

Migration and Fusion: Tracing the Roots of Chutney Music, A Journey from Bihar to Trinidad

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Abstract

Historians try to discern the reason for large scale population movement and the effects of those changes. In general, we can divide all the forces into two, pushing and pulling forces, that affect people's migration. Political turmoil, a lack of employment opportunities or congestion could work as pushing factors. Pulling factors include better life style, job opportunities or having relatives who have already moved. Different ethnic groups encounter one another and the hosting land works as a melting pot in which process of cultural amalgamation happens to create a new form. Chutney Music is the resultant of this very process in which Bhojpuri and Indian folk music are amalgamated with Caribbean calypso and Soca music. This is a fusion of Dhantal and Dholak from Indian continent, Soca beats and Tasha drums from Caribbean island. In this paper we map out the journey of Chutney music from north India to Caribbean island and how it evolved.

Keywords: Migration, Cultural Amalgamation, Melting Pot Theory, Ethnomusicology

Introduction:

Humanity has been in a state of flux ever since the emergence of human life. Some relocate to join their ethnicity, to pursue educational opportunities or to find employment or economic growth. Others relocate in order to flee hostilities, terrorism, persecution or human rights violations. And there are some people who relocate in reaction to the unfavourable

consequences of environmental variables like natural catastrophe or climate change. Many people migrate voluntarily, many more do so because they must. The term “Migrant” refers to any individual who is moving away from his or her usual residence, across an international border or within a state, regardless of the individual's legal status and the movement’s voluntariness and involuntary execution . In recent years, Migration studies have been developing with significantly different trajectories in different cultures. “Migrationism and diffusionism” is the topic of debate in recent times. Migration studies help us to understand how a particular civilization evolved. It illuminates the methods used in humanitarian subjects to examine human settlements and international migration. Now there are three components in this process- a group of people, a host country and a homeland. The triadic relationship of these components is the focus of analysis in migration studies and a new term comes into existence called cultural amalgamation. This phrase cultural amalgamation describes the mixing of two or more civilisations in order to produce something new, a distinct culture. This idea can be referred to as Melting Pot Theory, where different colours are mixed to create a new one. All immigrants have their own culture and heritage, which consists of unique customs, beliefs and way of life that define the civilisation from which they have originated. When it comes to bringing the people with different ethnicities and forging a new one, It becomes a difficult task because everyone is committed to their ancestral culture. Concept of cultural amalgamation is intended to preserve the existing culture and accept the new things wholeheartedly and create a unified culture. A good example of this process can be seen in chutney music. Chutney music is a fast paced style music quite similar to calypso music and is well liked in Trinidad and Tobago. It is a fusion of traditional Indian and African instruments mixed with contemporary electronic instruments. Chutney, often referred to as the indo Caribbean genre of music, is largely influenced by bhojpuri folk music. It is continually evolving and becoming a worldwide

sensation because of its upbeat and dance-like music. The Internet and other social sites play an instrumental role in easy transfer of culture around the world. Now if we delve deep into this specific genre of music, we have to traverse the realm of colonial history, particularly Indian colonialism. Because chutney music in itself is the offshoot of Indian colonial history. If you want to connect the dots, Take a step back and explore the little known aspects of Indian history. In Europe, in the 1820s there was emergence of a new kind of surge called liberal humanism which considered slavery an inhuman practice. It was the time when the slavery Abolition act of 1833 was passed by parliament that outlawed slavery in the majority of British colonies resulted into the liberation of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean islands, South Africa and a small number of people in Canada. After slavery abolished in England, various colonies turned to India to look for labourers who would work in the sugarcane and other plantations to perpetuate their domination when industrial revolution and capitalism were at their pinnacles. The British colonies were expanding gradually to South America, Asia and Africa which resulted in increasing demand of workers. Their old concept of slavery was obsolete. So They came up with the idea of contract labour. It was by following this ideology that the colonisers stopped slavery in India, and replaced it with new kind of slavery, a bonded servitude which euphemistically termed Indentured Labour. At this point another dark chapter of the Indian colonial period starts to be written in the annals of history. This is how end of slavery and surge of liberalism provided immediate background to indentured labour system. Britishers had already ruined predominantly agrarian society and their agricultural business set up which resulted in mass unemployment that had a harsh impact on small farmers. Their cottage industry was in a clutch of continuous decline resulting in extreme poverty. People were forced to leave their homes in search of work for survival. Modern day Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh were among the most affected areas. The workers signed a contract at their home place which specified the length of the

employment and conditions which were clear and limited. The workers' remuneration was of modest level varying by location. Over the period, they fixed the wages and promised a return passage at the end of the indentured period. These poor farmers indentured for ten years and were living in plantation areas in unhygienic conditions. This is how they marked their odyssey across *Kalapani*. Initially Only Men were considered for labour but gradually the British Parliament started encouraging whole family migration for stability reasons. Sea voyages were definitely not a pleasant experience for these poor Indians. It took approximately 170 days which was quite long, traumatic and perilous. harsh weather, poor sanitation, little access to food and no medication facilities forced most of them to give up their lives even before crossing the kalapani. Those who became corpses, were simply thrown off the ships into the sea. Most migrants were forged about the working conditions and the wages they would get.

