

INTEGRATION OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL RĀGA-BASED FLUTE MUSIC IN MEDITATION: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: Indian classical music has been associated with emotional refinement, and healing traditions. Rāgas can evoke specific emotional states and influence the human mind–body system. The research paper aims to explore the therapeutic integration of rāga-based Hindustani classical flute music into structured yogic meditation practices. The study highlights the meditative quality of a *rāga*, when consciously practised with proper traditional meditation techniques. The study adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology in integrating Hindustani Classical *rāgas* as meditative tool with a primary case study. Three Hindustani ragas were selected – Madhuvanti, Hansdhwani, and Malkāuns – the flute-based music was introduced as a meditative aid. Participant experiences were documented, and a comparative analysis was undertaken between sessions with and without flute music.

Keywords: Hindustani Classical Music, Rāga, Flute Music, Meditation, Case Study

INTRODUCTION

Music has been an important part of any culture since ancient times. Indian Classical music is not meant for entertainment, but is also used for mental peace, spiritual growth and healing. Ragas based on Hindustani Classical music can be used to express specific emotions and moods. These ragas are believed to have a deep effect on the human mind and body.

Meditation is a personal practice where someone focuses their mind using different techniques like concentration, reflection, or calming thoughts. It helps people become more aware of themselves, supports spiritual growth, and can improve both mental and physical well-being. Meditation is one aspect of Yoga practices.¹

The theme of the research paper is to explore the therapeutic integration of raga-based flute music with meditation practices to promote emotional well-being. The study aims to understand the role of Hindustani classical ragas in Yogic meditation, thereby highlighting the therapeutic potential of Hindustani classical music.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem statement of this research paper is to explore how Hindustani classical rāgas contribute to yogic meditation practices

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology. In addition, a Case Study has been conducted on meditation sessions involving a group of yoga practitioners, with the help of a yoga instructor, to observe the practical impact of rāga-based flute music during meditation and a comparative analysis of meditation sessions with and without flute music is drawn.

REFERENCES FOR THE THERAPEUTIC QUALITY OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

Indian classical music has been closely connected with spiritual practice and healing traditions since the Vedic period.

The few studies of relevant literature related to the therapeutic quality of Hindustani classical music has been done.

Chatterjee (2018) explores the therapeutic potential of Indian classical traditions, emphasizing its physiological, psychological, and healing dimensions. The paper highlights the use of music in Indian healing practices, especially through the application of specific ragas in what is termed *Raga Chikitsa*. An interventional study was conducted on Type-2 Diabetic patients. The result stated that there was a significant reduction in blood sugar level by listening to *rāga Bageshree*.²

Singh & Shivakumar (2025) discuss the concept of *Raag Chikitsa* and explain that specific Hindustani classical ragas can positively influence mental, emotional, and physical well-being by reducing stress, anxiety, and depression. The paper highlights that listening

to ragas can regulate mood-related neurochemicals such as dopamine, serotonin, and cortisol, thereby reducing stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. The study also documented how rāgas have healing effects.³

Kumari et al. (2024) explores about how Indian classical ragas affect the autonomic nervous system, heart rate variability and blood pressure. Clinical trials have demonstrated reductions in stress, anxiety, and salivary cortisol levels, alongside improvements in cardiovascular parameters. The paper concludes that the rāgas act as non-invasive therapeutic tools, and recommends further large-scale studies to establish their role as a complementary therapy.⁴

There is a report that listening to *rāga Darbari Kanhada* is said to be very effective in easing tension, anxiety, relief from acute headache, mental shock and insomnia. There is a newspaper from 2018 stating that “Raag ‘Darbari Kanhada’ brings patient out of coma”. In this case, a young patient from West Bengal who had lapsed into a coma due to dengue-related complications and a cerebral blood clot was administered music therapy alongside conventional medical treatment. Under the guidance of Dr. Sandip Kar, a physician and trained violinist, the patient was made to listen to a 24-minute rendition of *rāga Darbari Kanhada* by *Padma Vibhushan Vidushi Dr. N. Rajam* three times a day. Reports indicate that gradual physiological improvement was observed following the introduction of the raga, with increased responsiveness to medication and eventual recovery from the coma state within two weeks.⁵ This case can be referenced as an illustrative example of the integrative use of raga-based music therapy as a complementary approach in critical medical conditions.

CASE STUDY: INTEGRATION OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL FLUTE MUSIC IN YOGIC MEDITATION SESSIONS.

A primary case study has been conducted to observe the impact of rāga-based flute music during meditation sessions. The case study was designed to understand participants’ subjective responses to selected Hindustani rāgas when used as a meditative aid. The study employed a qualitative methodology. The duration of the case study was sixteen weeks. For the initial eight weeks, meditation sessions were conducted without flute music, following the regular schedule of the yoga trainer. Participant responses during this phase were observed and noted through informal feedback. In the subsequent eight weeks, flute-based rāga music using selected Hindustani ragas was introduced as an additional meditation tool and experiential changes were documented.

The case study was conducted with the support of a trained yoga practitioner, Mrs. Jyotsana Viswajith, who holds a Master’s degree in Yoga and works as a professional yoga instructor. The study took place at SaMa Soul and Motion Academy, located in Kozhikode, Kerala. The institution regularly conducts both online and offline yoga and meditation sessions for individuals of different age groups. The meditation sessions were attended by 17 participants in online sessions, consisting exclusively of female participants, and 12 participants in offline sessions, including both male and female participants. The age group of participants ranged from 22 to 64 years. All participants were regular attendees of the meditation sessions. Among the participants, a few had non-critical medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma, thyroid disorders, blood pressure issues, back pain, and allergies, while some participants had no medical conditions. However, the present case study primarily focused on observing the impact of raga-based flute music on participants’ mental state and level of concentration during meditation sessions.

