



AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC AND GLOBAL SOFT POWER

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ABSTRACT

The geopolitical landscape has greatly evolved since Cold War. The war machinery has changed, the new soldiers are no more in uniforms, words are now the new ammunition, also the national interests are secured without any violent wars. The means of securing a nation's foreign interest is now through capturing the psyche of the masses of that country through the psychological warfare and thus the concept of soft power arises. A term coined by Former US Assistant Secretary of Defense to Former Prez Bill Clinton, Joseph Nye in the 1990s, which talks about the ability to influence others through cultural, ideological and diplomatic appeal. It can be through Culture, Political values and Foreign Policy and Aid. In this context, India has long leveraged its rich cultural heritage as soft power asset with Hindustani Classical Music, which plays a pivotal role in cultural diplomacy of Bharat. This Indian Classical Music has been a cultural symbol of Bharat, that is India, which transcends the geographical borders, shaping the global perceptions of Indian heritage and our modern civilization. As a significant component of India's soft power strategic policy, it has been instrumental in Cultural Diplomacy, global collaborations, and academic exchanges. This paper explores Hindustani Classical Music functioning as a soft power tool, also analyzing the historical role and its impact on Global audiences. This study also examines the government initiatives, institutions and digital platforms that can help to expand its base of influence to secure our foreign interests, shaping our international image and also to strengthen our resolve to securing international peace in this conflict-ridden world.

Keywords: Soft power, Cultural Diplomacy, Geopolitics, Classical Music, Bharat & Civilization

Introduction to Soft Power

During the Prez. Bill Clinton's Administration, A Political scientist named Joseph Nye was appointed as the US Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs and before that he was the chair of US National Intelligence Council. He was the pioneer of the term "Soft Power". It is the ability of a nation, through which a nation can influence the masses of a foreign nation, it can be an allied or a rogue one. It is a tool which consists of foreign diplomacy, economy and also Culture, rather than military or economic force, soft power works by attracting and persuading global audiences. The United States is one of the powerful nations who used this concept in order to establish their dominance without involving itself to Kinetic means of war. The nation is considered as the world's formidable super power nation. With its world's largest standing military and Economy maintained its global image and stature through this concept itself and that too through their culture – from McDonalds to Madonna, the nation imprinted the global audience's minds with their "superiority" through soft power, thus creating the mindset of Pro-US Compatriotism overseas.

Key Pillars of Soft Power

1. Foreign Policy and Aid

Through these means, International Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, a nation can influence the decision making and the mindset of the masses of the country with which the state-actors are dealing with. Organizations like United Nations, ASEAN, SAARC, G7, G20 facilitates the same. Through Foreign Policy decision making, even an enemy nation is diplomatically neutralized, aiding to the acting nation's interests. For e.g. India provided COVID-19 vaccines to various nations for free when other nations were hoarding for their own nationals. Through this strategy, India built a Global image of "Vishva Guru" and it was considered as the one of the biggest humanitarian Soft Power Diplomacy of India – "The Vaccine Diplomacy". Here, economic factors are also taken into account as because a country can use their economic machinery to make another country prosper or to go bust. Organizations



like World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank provides loans to the countries which suffers from economic struggles and often these organization decide the economic policies of the borrower countries in return.

2. Political Values

Through Political Ideologies, nations can influence the political environment of another nation. Even there are some cases that through “Ideological Subversion”, a nation can be controlled. Through Media, Academia, Bureaucracy, Intellectuals and Political Activism, a nation’s domestic policy can be implemented or it can be reversed in most of the cases. During the Cold War, there was a scramble for ideological dominance and the world was split into bi-polar sides. These two sides took the kinetic means of warfare in order to seize and capture control over newly independent countries but then after the fall of USSR, US emerged as the only superpower nation and soon, started to control over certain nations of their strategic importance through non-kinetic means of warfare especially through “Regime Change”. E.g. the pro-democracy movement was resultant to the infamous “Arab Spring” movement which also led to the change in the political landscape of the Middle Eastern countries as well. Many Governments were overthrown, due to the fact that superpower nations leveraged the situation and financially aided many NGOs and opposing groups to instigate massive civil unrest.

