



Exploring The Therapeutic Role Of Hindustani Ragas In Enhancing Sleep Quality And Reducing Psychological Stress

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Abstract

More and more people are reporting trouble sleeping and heightened stress, especially with today's fast-paced routines and digital distractions. While medical treatments are readily available, many individuals are drawn toward more familiar, non-medicated ways of coping—especially those rooted in their culture. This study looks at how regular listening to *Raga Yaman* in the evening and *Raga Bhairavi* in the morning might help adults feel less stressed and sleep better. Thirty participants followed this daily routine for two weeks, and their sleep quality and emotional responses were tracked through sleep logs, stress scales, and personal reflections. A number of participants mentioned falling asleep more easily and feeling emotionally more balanced during the study period. These experiences reflect how consistent listening to ragas like *Yaman* and *Bhairavi* may offer a familiar and culturally sensitive approach to managing stress and improving rest.

Keywords: Hindustani Classical Music, Raga Listening, Sleep Health, Stress Relief, Emotional Regulation.

Introduction

Stress and sleep issues are no longer limited to a small corner of society—they're common among students, professionals, and even retirees. Most people are offered medication as the first line of treatment, but this often comes with side effects or doesn't resonate with those looking for alternatives. In India especially, where music has long been part of daily life and healing traditions, there's space to explore time-honored approaches to mental health.

Hindustani ragas aren't just musical scales—they're emotional frameworks with a purpose. *Raga Yaman*, typically played in the evening, is known for its calming and introspective mood. *Bhairavi*, rendered in the early

morning, carries a gentle melancholy often associated with spiritual renewal. The emotional weight of these ragas is tied not only to their structure but also to their timing, which classical theory insists plays a key role in their effect on the listener.

With growing interest in music therapy around the world, this study sets out to understand whether two ragas—when listened to consistently and at the right times—can help people sleep better and manage daily stress without external intervention.

Literature Review

There's a rich tradition of research exploring how music can impact emotional health. In one study, *Singh and Srivastava* (2019) found that meditative music helped university students fall asleep faster and feel more rested. Similarly, *Bhosale* (2021) noted that listening to *Raga Desi* led to measurable drops in heart rate and calmer moods in college students.

Classical musicology texts such as *Sangeet Ratnakar* and *Raga Vigyan* go even further, discussing how ragas are designed for specific times of day and emotional conditions. *Sharma* (2015) writes extensively about how Indian melodic structures—especially when performed with emotional intent—can evoke specific psychological responses.

Outside India, studies published in journals like *BMC Psychology* and *The Journal of Music Therapy* have shown that music activates brain regions tied to emotion, relaxation, and memory. *Nair* (2017) argues that traditional Indian ragas deserve more scientific attention given their deep cultural relevance and emotional complexity.

Still, even with these encouraging findings, few studies have applied rigorous scientific methods to *Hindustani ragas* specifically. This study hopes to fill that gap by offering both measurable data and participant insight.

Methodology

To understand how music could support sleep and reduce stress, I invited thirty adults between the ages of 25 and 45 to take part in a two-week listening experiment. Each participant had reported mild to moderate sleep difficulties and elevated stress levels.

Each morning at 7:30 AM, they listened to *Raga Bhairavi* for 20 minutes. Each evening at 8:30 PM, they listened to *Raga Yaman* for 20 minutes. Headphones were used, and participants were asked to choose a quiet space free from interruptions.

They recorded how quickly they fell asleep, whether they woke up during the night, and how rested they felt each morning. Stress levels were checked using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) before and after the study. Some also used heart-rate apps for biometric feedback. At the end of the study, participants shared their experiences in interviews and wrote down daily mood impressions.

Responses were grouped into recurring emotional themes, and numerical data was analyzed using paired t-tests to track changes.

Results

Participants showed noticeable improvements in both sleep and stress. Average sleep latency dropped from 42 minutes to 23 minutes. Night-time awakenings dropped from 2.1 to 0.7. PSS-10 scores fell from 21.4 to 14.8, showing a clear dip in stress.

Beyond numbers, people described feeling “more at ease,” “less mentally cluttered,” and “emotionally refreshed.” Many said that listening to *Yaman* helped them wind down at night, replacing scrolling on their phones with a moment of quiet reflection. *Bhairavi* was described as “gentle,” “cleansing,” and “perfect for mornings.”

Some participants were already familiar with classical music, and they appeared to respond more deeply. They noted shifts during specific parts of the ragas—such as the alap—and felt that the music mirrored their internal states.

Discussion

The outcome matches classical theory that ragas carry emotional weight when performed or heard at the right times. *Yaman*'s association with evening calm and *Bhairavi*'s ties to morning melancholy seemed to align with the mental shifts participants described.

Indian aesthetics offer the concept of “*Rasa*” where specific tones and musical phrasing evoke moods like peace, compassion, or joy. These emotional flavors appeared throughout the participants' reflections, reinforcing the idea that ragas can act as emotional mirrors or stabilizers.

The setting mattered, too. Many structured their listening as a ritual, treating it as a quiet moment before or after their hectic day. This act of making space may have added to the therapeutic experience—reminding us that music isn't just about the sound, but the setting and the intention behind it.

Participants with previous exposure to classical music seemed to engage more quickly. This highlights how cultural familiarity and personal connection play important roles in how therapy works—not just through technique but through resonance.

From a mental health perspective, these ragas could be integrated into sleep-hygiene programs, stress-management workshops, or mindfulness-based counseling—especially for people looking for non-medicated solutions that feel culturally meaningful.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study included a small group and relied on self-reported data, which can carry bias. We didn't include a control group or randomization, so further studies could expand on this design with more participants and clinical-grade tools such as EEG or cortisol tracking.

Future research could explore how musical training affects emotional response, whether other ragas offer similar or contrasting benefits, and how these interventions compare with mindfulness or yoga when used together.

Conclusion

Regular and time-specific listening to *Raga Yaman* and *Bhairavi* helped participants sleep better and feel less emotionally strained. These outcomes match traditional descriptions of how ragas work and show promise as part of holistic wellness approaches.

By blending centuries-old musical traditions with simple, structured listening routines, this research opens the door to culturally familiar solutions for common psychological issues. Hindustani music, when used mindfully, may serve not only as artistic expression but as a gentle guide toward emotional steadiness and deeper rest.

Author Bio

Mr. Basharat Ahmad Quasid completed his Bachelor's in Music from the Institute of Music and Fine Arts, University of Kashmir, followed by a Master's degree from Himachal Pradesh University. He has qualified the State Eligibility Test (SET) for Assistant professor conducted by the University of Kashmir, J & K, India.

His research interests focus on the intersection of Indian classical music and emotional wellness, especially its role in sleep and stress management. Through his work, he aims to bring together cultural heritage and contemporary mental health needs.

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