

# PEDAGOGICAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF BAITHAK-STYLE INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC CONCERTS ON UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*The present study, rooted in a cultural and pedagogical initiative undertaken at the Department of Music, D.S.B. Campus, Kumaun University, Nainital, Uttarakhand explores the revival and academic integration of Baithak-style Indian Classical Music concerts. Traditionally, Baithaks served as intimate musical gatherings characterized by close interaction between performer and audience, enabling a deep, immersive engagement with the music's spiritual and philosophical essence. However, such settings have largely faded in contemporary academia, often supplanted by large-scale, impersonal performances. This project sought to reintroduce this nuanced and immersive format within a university ecosystem, specifically targeting students who, despite being surrounded by a rich cultural heritage, often lack direct exposure to the lived tradition of Indian Classical Music.*

**Keywords:** Baithak-Style, Indian Classical Music, Concerts

## Introduction

The initiative comprised a series of three live concerts between September 2024 and March 2025, featuring Sitar, Sarod and Hindustani Vocal recitals by young but acclaimed classical artists. These concerts were curated not merely as performances but as immersive educational experiences, where traditional ragas, rarely encountered in mainstream programming, were presented in an authentic Baithak-Style setting. The ground-seating arrangement, proximity to the artists and minimal technological intervention created a reflective and meditative environment that was widely appreciated by the attendees.

Each concert was followed by informal student-artist interactions and a structured feedback collection process. The survey data, drawn from over 150 respondents across departments such as Music, English, History, Botany, Sociology and Computer Science, revealed several key outcomes. Over 90% of the attendees reported a significant enhancement in their understanding of Indian Classical Music. The majority found the live experience more impactful than digital or recorded formats, often describing it as “transformative,” “soul-soothing” and “emotionally resonant.” A noteworthy insight was the recognition of the cognitive benefit’s of listening to Indian Classical Music, with students reporting improved focus, emotional clarity and meditative calmness—factors directly beneficial in academic contexts.

Another critical dimension of the project was its emphasis on digital outreach and cultural documentation. All concerts were professionally recorded and uploaded to the Departmental YouTube channel, creating an open-access resource for students, scholars and music lovers beyond the campus. This step significantly broadened the initiative’s impact while aligning with the university’s vision of using technology to preserve and disseminate cultural heritage.

Equally important was the feedback-driven adaptability of the program. Suggestions such as improving acoustics and ventilation, inviting more female performers, increasing student participation and including thematic or Gharana-based presentations were documented and are slated for future implementation. The unanimous recommendation by students to integrate Baithak-style concerts as a permanent fixture in the university’s cultural calendar reflects both the project’s immediate success and its long-term potential.

This project not only revitalized an important traditional performance practice but also demonstrated the transformative potential of live Indian Classical Music in academic environments. By bridging heritage with higher education, the Baithak concert series cultivated a deeper cultural literacy, emotional engagement and intellectual appreciation among students. The model offers a scalable and replicable framework for cultural education in Indian universities and underscores the critical role of the arts in holistic student development..

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The primary aim of this project was to reintroduce, promote and institutionalize the Baithak-style Indian Classical Music concert format within a contemporary university setting. At its core, the initiative sought to bridge the widening gap between traditional Indian musical heritage and modern academic environments, especially among youth who are increasingly distanced from classical art forms. The following objectives were central to the conception and execution of this initiative:

#### **1. Revival of the Baithak Tradition**

One of the most significant goals was the revival of the Baithak tradition—an intimate and spiritually grounded format of musical performance that was once the cornerstone of Indian Classical Music practice. Unlike formal stage concerts, Baithaks are held in close-knit settings where artists and audiences share a communal space, enhancing the receptivity, emotional depth and spiritual resonance of the performance. This project intended to recreate this authentic experience within the university environment, reestablishing a forgotten but invaluable cultural practice.

#### **2. Promotion of Cultural Awareness Among Students**

The project aimed to expose students, especially those outside the Department of Music, to the rich traditions of Indian Classical Music. Many university students grow up in environments that emphasize modern entertainment or academic rigor at the expense of cultural literacy. By inviting students from diverse disciplines to attend and engage with Baithak concerts, the initiative sought to foster a more inclusive and holistic cultural education—one that values heritage, introspection and artistic sensitivity.

