



Music Therapy for Emotional Wellness

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Introduction:

'Where words fail, music speaks', – HC Anderson.

HC Anderson was a famous musician and a Danish author best known for writing children's stories including "The Little Mermaid" and "The Ugly Duckling." By its very nature, music is a powerful medium of communicating emotions to others as well as to oneself.

The Magic of Music

The breath, the heartbeat, the pulse: every proof of 'being alive', is musical. There is harmony, there is a fixed rhythm and hence there is 'life' and 'energy'. That's is perhaps the reason music/sound is referred as "Nada-Brahma"* ("Nada" meaning sound/music and Brahman meaning creational/existential energy)" in our scriptures. Human body-mind is nothing but different energies at play, energy associated with joy, sadness, anxiousness, stress and so on. These emotions and many more are abundant in the human mind. While listening to music during happy times, stimulates positive vibes, listening to it during a stressful state of mind can be equally cathartic. It tranquilizes the mind and a tranquil mind is meditative.

It's believed that music is a complete tool which activates the whole human body and mind, since it engages both, the physical body and the Meta physical mind totally, thus helping achieve a balance between the two. A balanced body mind is a treasure of positivism.

Indian music is so designed by our ancestors that the 72 main stream(Melakarta*) ragas in Carnatic system of music are supposed to be associated with 72000 naadis*(associated with nervous system on a physical level) of a human body. Naadis are considered as those channels which carry the life energy, Praana*. Certain ragas sensitize certain naadis in the body and hence are therapeutic, as far as human body-mind is concerned.

Scientifically speaking, the system of rhythm (tala) work on the logical part of the brain while ragas work on the emotional part of the brain. Thus, music is a wholesome wellness medium which works on the entire human system.

Music and Moods

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Music and Moods/Emotions are two faces of a coin, inseparable, yet distinct. Music creates different moods not only in humans but in animals and plants too. Emotions or moods are the interpretation of physical changes in our body, in response to an external stimulus, as per James-Lange theory of emotion. Musical notes are such external stimuli and thus result in different emotional states, be it joyous, peaceful, sad/intense or blissful.

According to Bharata's Natya Shastra*, there are nine predominant moods or emotions, namely:

- Sringaara: Related to love
- Hasya: Humorous/comic
- Bheebhatsa: disgust
- Raudra: Fury or anger
- KaruNa: Compassion or sympathy
- Veera: Heroic
- Bhayaanaka: Terrible/horrifying
- Adbhuta: Wonderment/ amazing

The ragas* with their distinct combo of Swaras* can stimulate one or more of the above-mentioned moods.

Ex: raga Kamavardhini, as the name suggests is basically a sensuous raga, kama* meaning love, vardhini meaning increase or upliftment. The effect of a raga does not cease to a single emotion as in the case of kamavardhini too. It is also sung to evoke devotion. The tempo, phrases used, pitch, lyrics and the instrument through which the raga is played are a few parameters that contribute significantly, to the effect, the raga produces. A few more examples that I would like to quote are:

- Kharaharapriya: 22nd melakarta raga. This raga evokes bhakti rasa as well as karuna rasa.
- Hamsadhvani and Mohana, janya in 29th melakarta, evokes Veera rasa and creates a happy mood.
- Vakra* (zig zag) or varjya* (omitted notes) ragas like kamaach, kambhoji, hindola, vasanta etc., are called rakti raagas for the raga shines basically due to their popular intricate phrases and has a potential to evoke positive emotions.
- Certain ragas like saavEri, in which the **jeeva swara***(‘G3’) triggers a deep emotion of connecting with the higher universal plane and possess the potential to take one to ‘**Samadhi**’ stithi* (transcendental state)

Music Therapy -A Nutritional Recipe during Pregnancy

“Moms-to-be” go through a pendulum of emotions, oscillating between extreme ends, at a physical and mental level. While symptoms like morning sickness, tiredness, bulgy stomach and so on bother her at a physical level, stress, fear, anxiety, expectations, overwhelmed happiness, relational strain and many more bother at a mental level. Coping up with all these emotions are extremely necessary in the birth of a healthy baby and a healthy mother. Listening to certain genre of music, can benefit the expectant moms, in coping with their emotions and the baby in the womb benefits in many ways as well.

