

Music for wellness

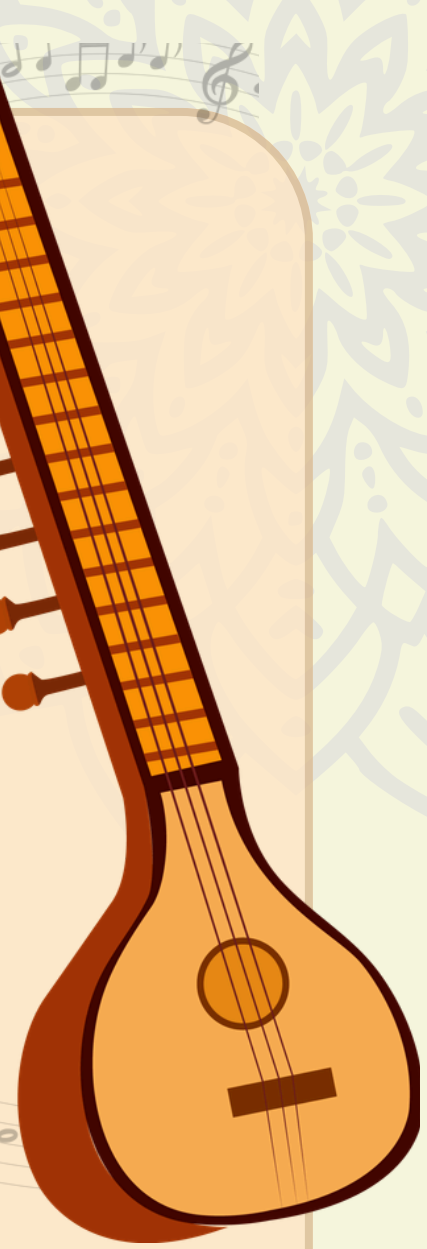
– A sonic journey,

3rd July 2024.

Introduction

The session on 3rd July, 2024, started with Smita Tai, a doyen of Eklavya, explaining the inspiration behind the name “Eklavya” in Eklavya Foundation, as a self-help group. She enumerated its main goals, some of which are:

- Conducting online meetings on Mental illness
- Conducting Mental Health awareness programs
- Removing Stigma around mental illness
- Publishing and circulating success stories of Shubhartis – Phoenix Project
- Addressing what-if situations where the illness is untreated or ignored
- Empower people with information on techniques to tackle mental health issues.
- Created a platform for people with mental illness to express their emotions through poetry by the name – Bahar Eklavya, Bahar Maharashtra, and now Bahar Bharat to be published
- Providing information and awareness to extended families, relatives, and friends so that a larger
- A cross-section of people participate in the healing process.
- Training students and volunteers to help Shubhartis and Shubhankars to deal with their mental health issues.
- Conducted an empowering training program for the Shubhankars by a renowned psychiatrist from Miraj, Dr. Arun Rukadikar



Smita Tai introduced Mr Ganesh Rajan as a Coordinator of Eklavya Chennai SHSG, who also initiates the special lectures on the first Wednesday of every month.

Ganesh Rajan introduced the speakers of the day – the charming father-daughter duo, Mr Rajeev Raja and Ms Revati Raja. He also explained the significance of the theme of the session as participants can leverage the power of music to enhance their inner calm.



Rajeev is the ex-national Creative Director of the advertising agency DDB Mudra. He is also one of India's finest Jazz and Fusion Flutists. Bringing these two worlds together, he founded Brand Music, a world-class Sonic Branding Agency. Hearing Rajeev's perspective of a performer and sonic designer about the power of music to reach out and touch people.



Revati specializes in individual therapy and also enjoys facilitating therapeutic group spaces for psychoeducation. She adds the dimension of a counselling psychologist to dive deeper into the impact of music on the brain.

Part II:

Lecture on music and wellness

Rajeev Raja began his session by outlining his own experience in music, advertisement, and Brand Music – adding an interesting bit about Mogo or musical logo! Rajeev, as an expert musician, and Revati, as a music therapist, interleaved their talks interestingly to bring out the very proactive role music has in guiding our mental state. Revathy began by highlighting the WHO definition of wellness as “a state of complete mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

Power of music on mental state: Rajeev started the session with a practical demonstration of the dramatic impact of music. He played a tune on his flute. He asked listeners whether it evoked different reactions such as visuals, memories or feelings. The audience affirmed their reactions. Very soon after, a change in only one note of the Hamsadhwani tune changed the mood completely from morning sprightliness to evening melancholy.

Theoretical underpinnings: Revati then explained the theory behind the impact of music on wellness by showing how different parts of the brain process different aspects of music.

The Temporal lobe, which processes “language,” helps us discern the differences in melody, lyrics, tone, and pitch.

The Cerebellum, which makes us understand the “movement” induced by music, such as rhythm and tapping sensation, and also helps us develop muscle memory in terms of music. It is noteworthy that the cerebellum ages differently as compared with other parts of the brain and that persons in coma or those with Alzheimer’s disease react to music.

