or activates 7 principal chakras in the human body associated with various visceral organs and tissues². It is to be reiterated at this point that the chakras may represent a conglomeration of nerve plexuses supplying the organs and tissues. The 7 chakras in the body have been named as the Mooladhara, Nabhi, Vishuddhi, Swadishthana, Anahat, Sahasrara and Agnya. The very structure of ragas is depicted as a combination of sapta swaras or 7 syllables namely S, R, G, M, P, D, N. These syllables or swaras when sounded activate the chakras denoted by them. It is noteworthy that the swara S also called the Shadjamam activates the mooladhara chakra represented by the pelvic region, prostate gland and the terminal portion of the spinal cord. The swara R also called Rishabham activates the swadhisthana chakra represented by the Aortic plexus – Liver, uterus, Spleen, Pancreas, kidney. The Gandhara swara also called G activates the nabhi chakra represented by the stomach, liver and digestive system. The madhyama swara M activates the anahatha chakra represented by the cardiovascular system. The panchama swara P activates the Vishuddhi chakra represented by the pharynx. The Dhaivatha swara D, activates and stimulates the Agnya chakra which is responsible for vision and the Nishadha swara N, activates the Sahasra Chakra



represented by the brain and cerebrovascular system.

It is also noteworthy that the chakras mentioned above have representative carnatic ragas. The Mooladhara chakra is associated with hamsadhwani, swadhithana chakra with subha pantuvarali, Nabhi chakra with abhogi, bimplas and hindolam, anahatha chakra with chakravaham and Mayamalavagowla, vishuddhi chakra with Dwijavanthi, agnya chakra with mohanam and baghesri, Sahasra chakra with Sindhu bhairavi and Darbari kanada.

It appears from the above literature that the respective chakras responsible for various anatomic entities need to be activated by the representative ragas/ concerned swaras when the concerned organs/viscera undergo pathological changes. The use of swaras alone for targeting diseases in the Carnatic music system is akin to using singing bowls which are employed in ancient Tibetan culture and are found to cure various diseases and ailments³. The schematic table depicted below explains the use of specific Carnatic ragas for certain diseases based on the Nada Yoga concept.

Table 1: Table Depicting Specific Chakras of The Human Body Represented by Swaras, Organs/Viscera and Denoted by Specific Ragas

Chakra	Swara Representation	Viscra/Organs	Specific Raga
Mooladhara	S	pelvic region, prostate gland and the terminal portion of the spinal cord	Hamsadhwani
swadishthana	R	Aortic plexus – Liver, uterus, Spleen, Pancreas, kidney	Subha Pantuvarali
nabhi	G	stomach, liver and digestive system	Aboghi, bimplas and hindolam
Anahatha	M	cardiovascular system	Chakravaham and Mayamalavagowla
vishuddhi	P	Pharynx	Dwijavanthi
agnya	D	eye	Mohanam, baghesri
sahasra	N	Brain and cerebrovascular system	Sindhu Bhairavi, Darbari kanada

Other than the above mentioned chakras, Nada yoga concept also stresses on 3 types of energy that have been conferred on to the human body namely, Prana, Apana and Samana⁴. While the Prana drives blood, oxygen and hormones towards the brain in an upward direction, Apana



drives blood, oxygen and hormones in a downward direction towards the peripheral organs. The samana is denoted as neutral energy while Prana and Apana are called positive and negative forces. The balance between the 3 types of energy is believed to maintain life and homeostasis. The swaras P denote samana, D and N denote prana and M, G, R denote Apana. Hence a combination of these swaras is believed to restore the Prana-Apana-Samana balance in the human body.

The Concepts of Ayurveda Integrated with Carnatic Music Therapy

It has been understood that traditional medicine systems such as Ayurveda, siddha and yunani have been practiced in our country since ancient times. The Ayurveda system of medicine is based on the vedic scriptures and is closely associated with music and astrology. According to Ayurveda, everything in the universe and cosmos are dominated by the 5 elements referred to as panchabhootha denoted by air, water, soil, fire and space⁵. The human body is also composed of the 5 elements and has a nature called prakrithi which is unique to each individual and is based on the composition of 5 elements. Ayurvedic practices classify individuals based on the tridosha concept according which an individual could be categorized as Vatha, Pittha and Kapha⁶. However, it is to be understood that all the 3 doshas coexist in individuals to maintain balance and homeostasis. However, elevation of 1 dosha over the others makes an individual represent that particular dosha predominantly. The doshas are explained below.

1. Vatha: made up of air and space elements. Denotes dryness of the body and activates the mind and improves perception. It removes all the excretions of the pittha and kapha and restores a dry state
2. Pittha: is made up of fire and water elements. Denotes heat and warmth and also responsible for all the secretions and digestive juices produced by the body
3. Kapha: is made up of earth and water elements. Denotes cold and is also responsible for mucus and phlegm secretions. It is the coolant and buffering system of the human body.