Though music is for everybody, it brings about a significant change in ‘to be Moms’ and the ‘to be born babies’. Listening to certain genre of music creates wonders in the carrying women and new mothers.

Scientific evidence

Recent developments in research have proved that playing and listening to music reduces chronic stress by lowering the stress hormone “Cortisol”. It also increases the neurotransmitter “Dopamine”, a feel-good hormone of our body. It also stimulates brain hormone “Oxytocin”, a very important hormone in women. Oxytocin is basically a hormone which signals the contraction of the womb during labour and also facilitates lactation in new moms.



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Music also has a mystic element associated with it. I would not be wrong in defining music as a **mystic healer** for the fact that it heals the human body mind, much beyond the realm of science. The 72,000 Naadis (Nerve endings on a physical plane) amazingly end at the navel and coincidentally the umbilical cord, is an extension of mom’s navel, through which the baby in the womb gets its life and nourishment!!! Hence one can imagine the benefits of rich nourishment, coming not only through good nutrition but also good music for soul.

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Post pregnancy symptoms like depression (due to hormonal dip), stress and irritation (due to broken sleep pattern, work-home balance pressure, lifestyles, etc), feeling of worthlessness, guilt, general loss of interest with family and friends, etc., are again a bagful, to sort and cope with, apart from physiological imbalances. Music therapy again is an antidote, helps cope and rejuvenate oneself.

During pregnancy, the expecting mom is not the only being of concern. The foetus developing in the womb enjoys the maximum benefits of music, when the mom listens to the music. Music enhances the cognitive skills, motor skills, Spatial thinking and Emotional intelligence of the baby as early as in the womb. Needless to mention, how Abhimanyu, Son of Arjuna, picked up the art of breaking the *Padmavyuha** (Lotus formation strategy), in the Epic story of Mahabharata. There are evidences which show that babies calm down when played a lullaby, which he/she was introduced to, when in the womb. The baby has the ability to relate to the lullaby and so connects with it emotionally. This in turn strengthens the mother-baby bonding too.

Conclusion

From a therapeutic perspective, it is appreciable if the carrying mother listens to all genres of music, to suit her temperament, on a regular basis. Consistency induces a readiness in the body mind of the mother as well as the baby in the womb. When both are ready as receptors, the magic of music manifests through them divinely.

Human body-mind system is akin to the flute, hollow from inside yet rhythmically divine. The Raaga and the Rhythm is a wholesome modality which when flowing through the human body-mind system, makes it Divine.

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Recommended Music Therapy during Pregnancy:

1. I have personally liked Kalyani Raga, during my pregnancy as it dissolved all worries and Stress. The Raga elaboration helped me relax thoroughly and cheered me up. Early morning ragas like Malayamaruta, Chakravaka and Dharmavati always helped me go easy on morning sickness. As a Carnatic Musician, I have recommended these Ragas to many carrying women amongst family and friends and were reported effective. Other ragas include, pentatonic scales like hamsadhvani, Mohanam, Bilahari and Hindolam to uplift the mood. Apart from these, the other genres that I have tried including are, soft lullabies on Piano which were reported by the clients as extremely useful in sleep patterns of both mother and the baby. Tibetan bowls were reported useful in tranquilising the mind and inducing sleep, in both mother and the baby during post-natal phase.
2. Dr. T. Mythily, Director of Music Therapy Department @ Apollo Hospitals, Chennai says thus: Indian Classical Music has much impact on individual moods and behaviour. Certain Ragas with specific notes act positive on individual's mindset. Our Upanishads speaks about the effects of Classical Music on individual life, behaviour, environment and one who listens to it with rapt attention. During the early stages of pregnancy, listening to music does good effect for the foetus. This has been proved in the Apollo Hospitals, Chennai through Research. Regular listening of this music CD does remarkable good to the foetus and mother simultaneously.
3. The famous Yoga guru and Veda Pandit TKV Desikachar, Founder of Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram is of the opinion that Ancient Vedic Chants have immense positive vibrations on the developing foetus and eases the labour pain as well.