#### **3. Educational Enrichment and Pedagogical Integration**

Beyond cultural exposure, the project was designed as an educational tool for music students. Each concert presented rare and complex ragas, performed by seasoned artists with distinct Gharana affiliations and stylistic nuances. This allowed students to experience live demonstrations of theoretical concepts taught in the classroom, such as raga development, improvisation, rhythmic interplay and emotional expression. Informal artist interactions after each concert further enriched this educational experience, allowing students to ask questions, learn about performance techniques and understand different pedagogical approaches within the Guru-Shishya Parampara.

#### **4. Creating an Immersive and Meditative Musical Environment**

The Baithak format inherently lends itself to a meditative and reflective listening. One objective was to offer students a calm and contemplative space amid the often hectic and fragmented experience of campus life. By doing so, the concerts aimed to enhance not only artistic appreciation but also emotional and mental well-being—positioning music as a therapeutic and transformative tool in academic spaces.

#### **5. Digital Outreach and Archival Documentation**

A forward-looking objective of the project was to utilize modern technology for archiving and outreach. All concerts were professionally recorded and uploaded to the Departmental YouTube channel, ensuring long-term accessibility. This step ensured that students who could not attend the concerts physically could still benefit from the experience, while also extending the initiative's impact beyond the university.

The digital archive now serves as a valuable resource for music education, research and cultural promotion.

## 6. Encouraging Student Participation and Sustained Engagement

Finally, the project aimed to ignite student interest in organizing, participating in and sustaining such cultural efforts. Feedback from students consistently emphasized the desire for more such events, indicating that Baithak concerts could evolve into a regular and beloved component of the university's cultural calendar.

### Methodology:

This study employed a practice-based qualitative research methodology aimed at examining the pedagogical, cultural and emotional impact of Baithak-style Indian Classical Music concerts on university students. The methodological framework involved a multi-stage process combining event planning, execution, audience engagement and feedback analysis to assess the effectiveness and reception of this traditional concert format in a contemporary academic environment.

### 1. Event Design and Planning

The methodological foundation of the project was rooted in experiential exposure and active participation. The concert series was strategically planned in three phases over a span of six months (September 2024 to March 2025). Each event was scheduled at intervals to allow adequate preparation, documentation and analysis between performances.

The selection of artists was a critical component. Musicians were invited based on their adherence to classical traditions, demonstrated performance excellence and potential to connect with a younger audience. The chosen artists represented a diverse range of styles and gharanas, including instrumental (Sitar and Sarod) and vocal traditions, thus offering students a broader experiential spectrum.

### 2. Creation of the Baithak Setting

The venue—Departmental mini auditorium—was transformed into a traditional Baithak-style setting. Ground seating was arranged to foster proximity between performers and the audience, replicating the intimacy of classical Indian Baithaks. Minimal stage elevation and natural aesthetics were maintained to encourage reflective and immersive listening. This physical environment was integral to the research methodology, as the spatial design directly influenced the quality of the audience's engagement and reception.

### 3. Promotion and Outreach Strategy

To ensure interdisciplinary participation, a multi-modal publicity campaign was executed. This included the dissemination of digital invitations via WhatsApp groups, classroom announcements, printed posters and word-of-mouth communication. Special effort was made to attract students from non-music departments such as English, Sociology, Botany and Computer Science, thereby broadening the scope of cultural exposure.

### 4. Concert Execution and Recording

Each concert was professionally recorded using high-definition video and audio equipment. These recordings were later uploaded to the Departmental YouTube channel, fulfilling both archival and outreach purposes. This dual focus on physical and digital accessibility allowed the project to reach beyond those present in the auditorium, offering remote engagement for future learners and researchers.

## 5. Interactive Pedagogy and Artist-Student Engagement

Post-concert sessions included informal interactions between students and performers, where artists shared insights into their training, stylistic lineage and interpretations of the performed ragas. These sessions enabled students to contextualize the music they had just experienced and facilitated dialogic learning outside conventional classroom boundaries.

