

## Grant Report

# Singing with Care: Senior Citizens' Karaoke Clubs in Ahmedabad, India

Recipient Name: Aditi Deo, Ahmedabad University

Funding Body: Musical Care International Network (through UKRI funding)

Grant Period: 1st January 2025 to 30th June 2025

Report Submitted On: 31st July 2025

## 1. Overview

This project is an ethnographic study centered on practices of social and interactive music-making among senior citizens in urban India. It focuses on people who participate in Karaoke clubs in the city of Ahmedabad in Western India. The music that is central to this scene is Hindi film songs from mid to late twentieth century. The Musical Care International Network grant supported four months of fieldwork with Karaoke club members, conveners and related individuals. Research methods included: (a) semi-structured interviews with seniors; (b) participant-observation at Karaoke events; (c) organization of a Karaoke event for research participants. The key objectives of the research were:

- (1) To understand the ways in which social music-making—singing for each other, listening to music together, and engaging in other activities that emerge from club membership—contributed to the wellbeing of participating seniors
- (2) To investigate the relevance of the specific music genre (Hindi film songs from the twentieth century) in the lives of Indian seniors
- (3) To examine the interconnections between serious leisure activities (in this case, music), expressions of reciprocal emotional and psychological care within close-knit communities (here, the clubs), and perceptions of wellbeing in participants
- (4) To understand how leisure activities, are facilitating reciprocal emotional and psychological care work for participants, both with each other and with residents of institutions that they visit

## 2. Ethnographic research

The fieldwork took place from March 2025 to July 2025. The research team included the PI, Aditi Deo, and two research assistants, Astha Adesara and Aashna Vora. Through personal social contacts, we identified four Karaoke clubs with significant participation of senior citizens among both singing and listening members. Following this, we reached out to potential participants through snowball sampling. While this method of recruitment led to self-selection of participants, it also connected us with individuals who had experienced the impact of music in their lives on several levels. The research involved:

1. Participant-observation: We attended several Karaoke and other musical events organized by the clubs. This allowed insight into group and individual dynamics as well as the broader contexts of club functioning, venues, musical support, etc.
2. Interviews: We conducted and audio-recorded around 30 semi-structured interviews with Karaoke enthusiasts and club conveners, most in the age group of ~60 years and above.
3. Karaoke event: At the end of the grant period, we organized an event to bring together several of the research participants to share the significance of music in their lives. The singing and short testimonials at this event were recorded. (Event details appended)

### **3. Key Findings**

Some significant findings that emerge from the research are:

- (1) We met two categories of seniors. One category was of seniors for whom music had been an important activity throughout their lives. They derived aesthetic pleasure as well as affective support from music. Often, they had returned to singing after a busy professional and domestic life. Those in the other category had discovered music (singing, learning, live karaoke events) through social networks connections and had taken it on as a serious activity.
- (2) Participation in Karaoke singing and listening was an important activity for most interviewees, from which they derived pleasure, opportunities to socialize, and a sense of community. These experiences enhanced the quality of their lives. This confirmed the assumptions with which we had begun the project.
- (3) While the predominant focus in interviews was on the positive aspects of Karaoke clubs, music-making and social interactions, some interviewees were more cautious about the positives and/or shared a few negative experiences. Followup interviews are required to fully understand the underlying reasons for these negatives, however, we can speculate that women, especially single women, experienced the sociality of the club community differently and were cautious in their participation.
- (4) Club memberships expanded mostly through personal networks. As such, the club communities were fairly homogenous in terms of economic class and religious affiliation. Music's potential to enhance the wellbeing of senior citizens was possible only within existing social hierarchies.
- (5) Significantly, the research made apparent the centrality of the repertoire of Hindi film songs from the mid- to late twentieth century in enabling the formation and sustenance of Karaoke clubs. It functioned as part of a collective unconscious for this generation.
- (6) For several of our interviewees, Hindi film songs and their lyrics were a mode of constructing narrative identities and personal philosophies, as well as in coping with grief, loss, or challenges in love, family, or friendship.

### **4. Methodological Reflections**

1. Conducting research among senior citizens presented its own challenges. Mobility and schedule constraints, and limited technological literacy were some recurring issues. In most cases, personal interviews were conducted at the homes of interviewees.
2. The PI has limited knowledge of Gujarati—the dominant language spoken in Ahmedabad. While Hindi could work as a shared language for everyone involved and several interviews were conducted in Hindi, the research benefitted greatly from having RAs who spoke fluent Gujarati and were closely familiar with the social context, having grown up in Gujarat.
3. Devising an interview format that illuminated the impact of Karaoke clubs and music on people's lives was a gradually developing endeavor. At the beginning of the research, our interview questions focussed on narrow and local matters (club membership, music-making, listening habits, etc.). However, we quickly realized that the impact of music was closely tied

into the personal biographies of those interviewed (e.g. sickness, loss, childhood, friendship, family, etc.). Gradually, we developed questions that centered around life course narratives. Given this, there were several personal and/or delicate details that emerged in the conversations. While not directly related to the question of musical care, these details were important in understanding how people make sense of music both in the short/immediate and the long terms.

## **5. Outputs**

- (1) During the four months, we have compiled an archive of audio-recorded interviews, field-notes, photographs and videos. While much of this material is marked by confidentiality clauses, some aspects can be shared when conducting comparative work.
- (2) The research on Karaoke clubs conducted through the grant has served as a pilot project into investigating broadly into how music facilitates a sense of wellbeing and community, and generally, has the potential to enhance quality of life.
- (3) Publication plans include a newspaper article as well as research publications (journal articles and book chapters).

## **Karaoke Evening for Senior Citizens**

Date: July 13, 2025

Venue: Anant Anand Studio, Ahmedabad

Sponsored by: Musical Care Network Grant

### **Overview**

On July 13, 2025, we organized a heartwarming Karaoke gathering at Anant Anand Studio in Ahmedabad with support from the Live Again Club and Musical Care Network Grant. The event was dedicated to celebrating the power of music in the lives of senior citizens and encouraging community engagement. The brief given to participants was to share their personal experiences about music's impact and sing a Hindi film song that held meaning for them.

The event was fully video documented.

### **Event Highlights**

The event saw the participation of around 50 senior citizens, who gathered to enjoy a vibrant evening of Karaoke and live performances. Ms. Hina Pandit, trustee of the Live Again Charitable Trust, led and coordinated the event. Approximately 15 singers—some of whom are pioneers of the Karaoke club scene in Ahmedabad and Modasa—were invited to perform a variety of classic and contemporary Hindi film songs.

The performances were interspersed with touching testimonials from the participants, who shared how music had played a healing and uplifting role in their personal journeys, especially during challenging times. Attendees included members of various senior citizens' clubs and musical communities, many of whom had contributed to our project's ongoing research on the impact of music on well-being. A special highlight was the final group performance, where all singers came together for a spirited rendition, symbolizing unity and shared joy.

The event sparked new connections among different senior citizen clubs, with several expressing interest in organizing inter-group musical gatherings in the near future. The shared stories and music reaffirmed the importance of creative expression and community for mental and emotional well-being.

The evening concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Ms. Aditi Deo, acknowledging the performers, organizers, and sponsors.

The event wrapped up with a dinner, providing space for conversations, networking, and celebration.