3. Culture

Nations have used their “culture” to influence the minds of other nations, in turn creating various trends, lifestyle and mindsets. Powerful nations used to project their strength and might through wars and conflicts but nowadays they project their strength through movies, sitcoms, OTT contents and even through music too. Countries like US has projected their cultural modernity through Hollywood and American Popular music as well. In India, soon US TV channels came into Cable TVs, broadcasting American Pop music, American TV series and SITCOMs. For e.g. The American sitcom “Friends” significantly shaped the Indian millennials, which influenced the perceived image of the concept of urban independence and concept of living away from one’s parental home. Also, it disrupted the traditional concept of Indian family system and also many Indian youths found it inspiring to shift towards seeking personal space and autonomy. Cit. (Buiten Dijk, J. (2019). Millennials watching Friends (Master's thesis). Erasmus University Thesis Repository).

Hindustani Classical Music as Soft Power Tool

India’s asset is not only its military, economy or the administration, but also its rich ancient culture, which dates back from Indus Valley civilization period. India has faced a lot of invasions and during which our own Vedic music forms were combined together with the Persian and Arabic music forms and gave birth to new forms of music. First it started from Qawwal and then we get to know the evolved form – Khayal, founded and popularized by Ustad Amir Khusrau. Apart from this, another form of music was also in vogue, which originates from Prabandha Giti’s Dhruva pravandha, popularly known as Dhrupad, which was popularized by Raja Mann Singh Tomar.

In today’s scenario, Hindustani classical music has become globalized in such a way that global audiences are now getting much more attracted towards it. This music form has the power to convey the feeling or vibes to the audiences through the lyrics and the precise tuning of notes, and the aesthetic concept of this music is called as “Rasa”. Through this Rasa, the psychology of a man can be easily altered, due to its therapeutic effects, providing the elixir of bliss. Cit. (Bardekar.A. A & Gurjar.A. A, “EEG Study of Ragas and its Impact on Brain Waves”, IJIRSET).



Rasa & Aesthetics – The driving force behind the “soft power tool”

The ragas that we listen and get enchanted to its blissful sound, nuances, harmonious movements of tune which influences our mood and creates an atmosphere of elixir, is backed by a characteristic which gives the raga its own identity and creates a sense of grandeur, this characteristic is termed as Rasa. As we discuss about the Rasa, the Nobel Laurette Shri Rabindranath Tagore talks about it in his globally renowned Literary creation “Gitanjali” he mentions –

I know not how thou singest, my master!
I ever listen in silent amazement.
The light of thy music illuminates the world.
The life breath of thy music
Runs from sky to sky.
The holy stream of thy music breaks through
All stony obstacles and rushes on.
My heart longs to join in thy song,
But vainly struggles for a voice.
I would speak, but speech breaks not into song,
And I cry out baffled.
Ah, thoust has made my heart captive
In the endless meshes of thy music, my master!

-Rabindranath Tagore, Gitanjali (Ruckert, 2004, p.52)

To fully comprehend the ancient Sanskrit term "rasa," one must experience it rather than read it. There are multiple translations for it, including "fluid" and "aesthetically pleasing juice." In contrast to outside stimuli, such as music we hear, this term refers to the flow of consciousness, or the emotional elasticity in our minds. Not only that Various Upanishads (especially the music based) explains the rasa in a different path. Taittiriya Upanishads describes rasa an essence, which is beyond our materialistic senses. Its within our souls, touching different layers (kosha) of our eternal self (atma).

अथानन्दमयः ।

अस्यान्दो मयत्वमदश्रीयत्व प्रिय प्रिरस्तः श्रतमप्रि-प्रनमषो मन्नः स्यात सुकृतं वक्त्र प्रजापति-

वेदः नित्यमाचरण वाक ॥१॥

Transliteration

Sloka 1: Athānandamayāḥ | Asyānando mayatvamadasrīyatvam priyam sirastaḥ śrutam-akṣi-nimeṣo mantraḥ syāt sukṛtam vaktraṁ prajāpatiḥ vedah nityamācaraṇam vāk ||1||

This layer consists of bliss. It is the innermost, and its essence is pure joy. The head of this layer is joy, its right part is delight, its left part is great delight, its trunk is bliss, and its foundation is Brahma (the ultimate reality).



