

Sangeet and Selfhood: The Role of Hindustani Classical Music in Fostering Identity, Empowerment, and Wellbeing among Women Learners

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Abstract

In the context of the fundamental theme of this study, “Bridging Gaps and Building the Future,” the findings provide evidences of harmonised voices and enhanced academic articulation in women, as the products of self-devotional musical practice and reflection.

The purpose of this research study is to listen to female students and teachers, as well as singers who were trained in the *guru shishya parampara* and learned digitally. It was noted in their testimonies that continued *riyaz* (practice) builds discipline and patience and helps to master emotional control. In addition, working with different *ragas* teaches the students to convey feelings that may be too complex to express in words. Activities like *baithaks* and informal concerts instill the women a sense of confidence, leadership, and community. The combination of technology and traditional teaching methods has also increased accessibility to classical music teaching for women in smaller towns and non-metro universities.

The lived experiences presented here are within the parameters of the “U. N. Sustainable Development Goals”, more specifically, the parameters are on quality education, gender equality, innovation, and inclusion. These results indicate that *Sangeet* is more than an artistic form or an area of learning. It is an alive form of learning, helping individuals with emotional balance, self-awareness, and, more importantly, resilience. It is through music that women learners construct meaning and harmonize their lives and their learning, thereby offering an innovative, sustainable, and culturally relevant model of empowerment in contemporary India.

Keywords: “Hindustani Classical Music”; “women empowerment”; “education”; “emotional wellbeing”; “interdisciplinary learning”

Introduction:

The debate in education and empowerment emphasizes measurable indicators which include policy developments, technological improvements and economic gains. Learning does not always occur during the aforementioned measurable indicators. Learning also occurs during the situations that one can feel, and also require discipline, control and emotional intelligence. Learning also occurs in the situations that require self-control and emotional intelligence. In the Indian knowledge systems *Sangeet* illustrates such a space. *Sangeet* is a form of integration of one’s self. It provides education that makes one grow in many dimensions, not only in the dimensions of the mind, but also in the dimensions of the emotional and the spiritual.

It articulates thoughtful, emotional, and focused engagement, all while requiring significant dedication and patience. In terms of the two main forms of classical music in India, Hindustani Classical Music, is the most persuasive in terms of its flexibility and depth of articulating how the learning of an art form may influence the construction of identity. For many women devoted to the craft of Hindustani Classical Music, the technicalities of the notes, the *ragas*, and the compositions are simply stepping stones along the journey to find one’s inner voice. In performs and public expression, the Hindustani Music performer gains the confidence to express and

communicate through music. Hindustani Classical Music is rooted in tradition and history, times when women were virtually confined to public spaces. An appreciation for the art in public held the same restrictions. In these contexts, and in contrast to historical public expression, Hindustani Classical Music offers a forum for women to reclaim public space. Music and artistry in all its forms become a means to reclaim and create internal space, and to express identity, agency, and self-worth through sustained artistic engagement.

Every art form exists to promote a craft, preserve knowledge, and pass down cultural values. *Sangeet*, like other art forms, travels and carries with it a cultural heritage. The *Sangeet* tradition rests upon the heritage of oral communication and mentoring. The values of cultural heritage are evident in the art and in its practitioners. The values of emotional strength, humility, and discipline are evident in the practitioners. With confidence and expression at its core, the *Sangeet* tradition promotes empowerment with sustainability at its core. Women practitioners in the *Sangeet* tradition pioneer a reflective form of expression, enabling self-empowerment and personal growth through discipline. The most profound example of cultural balancing and evolution is found in the document, 'Closing the Loop and Shaping the Future'. As an Indian Knowledge System, Hindustani Classical Music integrates practice (*sadhana*), culture (*samskara*), and health (*svasthya*). A *riyaz*, or daily practice, imparts to the musician the mental discipline of unwavering focus along with the extreme patience and effort needed for prolonged, sustained engagement with a challenging task. While concentrating on a *raga*, the practitioner also develops certain emotional competencies (awareness, empathy, and sensitivity). It is this emotional and cognitive synergy that integrates the inner self with the outer world.