The human body in physiological state is believed to have all 3 components as earlier mentioned. Early morning is denoted as natural Kapha time in Ayurveda, while afternoon is denoted as pittha and evening is vatha time². Hence based on the tridosha system, a kapha constitution patient will benefit from morning ragas, pittha dominant patient will benefit from afternoon ragas and a vatha trait will be healed with evening ragas. Table 2 represented below depicts the ragas effective for the 3 doshas and can be followed by music therapists. It is to be noted that bhairavi, shankarabharanam, kambhoji and kalyani are sarvakaalika ragas which can



heard and sung all through the day.

Table 2: The Ragas Effective for the 3 Doshas Vatha, Pitttha and Kapha.

Body Constitution/ Prakrithi	Raga Recommendation
kapha	Boopalam, bowli, bilahari, dhanyasi, kedaram, saveri
pittha	Madhyamavathi, manirangu, shree, begada, mukhari.
vatha	Ananda bhairavi, nattaikurunji, poorvi kalyani, vasantha.

At this point we should also understand that human diseases with predominance of kapha, pittha and vatha would benefit from therapy with the ragas denoting them⁷. The kapha diseases of the body include obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome and excessive eating and binging. The pittha diseases include hematological disorders, rashes, hepatitis, dysentery and frequent infections. The vatha diseases include cancers, dryness of skin, mental depression and anxiety, debility arthritis and rheumatism.

Clinical Applications of Ragachikitsa

Ragachikitsa is an ancient treatise that describes the use of various ragas for disease management⁸. The concept of Ragachikitsa is based on a deep understanding of Nada Yoga and Ayurveda. According to Ragachikitsa, the human body is made up of many emotions which are categorized into nava rasa or 9 basic emotions. There are Carnatic ragas that denote these emotions and can be used in a positive way to enhance a particular type of emotion which would benefit the patient. A thorough analysis of literature has revealed a few Carnatic ragas having therapeutic benefits and mentioned in the table below. It is to be noted that few ragas have been mentioned only based on anecdotes and are not supported by any scientific studies while the other ragas have been analyzed by scientific and clinical studies and are supported by references.

Table 3: Carnatic Ragas Having Therapeutic Benefits



S.No	Raga Name	Therapeutic Benefit Based on Ragachikitsa	Reference
1.	Atana, Kanada, Mohanam, Revagupti, Neelambari	Reduces depression and increases self esteem	9
2.	Bilahari	Increases positive attitude	10
3.	Kannada, Vakulabharanam	Reduce anxiety	10
4.	Bilahari, Shankarabharanam	Increase optimism and positivity	10
5.	Hindolam kalyani, thodi	Improve physiological vital signs in postoperative patients	11
6.	Madhyamavathi, shankarabharanam	Positive effects on the electroencephalogram. Stimulate memory and cognition	12
7.	Bimplas, Thodi and Hindolam	Reduce heart rate and blood pressure	13
8.	Ananda Bhairavi	Reduces pain	14
9.	Bageshri	Reduces fever	15
10.	Punnagavarali and sahana	Reduces anger and violence	-
11.	karaharapriya	Reduces tension	-
12.	Kalyani, shankarabharanam and charukesi	Improve cardiovascular health	-
13.	Hindolam and vasantha	Blood purification	-
14.	Asaveri	Cures headache and migraine	-

Devising The Carnatic Music Therapy Prescription

From all available evidences, it is clear that Carnatic music therapy is based upon a deep understanding of Nadayoga, Ayurveda and Ragachikitsa. It is hence a holistic approach that needs to be followed by the therapist with a decent understanding of the western system of music therapy. Carnatic music therapy is different from Carnatic music medicine which does not involve a systematic process. Moreover, Carnatic music therapy is also considered as a specific form of Rhythmic Auditory stimulatory therapy¹⁶ where sound is used as a medium to activate the brain, which in turn exerts several systemic effects. Based on understanding of all concepts related to Carnatic music therapy we herewith, provide a Standard operating Protocol (SOP) for devising a Carnatic music therapy prescription:

1. Analyze the patients clinical condition along with all reports provided by his/her physician



2. Understand the patient's psychological status: whether he suffers from anxiety, depression, low self esteem
3. Analyze the chakras involved in the disease based on Nadayoga concept
4. Analyze the Ayurvedic constitution of the patient, whether he is of kapha, pittha or vatha trait.
5. Apply the concept of Ragachikitsa, Nadayoga and tridosha to derive the beneficial ragas for the patient
6. Use the Bonny method of guided imagery and music, Vocal psychotherapy, Nordoff-Robins music therapy or Cognitive behavioral music therapy protocols to deliver the music prescription to the patient using vocal, instrumental music or a combination of the two.

CONCLUSION

Carnatic music therapy is a holistic form of treatment of diseases and has to be formulated based on a deep understanding of ancient concepts such as Nadayoga and Ragachikitsa and modern allopathic concepts such as physiology and aetopathogenesis various diseases. Carnatic music therapy is not a monotherapy for any disease and has to be used only as an adjunctive measure of disease management.

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