

INDIA, MUSIC AND INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS

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Abstract: India contains many different cultures and it has inducted components through intercultural exchanges. This process enriches individual cultures and propagates the message of peaceful co-existence, mutual respect and tolerance for other cultures.

Indian Music has elements of different cultures and it is widely accepted in the world periphery. This indicates that enlightenment through inter-cultural exchanges has the potentiality to elevate a culture towards universality.

Education and culture are intimately related. Three important aspects of living education are: the man in his commonness and in his uniqueness, the nation and universal humanity. General study of world culture and intercultural activities are tools to foster such understanding.

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Multi-cultural India

India's cultural heritage is one of the most ancient, varied and extensive. Because of its vast geographical area and; many races and peoples, who either temporarily came into contact with India or permanently settled in the country, are constituents in evolving a distinctive culture. The core of this synthesis rests on eternal values.

The country has eighteen official languages [scheduled] and 96 non-scheduled languages [*census report 1991*]. Amongst them the main source languages are as different as *Sanskrit* and *Dravidian*. Two more language-families are also natively present in India, namely, the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman families although these have a relatively lesser influences in terms of user population mass. The Indian languages also adopted words from Persian, Portuguese, English, and so on.

After Sir G.A. Grierson's pioneering study [*Linguistic Survey of India 1896~1927*] on Indian languages the Government of India has undertaken a fresh survey after a gap of about 75 years. The current phase of the survey is going on in Orissa [one of the states in the country]. The present survey revealed that out of the 96 non-scheduled languages 45 are found in Orissa. Out of these, 26 languages have been studied and it was found that 9 languages belong to Indo-Aryan family, 11 belong to Austro-Asiatic family and 6 to

Dravidian family [*op. cit.*]. India's schools teach 58 different languages, print newspapers in 87 languages, broadcast radio programs in 71, and films in 15 languages. India, well known as the land of spirituality and philosophy, was the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism among other religions. Along with the religions that developed in India, there are also followers of religions of non- Indian origins. Among these religions are Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Bahaism and Judaismⁱ. The followers of these different religions arrived in India at different times. So the cultural diversity in terms of languages, religion, customs and many other areas are predominantly present in the country. This gives birth to the concept *Unity in Diversity* as a bonding concept working to run this vast nation despite its myriad colours and shades in life-components.

Unity in Diversity

The majority of people in India understand the potentialities of ‘*unity in diversity*’ and the intercultural exchanges take place almost like natural phenomena. The fact is, with these intercultural exchanges the individual cultures also get even richer with more colours and diversities apart from the fact that it naturally propagates the message of peaceful co-existence . Mutual respect and tolerance for other cultures, especially in the Indian metropolises, are comfortably existent. The former Israeli Prime Minister, Shimon Peres said, India is the greatest example of tolerance. Mr. Peres appreciated India's unity in diversity and called upon other countries to learn lessons in co-existence from it [*The Hindu/Dec 13 2002*]. So, I thought it pertinent to share thoughts of India from the intercultural perspectives with major focus on music.

Happiness and intercultural understanding

Happiness is a specific type of mental state that comes from higher natural acceptability of the prevailing situation or situation created at certain period. *Rabindranath Tagore [1909]* in *Tapoban* refers to *Upanishad*ⁱⁱ and writes, “*Upanishad mentions about tolerance that is not sacrifice but fuller acceptance that brings deeper happiness. ---*“ Culture shapes the man from his inner consciousness. This influence helps a man to bloom to its full. A man can find his fuller expressions when he develops better understanding towards the creation around him. Culture shapes the man from their inner consciousness. This influence helps a man to bloom to its full [*op. cit.*]. A man can find its fuller expressions when he develops better

understanding towards the creation around him. Understanding of different cultures helps a mind to grow with better perceptive power and the intercultural exchanges help in this. The culture itself gets enriched when some elements of other culture get naturally accepted by a culture [as a result of healthy intercultural exchanges for a considerable period of time]. Of course in such adaptations the imbibed element loses its original colour and takes a matching shape to get intermingled with the receiver. Indian music has accepted many elements of other cultures but this has so much intermingled that it has become fully Indian and become an integral part. Understanding of different cultures helps a mind to grow with better perceptive power and the intercultural exchanges help in this. The culture itself also gets enriched when it accepts certain elements of other culture through a natural process like healthy intercultural exchanges for a considerable period of time.