The Amygdala, which controls our varied emotional reactions to different kinds and genres of music from positive emotions such as enthusiasm and tranquility to negative ones such as fear and anxiety.

The Hippocampus, which in fact stores information surrounding music such as related images and subsequently builds long-term memories associated with a certain musical piece. This helps us connect to past events by listening to long-long yet familiar music.

The theoretical explanations came alive with lucid musical demonstrations by Rajeev. The audience experienced different tonal quality with the same note played on flute and piano (which Rajeev happily simulated with his mouth) and pitch by playing the same note at different octaves. He explained rhythm with beats, illustrating how beats at normal heart bpm (around 60) is calming, while music played at 100 bpm brings joy, and at 150 takes us to another zone of excitement. The impact of the Hippocampus on music muscle memory became evident as listeners immediately identified with the evergreen “Doe-a-deer...” from sound of music as remembrances of a joyous childhood, and the background music of Titanic as recollections of a compassionate, romantic sunset imbued journey on the deck of titanic on the calm ocean.

Thus, it became amply clear that the effective use of music can make it a wonderful therapeutic tool in enhancing our well-being in its entirety.

Characteristics of Music therapy: Rajeev and Revati together explained the scope of music as a therapeutic tool for wellness.

- Not specific diagnosis based but addresses spectrum of symptoms: Revati pointed out that music is not prescriptive for a particular mental issue but improves global functioning. It influences thinking patterns and feelings – so crucial for recovery. Over a period of time, music can eventually lead to behavioral changes as short-term influences bring about continuous improvement.
- Music therapy can be tapped to reduce anxiety, improve blood pressure aberrations, ameliorate pain, improve sleep quality, sharpen mental alertness, enhance memory power, and help in pain management.
- Music therapy can help in developing coping strategies under different situations, reinforce positive emotional behavior, increase frustration tolerance, improve interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, and self-esteem.
- Group music therapy: The therapy can be imparted individually or in pairs or groups to improve inter-personal relationships.

General principles of listening to music in day-to-day life: Rajeev and Revati gave the following indicators that can accrue benefits

- Rajeev emphasized that instead of continuously listening to music offerings from various online music platforms, one must allocate some time daily to connect to music consciously. It is widely accepted that music does bring about a dopamine rush that helps us regain mental calm.
- Person-specific: Music therapy must be fine-tuned to each individual as per his/her inclinations, preferences, and experiences. Which music can be matched to which mood is a matter of individual preferences and needs to be discovered with the therapist.
- Engage in community singing: It is well-known that chorus songs enhance the sense of belonging and camaraderie. Revati enthused all to sing the popular song “Hum honge kaamyab...” With her as an illustration, followed by its English rendition by Rajeev. Thus, community singing can make people connect to each other without explicitly connecting.
- Meditative music: A meditative musical piece was played, and the audience affirmed how it soothed the mind and all parts of the body. Revati emphasized the need to focus on breathing while listening to meditative music.

Part 3: QA session

One of the questions addressed what individuals should do when music feels unpleasant or distressing. Rajiv Sir suggested practical coping strategies such as removing oneself from the source of music, turning it off, or engaging in conversation with someone. He emphasized that distraction plays a key role in reducing the negative impact of unwanted auditory stimuli. This highlights the importance of environmental control and conscious disengagement in maintaining emotional comfort.

Another question explored what type of music should be listened to during low moods or emotional distress. Revati Ma'am clarified that music is not a form of medication, but rather a subjective experience. Its effectiveness depends on individual preferences and emotional responses. She emphasized the importance of self-awareness, encouraging individuals to identify what kind of music positively influences their mood rather than relying on generalized recommendation

A significant distinction was made between listening to music and actively creating or performing it. Revati Ma'am explained that playing an instrument involves complex brain functioning, particularly the coordination between the left and right hemispheres. Research indicates that musicians often show noticeable differences in brain structure and connectivity compared to non-musicians, due to the neural pathways developed during musical training. Additionally, Rajiv Sir pointed out the emotional depth involved in musical performance. When individuals engage in playing music, especially in a performance setting, they often experience a shift in emotional state. Even if they begin with discomfort or stress, they tend to gradually immerse themselves and feel better, sometimes losing themselves in the experience. This reflects the therapeutic and immersive nature of active musical engagement.

The lecture also addressed how music influences brain function and behavior. Revati Ma'am explained that music therapy works holistically, involving elements such as rhythm, improvisation, and emotional connection. Rather than targeting a single brain area, music engages multiple neural systems simultaneously. She shared examples from her work with children diagnosed with autism, where music and rhythm were used to help manage impulsive behavior and improve self-regulation. Through structured musical activities, children learn timing, control, and responsiveness, which translates into better behavioral outcomes.

This demonstrates that music can be an effective tool not only for emotional expression but also for behavioral modification and cognitive development, particularly in neurodivergent individuals.

The moderator read out questions put forward by several participants, which Rajeev and Revati fielded ably. They assured that resources for further information and consultation will be forwarded.

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