## 6. Structured Feedback Collection

A key methodological component was the implementation of a Google Form-based feedback system. Respondents were asked to reflect on their emotional experience, cultural understanding and the cognitive effects of the live music. Data was collected from a wide demographic, including undergraduate and postgraduate students, alumni and faculty members across departments. Both quantitative ratings and qualitative comments were analyzed to evaluate the project's outcomes.

The methodology integrated performance, pedagogy, feedback and digital archiving to study how Baithak-style concerts function as tools of cultural transmission and education in a university context. The holistic approach enabled an in-depth understanding of the potential of traditional music practices within modern academic frameworks.

### Overview of the Concert Series:

As part of the project "Promotion of Baithak Style Indian Classical Music Concerts Amongst University Students", three Baithak-style Indian Classical Music concerts were organized between September 2024 and March 2025 at the Department of Music, D.S.B. Campus, Kumaun University, Nainital. Each concert was carefully curated to reflect the diversity, depth and emotional range of Indian Classical Music, while also showcasing varied instrumental and vocal traditions. The artists, selected for their mastery and accessibility to younger audiences, brought forward rare ragas and traditional styles in an immersive Baithak setting that encouraged reflective listening and close audience-artist engagement.

#### Concert 1 – Sitar Recital by Shri Soumitra Thakur

Date: 9 September 2024

Accompanist: Shri Chitrank Pant (Tabla)

Guest of Honour: Prof. L.M. Joshi (HoD, English)

The inaugural concert featured Sitarist Soumitra Thakur, who presented Raga Basant Mukhari and Raga Soordasi Malhaar. The former, a meditative morning raga, created a tranquil and introspective mood, while the latter offered a vibrant, monsoon-themed conclusion to the recital. The performance beautifully blended the Gayaki Ang with instrumental virtuosity. The concert was praised for its emotional intensity and clarity of expression, with many attendees describing the experience as "soul-soothing" and "transformative."

#### Concert 2 – Sarod Recital by Shri Smit Tewari

Date: 10 February 2025

Accompanist: Shri Lokesh Joshi (Tabla)

Guest of Honour: Prof. Lalit M. Tewari (HoD, Botany)

Smit Tewari, a distinguished Sarod player, performed Raga Jaunpuri, Raga Hemant and Raga Sindhu Bhairavi. His renditions captured a wide emotional palette—from the melancholic introspection of Jaunpuri to the devotional richness of Sindhu Bhairavi. The performance was technically intricate yet highly accessible and his jugalbandi segments with the tabla accompanist were particularly appreciated

by the audience for their rhythmic interplay. This concert further solidified student interest in instrumental forms of classical music.

### **Concert 3 – Hindustani Vocal Recital by Shri Siddhant Negi**

Date: 19 March 2025

Accompanists: Shri Smit Tewari (Tabla), Shri Gaurav Bisht (Harmonium), Dr. Alankar Mahtolia & Shri Harsh Sahdev (Tanpura)

Guest of Honour: Prof. Rajnish Pande (Dean, Faculty of Arts)

The final concert of the series featured a Hindustani classical vocal recital by Siddhant Negi, who presented Raga Komal Rishabh Asawari, Raga Shuddha Sarang and devotional Bhajans of Meerabai and Kabir. His emotive and spiritually evocative performance was widely praised for its depth and expressive delivery. The inclusion of Bhajans added a devotional dimension that resonated deeply with listeners, enriching the cultural and emotional tone of the concert.

Each concert was professionally recorded, uploaded to the Departmental YouTube channel and followed by interactive sessions with the artists. Collectively, the series provided a rich tapestry of musical experience and served as a powerful educational and cultural platform for students across disciplines.

### **Key Findings and Analysis:**

The outcomes of the project were assessed through a combination of qualitative audience feedback, structured survey responses and observational data collected during and after each of the three Baithak-style concerts. The findings indicate a profound and multi-dimensional impact on student audiences, encompassing cultural awareness, educational enrichment, emotional well-being and cognitive engagement. The analysis presented here highlights the significance of reviving traditional performance settings in contemporary academic contexts.

