

Cultural Appropriation of Western Musical Elements into South Indian Classical Music A Critical Appraisal of the Dispensation of Serfoji II

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Abstract

Cultural Appropriation of the subordinate under colonial rule in Tanjore, the southern part of India is understood through the anthropological perspectives of diffusion. The located specific pattern of diffusion is further critically analyzed through the framework of Richard Rogers to interpret from the dispensational perspective through a historiographical exegesis of the dispensation of Serfoji II. In the present study, it has been identified that Serfoji II employed selective appropriation based on his western ideology leading to the assimilation of the popular music as source for appropriation while overlooking the western classical music that was in practice as part of the court. The present study elucidates the path of appropriation of violin and clarinet during the dispensation of Serfoji that followed different models. A new model has been observed for the appropriation of clarinet that was observed as a process but not as a model

Introduction

Cultural appropriation, defined broadly as the use of a culture's symbols, artifacts, genres, rituals, or technologies by members of another culture, is inescapable when cultures come into contact, including virtual or representational contact. Cultural appropriation is also inescapably intertwined with cultural politics. It is involved in the assimilation and exploitation of marginalized and colonized cultures and in the survival of subordinated cultures and their resistance to dominant cultures (Richard Rogers). Though cultural appropriation was common among two cultures that interact, it can be inferred from the literature that more number of appropriations were done by the subordinate group than the dominant in the context of colonialism that can be described as stimulus diffusion. It occurs when knowledge of a trait belonging to another culture stimulates the invention or development of a local equivalent resulting in native feel. (culture and culture change, p.28). Best practices of music from another culture is borrowed for permanent use or appropriated to enhance the existing system. James Young, the ethnomusicologist negates the negative connotation attached to the term 'Cultural Appropriation' and distinguishes certain appropriations as one that incorporates creativity and aesthetics to the culture of the appropriator regarding which he exclaims as, "an artwork can be expected to have a degree of social value that can counterbalance the offence felt by the members of a culture from which something has been appropriated." (Cultural Appropriation and the arts, James o young). Stimulus Diffusion Cultural dominance: the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed onto the subordinated culture, including appropriations that enact resistance. Gleaning through the literature, it can be observed that colonial rule exerted by the British contributed to the appropriation of western musical elements by her colonies. Japanese imbibed the aspect of Choral singing and adopted the western system of staff notation from the British to preserve their own musical compositions. The attempts to culturally appropriate can be viewed as an integrative attempt to fuse western and native musical cultures to form a unique pattern of Japanese harmonic language, but the composers of the latter stage in history almost followed western musical style projecting complete assimilation towards the western musical elements. Similarly, the colonial rule of Spain in South America exhibits the cultural appropriation of Chirimia, the Spanish instrument by the people of Mexico for their



own use. It can be observed that much of the appropriation was done by the elite from the subordinate culture signifying their ability to optimize new ventures and to adopt the new culture and the instruments for their own purpose. (The Chirimia: The Latin American Shawm). Literature evidences on the cultural appropriation that effected in South India, Tanjore during the dispensation of Serfoji II construes the reconstitution of south Indian classical music with appropriations of western instruments and framework built on western ideologies. A systematic study of the anthropological factors that influenced the appropriation of clarinet in south Indian classical music has not been dealt with so far. Amanda Weidman, the musicologist and performer of Carnatic violin points out to the conflation of music between India and west. She exclaims the makeover of European violin in Carnatic music as an intense shift in the embodiment of South Indian Classical music. Musicologist Takako Inoue has elucidated the covert resistance of serfoji II towards religion and western classical music but a systematic study on the appropriation of western musical elements during the time of Serfoji II has not been studied critically through a proper framework. Hence the present article would explicit the cultural appropriations carried out during colonialism in reconstituting the framework of south Indian classical music with a special reference to Clarinet through a historiographical framework of dispensation view. The historiographical framework to study cultural appropriation of clarinet consists of three dispensations. They are the dispensations during Maratha Kings, Post Maratha kings and during the period of AKC Natarajan. The present article explicates a part of the first dispensational framework proposed by the author in her thesis work that relates to the period of Serfoji II. The present study envisages to bring in the connect between western ideologies and its impact on the explicit and tacit appropriations in south Indian classical music through the Rogers model.

