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**MUSICAL MIXES OF “CLASSICAL” INDIA AND THE WEST:
EXPLORING NOVEL STYLES**

A MUSIC HONORS RESEARCH PROJECT

UNIVERSITY OF REDLANDS,

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

BY

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Indian music has a rich history, beginning in ancient times with the Aryans who used music as a religious practice. It continued developing through the centuries growing and expanding into a system that has its own unique theory, notation, instrumentation, and vocal style. One of the most dynamic periods in the history of Indian music was during colonization when, as early as the fifteenth century, India was introduced to Western cultures. Even though the cultures refused to mingle at first, an appreciation between them eventually developed, leading to an interesting exchange. Slowly but surely, through the pressures of Western ideals and the introduction to Western musical styles, a hybrid style gradually formed. This progression toward the new blend can be observed through the centuries by examining the genre of Hindustani Aairs and the composer Mutthuswami Dikshita during the eighteenth century, through the compositions of Rabindranath Tagore (1861- 1941) in the nineteenth century, and through the life of the composer and sitar player Ravi Shankar (1920-2012) in the twentieth century. The earlier novel styles, propagated by the British, portray India as a British colony where as later novel styles establish India as an independent country with its own musical sound.

Indian music is a complicated system with hazy origins, but it clearly has religious and theatrical roots. Its beginning was lost in the legends of gods and goddesses who were considered to be music's patrons and authors. Early Indian music can be found in the religious texts of the Vedas that were developed during the Aryan era, whose origins can be traced as far back as the 1700 BCE.¹ Music was a tool used for chanting the Vedic scripture, a tradition that is cultivated even today. Music also appears in the form of ballads in the

¹ Herbert Arthur Popley *The Music of India* (New Delhi: Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, 1971), 8

religious texts of the Ramayana from around 400 BC to 200 AD.² In ancient India, music went hand in hand with theatre and dancing since religious stories were often portrayed in theatrical forms. The earliest recorded reference to Indian musical performance was from 300 BC when Buddha's disciples attended a musical drama. The earliest recorded reference to Indian musical theory on the other hand was from 400 BC where three voice registers and seven note names were mentioned in an ancient book.³

Interestingly, the time period in which early Indian music developed is also the same time during which Pythagoras established the Greek musical system in 510 BC.⁴ There is speculation that there was contact between ancient India and the early Greeks as there are certain musical similarities between the cultures. In fact, the two earliest Greek scales, Mixolydian and Doric, are similar to early Indian scales.⁵ Since the Greek musical system was the earliest known inspiration for Western music, the fact that early Indian scales and Greek scales contain similarities indicates a certain common ground from which future novel styles could be constructed.

Over time, in addition to the primary purpose of music as a religious tool, music developed a secondary function as a form of entertainment. Important kingdoms and rulers arose in India, some of these kingdoms established by outside invaders.⁶ Music became a common form of entertainment in these courts, especially in the courts of the Moghuls and the Sultans. Many rulers were music enthusiasts. Akbar, one of the greatest emperors of

² Popley, *The Music of India*, 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10

⁵ *Ibid.*, 28

⁶ Najma Perveen Ahmad, *Hindustani Music: A study of its development in seventeenth and eighteenth century* (New Delhi: Manohar publications, 1984), 1

India and an avid lover of music, was one such enthusiast who was responsible for introducing chamber music to the court by the end of the 1600s.⁷

Along with the rise of ethnically different kingdoms, there came a strict geographical and political divide in India between the North and the South. This divide radically influenced the progression of music in India from the 12th century on.⁸ Musically, the divide between North and South India can be traced through differences in scales, melodic formulas, and language. The styles separated and developed into independent entities, especially during the 14th and the 15th centuries.⁹ The primarily North Indian style is known as Hindustani music, which was heavily influenced by the systems of the Persian and the Central Asian Islamic cultures that ruled India for centuries. Simultaneously, in the South, a musical style known as Karnatic music was flourishing with its own language, rigid system, lyrical content, devotional themes, and a successful system of notation.¹⁰ There were several attempts throughout Indian history to unify the styles of the North and the South, but to no avail. Such was the state of music when Europeans encountered the subcontinent of India.