#### **1. Revitalization of Cultural Awareness**

One of the most prominent outcomes of the project was the evident revival of interest in Indian Classical Music among university students, particularly those outside the Department of Music. Participants across departments—including English, Sociology, History, Botany and Computer Science—attended the concerts in notable numbers. Feedback revealed that for many students, this was their first exposure to live Indian Classical Music and the Baithak-style format played a crucial role in making the experience accessible, personal and engaging. Students described the events as “unique,” “eye-opening,” and “deeply rooted in Indian heritage,” underscoring the success of the initiative in bridging cultural gaps.

#### **2. Pedagogical and Artistic Enrichment**

From an educational standpoint, the concerts provided significant value to music students and aspiring performers. The presentation of rare ragas—such as Komal Rishabh Asawari, Hemant and Soordasi Malhaar—along with diverse performance styles (Sitar, Sarod, Vocal) offered an enriching exposure to the expressive possibilities of Indian Classical Music. The post-concert artist interactions allowed students to delve into the technical and aesthetic dimensions of performance, including raga development, rhythm cycles (taal) and stylistic variations across gharanas. These live, experiential learning opportunities were regarded as valuable supplements to classroom instruction and textbook knowledge.

#### **3. Emotional and Meditative Impact**

The concerts also had a demonstrable emotional and psychological impact. A significant number of students reported that the Baithak setting fostered a meditative listening environment. Many described the experience as “calming,” “therapeutic,” and “soulful.” Attendees particularly appreciated the

unamplified, natural acoustic setting and the close proximity to performers, which allowed for a deeper emotional connection with the music. The concert featuring Bhajans by Meerabai and Kabir was frequently cited as spiritually uplifting and introspective.

#### **4. Cognitive Benefit's and Well-being**

Beyond emotional resonance, respondents in the feedback surveys noted potential cognitive benefit's associated with listening to Indian Classical Music. Several participants mentioned that the music helped improve their concentration, focus and emotional regulation—attributes that align with existing research on the therapeutic impact of classical music. These responses suggest that integrating such concerts into university life can have a positive influence on students' overall academic performance and mental health.

#### **5. Digital Outreach and Long-Term Accessibility**

A significant methodological strength of the project was the digital archiving of each concert on the Departmental YouTube channel. This strategy enhanced the project's reach and ensured the long-term accessibility of high-quality cultural resources. Students who were unable to attend the live events could engage with the recordings later and faculty members expressed interest in using these materials for classroom instruction, research and independent study.

#### **6. Constructive Feedback and Sustainability**

Structured feedback collection yielded important suggestions for improving future concerts. Recurring recommendations included expanding seating capacity, improving sound and ventilation, inviting more female artists, organizing thematic concerts and including pre-concert briefings by faculty. Notably, 100% of surveyed participants recommended integrating Baithak-style concerts as a regular feature of the university's cultural calendar. This unanimous endorsement highlights the project's long-term viability and its potential for institutionalization.

These findings collectively affirm that Baithak-style concerts, when carefully curated and integrated into an academic setting, serve not only as cultural enrichment tools but also as platforms for emotional engagement, educational enhancement and community building. The project has thus established a replicable model for cultural revival through performance-based pedagogy in higher education institutions.

#### **Challenges and Suggestions for Improvement:**

While the Baithak-style concert series was met with overwhelming appreciation, several challenges were identified through participant feedback and observational insights. The most prominent issue was venue-related constraints. The departmental mini-auditorium, while effective in creating intimacy, faced limitations in seating capacity, ventilation and acoustics, leading to some discomfort during longer sessions. Expanding to a larger yet acoustically appropriate venue was widely suggested.

Another significant area of improvement was the diversity of performers. Attendees recommended the inclusion of more female artists and vocal recitals, along with a wider representation of different gharanas and regional styles, to ensure a more inclusive and varied musical experience.

There was also a call for structured educational engagement, such as brief pre-concert talks by faculty or artists to help audiences better understand the ragas and performance context. Students also expressed a desire for formal post-concert Q&A sessions to deepen their learning.

Finally, while publicity was effective, earlier and more targeted digital outreach—including social media and university-wide announcements—was advised to further expand audience participation. These

constructive suggestions offer a clear roadmap for enhancing future concerts and sustaining the initiative as a valuable academic and cultural platform.