Reception of European music during the dispensation of Serfoji II

Transformation in the culture of South India can be observed in a span of hundred years as each ruler in south India left their imprints in the society. Early 1800s witnessed the systematic effort made by King Serfoji II during the colonial rule of the British in Tanjore to introduce western music to the natives because of the uniqueness of its sound and the scientific approach towards music. Clarinet was introduced through processional music and many other western instruments were part of the band that led to the appropriation of European instruments. There had been 300 years from the time of assimilation of European instruments in 1717 when the 'European musik' was toured throughout Madras city indicating the presence of both native and European musicians playing European music (Perceval Spear). The European community during Serfoji's time were still a tiny community but the impact they had on the economic, political and cultural aspects of Tanjore was enormous. The elite from both the European and the local communities such as Brahmin, vellalar, mudaliar and chettiar met over soiree of music and dance performances from the dancing girls and hereditary musicians where clarinet was a part of the chinamelam, the dance ensemble. The soiree can be seen as an attempt by Serfoji to associate with the elites of the native community and the British community. Artistic music with melodic and rhythmic intricacies thrived in Madras patronized by wealthy trading communities as portrayed in Sarvadevilasa a book written in 1800s by an anonymous author. The book records the artist's ability to improvise a composition with melodic and rhythmic beauty. While the reconstituted south Indian classical music during the early 20th century gave importance to the melodic music and did not consider rhythmic expertise as a needed quality for an artist, Sarvadeva vilasa shows that Brahmins of the early nineteenth or the end of 18th century were experts in rhythmic patterns in contrast to the ideology set by the 20th century south Indian classical music. The notion that rhythmic intricacies were always associated with the lower caste made the 20th century musical scenario to refine the south Indian music as classical art music emerging out from the western ideology that culturally defined art music always distinguished it from the common folk music of the natives from the rhythmic acrobatics or mere calculation and rested upon the melodic aspect that symbolized the divinity of music. Some of the cultural appropriations that were made during the time of Serfoji II are Military Music, Staff Notation, Cultural Appropriation of western musical instruments, Appropriation of popular music over Western classical music, Appropriation of the names of



the Musical instruments to indigenous names

Comparison of Cultural appropriation of violin and clarinet:

The first Maratha king to have accommodated western instruments such as violin, clarinet, French Horn, French flute, Trombone, Trumpet, Piano, Bugle into the indigenous cultural music was Serfoji II. Lord Valentia regarded Serfoji II as a composer of western tunes in English during his visit in 1804 to the palace. Both native and Western instruments in his orchestra were adorned with precious diamonds and pearls (Takako Inoue) portraying the value given to musical instruments. Seetha, the musicologist mentions that excellent players of clarinet, nagaswaram, dulcimer, veena, gottuvadhyam, tavil, mridangam, flute, mukhavina, balasaraswathy and sarangi existed in the court of Serfoji (p.119). From the name Clarinet it can be inferred that the practitioners excelled in both western and native music. According to Seetha, clarinet was appropriated by Mahadeva nattuvanar in 1857 AD but the book Sarvadeva Vilasa written in 1800s by an anonymous author records the presence of clarinet functioning as a tough competitor to nagaswaram, the native wind instrument. But, Mahadeva Annavi Nattuvanar was invited by Tulaja II to codify the elements of dance ensemble of chinnamelam. Thus from the literature evidence it can be inferred that Clarinet must have been appropriated even from the times of Tulaja II. Clarinet was performed in weddings, functions, chinnamelam and in processional bands. The appropriation of violin also dates to 1800s. Narratives from the literature reveal three musicians to have credited with the appropriation of violin during the time of Serfoji II. According to the time of Baluswami Dikshithar (1801) the brother of Muthuswami Dikshithar, it can be said that Baluswami appropriated violin. Vadivelu one among the four brothers of Tanjore quartet started learning violin only from 1827 and Varahappa Iyer, the court musician and superintendent of Tanjore Band. Little early to vadivelu. The first two narratives reveal the spontaneity in learning the instrument after listening to the instrument. But Varahappa Iyer might have learnt due to the reckoning of Serfoji II. Baluswami learnt from the bandmaster, Vadivelu learnt from a Christian priest and Varahappa Iyer should have also learnt from a European musician. Learning violin with the technicalities for which it has been designed was considered as a must at the starting stage when violin was appropriated. The second reason can be attributed to the absence of such an instrument in the geographical area of Tanjore.