In this regard, the research participants, women musicians, reflected upon the *Sangeet* influences and their transference within and outside the concert. Reported self-assuredness and emotional self-regulation, with decisional clarity, were reflected through the academic discourse. The musicians changed their self-communicative stress, self-emotional awareness, and coping. Therefore, it can be stated that musical education provides the patience, teamwork, listening, and creativity that are the fundamentals of leadership. Such leadership protects the health of the individual and the society as a whole. This study builds on and complements the Outcomes of the Arts and the UN Sustainable Collaboration Goals on Quality Education and Education for Women's Empowerment. Women's participation in Classical Music challenges and shatters the boundaries of the 'top-down' structure and leadership of the Hip Hop Community. Digital and online learning continue to integrate and unlock access to learners in new geographic locations and access to the Digital World for the Antiquarian World. Community learning and Hindustani Classical Music Partnership demonstrates the spirit and the power of Collaboration and Creative Partnerships. The paper brings to the fore the Identity and the Wellbeing of Women learners through the medium of Music and asserts the view that the Arts are the catalyst of self-empowerment and mobilize the collective consciousness of the community, including participants on multiple levels, and create new networks of interdependency.

Literature Review:

Academics from different traditions and interdisciplinary fields have for quite some time had an inquiry into the connection between music and teaching and empowerment. Within the realms of pedagogy, music is often regarded as a learning phenomenon, and it goes beyond an experience for entertainment or artistic expression. Within the Indian milieu, music or *sangeet* is conceptualized as a performing art, but not exclusively as such. It is also related to one's personal growth, self-mastery, and self-exploration. Ancient texts of India speak of sound or *nāda* as an aspect of consciousness discussing music as a tool for self-awareness. It is with this understanding that music is a form of artistic meditation that fosters self-harmony and awareness.

HCM is appreciated especially from an educational perspective within this tradition, especially for its improvisational structures. *Ragas* enable students to work within a set framework. Then, over time, students learn how to effectively express their feelings within a defined compositional way through improvisations. Such a balance encourages emotional development through the focus and disciplinary training. Scholars have noted the training benefits, as consistent practice of a *raga* promotes emotional self-expression while maintaining control over other emotions. In this way, Hindustani music supports emotional intelligence by helping learners

understand, regulate and communicate feelings. The gender and the arts promote research toward musical learning spaces, and the benefits provided to women. Ethnomusicology, education and psychology studies promote music learning and performance as a pillar for self-confidence, emotional well-being, and enhanced communication. Women often find this to be a creative and safe environment to self-discover, and define their personal and social identities. The social emphasized through these creative productions, and collaborations, foster a greater sense of self, particularly in patriarchal societies that have historically restricted women's creative and social expressions.

In India, the *guru-shishya parampara* is the dominant approach to teaching classical music and has received the most attention in the scholarship. Unlike competitive and exam-oriented systems, this methodology is based on trust, long-term mentorship, and value-based learning. The *guru* and the student share a relationship that is not only personal but also educational and transcends the boundaries of formal technical training. Many scholars point out that mentorship of this kind helps in the building of confidence and resilience in women, as the educational environment is one that values progress and personal improvement rather than rivalry. The impact of technology on the teaching and learning of Hindustani Classical Music is another area of inquiry in the most recent of scholarly conversations. The teaching of classical music is increasingly accessible due to digital offerings such as online classes, recorded lectures, and apps. Such technologies provide women who live in small towns and rural areas without trained teachers the ability to obtain the skills and knowledge to practice. The geography, social, and temporal barriers to the practice of classical music, as some researchers have pointed out, are largely removed by digital platforms. However, studies also point out the shortcomings of distance learning in fulfilling the emotional, disciplinary, and interpersonal requirements of conventional teaching. The difficulties of the tradition *guru-shishya* relationship on the digital space have also been highlighted in the literature.

The incorporation of Indian classical music into STEAM has begun to draw attention. Scientists and educators acknowledge the relationship between music and the skills needed in all directions of STEAM. The concepts of *tala* (rhythm), *raga vistar* (melodic development), and improvisation represent a sequence of steps in a problem are logical and creative. Scholars suggest that improvisation in music encourages flexible thinking and creative responses to new challenges. These attributes are valuable in the fine arts and become increasing attention in various professions. From this perspective, *Sangeet* is a complete educational system, because it provides both structure and the freedom to express, and the discipline to imagine.

Even with all this research regarding music, identity, and emotional development, there are still very few studies that specifically target the effects of empowerment that come with formal training in Hindustani Classical Music and the impacts this has on women learners in the field of higher education. Much of the research that is out there discusses the impacts on culture and emotion, and fails to look at the women's experiences within the academic and hybrid learning environments. There is still a lack of research regarding the impact of women students with traditional pedagogy along with modern digital tools on self-confidence, self-expression, and wellness. These issues show the need for modern research surrounding the training of classical music and how it relates to the fields of women, education, and sustainable development. There is much literature on music and identity but there is less literature that discusses classical training and empowerment for women learners in higher education. This is the gap that this study aims to address by connecting traditional teaching methods to contemporary narratives of pedagogy, empowerment, equity and sustainable development.

