

The Contribution of Indian Music in Enhancing Intercultural Ties: A Mauritian Perspective

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Abstract

The aim of this research paper is to reflect briefly on the contribution of Indian Music, be it, Classical, film song or temple singing and its contribution towards the cultural development it has brought to the benefit of the population in Mauritius, an Indian diaspora nation. It begins by situating Mauritius as a Multicultural country. It then sees the new trends which pave the way through intercultural exchanges between different ethnic groups.

Keywords: Mauritius, Diaspora nation, contribution of Indian Music for national identity and unity, music in multicultural society, new styles of music, *Sega*, *Fusion Music*.

New Styles of Music in Mauritius

Mauritius has known new emergence of different styles of music. Being a multicultural and multilingual country, Mauritius has been a laboratory since decades, coming up with new patterns in the musical field. We know that a country's success depends on its economy, but its culture is of utmost importance. The cultural diversity in Mauritius is unique in the world. With people coming from India, China, Africa, Europe, this multi-ethnicity has been a plus point for Mauritius for a multicultural society.

Music Drawn from Multi-Cultural Mauritius

The culture of Mauritius has evolved as a result of a lot of culture-sharing. The Mauritian culture rich in diversity has European, Indian, Chinese and African cultures converging together to make up the rainbow nation which we all are proud of (whether it is in arts, music, cuisine, religions, festivals, language and literature, these cultures offer the proof of a multi-ethnic Mauritius where we have also a multi-lingual well-based people).

Different languages like Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Marathi, Urdu and Mandarin are commonly used in Mauritius. Each of them has contributed to the emancipation of music in Mauritius. The *lingua franca* is the Mauritian Creole. This language is also the medium of the indigenous music and dance form of Mauritius which is the *Sega*.

Sega

Sega is an indigenous musical form. *Sega* includes music, songs and dances of choice played to tourists as a taste of the local culture. Its origins are said to be that of African. As it started among the slaves of African origin, it is conventionally believed to be of African origin.

Instruments of Sega

The *Sega* is based on three basic instruments namely the *ravanne*, the *maravanne* and the triangle. The dancers wear colorful blouses and skirts with flower motifs and swaying their hips to the rhythmic music. According to some observers, there is no easily found equivalent in mainland Africa. *Sega* could therefore be of mixed origin.



Sega Dance in Mauritius

Forms of Sega

Sega comes in many forms. There is the commercial variety sung in hotels, usually of a joyous mood, the more politically involved “sega engage”, with strong leftist overtones, and the rough-hewn sega typique, a traditional form of sega, which starts as a slow melody and gradually gathers speed. Modern Creole music also shows the influence of jazz, ragamuffin, rap and mainstream pop styles.

At present it is observed that the rhythm of the sega is being used in local compositions in other languages present in Mauritius. Bhojpuri is found to become very close to sega in terms of its music in general. There are many festivals where the music of various ethnic groups gained preponderance. And yet, the fragrance of Mauritius does not lose sight.

Fusion Music Leading to Interculturality

A fusion genre is music that combines two or more styles. We cannot contemplate life without it. Music is for me an important vector for the consolidation of feelings “appartenance” to the great Mauritian nation. The largest collaborative event was titled “*Unisson*” and was held in 2011. It was a joint collaboration between The Mahatma Gandhi Institute and the Conservatoire National de Musique Francois Mitterrand Trust Fund. This blending of the two different systems of music between western and Indian music was a successful initiative. One could feel the different colors of each style thus, enjoying. This kind of representation is well appreciated by many people. During the Unisson programme, various instruments were used for both Indian and European style. The sitar, table, violin, swarmandal, Dhol, Dholak and the Duff, together with South Indian musical instruments like the Mridangam, the Khanjira, Ghatham, Veena and South Indian violin merged in unison with those of western musical instruments like the Cello, Western violin, Piano, Congas, Vibraphone, Mallets, Western flute, Oboe, Bassoon, trumpets, Timpani and horn.

There is a new concept of fusion whereby the MGI innovated in 2017 in presenting Indian Music to a grand audience outside its campus. This was conceptualized and coordinated by Dr Adi Sankara Peruman. The idea was to reach the maximum public and showcase the different subjects taught at MGI. But here, the blending of Indian Music instruments with European instruments gave a new dimension to the show. The three styles Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi and Kathak dances were showcased with a fusion style. This new concept was launched for the first time for Divali 2017 at the Bagatelle Mall in Mauritius. It was a true success and appreciated by one and all.



MGI presenting fusion music at Bagatelle Mall- November 2017

This fusion of the two cultures of music has given way to a spirit of camaraderie and bondage between artists too. It was also a way of exchanging knowledge among the musicians. What is new is the conscious decision on the part of some artists to make cross-cultural music in an effort to show how people from different cultures can grow by learning from each other.

Combining World Music Styles – Mauritius Trend

As this planet becomes more aware of itself as a whole, a growing number of musicians are now experimenting with new combinations of world music styles. The most exciting fusion music explores the real musical ground between traditions, not just between East and West, but between Chinese and Indian music, or between north Indian and South Indian Music and others.

Blending the Familiar and the Exotic

When musicians from different cultures perform together, they grow from the cultural exchange, learning techniques and forms that are new to them, making their music richer. Fusion music has elements familiar to most people as well as elements that are exotic. In this way, it often opens people up to music from cultures other than their own. Fusion music has become a standard term used in the music industry for this new musical genre. More importantly, it has become a passion and life's work for many musicians. They find it artistically stimulating to create music by integrating ideas from more than one tradition. And this seems to be an established trend in Mauritius.



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