During the sixteenth century, Europeans developed curiosity about the abundant financial opportunities that India had to offer, especially through the ever-profitable spice trade.¹¹ The British East India Company was established during the year 1600, and the first

⁷ Ahmad, 4

⁸ Popley, 18

⁹ Ibid., 18

¹⁰ Chandra S. Balachandran, "Geography as Melody in Muttusvami Dikshita's Indian Musical Works," *Geographical Review* 91, no. 4, (October 2011) 690-701.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3594726> (accessed October 14, 2013)

¹¹ India and the British

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/india/india_british.htm (accessed February 25, 2014)

official trading post was set up along the coast of India in 1613.¹² Thus opened the way to the ultimate subjugation of India under the British rule.

The early interactions between Indian and British musical styles were few and the general attitude of the British toward Indian music was negative. While the general populace of India had its own folk music, most of the traditional, religious, and literate Indian music, which utilized virtuosic instruments played by master players, were confined to the courts of the princes. Europeans barely heard Indian music and when they did, they regarded Indian music as primitive and ugly. It is an understandable impression, given the key distinctions between the Indian and Western musical cultures that would make an early British listener disregard Indian music as “unpleasant.”¹³

Indian music differs from Western constructs in the usage of melody, harmony and ornamentation. Indian music considers melody derived from *ragas* (melodic laws and orders) to be its most important element, whereas Western music, as codified in the treatises and compositional practices of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, considers harmony and counterpoint to be most important. Indian music is based on the important notes that make up a particular *raga* but Western music is arranged not only based on melody but also harmonic relativity.¹⁴ In fact, Indian music lacks the concept of harmony altogether, which caused the British to describe Indian music as unsophisticated and primitive. In Indian music, mood plays an important role as the elements (including *raga* or *thala* i.e. rhythm) that are picked for a piece serve the purpose of delivering the desired atmosphere. In Western music, mood is used as an element of balance where

¹² India and the British

http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/india/india_british.htm

¹³ Popley, 21

¹⁴ Ibid., 133

different variations and sections convey an array of contrasting ideas aimed at evoking different ambience.¹⁵

Ornamentation also plays a central role in Indian music. Since Indian music is based on a twenty-two microtonal system similar to the ancient Greek tradition, it contains intervals of quartertones, which sounded dissonant to the early British ear.¹⁶ In addition to ornamentation, Indian music contains no established rhythmic structure and real time is not important. However, time, as paced throughout a large-scale form, plays an important role in Western music.¹⁷

These disparities between Indian and Western musical styles provide the source for the early British attitude of dislike of foreign, Indian music. An early British commentator handily summarized the differences between Western and Indian music by stating, "In Europe we listen for the tone, the sweetness of the voice, of the instrument. In India they listen for the tune- the melody and the rhythm."¹⁸ Because of these differences separating the two cultures, Indian music sounded like sheer noise to the early, untrained British ear.

Having an understanding of the earliest interactions between the British and India, and the attitude of the early British toward Indian music, the study of changes in music over the next few centuries is made possible. These changes that occurred because of the cultural and musical exchanges between the British and India led to the formation of hybrid musical styles along the centuries. These styles exhibit musical and stylistic elements from both cultures woven together, resulting in unique and novel sounds.

¹⁵ Popley, 133

¹⁶ Bandopadhyaya Shripada, *The Music of India: A popular Handbook on Hindustani Music*, (Bombay: Taraporevala Sons and Co., 1970), 9

¹⁷ Popley, 133

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 135

Eighteenth Century

The eighteenth century is marked by struggle between powers as the British East India Company was gaining political and economic control of India while the Indian rulers maintained political stronghold over the territories. The French and the Dutch were defeated in India and Britain rose as the sole foreign power.¹⁹ Culturally, the late eighteenth century sees the rise of scholarly interest in India, especially with the dawn of Romanticism. The ideals of colonial domination, specifically in areas of art and language, were on the forefront of British minds. India became another land and culture from antiquity to be studied, similar to humanist interest in the ancient Greeks and Romans.²⁰ Hinduism became a fascination; a religion that Europeans strove to understand and preserve. Therefore, the eighteenth century characterizes the early stages of British infatuation and desire to domineer Indian culture combined with the exposure of western music to the Indian public, leading to the earliest mingling between the musical styles, which at first took on the form of mere imitation.