Research Gap Identification:

The present studies reiterate the passionate and traditional reverence of Hindustani Music, but there is limited study analysing the effect of Hindustani Classical Music learning in empowering the women mentee in the present digital, academic and skill-based environments that are STEAM-focussed and boost confidence and self-esteem.

Methodology:

This research followed a qualitative design to capture the lived experiences of women engaged in Hindustani Classical Music learning. Guided by an interpretivist approach, it sought to understand how personal meaning, discipline, and emotion intertwine in musical practice. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation of riyaz sessions, and informal group discussions held at three Indian universities offering music programs. This study examines the experiences of women getting to learn Hindustani Classical Music through the lens of qualitative research. The study looks at the meaning of music to the women and its impact on their everyday lives and emotional development and self-confidence. The participants provided their own testimonies through their experiences, and the researcher, guided by an interpretivist approach, collected their narratives through individual semi-structured interviews, observations of their riyaz sessions, and informal discussions. The participants of the study were enrolled at three Indian universities where music was a field of study, which provided the researcher a chance to study the formal and informal educational structures provided by the institute of higher education.

The research study was conducted on a purposive sample of thirty women consisting of students, vocal teachers, and performing artists to capture a wider range of age and educational and musical background. The participants were self-empowered through music and, as a result, self-and emotional expression were the most self-empowered narratives which were thematically analyzed. The impact of the digital guru and shishya system and the traditional pedagogy were two key players in the educational and personal development of the participants, and the researcher was interested in both.

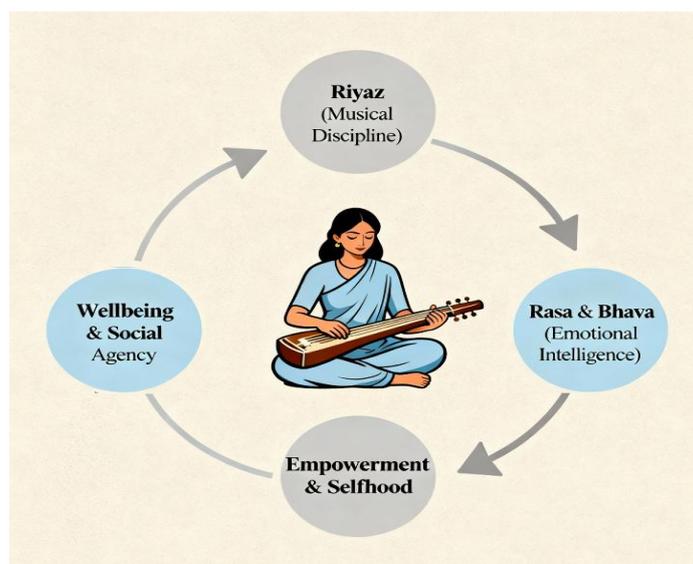


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework – Music, Empowerment, and Selfhood

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Participants	Age Range	Region	Educational Level
Students	22	18–25	North & West India	UG/PG
Educators	8	30–50	Pan-India	Professional/Research

Findings and Analysis:

This research has revealed the personal and emotional growth Hindustani Classical Music fosters in women. This phenomenon can be encapsulated in five themes: mentorship, emotional expression, digital participation, communal solidarity, and discipline.

1. Rhythm as Routine: Building Focus through *Riyaz*:

Almost all research participants spoke of *riyaz* as a practice that lent order and serenity to their lives. For many of the participants, it shifted *riyaz* into a mental and emotional training habit as they learned patience and focus on levels that transcended the rational levels of the musical exercises. For many, *riyaz* was a tool to schedule their day. meditation as some women described *riyaz*, they illustrated it as a way to quiet distractions to focus inward. Improved emotional balance and stillness in the presence of anxiety and stress resulted beneficially on their academics and family situations. With *riyaz* routine in place, many felt a greater emotional balance, stillness in the presence of anxiety and stress, improved academic and family situations. Over time, the discipline inherent in maintaining the practice developed their confidence and resilience. *Riyaz* was not only musical training, it was a method of self-regulation and emotional resilience.