यो ऽ यमानन्दमयो नित्य एवात्मा स यस्येतोन्नमयो न्योन्यन्तरेण वानप्राणमयः शरीरमयः स आत्मा ॥२॥

Transliteration

Sloka 2: Yo 'yamānandamayo nitya eva ātmā sa yasye'to' 'nnamayo'nyo'nyantareṇa
vānaprāṇamayāḥ śarīramayaḥ sa ātmā ॥2॥

This Anandamaya (layer of bliss) is the innermost and eternal self (Atma). Beyond it, there is no further sheath. The previous layers like the Annamaya (the food layer), Pranamaya (the vital force layer), Manomaya (the mental layer), and Vigyanamaya (the knowledge layer) are all external to it. This innermost blissful self is the ultimate truth.

Furthermore, the Chnadogya Upanishad 6.2.1's one of the famous statements also explains about the Rasa in an in-depth manner. The sloka which talks about is mentioned here below:

Sanskrit Sloka: Chandogya Upanishad 6.2.1

सर्वं खलविदं ब्रह्म तज्जलानिती शान्त उपासीत ।

अथ खल क्रतमयः परुषो यथाक्रतस्तप्रस्मन्लोक परुषो भवप्रत तत्क्रत कयाप्रदप्रत ॥

Transliteration

Sarvam khalvidam brahma tajjalāniti śānta upāsīta |

*Atha khalu kratumayaḥ puruṣo yathākratuḥ tasmin loke puruṣo bhavati tat kratum
kuryād iti ॥*

All this, indeed, is Brahma. From Him does it arise, by Him it lives, into Him it returns. One should meditate with a serene mind on this truth. Now, the person is nothing but will (resolve). As a person wills in this world, so does he become. Therefore, one should form this resolve- In this above text, it declares, "All this is Brahma," suggesting that the variety of experiences and emotions in the world are forms of the same underlying reality. In this realm of aesthetics, the multiplicity of emotional reflexes generated by the artistic creations can be understood through that truth which attributes to that eternal shapeless omnipresent form – Sacchidananda Brahma.

This whole concept of rasa, powers the Hindustani Classical Music, which provides a therapeutic effect, easing the existential anxiety and melancholic cacophony of their day-to-day life, as if they are feeling the state of Nirvana, a place of perfect and happiness.

Evidences of Effects of Rasa Emotions in Raag-Observations by Maestros

Pandit Ravi Shankar explains that Raag Yaman has soothing qualities, making it a favorite for evening performances. This raag is often associated with the rasa of shringara (romantic love). Its serene and graceful melodic structure evokes feelings of longing and devotion. (Shankar, Ravi. My Music, My Life. New York: Random House, 1968.)

Ustad Vilayat Khan have highlighted about the Raag Bhimpalasi's emotional depth and the subtle interplay between joy and sadness. This raag, performed in the late evening, embodies the rasa of vira (heroic) and shringara. It expresses a deep longing and yearning, resonating with the complexities of love. (Khan, Ustad Vilayat. "Bhimpalasi." In The Art of Indian Classical Music. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 2005.)



Raag Darbari Kanada: Known for its deep, weighty emotions, this raag typically elicits the rasa of karuna (compassion) and bhakti (devotion). Its gravitas and richness have been celebrated by maestros like Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, who have often conveyed profound sorrow and introspection through its intricate phrases. (Khan, Ustad Ali Akbar. *Aesthetic of Indian Classical Music*. New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2007.)

Vocalists like Ustad Rashid Khan have brought out its nuances, highlighting its emotional intensity. Raag Todi is associated with karuna (compassion) and vira (heroic). Its complex structure allows for a wide range of expression, often evoking a sense of introspection and deep emotional resonance. (Rashid Khan. "Exploring Raag Todi." In *Indian Classical Music: A Cultural Study*. Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 2010.)

Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, as expresses about Raag Bageshree, this raag is performed late at night, which embodies the rasa of shringara (romantic love) and karuna (compassion). Its soft, romantic quality can evoke feelings of yearning and devotion. (Ghulam Ali Khan, Ustad Bade. *The Essence of Indian Classical Music*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.)

Global Recognition of India through Hindustani Classical Music

People from the Western world are now more actively participating in various events of spiritual gravitas and grandeur. The materialism of the Adam Smith's version of Capitalism has resulted to the eventual moral and mental decay of the western society at large, which has also affected both the young and ageing population. (cit. Weber, M.1905. "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism"., Bell.D.1976. "The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism". Basic Books & Sacks, J.2013." The Great Partnership: God, Science and the Search for Meaning". Schocken.). After India's G20 Presidency, Bharat has observed a significant jump in Indian Tourism which involves Medical, Spiritual and also Cultural Tourism. Practices such as Indian music in Hindustani Classical music, have become significant cultural milestones, which illustrates the search for inner peace, holistic well-being and a connection with self and nature of profound depth.

This is the ultimate Unique Selling Point (USP), where we offer the western audiences the benefits which also helps in strengthening our global image as an Intellectual powerhouse or as a civilizational state, which is rich in indic heritage and wisdom. It also shatters the negative stereotypes on India and Indians at a global stage. In this era of increasing xenophobic attacks and bigoted speeches against Indians across the globe, It is essential that Music, which serves the tool of promotion of peace and harmony, can be implemented as a tool of Cultural Security and also showcase our national power through non-coercive and non-violent channels. For e.g. Rather using our Intelligence Apparatus only in collecting foreign intelligence and working in supporting the proxy groups in certain adversary countries, they can be used to promote our cultural value systems and art forms at a Command level basis, just like People's Republic of China did through it's Confucius Institutes across the globe.

The people from Western world come to India to experience this bliss, either through Spiritual tours or through music. In 1985, The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), GoI, The ITC Sangeet Research Academy and The University of Pittsburgh played a crucial role in organizing the "Festival of India" which was a multifaceted celebration of Indian Culture in the US, with joint efforts of both India and US Govt.

Recent Trends in Indian Classical Music and it's example in Mainstream

The Indian Classical Music has a problem of "Niche Audiences". Music is such a medium of entertainment which has the power to drive nation's narrative and perception, but if the specific form of



music caters the needs of a few audiences then the purpose of creating perception in the minds of the masses remains void. So, in order to cater the new Generation of Listeners, especially the Gen Z, The Indian Classical Music gone through various fusions and modernization.

The Amazon Prime “Bandish Bandits” show has greatly promoted the Indian Classical Music, to the young population and has greatly showcased the Indian Discipline of Hindustani Classical music through the Guru Shishya Parampara, which is the prime building block for the pedagogy of this music and Gharana System, which holds the stylizations, nuances and discipline of a performer and its now becoming out of vogue due to modern technology and advancements. The series is available in around 195 countries to watch. The instrument Sitar was electrified by a musician named Niladri Kumar, who combined the Electric Guitar and Sitar, named – “Zitar, where Sitarist Purbayan Chatterjee contributed his electrifying, yet melodious renditions in this series.

In an interview to The National Herald, the director Anand Tiwari quoted:

“We’ve just brought it to the digital language... We all understand music because it can be communicated without language... If you want to tell the story of beyond one city or beyond one culture, what better vehicle than music? Hence, we feel that it’s a very relevant show for today’s youth.”

Challenges and Solutions

Unlike the Pop Commercial Music, Indian Classical Music has a limited audience base. The Gen-Zs tends to incline to the postmodern up-beat music as because in our Curriculums, the global youngsters are not taught about the appreciation of Classical Music.

- In order to make it appealing to the younger audiences, we cannot compromise with the Shastriya rules and guidelines, instead Music institutions can organize various Hands-on- Training in music appreciation of Indian Classical Music. Organizations like Visva Bharati University, Banaras Hindu University and other Indian Universities, which has the faculty of Indian Music, needs to accommodate more Foreign Candidates through the ICCR scholarships, in order to spread the Indian music wisdom through these young minds.