Before the implementation of flute-based rāga music, meditation sessions followed a structured weekly schedule employing various traditional meditative techniques. Sessions were conducted five days a week, with each session lasting 20 minutes. Different meditation tools were assigned to each day of the week, including singing bowl meditation, Nādanusandhāna meditation, gratitude meditation, Om meditation, and Soham meditation, in the chronological order of the days of the week from Monday to Friday, respectively.

As part of this research study, rāga-based Hindustani classical flute music was introduced as an additional meditative aid. Three Hindustani classical rāgas—Madhuvanti, Hansdhvani, and Malkāuns—were selected for the case study. The researcher, being a trained flute player and a student of music, recorded meditative flute compositions based on selected Hindustani rāgas. These audio recordings were shared with the yoga instructor and incorporated into both online and offline meditation sessions. Flute music was used for two days per week on a regular basis, for the duration of case study. The structure of the meditation sessions, participant group, duration, and instructor remained unchanged to ensure consistency. Each rāga was introduced separately during meditation sessions to observe distinct experiential responses among participants.

OBSERVATIONS AND PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

The responses of all participants to the three selected rāgas were noted and analysed. The observations indicated a positive impact on the meditation sessions when rāga-based flute music was introduced as a meditative aid.

Response to Rāga Madhuvanti

Participants reported experiencing a deep meditative state while meditating with flute music based on Rāga Madhuvanti. Observations indicated enhanced concentration, inward mental focus, reduction in distracting thoughts, and a noticeable sense of stress relief. One participant, a married school teacher, reported that the rāga enabled her to enter a deeper state of meditation more effortlessly and sustain concentration for a longer duration compared to her usual experience.

Response to Rāga Hansdhwani

Rāga Hansdhwani was introduced based on participant interest in experiencing a rāga associated with positive and uplifting emotions. Participants reported feelings of happiness, joy, mental clarity, and inner calm during meditation. Several individuals described a sensation of mental blankness accompanied by a feeling of lightness and over-joy, suggesting that the rāga facilitated a pleasant emotionally balanced meditative state.

Response to Rāga Malkāuns

Rāga Malkāuns was observed to be particularly effective in inducing deep relaxation. Participants experienced sleepiness, release of physical and mental fatigue, and a sense of freshness after meditation. This effect was especially evident in evening online sessions, where participants reported work-related tiredness. Some individuals experienced brief periods of deep sleep during meditation and described feeling relaxed and rejuvenated afterward.

Special Observation

One participant with a known history of hallucination-related mental disturbances was closely observed during the meditation sessions. The participant reported meditation with flute music helped to gain focus, concentrate during the sessions without distraction. The participant had distractions and less mental stability during past meditation sessions where the rāga-based flute music was not introduced. Listening to ragas had a calming effect on the mind, reduced mental agitation, and improved emotional stability. No adverse reactions were observed during the study period, indicating that the flute-based rāga music functioned as a gentle and non-intrusive meditative support.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: MEDITATION WITH AND WITHOUT FLUTE MUSIC

A clear difference was observed between meditation sessions conducted with and without flute music. In sessions without music, participants generally required more time to settle into meditation, and mental distractions were more frequent during the initial stages. The depth of meditation varied depending on the technique used.

In contrast, meditation sessions supported by rāga-based flute music enabled a faster transition into a meditative state, improved concentration, reduced mental fluctuations, and deeper emotional engagement. Participants consistently reported enhanced calmness, joy, inner peace, and a stronger mind-body connection, particularly during sessions using Rāga Malkāuns.

LIMITATIONS

The study has certain limitations. It involved a limited number of participants from a single yoga institution, restricting the generalisability of the findings. Data relied primarily on self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by personal expectations, mood, or familiarity with meditation. Additionally, the study did not employ standardized psychological or physiological assessment tools, and external variables such as daily stress levels and health conditions were not controlled. Therefore, the findings may be interpreted as exploratory rather than definitive.

FINDINGS

Since the same group of participants, meditation duration, setting, and instructor were maintained throughout the study, the comparison between meditation with and without flute music holds methodological validity within a qualitative framework. The case study suggests that Hindustani classical flute music, when thoughtfully integrated into yogic meditation, can positively influence mental focus, emotional balance, and relaxation. These findings may support the theoretical premise that music can function as a harmonising and supportive element in yogic meditation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research examined how selected rāgas, such as Madhuvanti, Hansdhwani, and Malkāuns, can function as supportive tools in meditation practice through a primary qualitative case study. The study findings suggest that rāga-based flute music significantly enhanced participants' meditative experiences. Compared to sessions conducted without music, meditation supported by rāga-based flute music facilitated quicker mental settling, deeper concentration, emotional release, and improved relaxation. Even though the study is limited by its qualitative design and small sample size, the consistency in participants, instructor, and meditation structure lends to the comparative analysis. The findings indicate that Hindustani classical flute music can act as a harmonising bridge between sound and silence, enhancing the meditative process without altering its foundational yogic framework. The study may encourage further research employing interdisciplinary methodologies and standardized assessment tools to systematically evaluate the physiological and psychological impacts of rāga-based interventions, which can also draw a quantitative assessment with the help of a medical practitioner.

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