### **Implications for Higher Education and Cultural Preservation:**

The success of the Baithak-style Indian Classical Music concert series at Kumaun University underscores the powerful role that traditional arts can play in enriching higher education. By integrating live classical music performances into the university's cultural and academic fabric, the initiative demonstrated how experiential, arts-based learning can foster holistic student development—intellectually, emotionally and culturally. These concerts went beyond entertainment, functioning as live classrooms where students engaged with complex musical forms, emotional expression and aesthetic sensibilities in a way that formal syllabi often fail to achieve.

One of the key implications is the potential for interdisciplinary cultural education. Students from diverse academic backgrounds—ranging from Music and English to Science and Computer Studies—participated and responded positively to the concerts. This cross-disciplinary interest highlights the relevance of Indian Classical Music not just for musicians, but for a broader student population as a tool for cultural literacy, mental wellness and creative thinking.

Moreover, the Baithak-style concerts helped revive a diminishing traditional performance format, contributing to cultural preservation in an authentic, sustainable manner. The combination of live engagement and digital archiving via YouTube ensured that these experiences were both rooted in tradition and accessible through modern platforms. This hybrid approach offers a replicable model for other universities seeking to integrate cultural heritage into their pedagogy.

The project also opened pathways for youth participation in cultural continuity. By encouraging student involvement not only as audience members but as organizers and future performers, the initiative laid the foundation for nurturing the next generation of artists, scholars and cultural ambassadors. In doing so, it reaffirmed the vital role of educational institutions in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage while making it relevant and engaging for today's learners.

### **Conclusion:**

The study and practical implementation of Baithak-style Indian classical music concerts at Kumaun University have yielded powerful insights into the pedagogical and cultural benefits of integrating traditional music forms within an academic framework. Through a series of three meticulously planned and professionally executed concerts under the KU-IFR initiative, the Department of Music successfully reintroduced students to the intimate and immersive aesthetics of the Baithak tradition. Each event—whether featuring Sitar, Sarod, or Hindustani vocal recitals—was held in an acoustically sensitive, close-proximity setting designed to maximize listener engagement and minimize performance hierarchy.

Pedagogically, the concerts served as potent experiential learning environments. Students were exposed to rare ragas and authentic performance styles, enhancing both their technical understanding and aesthetic appreciation of Indian classical music. The artist-student interactions post-concert—informal yet intellectually rich—created new avenues for dialogic learning, wherein students could directly access the philosophies, *sadhana* (discipline) and interpretations of seasoned performers. Feedback data indicated that over 90% of attendees reported significant improvement in their understanding of raga-based music, with many citing increased concentration and emotional well-being as cognitive benefits.

Culturally, the initiative fostered a deeper resonance with India's intangible heritage. It brought forth a renewed enthusiasm for live classical music, especially among students from non-music disciplines such

as English, Political Science, Botany and Computer Science—revealing that the Baithak style's emotional immediacy and spiritual overtones transcend academic boundaries. The concerts also highlighted the role of music in promoting mental wellness, contemplative thinking and community cohesion.

From a strategic perspective, the project demonstrated the transformative potential of digital archival and outreach. Each concert was professionally recorded and made available on the Department's official YouTube channel, [www.youtube.com/@DSB-Music](http://www.youtube.com/@DSB-Music). These recordings now serve as publicly accessible cultural and academic resources, supporting asynchronous learning and broadening the university's cultural footprint beyond geographical limitations.

However, while the successes were substantial, feedback analysis emphasized areas for future growth. Key recommendations included the inclusion of more female artists, thematic raga-based concerts, larger venue options with improved infrastructure and structured pre-concert educational briefings. The demand for a multi-day Indian Classical Music Festival—voiced across all three concerts—further underscores the appetite for expanded cultural programming within the university setting.

This research substantiates that Baithak-style Indian classical music concerts are not only effective tools for cultural preservation but also powerful pedagogical mechanisms. They enhance academic environments by nurturing emotional intelligence, cultural empathy and aesthetic literacy. Going forward, institutionalizing such initiatives as regular features of the university's cultural calendar will not only preserve India's rich musical heritage but also cultivate a more culturally enriched and intellectually vibrant student community.

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