Chart 1. *Riyaz* Routine vs. Focus Rating

Weekly <i>Riyaz</i> Routine	Focus & Concentration Rating (1-5 scale)
1-2 times	2.8
3-4 times	3.7
Daily	4.6

2. Speaking through *Raga*: Music as Emotional Language:

Each *raga* incited and brought to the surface and processed emotions, about which learners sometimes had difficulties to articulate. While improvising the Indian Classical Music, learners gained the confidence and went on to construct feelings of security and strength, and embraced the entire spectrum of vulnerability within their lives. Many learners experienced, and then to their astonishment, the *raga* helped release suppressed emotions, particularly, and their states of stress, sadness and, the only occasional, joy. Emotional clarity and self-awareness are the only constant within the mention of such, and is moreover of significant value. Finally, the data within Table 2 and describes emotional shifts and changes in confidence, displays and encourages us to give attention to the significant value of *raga* practice to learners. The reminder of interconnectedness of creativity and emotional self brings forth the value of deep emotional understanding and the relationship between engagement in practice of music.

Table 2. Observed Relationship between *Raga* Practice and Emotional Expression (n = 30)

Raga Performed Practiced	Dominant Emotional Rasa	Reported Emotional Expression (Learner Self-Assessment*)	Observed Confidence in Performance (Instructor Rating 1-5)	Qualitative Insight
<i>Raga Yaman</i>	<i>Shānta</i> (Peace, Balance)	83% of participants reported improved calmness and focus	4.2	Enhanced composure, improved articulation of slow tempo phrases

Raga Performed / Practiced	Dominant Emotional Rasa	Reported Emotional Expression (Learner Self-Assessment*)	Observed Confidence in Performance (Instructor Rating 1-5)	Qualitative Insight
<i>Raga Bhairavi</i>	<i>Karunā</i> (Compassion)	77% expressed greater emotional depth during vocal delivery	4.0	Emotional release, increased empathy and reflective tone
<i>Raga Desh</i>	<i>Vīra / Śṛṅgāra</i> (Joy, Energy)	81% reported improved self-expression and confidence	4.3	Stage performance confidence noticeably improved
<i>Raga Darbari Kanada</i>	<i>Karunā / Raudra</i> (Pathos, Power)	70% found it emotionally demanding yet transformative	4.1	Vocal modulation improved; deeper engagement with emotional nuance
<i>Raga Hamsadhvani</i>	<i>Ād bhuta</i> (Wonder)	85% reported feeling “uplifted” and more connected to music	4.5	Evoked joy and heightened creative spontaneity

*Data reflect learners’ post-performance reflections, capturing self-perceived emotional engagement and the confidence they associated with interpreting specific ragas.

3. Community and Belonging

Taking part of *baithaks* or classroom gatherings made an ambiance of shared responsibility. People mentioned of how group rehearsals cultivated empathy and a feeling of a shared accomplishment. This transfer of energy alleviated feelings of loneliness and made them even more confident in collaboration as an essential life skill.

4. Mentorship and Intergenerational Solidarity

The relationship between a *guru* and a *shishya* was instrumental in shaping the experiences of the women involved in the learning process. Many of the women learners described their mentors, not just as music teachers, but as instructors, teachers, guides, and definers of their support systems. Consider the ways in which women described their *gurus* and the ways in which these *gurus* assisted the women in learning and embodying the virtues of patience, humility, dedication, and inner strength. These virtues were not all formally taught, but rather absorbed almost like a way of being that resulted from continual engagement.

Having a sense of intergenerational connection, learners believe their *gurus* went through years of hardships yet were able to gain mastery through patience and dedication to their art, and that propelled these learners to pursue their journeys with self-assurance. Women were able to overcome their self-doubt because their *gurus* invited narrations of personal crises, offered corrections during practice, and encouragements during the daunting portions of their compositions. This mentorship, built trust and emotional safety enabling the learners to be fearless in their self-expression. Consequently, the *guru-shishya* relationship evolved into a significant venue of integrated artistic education and personal development, and offered women a sturdy sense identity and empowered them.

5. Digital Inclusion and Innovation

Supportive technology became evident in the pedagogical process of learning Hindustani Classical Music. Digital instruments and applications along with online music education contributed to accessibility and learning to

women learners particularly from remote and non-metropolitan areas. Music education in recording and digital practice enabled learners to overcome geographic and temporal limitations of their music training.

Yes, it was nice having conversations with mentors in person, but being in the meeting virtually instead of in person, provided less anxiety inducing pressure and thus was a better choice for learning for mentors and participants for the majority of the program as stressed participants were not as likely to disengage and leave the programs. Online learning allowed students to engage in techniques and, if needed, even modify and refine those techniques to the point of being able to acquire a learned level of skill. For some of the women, the technology was simply a tool and not a substitute for traditional learning. In the jazz program, technology provided participants with more opportunities for individual practice, which ultimately led to greater confidence, connectivity in the social network, and even immersion in the community.