Even though the British infiltrated society in many areas, the courts of the Wodeyar kings in the south ruled without much foreign interruption. In the court of the Wodeyar kings, music was incorporated in daily evening programs that consisted of dances, enactments of religious stories, vocal, and lute music. Musical depictions of the sacred stories of the Mahabarata and the Ramayana were everyday scenes.²¹ The use of music as a tool for religion, as seen in the Wodeyar courts, is consistent with the origins of music in India. Additionally, for the first time in India's musical history, musicians and

¹⁹ Balachandran, 691

²⁰ Garry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, (Chicago: Oxford University Press, 1997), 21

²¹ Mandayam Bharati Vedavalli, *Mysore as a seat of Music*, (Trivandrum: CBH publications, 1992), 11

instrumentalists well versed in Karnatic, Western, and Hindustani styles were encouraged and honored by the kings with gifts.²² The musical revolution in the kingly courts reached regular citizens through public concerts, educating the public about “literate music” enjoyed in court.²³ Music was becoming a part of the lives of rich and poor alike. Public concerts made it possible for people of various classes to listen to music. Because the Wodeyar kings encouraged various styles of music, it is safe to suppose the public was aware of the differences in sound between the Karnatic, Western, and Hindustani styles. The attitude portrayed by the Wodeyar kings during this era was crucial in introducing their subjects to the concept of embracing not only music from their region, but other types of music as well.

The first attempt to combine Western and Indian musical hybrid styles was by the Southern Indian Karnatic musician and composer, Mutthusvami Dikshita (1776- 1835). Dikshita was regarded a saint as well as a musician since his music had intense spiritual, mythological, and philosophical undertones.²⁴ His first musical training was from his father who taught him to sing and play the vina.²⁵ The vina is a lute-like instrument, favored for accompaniment by the higher classes of India.²⁶ Dikshita’s family had contact with the British East India Company and the family was encouraged to move to Manali, a British hub in South India, where he was first exposed to Western musical styles. Dikshita encountered other vernacular forms of music through his interaction with Irish fiddlers and other

²² Vedavalli, 11

²³ Ibid., 11

²⁴ Maria Lord, *Dikṣitar, Muttusvāmi*, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music online

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Robert L. Hardgrave Jr. and Stephen M. Slawek, “Instruments and Music Culture in Eighteenth Century India: The Solvyns Portraits”, *Asian Music* 20, (1988 -1989), 1-92, (accessed December 19, 2013)

European instruments.²⁷ His younger brother learned to play the violin and became a pioneer for the use of the violin in Karnatic music. Through the music that his brother learned to play, Dikshita familiarized himself with French and English band music.²⁸ Because of the efforts of both Dikshita and his brother, the violin became an important aspect of Karnatic music.

Muttusvami Dikshita sought inspiration from these aforementioned Western influences when he was requested to compose text for famous European airs by the British officer Mr. Brown, stationed in Madras.²⁹ The first manuscript of this commission contained twenty-nine songs, composed in the scale of C major with some accidentals incorporated. In these compositions, Dikshita used rhythmic units analogous to the 3/4 or 4/4 time signatures.³⁰ He composed Sanskrit lyrics and set these texts to Western airs, some of them being well known tunes such as “God Save the Queen” and “O Whistle and I Will Come to You, my Lad”.³¹ These airs containing Sanskrit and Telugu texts were compiled in his collection *Nottuswara Sahitya* [1833]. Eleven out of the forty compositions in this collection were exact replicas of English song melodies.³² Reducing the complex, twenty-two microtonal system of Indian music into Western notation was not an easy task for Dikshita. Dikshita was the first composer who acted upon his interest in the Western tradition by imitating tunes and using simple time and key signatures. By doing so, Dikshita exposed his wide Indian audience to the concept of Western music.