Eventually migrants had made through these harsh situations and reached far flung British colonies. Through their language, cuisine, music and other a few belongings they were allowed to take, these migrants brought their culture. Although they were constrained to reside in the boundaries of these vast plantations yet they developed their distinctive socio-cultural ecosystem following their heritage. Some of them left after their indentured terms ended but the majority remained. Those who did remain did so because they had established new homes with their families and were destitute who had been unable to keep in touch with or maintain ties with their ancestral family and country. This practice of indentured labour resulted in the growth of a large diaspora with indo Caribbean, indo African and indo Malaysian heritage that continue to live in the Caribbean, Fiji, Mauritius, Malaysia etc.

What transpires when various racial and ethnic groupings come into contact.. Or when immigrants experience many different cultures as they settle in a new society..when a group is exposed to a new culture, assimilation takes place and they adopt aspects like language,

music, cuisine and dressing sense. For instance, if you relocate to a new nation with a wide variety of religious traditions, you can start to follow them when this new culture starts impacting you. This is cultural amalgamation. Now this amalgamation comprises each and every component of your culture. Music is one of the major components of cultural identities. Refugees and migrants have long used music as an outlet for their emotions and they will continue to do so as they constantly negotiate their new identities. A number of interdisciplinary studies strikingly demonstrate how music listening and its performance both aid in the development, expression and recognition of specific cultural identities which is specifically called ethnomusicology. Since music has always been a fundamental and imperative component of culture and society, it has been increasingly significant in the development of both societal and personal identities. It can be viewed as a platform that allows its members to unite and create a sense of belongingness. These indentured labourers also evolved an amalgamation of music which is a fusion of Dholak and Dhantal from Indian repository and Tasha and Calypso beats from Caribbean repository. It is now conceptualised and inspired by Indian folklore, especially that of the Bhojpuri as well as devotional songs Bollywood music. It serves as the only means of communication with the parent nation and a form of assertion of fundamental Indianness in the foreign land. The word Chutney refers to a spicy mixture/fusion of vegetable, fruits and other fresh herbs. Thus Trinidadian music industry uses this term Chutney to suggest a similar form of hybridisation. Chutney music has been created as a result of stylistically and selectively preserved aspects of traditional customs that were originally followed in Bhojpuri speaking areas of UP and Bihar. Chutney has its origins in Hindu weddings rituals and performed by women in private, gender segregated spaces using sexualized steps and expressions, music and songs. Chutney's development transformed a custom from one of holy secrecy to one of raucous notoriety and rural community to urban licentious grounds. Chutney has helped revitalise folk songs into

well known tracks and has the ability to improvise the forgotten sounds. Like the singers, these songs had straightforward concepts and even simpler lyrics which were weirdly arranged and delightfully jumbled. For instance, lyrics of a song by Sundar Popo, the “King Of chutney music:”

Nana-Nani Ghar Se Nikale, Dheere-Dheere Chalke Gaye,
Madira Ki Dukaan mein, Dono Jaake Baithe,
Nana Chale Aage-Aage, Nani Going Behind,
Nana Drinking White Rum, Nani Drinking Wine”

Till 1950s, Chutney music was exclusively an oral tradition. When Ramdeo Chaitoe and Draupadi produced records of their music, things started sifting. Their tunes were energetic and addressed to large scale audience because of their distinct dance tempo. But it wasn't until the end of 1960s, Sham and Moran Mohammad, two Trinidad radio producer played these recorded songs on the air, came up with the title Chutney music. When Sundar Popo first appeared on the music scene in 1969, things began to change. This Trinidadian of Indian descent gave the hot chutney mix an entirely new flavour with odd lyrics accompanied with guitar and electronic sounds. Chutney music was already enjoyable, well liked and occasionally even cheeky by this point. Popo made it simple for listeners to enjoy this musical style, which was now infused with fast-paced Calypso beats. In 70's Rohit Jagessar came up with new ideas and made it worldwide by his production, marketing and distribution network. Kanchan and Babla were popular in 1980's who created a sensation even in India. One of the characteristics of modern chutney music is the presence of sexual and double meaning lyrics. Sexual connotations are often merged with metaphorically used vegetables, fruits and other cooking elements. Quoting the lyrics of a song: “Rosie gal, whey you cookin' for dinner/She makin' choka, it ent have no salt”. Rum culture is also glorified in modern chutney music. The French elite introduced the culture of carnival in Trinidad in the

1790s. Now carnival has developed into more than just a way of entertainment and amusement. It now serves as an apparatus to define and present national cultural identity in the context of global society. Chutney has managed to defy calypso's dominance as the driving force behind carnival music in addition to serving as a means of preserving Indian cultural heritage.

Conclusions:

With Indian artists refusing to be silenced and rendered invisible on mainstream media and global stage, Chutney is developing as a platform for Indian cultural existence and visibility in Trinidad. Chutney music could be interpreted as a form of socio political and cultural restraint in this new landscape. These songs don't overtly express their rage and frustration with an unfair system. As a cultural resistance, it is based on the determination to uphold its historic voice while also innovating and paradoxically appropriating certain aspects of a culture that is attempting to subjugate it.

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