Appropriation of clarinet served as an uplift for the social mobility of hereditary musicians finding opportunities in the processional bands to play for survival. Being a western instrument had its advantages and disadvantages but even by 1800s many hereditary musicians have shifted their profession from nagaswaram to clarinet enabling themselves to move from the point of stagnation to find other opportunities for performing. Appropriation of clarinet was feasible as the similarity between the western and the native culture aided the process. Musicians expressed that careful observation of the facial gestures of the performers of wind instruments helped them to imitate the gestures and learning through imitation was the best way to learn (Robert Booth). Thus it can be associated with a new model of migration of guest cultural elements to the host counterpart. Migratory diffusion between cultural elements happens when there is a cultural similarity between host and home cultural elements as a consequence of cultural convergence being caused by a diffusion of values and norms from the host to the home cultural element. However, socio-cultural resistance as cultural determinant that perceived the wind instruments as polluting offered to the appropriation of clarinet in relation to the appropriation of violin where socio-cultural facilitations accelerated the process of appropriation as a solo instrument through stage musicals. But ironically Nagaswaram symbolized auspicious moment. While violin became the undisputed king of the south Indian classical concerts, hailed as divine and on par with the human voice not able to differentiate between the voice and the violin was the expression of Tyagaraja as he listened to Vadivelu playing his violin. Strengthened the voice of the artist hiding the flaws if any and by providing the cues to for improvising the melodic phrases strengthened the south Indian classical music and maneuvering the concept to modernity. Thus the Socio-cultural resistance played a vital role as parameter in the capacity of a cultural determinant to moderate its diffusion. Migratory diffusion model can be



studied using the following parameters 1. Simile 2. Imitation 3. Integration 4. Assimilation 5. Resistance

Appropriation of popular music over Western classical music

Compositions of Serfoji follows quick time and waltz projecting the simple nature of western music signifying the tistra ekam and the chatusra ekam. jettisoning compound time signatures to make western music appear as an easy to learn system compared to the complexity of native system of music. While Indira Peterson, the musicologist explicates that Serfoji's knowledge of western music was deep, diverse and innovative, from the very compositions made by the king it is clear that Serfoji only made simple compositions which was easily understandable by the normal public. Handel's overture to Samson being played by the Brahmin musicians at Serfoji's court to entertain Bishop Heber reveals the western classical training of the musicians and the knowledge they had acquired on par with the western musicians. The knowledge remained internally within the courts of serfoji and not projected for the public as evident from the compositions made by the king and the type of western music played by the military band. Popular music was in demand in Britain during the time of Serfoji. The negligence towards western classical music can be viewed in two ways as

- Culturally refined art music distinguishing it from the folk music that stems from the western ideology, hence to constrict the learning of western classical within the courts as the complexity of harmonic texture of western classical cannot be fathomed by the local people.
- Preference for the melodic music over the polyphonic texture of western classical that made serfoji to learn the popular music and limit himself to the compositions based on military music
- To give a picture to the people that western classical is easy and south Indian classical music is intricate. The locals had the feeling that western music only has two scales the minor and the major for a very long period of time.

Cultural Assimilation and Exchanges – Tanjore- nottuswara vs Calcutta Hindustani airs

The model represented by Calcutta can be called as a fusion between the Hindustani tunes with the backing of western music support. On the contrary, Serfoji's effort of appropriation can be termed as syncretic as the western tunes were appropriated by Muthuswami dikshithar projecting only the native music rather than the western music in its essence.

Appropriation of English jigs and reels by Muthuswami Dikshithar as "English Notes".

It was during the rule of serfoji II that Muthuswami Dikshithar composed 39 songs imitating the popular western melodies that was prevalent during Serfoji's time. It was later compiled as the Nottusvara Sahitya and released in 1977. The songs were written using Tamil letters for the swara and Sanskrit for the lyrics.

Appropriation of the names of the Musical instruments to indigenous names

Serfoji II replaced English names of the musical instruments that represented colonialism and gave indigenous names to the European musical instruments in the military band into Sanskrit and Marathi equivalent words

Trumpet	Bugle	→	Kartiki,	Kettle	Drum	→	Birudu	Dundubhi,		
Hangaai	→	Thallaki,	Triangle	→	Aya	(iron	kinkini),			
Clarinet	→	Manjula	Sarkva,	Instrument	like	gun	→	Kahana,		
Trombone	(Whirling	Horn)	→	Surpakahala,	Flat	Drum	with	bells	→	Chandrika,
Flute	→	Bama,	Big	Drum	→	Dundubhi	Danka			

The appellation projects the efforts to identify the European instruments as indigenous to encourage them to view it as native ones. The name change can be possible only when two cultures are in resonance with



each other or else it may end up in rift between the cultures in contact.

Conclusions

- The present study has analyzed the appropriation of western music as culture under the banner of musical appropriation and western musical instruments namely violin and clarinet as appropriation of musical instruments.
- Appropriation of Western music during Serfoji II was promoted by stimulus diffusion model through imitation followed by integration and assimilation of the dominant music elements as parameters.
- On the other hand, the comparative account of the appropriation of Violin and Clarinet insinuates that they followed a different pathway of adaption leading to stimulus and migratory diffusion as models respectively.
- The idea of migratory diffusion has not yet been reported as model though the process is widely observed. Hence this model prospectively can be applied to the appropriation between culturally similar elements.
- Moreover, the study of the power of migratory diffusion in the absence socio-cultural determinants as impediments in other cultures could be a specific research problem to be attempted in future.

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