²⁷ Balachandran , 692

²⁸ Ibid, 691

²⁹ Ibid, 692

³⁰ Durga S.A.K., “Nottuswara Sahitya of Muthiswami Dikshitar: An intercultural musical form.” *Journal of the Indian Musicological Society*, 27, (1996) 84-87 (accessed September 28, 2013)

³¹ Balachandran, 694

³² Durga S.A.K.,

Dikshita was one of the first Indian composers who was interested in European music and sought to incorporate elements of the foreign style into his own compositions. In fact, some of his compositions merely imitate Western tunes. However, since he preserves the Sanskrit and Telugu languages, along with their rhythmic stresses, he still maintains elements of Indian music. Dikshita was not only inspired by Western melodies and tunes, but also Western instruments such as the fiddle and the violin. Dikshita and his brother were pioneers of incorporating the violin as an instrument used for classical Karnatic music performance.³³ Dikshita was the first Indian composer who tried to use Western notation and time signatures. He composed Indian music that could be notated using Western notation.³⁴ Because of the imitation, inspiration, and novelty that Dikshita incorporated into his work based on Western styles, still maintaining the traditional Indian languages, his compositions can be considered a hybrid musical style that contrasted significantly from the traditional Indian music commonly heard during the eighteenth century.

Even as Indian composers such as Dikshita were accepting of the idea of Western music, Europeans were slower in embracing and understanding Indian music. However, the late eighteenth century witnessed the dawn of Romanticism in Europe. One of the hallmarks of Romanticism was exoticism, an interest in all things foreign and particularly in the oriental.³⁵ India and other colonies became fascinating subjects, especially among the

³³ Dikshita, Mutthuswami, *Raga Amritavarshini (Rain of Nectar)*, Aruna Sairam (vocals), H.N. Bhaskar (violin) Satish Kumar (mridangam), *Triologue: A project around South India, Moroccan and European Traditions*, (Glossa GCDP32306, , *Naxos Music Library*)

³⁴ Durga, S.A.K.

³⁵ Henry H. Remak, "Exoticism in Romanticism," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15, No. 1, (March, 1978), pp. 54, <http://0-www.jstor.org.books.redlands.edu/stable/40468062>, (accessed February 25, 2013)

visual arts. Artists such as Johann Zoffany and Francesco Renaldi painted several renowned structures and scenes of India, one popular example being the Taj Mahal.³⁶



Figure 1: Johann Zoffany, *Group Portrait With Sir Elijah And Lady Impey* (1783-84)

Several romantic paintings focused on European life in India, which offers insight to the British view of Indians during the late eighteenth century. For example, European families were depicted in comfortable settings with exotic Indian elements.³⁷ The figure indicated above represents a depiction of a British family, a couple and their two children surrounded by Indian musicians and servants.³⁸ The painting emphasizes the dancing child in the center with her Indian clothes dancing to the music the Indian musicians are playing.

³⁶ Farrell, 20

³⁷ Ibid., 20

³⁸ Johann Zoffany *Group Portrait with sir Elijah and Lady Impey*, ca. 1783-84, Museo Thyssen Bornemizsa, Madrid, Spain

Interestingly, the child is wearing the Indian clothes, making the painting playful, but at the same time making the Indians in the painting seem childish as well. The adults in the painting, however, maintain their original European dress. Paintings such as these were used as propaganda tools, promising the British a comfortable life in India. Additionally, through this painting, India seems less daunting, where British dress and lifestyle can be maintained with the added advantage of pleasing Indian elements, which convey mystery and exoticism.