That is what actually happened to Indian Music. Indian Music, which was once appreciated and enjoyed in its own land, has got much wider acceptance in the world periphery with its current forms. This gives us clear indication that enlightenment through inter-cultural exchanges has the potentiality to elevate a culture towards universality.

Intercultural exchanges in music: a step towards universality?

One of the prominent reasons for the intercultural character of the Indian classical music is due to the invasions of other nations. Historically, the Indian Music incorporated the folk, the regional and even non-Indian types. [Mukherjee, D.P., 1943] India was under the *Mughal* rule before the colonial rule. It is interesting to note that intercultural aspects in the classical music of India have been merged in such a way that the other musical culture's idioms, concepts, form and styles have become unified with the native music culture. The North Indian classical system - the *Hindustani* music, the classical music of Kashmir are more influenced by the music of the Islamic countries than of the Western countries, whereas the South Indian classical system i.e. the *Carnatic* music is more influenced by the music of the West. The musical influence of Persia and Arabia is found in the adoption of musical instruments such as *Sitar*ⁱⁱⁱ, *Sarod* and *Tabla*; music forms such as *Khyal* and the *ragas* such as *Yaman*, *Sarfarda*, *Sajgiri*, *Zilaf* and so on. The use of *violin*, *guitar* and *harmonium* suggest Western influences. Although now we find some renovations in the instruments to suit the characters of Indian music, e.g. adding sympathetic strings to the violin and guitar. Currently

we also find guitar with an additional gourd like structure on the upper part to give it an Indian look!

The impact of Western music can be found in the classical music of South India because of the British colonial rule from 18th century onwards. The Western influence on the South Indian music is found in the adoption of the Western musical instruments such as violin, viola, clarinet, mandolin, saxophone and guitar. There are also many new *Carnatic ragas* that are based on Western scales and tunes. Interestingly, Indian Classical Music has integrated many suggestive elements from the folk cultures [those went through due refinements and processing]. *Bengal* gave *raga Bangalee*, *Sindh raga Sindhu*, *Surat Sorat*, *Gujrat Gurjari*, *Bihar Bihari*, *Jaunpur Jaunpuri-Todi*, the *hilli regions* gave *raga Pahari* and so on [op. cit.]. The neoclassical variety also accepted a number of folk styles and refined to match the demands of classicality, e.g. *Kajri*, *Chaiti*, *Hori*, and so on. Now, of late we see the induction of ideas even from song varieties like *Rabindrasangeet* [songs of *Rabindranath Tagore*^{iv}] in the classical instrumental music compositions^v. As many of us know, extemporization is a very prominent element in Indian Classical Music. This is possibly the reason that it can invite and accept many elements from different sources and accept it after due processing to match its basic character. Now in India the two classical styles are *Hindustani* and *Carnatic* styles, the musicians of these two styles are at times found to be involved in joint music presentations despite quite different apparent characters of these two styles. The exchanges are going on and now the *Hindustani* style has accepted many *Carnatic raga-s*, the *Hindustani* percussionists has imbibed considerable amount of *Carnatic* elements in their playing and as a result the style got considerably enriched; as is expected in intercultural exchanges. A considerable amount of international exchanges have also taken effect. The music and the musicians have become so open that it is welcoming many inter-cultural exchanges in music productions. The music coming out of these efforts are getting wider acceptances in wider cross-section of societies of the world. Indian Music, which was once appreciated and enjoyed in its own land, has got much wider acceptance in the world periphery with its current forms. There have been wide inter-cultural interactions in the context of Indian Music. We find a lot of non-Indians performing the music as if this is their own breath. Listen to Ken Zuckerman [USA] or Adrian McNeil's [Australia] Sarod or Amelia Cuni-Durand's [Germany] vocal renderings and many such others and enjoy the great musical impact. Jon Barlow [Australia] who spent major part of his life in the pursuit of this music and developed fantastic understanding of the art of music making and craftsmanship in