Discussion and Implications:

To make the acquired data conveniently available the report outlines the fallout from learning Hindustani Classical Music. Learning the craft itself is only one dimension. It is far more interested in the women learners' inner journeys. It goes to self-discovery and self-awareness concerning the inner space and feelings which can be a zone of emotional and inner calm and stability. Inner transformation is facilitated by *riyaz* which in turn helps the learners to be more self-disciplined and to a larger degree to be equable and calm. Such traits become manifest in their everyday cultural engagements. On the other hand, the different ragas encourage learners to tackle and work through difficult emotions. This way of emo- musical engagement and expression helped some participants articulate emotions more clearly and with a sense of cultural and technical relief while experiencing academic and personal stress. It also helped them to integrate complex emotions and articulate with greater technical and cultural competency as well as with emotional honesty and clarity.

Self-evident and prioritized implications for academic integration and policy reform. Once integrated into higher education systems, *Sangeet* has the potential to develop emotional self-regulation, sustained attention and collaborative skills which are in high demand with the latest adaptations of STEAM education. A higher degree of integration of the emotional and artistic skills with the technical knowledge of the discipline is needed. The guru-shishya system has educational impact the study regards it to the present system of schooling. Relations of trust and respect, emotional understanding, and teacher-student relations based on the mentor-mentee model, enhance the educational system emotional space.

Conclusion, Limitations, and Further Scope of Research:

It emerged as a Key Finding of the research work, reflected in the thesis, that Hindustani Classical Music has its own significance as a system of learning, transcending the boundaries of learning just as a discipline of performance or technical training. The inner and the outer life of the woman learners were shaped as a learning system. The discipline of *riyaz* along with balanced mental freedom that is eloquent to express feelings in a nurtured, natural and rational nuance is the stronghold of the *durga* bhakti. The enduring bond of the *guru-shishya* relationship instils emotional and '*safsoorzi*' (refers to emotional healing) along with learning of the outer *drishya* (refers to the outer/physical realm of learning) is in the nature of a smile, and many of the participants reported that engagement with *Sangeet* facilitated coping with stress and focus, as well as a connection with themselves. Over the course of increasing the engagement, participants reported having a source of relaxation, as well as inner positive energy and guidance from music as bring strength to their life in the various spheres. All of these accounted for the fact that Hindustani Classical Music is a source of overall well-being, and helped many women strengthen their self themselves (identity). Therefore, *Sangeet* should be used in contemporary India as a form of education that promotes emotional balance along with mental gain, to highlight the nature of *Sangeet* developed emotional health as a form of contemporary education to balance self-identity with her internal self. The holistic nature of *Sangeet* in contemporary India should be valued.

The study also shows the societal importance of including Hindustani Classical Music in the classroom setting. Music education can promote gender equality, the integration of diverse cultures, and the cultivation of creative thought, for in music, the voices of women are given attention and value. Learners can bridge the existing traditional knowledge with the modern challenges and expectations through *Sangeet*. The integration of traditional knowledge with contemporary challenges prepares the students to be empathetic, responsible, and good leaders for their society. The female students reported increased confidence during speaking, performing, and engaging in collaborative activities in and outside the classroom. It helped the learners to trust their individual potential through musical expression. *Sangeet* can be regarded as a unique form of empowerment, enhanced identity, and cooperative approaches with others, as a gentle yet impactful instrument of empowerment.

Limitations:

The investigation carried out on this subject is indeed very important, but it reports on the investigation this thesis is based on: the investigation was based on only 15 respondents, which, when extrapolated, represents only a small fraction of the total population of respondents from the various geographical areas of India, which, as is known, has a plurality of geographic areas sharing different styles, resources, and cultures. In addition to this, it is also important to mention that this project primarily used qualitative research and focused on the subjects' autobiographical self-reflections. This is of course very important, but it is a one-sided perspective and does not allow us to speak freely in terms of total and broad statistical generalizability. The project also touched on some of the digital tools aimed at teaching music, but it would not be reasonable and even appropriate to discuss the emotional, artistic, and didactic impact of these tools over time. These boundaries of the project indicate a need for more plentiful and diverse projects in the future.

Further Scope of Research:

The research on *Sangeet* could extend to the many other styles of Indian music like folk, *Sufi*, or even *Carnatic* traditions, which could all contribute more to understanding different facets of empowerment, the creative process, and emotional healing. Other *Sangeet* research could analyze different *Sangeet* traditions in the same research framework to discover underlying values, as well as outcomes that may not be apparent. Other future research could use mixed methods to assess emotional well-being, confidence, and leadership in the future, and to measure those values qualitatively and quantitatively. These studies could shed light on the influence of certain forms of classical music on various aspects of personal growth across a lifetime.

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