At first, the romantic notions of India were mostly captured through visual and literary depictions and not through music. Because the British did not understand Indian music, they were not comfortable with embracing and incorporating it into their own musical styles. Additionally, the British were concerned about preserving the purity of ancient Indian music and feared that it might have already been lost.³⁹ They found that the contemporary music of India might have already been “corrupted” with Muslim influences, making the contemporary music an Indo-Islamic representation rather than a pure Indian style. Furthermore, there were many challenges for the British in understanding Indian music. Indian music was difficult to decipher as it contained its own distinct structure and grammar, making it difficult to analyze and document.⁴⁰ There were old treatises available to the British to help them interpret the music they were hearing. But the treatises were outdated and did not prove to be of much use in helping to examine contemporary Indian music.⁴¹

³⁹ Farrell, 21

⁴⁰ Ibid., 21

⁴¹ Ibid., 21

British interest in Indian music was first made possible by the work of orientalist Sir William Jones. Jones was a notable figure, instrumental in making Indian music understandable to the Western ear. Being a scholar, linguist, and orientalist, Jones moved to Calcutta in 1793, while in his thirties, to live there for the rest of his life.⁴² Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1794, dedicated to the study and understanding of language, literature, history, and culture of the Indian subcontinent.⁴³ Even though his primary area of expertise was linguistics, his knowledge of the ancient and preserved Sanskrit language made him a useful resource to decipher ancient treatises on Indian music.⁴⁴ In his essay “On the musical mode of the Hindus” [1792], William Jones draws the attention of the Europeans to the amount of information about Indian music that can be gleaned from Sanskrit texts, specific to the Hindu past, with very little Indo-Persian influence.⁴⁵ He commended the fact that math does not play an important role in Indian music but rather Indian music employs artistic freedom through the lack of rhythm. He was passionate about understanding what Indian music was like in the past and did important fieldwork to research the older forms of Indian music.⁴⁶ Jones is an important figure in the formation of the musical hybrid as he opened the eyes of the British to the concept of Indian music by making it less daunting and more understandable to the Western ear and encouraging British attempts to incorporate Indian music into British musical culture.

Orientalists such as Sir William Jones were important in the British understanding of Indian music. However, examining the intention of the British to study colonial culture

⁴² Peter Platt and Ian Woodfield. *Sir William Jones*, Grove Music Online. Oxford music online.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ William Jones, “On the Musical Mode of the Hindoos”, *Third Volume of Asiatic Researches*, 1799, Asiatic Society of Bengal, India

⁴⁶ Farrell, 25

through a postcolonial lens allows us to see that the British intent to study Indian music was not mere admiration, but rather a tool to establish authority over the Indian colony. Western music was a symbol representing European power, and the accumulation of knowledge from other musical cultures added to the demonstration of European supremacy.⁴⁷ The British governor general of India Warren Hastings captured this idea of gaining an upper hand over the colonies as an exhibition of European greatness when he encouraged “social communication over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest.”⁴⁸ Because of the British encouragement of the study and understanding of Indian music, Sir William Jones and other notable members of the British society in India developed an interest in learning and documenting Indian music.

This interest and the previous work achieved by Sir William Jones led to the novel genre of the Hindustani Air. Hindustani Airs are defined as “short musical pieces derived from an Indian original but arranged in a European idiom”.⁴⁹ The Hindustani Air was the primary step taken by Europeans to understand Indian music, especially as Indian music was transcribed into Western notation for the first time.⁵⁰ Because Indian music was reduced to a written form with staff notation, the end result of the Hindustani Air was rather inaccurate in terms of depicting the original melodies that were heard.⁵¹ The Hindustani Airs are significant as a novel genre as they capture the first attempt of the British to rationalize Indian music into a familiar sound.

⁴⁷ Cameron F. Bushnell, *Post Colonial Readings of Music in World Literature*. (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 12

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13

⁴⁹ Ian Woodfield, “The ‘Hindustannie Air:’ English Attempts to Understand Indian Music in the Late Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of Royal Music Association* 119, no. 2, (1994) 189, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/766519>. Accessed November 14, 2013

⁵⁰ Woodfield, 189

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 190

The genre of the Hindustani Air was socially established by English women, who with the help of their brothers and husbands, spread the genre among the British populace in India. A small group of women, reflecting the fashionable interest in all things oriental, began to employ professional musicians to “collect” Indian songs by notating the songs being sung by lead Indian singers during a performance. These women employed Indian women to play music for them while the collectors transcribed what they heard into a harpsichord arrangement.⁵² They were required to add a key signature, a time signature, and harmonization to the song while it was being sung by the singer.⁵³ By transcribing Indian music into a pre-existing, structured Western system, the British are exerting colonial attitude by taming the original sound of Indian music.

