

Beyond the Western Lens: A Psychological Analysis of Musical Growth and Creativity in Indian Children

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Abstract

Musical development is a vital element in empowering children to augment their character, to exhibit their aptitude in a constructive way and to perform their musical skills in a refined manner in society. This study is an analytical investigation into the different developmental phases that a child experiences while enhancing his/her musical skills and creativity, and what more does the Indian scenario beyond the Western lens by evaluating the applicability of theories such as Stage Theory of Malloch and Trevarthen, Self-Determination theory of Evans and McPherson, and Lamont's Life span approach within the Indian context.

Besides these aspects, various psycho-social-cultural factors influencing the musical development of Indian children in connection with Guru-Sisya Tradition, Music Education in Indian Classrooms are particularly observed. The main objective of this study is to point out the challenges of children in developing their musical skills and abilities within their social atmosphere. This study was solely comparative-qualitative in nature, and data were organised thematically. The findings go through the unravelling of Indian classical music and its abundant techniques of sādhanā could be a useful tool with the help of a psychological lens established by Western theorists.

Keywords: Psychology of Music, Musical Development, Musical Growth, Creativity, Child Psychology, Indian Culture, Social Environment, Classical Music, Carnatic Music.

1. Introduction

Many studies have indisputably proven that music could influence human beings, and it has a significant role in shaping human character as well. Music Psychology is an emerging field globally, which explores an assortment of psychological elements like cognitive processes, emotional perspectives, identity formation and its connection with music. Musical development is a continuous transition process by realising the basic musical skills like pitch recognition, placement of accurate notes, imitation of tune, rhythm balancing and acquisition of creative skills. Musical Growth, which could be the next stage, is achieved by enhancing the skills through in-depth practice and proper training, and the realisation of the aesthetic depth of that art form. Creativity is another crucial factor in Musical development. Originality and effectiveness are the key components of defining creativity, according to Runco & Jaeger (2012).

1.1 Background of the Study

Music psychology is more connected with learning strategies in Western techniques like staff-notation reading, harmonic arrangements, orchestral coordination, etc. However, the Western music-development theories are mostly centred on Western music, and habitually ignore other popular classical musical systems in the world, and they often fail to account for the socio-cultural nuances of the Indian context. The long-established learning-teaching methods of Indian classical music, both Hindustani and Carnatic music also be considered for framing such new theories in music psychology.

1.2 Problem Statement

The field of music psychology, mostly engaged with Western frameworks like Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Life Span Approach, etc, offers valuable insights, but they are frequently inadequate in the Indian musical eco-system. Guru-Shisya pedagogical bond, Rāga-Tāla system, Sādhana Methods, Oral traditions, Notation Systems are extremely unique and influential in the Indian context. The perceptions of Gamaka applications are also unique. This study addresses theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological gaps with the musical realities in India to redefine the true aspects of musical growth and creativity.

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions

Objectives:

- To examine the current scenario of musical development of Indian children
- To identify the key challenges in musical skill development
- To explore Western theories and the applicability of music psychology tools in the Indian context
- Research Questions:
- What are the existing methods of musical development in India?
- What are the challenges and hindrances in skill development?
- What are the main Western approaches and their applicability, and the possibilities of making new integrated ideologies?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2. a Stage Theory

Malloch & Trevarthen (2008) explain the idea of musicality by making observations of mothers and infants, mutually enjoyable communications and how they become memorable stories. They explain various stages in Music development- The infant stage, the early childhood Stage, the later childhood stage, and the adolescent stage are the different transitional stages. According to this theory, individuals go through several stages throughout their lives, indicating substantial shifts in their musical tastes and preferences (Duman, 2024). They describe the behaviour of children in each stage with examples. Eg:- infants react naturally to lullabies and soothing music (babbling, mimicking, etc). This theory emphasises the importance of early musical interactions in laying the foundation for later musical development.

2.b Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination theory (SDT) of Evans and McPherson deals with how musical identity is shaped during adolescence. According to this theory, three aspects are the crucial psychological needs of children in fostering sustained musical engagement, ie Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness (Duman, 2024). Autonomy allows a child the world of more freedom to something to do something according to his goal, and thus the motivation increases. Competence is the belief of own capabilities.

Relatedness is the social connection with his family, friends, mentors, etc. These three psychological needs are to be satisfied according to SDT, for more advancement. If the children are encouraged to express their musical preferences and choices, they tend to make it a lifelong passion. (Evans, 2015)

2.c Life Span approach

A person's musical identity develops and changes throughout their lifetime rather than being restricted to a set of developmental stages (Duman, 2024). Both Formal and informal musical experiences have an impact on the development, according to Lamont. Music identity may alter and develop according to personal experiences, social circumstances, cultural environments, etc. He emphasises the dynamic nature of the circle by emphasising the influence of peer groups and home atmosphere throughout childhood and adolescence.