The Government of India lacks in aggressive promotion of the Indian Classical Music. Although organizations like ICCR and CCRT provides scholarship and fellowships to young artistes every year, but mere support through the academic means is not enough in this new world order era. Countries like South Korea heavily invests in the K-Pop industry and their market size has been valued to around \$6.38 Billion (Rs. 52700 Crores), which is actually represented by its leading Music conglomerate HYBE Corporation which manages the famous BTS boyband and it accounts the 7.3% of the country’s total content industry revenue. Secondly, Entertainment Industry is heavily taxed in India, for e.g. local authorities often levy a Local Bodies Entertainment Tax ranging from 10 to 25% in addition to GST (<https://cleartax.in/s/media-entertainment-taxation-gst>),

- Just like South Korea, Government of India can establish a dedicated National Music Promotion Board for funding, regulation and support music exports. Govt can offer tax breaks for music companies, live performances and international collabs, which can attract FDIs.
- Music Education and Skill Development is absolutely necessary which includes structured courses on Music Business and Production. Various Schools of Businesses can create new curriculums and can be incorporated in the New Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020).



India lacks in creating businesses and companies in Music Industry as because only 4 major label companies have dominated the markets in such a way that Indian music is at the mercy of these companies itself, plus it is plagued with the Criminal Enterprises connections, which is the biggest reason, why Indian Music Industry doesn't grow at its natural pace and no new innovations. The ease of doing business in this industry is questionable and can also be fatal, due to Corruption.

While our Global counterparts like US consists of 590 Recording label companies, UK consists of 124 and Japan has 18, but surprisingly, is considered at the 2nd position for largest music production (<https://info.xposuremusic.com/article/these-are-the-top-10-global-markets-for-music-consumption>).

- Private Entities like Tata, Adani, Reliance, Birla and Startups can create Music-based economic ecosystems which will provide easy and streamlined space for music business entities to build Recording Labels, Streaming Platforms and Talent Recruitment agencies.
- India can solve the problems of corruption & loss of royalties in this industry through stringent and simplified frameworks, where dedicated Legal remedies can be deployed in Entertainment, Copyright and IPR laws.

Hindustani Classical Music is still taught in an un-interactive medium of teaching. In this age of Information and Communication Technology, the chalk and talk and text book rote learning is counter-productive when it comes to the application in real life, because we still are stuck to the old system of rote learning. AI and Virtual Reality can be a gamechanger in this field, where learning can be made more interactive and actuate our senses more aggressively. Shoolini University was the first University to apply this tech in Meta space. (<https://shooliniuniversity.com/blog/can-metaverse-change-the-face-of-education/#:~:text=Shoolini%20University%20ensures%20that%20all,they%20move%20to%20virtual%20learning>)

Unlike other nations, India faces a challenge in global-outreach when it comes to promotion and branding because of Western dominance in the markets. They have powerful Public Relations firms, Marketing Agencies and Distribution networks.

- India can establish a synergetic ecosystem of Brand-image building and Outreach, which can bridge the global divide between Indian Classical Music Community and rest of the world. We can create World Concert events and Music Festivals just like the Darbar Music Festival, or the classical version of Western concert events like Coachella, Glastonbury, promoting Indian talents.

Conclusion

Hindustani Classical Music has historically played a significant role in India's soft power through its deep cultural heritage, global appeal, and artistic excellence. From diplomatic engagements to international collaborations and digital platforms, its influence continues to shape India's global cultural identity. However, challenges such as niche audience appeal, lack of structured government support, and competition from global pop culture need to be addressed and India, being a \$4 Trillion Dollar economy, has the adequate resources to tackle these issues. Thus, we can infer that Hindustani Classical Music can be a non-coercive, non-violent, non-threatening, inclusive, and persuasive tool in diplomacy, which can be deployed at an aggressive level, which can lead to fostering healthy relations between India and world, fulfilling the motto of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" and "Janani Janma Bhumischa Swargaddapi Gariyasi".



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