Even though women were instrumental in starting this genre, men were important in publishing the compositions of these songs. The arrangements of some of these airs were collected and published in Calcutta as *The Oriental Miscellany: being a Collection of the most Favorite Airs of Hindoostan* [1798] by the musician William Hamilton Bird. After the initial publication, there were several other such airs that were published in England.⁵⁴ Hamilton Bird’s collection contained instrumental pieces for harpsichord, flute, and guitar.⁵⁵ These Hindustani airs were a representation of Indian music in Europe. However, as the Aairs went farther away from their original source, they resembled Indian music less.⁵⁶

Composition of these airs was a desperate attempt of the British to rationalize the music that they heard onto paper, not realizing that Indian music loses its value as it is forced into

⁵² William Hamilton Bird, *The Oriental Miscellany: being a Collection of the most Favorite Airs of Hindoostan*, (Calcutta: Printed by Joseph Cooper, 1789)

⁵³ Peter Platt and Ian Woodfield. *Sir William Jones*, *Grove Music Online*. Oxford music online

⁵⁴ Platt and Woodfield

⁵⁵ Farrell, 33

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35

Western notation because its free and independent form cannot be captured with the strict rules of staff notation. The British were willing to sacrifice the accuracy of the melody of the airs in favor of a harmonic structure.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Hindustani Aairs serve as a hybrid style combining musical inspirations and original melodies from classical and folk Indian tunes, incorporated into Western notation, designed to be performed by Western musicians on Western instruments.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the British had a better grasp of Indian music, attained through the colonial desire to conquer the field of Indian music. They sought to capture the true ancient styles and texts from antiquity without adulteration from Persian and Muslim styles that infiltrated Indian music through centuries past. The give and take between the Western and Indian styles nevertheless resulted in the formation of hybrid styles. Firstly, Mutthuswami Dikshitar, inspired by English tunes and instruments such as the violin and fiddle, developed his own, unique style by incorporating Western elements into his classical, Sanskrit based music. Through the encouragement and intellectual help provided by the linguist and orientalist Sir William Jones, the British began to grasp the ideas and understanding behind Indian music. This illumination gave rise to the hybrid style of the Hindustani Aairs, which is an amalgamation of Indian and Western styles: it filters original Indian folk and classical music into Western music through transcriptions that change instrumentation and implement staff notation. Slowly but surely, both cultures started the process of accepting, understanding, and incorporating music from each other.

By the end of the century, in addition to the dawn of musical exchange, there were several political and cultural changes occurring within India. Lucknow, a city in the North

⁵⁷ Bushnell, 13

of India was emerging as a cultural center as the grand Moghul Empire came to an end.⁵⁸ Lucknow was a melting pot of influences where Indians were introduced to new genres, and new instruments, such as the Hindustani Air and the harpsichord respectively. In the South of India, the Wodeyar kings continued as important proponents of music as they encouraged *vidwans* (scholars) of the court to expand their knowledge of musical styles. Western and Karnatic music bands were established in courts, and books on music were collected and preserved.⁵⁹ This was the musical condition in India stepping into the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth Century

During the early nineteenth century, the mask of peaceful coexistence was fading between India and the British as the political tension that developed over the course of a century led to uprisings and rebellions.⁶⁰ The beginning of the nineteenth century saw the development of an elite group of Hindus, with their own brand of religion and nationalism, entertaining the idea of obtaining independence from the British.⁶¹ The movement towards gaining independence started when several Indian leaders returned to India after studying in prestigious universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. Because they were exposed to ideas of progress and pride during their studies, upon their return, they decided to apply these ideals to form coalitions with the aim of obtaining independence from the British.⁶² In the South, the British were strengthening their power, allowing less freedom in the courts. In spite of financial and political restrictions, the endowment of temples - a central

⁵⁸ Woodfield, 206

⁵⁹ Vedavalli, 18

⁶⁰ Farrell, 45

⁶¹ Ibid., 47

⁶² Ibid., 54

place for music performance and growth - continued.⁶³ The ideals of British culture from the eighteenth century dispersed into the elite Indian societies, as adopting certain aspects of Western music became a sign of progress and prestige. Indian music, which was already intertwined with Western themes, played an important role in the grand nationalistic movement of India.⁶⁴

