

The fifth music therapy session: Hindustani classical music and its therapeutic value

Abstract

We hereby present a brief report on the fifth and final music therapy session in connection with our ongoing research project titled Hindustani Raga Analysis Using Statistical Musicology with Therapeutic Applications for Stress Management sponsored by IDEAS: Technology Innovation Hub @ Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata. Details of the first four music therapy sessions have been published and the interested reader is referred to Chakraborty S et al.¹⁻⁴

Keywords: music therapy, hindustani classical music, raga

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Introduction

We hereby present a brief report on the fifth and final music therapy session in connection with our ongoing research project titled Hindustani Raga Analysis Using Statistical Musicology with Therapeutic Applications for Stress Management sponsored by IDEAS: Technology Innovation Hub @ Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata. Readers interested in the first four music therapy sessions are referred to Chakraborty S et al.¹⁻⁴ respectively.

Report on the fifth music therapy session

The fifth and final music therapy session was held on 4th May, 2023 in the music room of BIT Mesra, Ranchi, India. To begin the proceedings, the music therapist played the singing bowl, also called the Tibetan bowl, and the participants were asked to close their eyes, sit in *sukh asana* and meditate. Mainly Buddhists use these bowls for meditation purpose. It is still debated as to where these bowls originated from but there are some evidences which reveal that it could possibly be China around the 16th century B.C. Traditional bowls were made up of a variety of metals including mercury, lead, silver, iron, gold and copper. They started gaining popularity in the United States in the 1970s and became very popular in 1990s as a complementary and alternative treatment for a variety of ailments.

Next the participants did some self-breathing exercises with counting. This was followed by deep breathing, *ujjayi pranayama*, humming, Ohm (Aum) chanting, chanting of *Mahamrityunjaya mantra* and shanti mantra which evoked a peaceful environment. Thereafter the musical session started with *Ganesh stuti*, namely, *Vakratunda Maha Kaya*...which is sung for the success of any event. Chanting of this mantra opens the blockages of the mind and helps the person to become more focused, creative and wiser. The music therapist then sang a beautiful *thaat geet* in which the representative ragas of each of the ten *thaats* (in Hindustani classical music, a *that* is a raga group according to scale and notes used; a raga is a melodic structure with fixed notes and a set of rules characterizing a particular mood conveyed by performance;⁵ the idea of grouping the ragas into ten *thaats* is credited to Pt. V.N. Bhatkhande) were established one by one by singing melodies containing the name of these ten

representative ragas in the lyrics and their emotional content (*rasa*) embedded in the tune.

This was followed by some pure Hindustani classical *Khayals*, semi classical *dadra* and bhajan (devotional song). The first khayal rendition was performed by Dr. Purnima Chakraborty, D.Mus. BHU (Banaras Hindu University) who is a disciple of Dr. Vanamala Parvatkar, eminent Hindustani classical vocalist of the Banaras Gharana and ex Head, Faculty of Performing Arts at BHU. Dr. Purnima opened with a *vilambit* (slow tempo) composition in raga Bihag followed by a *drut* (fast tempo) composition. She then performed a bhajan in raga Gauri. Finally, on request, she concluded her recital with a *Chota Khayal* in raga Hansdhwani.

The music therapist herself then sang a *dadra* in raga Mishra Pilu originally sung by Girija Devi, a veteran thumri and tappa singer of the Banaras Gharana. She also elaborated the therapeutic benefits of this raga in combating stress.

The last vocal recital of the day was performed by Manish Kumar Sharma, who is an assistant professor of music at Ranchi University. He is also actively involved in music research leading to a PhD in Music under the guidance of Dr. Jaya Shahi, Faculty of Performing Arts (vocal) at Central University of Jharkhand. His musical training is credited to M. Kumar, S. Pathak (*Dhrupad* singer, Gaya Gharana) and K. A. Chanchal (BHU). He presented an enthralling performance in raga Bairagi (also called Bairagi Bhairav) comprising of two *Chota Khayal* compositions.

The principal investigator (PI, second author) briefly talked about the therapeutic benefits of some of the ragas and concluded the session thanking all the artists and the participants. Further literature on the terms and genres in Hindustani classical music can be found in chapter two of Chakraborty S et al.⁶ Readers interested in therapeutic benefits on western and non-western (Indian) music are referred to Singh SB et al.⁷ For further literature on the ragas Bihag, Pilu and Bairagi, the reader is referred to Mahabharati S et al.⁸

Concluding remarks

Given the non-musical background of some of the participants, the fifth music therapy session emphasizing on Hindustani classical

music was a big success, as per the positive feedback received from the participants. This session gave the participants the exposure to the great Indian raga tradition which is a potential musical genre for therapeutic intervention.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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