Alimi Selmani (2024) reported that there are four important development stages of musical influence, ie Influence of Music on the physical development, cognitive development, social development, and emotional development. Physical means musical activities such as dancing along with music, playing musical instruments, which enhance coordination, flexibility, etc. Cognitive development includes intellectual skills such as information processing, concentration, mathematical, and logical skills. Through Musical activities, children gradually develop communication skills, and they recognise the importance of social bonds. Musical activities also advance the sense of emotional awareness.

Method

The current study follows Qualitative Literature Synthesis, which is followed by Thematic Selection, Contextual Mapping, and Synthesis. Unlike traditional music research, the present study seeks to understand the new perspectives and trends in music psychology. The study has utilised data obtained from reputable journal reviews and various authentic texts. No questionnaires have been served as it followed a theoretical review method.

The Indian Context

As India is a land of diverse culture, different religions, lots of languages and rich traditions, it is complicated to analyse the social, economic backgrounds of each child in India. Some of the scenarios are discussed below.

The musical preferences of children at younger school ages are formed and shaped gradually, while Adults typically have consistent musical preferences that have developed over time. For children, music is a game that still primarily focuses on motivation and exploration. Pre-schoolers are exposed to more musical stimuli, initially through perception and subsequently through exploration. Numerous games and activities can lead to the child's first musical experiences. The stimulus field is then extended to include preschool and early childhood education institutions in addition to the family setting, where children are primarily exposed to musical stimuli. Movement activities, toy handling, and manipulating a variety of objects all involve singing and music. All things considered, the motor abilities are improved, and the upper and lower limb movements are better coordinated and synchronised. As a result, the youngster has more opportunities to produce different noises. (Kusý & Vindišová, 2024)

Since early childhood, kids are influenced by many things around them- family, school, environment, media, social media, religion, beliefs, internet, etc. Devotional music from places of worship, a piece of viral reel music from social media, folk music in their regional place, etc, could be highly influential to a kid. There are kids who start learning music at the insistence of their parents, and some at their own self-

motivation. After a few years, most of the students may be distracted or discontinued due to various 'unknown' reasons.

Some of the distinctive features of Indian classical music (ICM) are discussed below. The ICM, both Hindustani and Carnātic, emphasises various theories and practices on rāga and tāla, provides a rich environment for developing micro-auditory skills and rhythmic proficiency. As children engage with classical music, whether through listening, singing, or moving to the rhythm, the brain undergoes a symphony of systematic activity. Children's music engages numerous areas of the brain, including those related to: Working memory; Language processing; Spatial-temporal processing; Emotional regulation and self-control; Problem-solving; and Flexible thinking (Alimi Selmani, 2024).

- ***Auditory Perceptual skills***

ICM relies heavily on microtonal nuances, such as the concept of 'Sruti' is relevant here. How musicians develop the ability to understand these micro-pitch variations, potentially exploring the auditory training, is a researchable phenomenon. A music student in India should have the ability to recognise, imitate and sing minute svarastānanas according to pitch. The micro sruti intervals, such as pūrṇa Sruti, pramāna Sruti, nyūna Sruti intervals, originated according to the Dhruva veena -Chala veena experiment of Bharata is one of the oldest examples of auditory perception skill. The students without these skills, or having no idea about sruti intervals, have to face struggles in their musical growth.

- ***Working Memory Skills***

Memorising numerous compositions in Indian music along with complex tāla cycles and improvisational frameworks is an extraordinarily skilful activity for every student. To improve working memory, the great musicians in ICM developed many practical methods such as 'sādhana' (repeated practice), mental mapping of raga structures, and rhythmic exercises. Some Scientific researchers also state that musicians have better spatial working memory than non-musicians.

- ***Pattern Recognition Skills***

Creative Improvisation (manōdharmā) is a core concept of ICM. The ability to render Manōdharmā according to the rāga, tāla, sruti, etc coordinates multi-functional brain activities. Manodharma is the classic example of 'live creativity'. Many researchers have tested the cognitive processes involved in generating raga and tala variations and found that the pattern recognition abilities are boosted while doing such svāra exercises.

- ***Mathematical Concepts***

There are numerous interesting mathematical concepts in Indian Music. The difficulties of learning mathematics traditionally may be solved by adopting 'Musical Mathematics' into the curriculum. It is proven that children can learn maths better through musical knowledge (Guha S, 2022). 22 Sruti concept in Carnatic Music is a suggestive mathematical technique regarding this topic.

As discussed above, there are specific skills needed in the musical development of a child in the Indian context. On the other hand, the challenges are also to be discussed. Some of the social scenarios are mentioned below.