musical instrument making. Passionate involvement with this music and adapting the style as of own can be seen very widely around the globe. There is a long list of musicians from different countries who could considerably master this music style and enjoy it. Possibly similar discussion can also be initiated with the music of other styles where there is a presence of multi-cultural components. My experience with non-Indian students suggests that the wide acceptability of Indian music style possibly happened because this can considerably fulfil the basic musical demands of persons from different societies and backgrounds. Due to this intercultural interactions the music itself developed a quality that can cater to the wider cross-section of the world society. This music can serve wide variety of musical elements and still retain its fundamental character.

This gives us clear indication that enlightenment through inter-cultural exchanges has the potentiality to elevate a culture towards universality. It might raise questions whether universality is a utopian concept. The value of protection of individuality of cultures is another issue. Despite the fact that universal acceptance of any cultural activity is a utopian concept and possibly not desirable too [under many contexts], but a few steps towards this help in creating an environment of peaceful coexistence. Globalisation and internationalisation binds the people of the planet Earth under a universal platform. The globalisation creates plurality in culture and this ultimately gives birth to new forms of culture in combination with the traditional.

Step towards Cultural Liberation?

A new kind of human liberation is emerging with smoother global communications becoming available through different medias to masses and this ushers in the transition from monocultures to multiculturalism. The effect is quite pronounced and this may merit the term '*cultural liberation*' too. Here it implies '*liberation*' neither from the culture itself nor from any particular culture, although the latter may be possible to an extent through creativity and multi-cultural awareness.

To appreciate the culture of different communities, it becomes necessary to cultivate familiarity with their artistic creations, which have a universal appeal and transcends the limitations of geographical boundaries. The intimate study of the practices of different culture is facilitating in raising the level of understanding of cultural activities of other cultures

which is widening the art's penetration periphery and thus approaching the **universal** status. With this the differences of mind frame, because of different geographical locations, are gradually getting minimized. Increase of inter-understanding between the people of different cultures helps to feel the mind pulse of others and fosters international amity and unity.

Culture in Education

Education and culture are intimately related. The education is concerned with the transmission of the past generations to the new generation. It must lay stress on development of mind and character, so that the man can adjust with the society and assess the value of culture to remove its defects and to work for its development. As Sri Aurobindo put it, there are three things that have to be taken into account in a true and living education, the man, the individual in his commonness and in his uniqueness, the nation or people and universal humanity [Sri Aurobindo, 1920]. General study of world culture and intercultural activities are tools to foster such understanding. So, the general study curricula may promote wider inter-cultural activities to create a world with much more understanding that will ultimately lead to lessening of conflicts in all areas of life.

Concluding remark

The intercultural exchanges in music in India not only considerably enriched the art but also worked as a catalyst to evolve a mental state that is directed to eliminate discriminations that take place because of the recognized components that is understood to be fundamental.

The musician fraternity generally say that musicians do not have any formal religions and they are exclusively musicians. This happens mainly because of the fact that they have the mutual respect and understanding of different cultures where music, as non-formal language, becomes the medium of communication. So, communication is essential for developing awareness and understanding of different cultures. The widening of understanding of different cultures seems to be the path to foster global unity and amity.

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ⁱ Hinduism - about 82% Islam - about 12%, Christianity - about 2.5%, Sikhism - about 2%, Buddhism- about 0.7%, Jainism - about 0.5%, Zoroastrianism - about 0.01%, Judaism - about 0.0005%. Apart from these different Jewish communities like Bene Israel, Cochini, Baghdadi and Bene Menashe are also present and many of them claim their arrival in the country 2000 years back.

ⁱⁱ Authored around 2000 BC

ⁱⁱⁱ Some musicologists argue that *sitar* and *tabla* are indigenous to India.

^{iv} Rabindranath Tagore [1861-1941] is the most adored poet of India. He was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.

^v Buddhadev Dasgupta is the pioneer of this trend. [National Programme of Music, 1978, *Pilu*: based on the song *Shedin Dujane Dulechhenu Bone*, All India Radio]