Family background: Bad Parental support, Low income of the family, unavailability of good teachers, Particular religious beliefs, Non-progressive mindset of family members, Conflicts between Parents, Conflicts between siblings are some negative factors in the musical development of a child. Whatever the situation may be, it is important how they overcome it. One of the greatest composers in Carnatic Music, Tyāgaraja Swāmi, had a conflict with his brother Panchapakēsa, who always insisted that he should compose for earning material profit, but Tyagaraja refused to use his talent for financial gain.

The transmission of musical traditions within families, particularly through informal singing and playing, lays the foundation for formal training. The unique stylised *Parampara* (tradition) of Musicians such as ‘Bani’ (distinct style or school of rendition) in India is a notable one. The heirs of musicians have higher chances of becoming musicians rather than others is an example of a supporting system. The influence of family musical preferences on a child's musical aptitude and engagement is important. Exposure to diverse musical experiences in the community, such as religious ceremonies, festivals, and local performances, shapes a child's musical perspectives to a wider extent. The influence of regional folk music, popular music, and the influence of social media, including the impact of Bollywood and global music trends, ought to be considered. In many Indian families, pursuing classical arts is seen as a sign of refinement, discipline, and cultural awareness, and parents may have high expectations for their children to excel in music, viewing it as a valuable addition to their education and personal development.

Proper Schooling: Structured learning, access to instruments, and opportunities for group performance, motivation from the teachers, and co-students also help the kid to get insights about his musical career. Early exposure to music education in schools may foster a lifelong appreciation for music, develop essential skills like rhythm and pitch recognition, and enhance cognitive abilities. Furthermore, school music programs cultivate teamwork, discipline, and self-expression, creating a supportive environment for children to explore their maximum musical potential. Art education should be strictly included in the school curriculum, and Music is to be considered a curricular activity, not as a co-curricular activity. If music is considered as a time-pass/ leisure/ entertainment in school, it would inversely affect the development of a talented student. A good music teacher can influence, inspire, motivate, and upgrade students.

Social environment: The importance of providing spaces for creativity, such as music rooms and art labs, is essential. Performance anxiety in music students can hinder their development and enjoyment of music, manifesting as stage fright, fear of appraisal, and physical symptoms that hamper their ability to perform effectively. Online and offline public performances also help to reduce performance anxiety in children, such as stage fright, introspection tendency, etc. Furthermore, cultural norms and values impact the perceived importance of music, either fostering or hindering a child's musical exploration. Strict adherence to certain religious doctrines that discourage secular music may also lead to students experiencing burnout, muted creativity, and a diminished sense of personal autonomy. In essence, the environment provides the raw materials and context that carve a child's musical journey.

Discussion

In Carnatic, the primary lessons are set to the ‘Mayamalavagoula’ raga, and the children could simply grasp the frequency of the particular arrangements of that raga. There are a lot of musical compositions, from ‘varisha’ to ‘varna’, for practising. Musical students of Carnatic can feel their improvement stages, thus they will obviously self-motivated at each stage. Learning simple compositions in ragas such as ‘Mohanam’, ‘Hamsadhwani’ and ‘Sankarabharanam’ also stimulates musical interest in children. However, in Carnatic, Hindustani or Western music, the primary music lessons are not at all similar, and they are also taught in different styles and scales. Basically, children can be confused about which one to choose. These confusions may lead to choosing the wrong options for their musical training methods.

One of the primary questions exists. How can we indigenize music psychology? It is possible to integrate with Indian music concepts and psychological theories by purposefully sampling the Indian students and experimenting with established theories. The Indian Rāga and Tāla system is a unique gem,

and it would contribute many insights by practising and integrating it into existing theories and recommending Indian musicologists to reframe it.

Conclusion

Music development in Indian Children is a complex and multifaceted process, shaped by various psycho-social-cultural factors. These factors can have both positive and negative influences according to the approaches. By exploring these factors, a supporting system should be constituted to nurture the musical talent of gifted children. The Guru-Shisya Parampara (teacher-disciple lineage) is explained as the Master paradigm in the Indian context. It's not about merely passing knowledge transformation, but is built on lived experience and aimed at disciples' holistic transformation. The oral nature of guru-shisya tradition involves an extraordinary brain engagement rather than passive digital screen education. It enhances auditory memory skills, real-time problem-solving and confidence in kids. Creating a **hybrid model** for art education, mixing traditional values and modern settings, should be encouraged. This study emphasises the importance of systematic music education in childhood with proper scientific supportive measures and suggests a hybrid model of art education. A child's musical development is not a static, isolated or 'magical' phenomenon, but rather a dynamic, vibrant process shaped by a complex interplay of several societal and environmental factors.

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