Westerners continued to consider Indian music to be a memento as they collected Indian music for curiosity's sake – as a souvenir for “scientific, ethnographic, and bureaucratic enterprise.”⁶⁵ A new differentiation arose during this era, separating Indian music from Hindu music, and the British were only interested in the latter. Indian music was the contemporary music of the nineteenth century, which the British were concerned was adulterated with Islamic and Persian themes. Hindu music, on the other hand, was understood as the pure Sanskrit music from the past.⁶⁶ The British did not acknowledge the growth of music that happened through the centuries but were only concerned with the recitation of Vedas and the origins of the Indian musical system. Several scholars arose interested in the study of “Hindu music,” including Captain N. Augustus Willard, who wrote the *Treatise on the Music of Hindoostan* in 1834, relating modern performance practices to ancient Sanskrit theoretical treatises.⁶⁷

Indian scholars admired the curiosity of the British in Indian music and therefore attempted to create their own societies, inspired to study Indian music in order to reclaim it. The nineteenth century was a big step because of the origin of the idea of Indian

⁶³ Vedavalli, 20

⁶⁴ Farrell, G, 49

⁶⁵ Ibid., 49

⁶⁶ Ibid., 50

⁶⁷ Regula Qureshi et. al, *India 2: History of Classical Music*, in Grove music. Oxford Music Online.

“classical” music. Indian music always existed but the idea of naming it and using it as a source of national heritage and pride was established in the early nineteenth century.⁶⁸ In Poona, a city in the north of India, the Gayan Samaj was established in 1874, an organization responsible for research and performance in both Hindustani and Karnatic musical styles.⁶⁹ There was a call for founding a united national sound combining Hindustani and Karnatic traditions.⁷⁰ The musical societies that developed during this century aimed to achieve the unification of the different traditions. The early nineteenth century therefore saw a development of several musical societies, musicians, and intellectuals from within India itself, a robust change compared to the eighteenth century, during which the study and analysis of Indian music was mostly done by the British.

The main challenge of the musical societies was developing a style that unified the Karnatic and Hindustani notations. It was obvious that transcribing Indian music to paper presented a challenge due to its microtonal subtleties and both Western and Indian musicologists concerned themselves with this problem.⁷¹ Ethnomusicologists believed that for education’s sake, there was a need to utilize Western notation as it could serve as a tool to unify the Indian musical systems.⁷² There were constant arguments in societies such as the Gayan Samaj about what notation to use in music schools. The Royal School of Music in India decided to offer training in Western music and notation.⁷³ These societies and their debates about Indian music are important to the creation of a hybrid musical style because

⁶⁸ Vedavalli, 56

⁶⁹ Regula Qureshi et. al, *India 2: History of Classical Music*, in Grove music. Oxford Music Online.

⁷⁰ Qureshi et. al

⁷¹ Farrell, 52

⁷² Ibid., 52

⁷³ Vedavalli, 35

they allowed Western notation and theory to seep into the Indian classical system, which was aimed at opening up Karnatic and Hindustani music to the general populace through schools and institutions. The influence of Western music was not just in terms of sound, instrumentation, and language anymore, but included the fields of theory, notation and educational systems as well.

Societies such as the Gayan Samaj were instrumental in transforming the future of Indian classical music. They were proponents of introducing an instrument known as the harmonium around the year 1850 after much debate. The harmonium is a keyboard instrument with a tempered scale. Because it was a tempered instrument, Indian *shrutis* or scales that contained microtones had to be altered, causing a major impact in the classical Indian sound.⁷⁴ With the loss of the microtones, Indian music lost much of its individuality to share a major similarity with Western music.

In addition to the introduction of the harmonium, the musical societies worked with the British in opening up the music to the middle and low classes as well. During this era, music was becoming a middle class pursuit with many performances and competitions targeting participation from the middle class.⁷⁵ These societies wrote to Indian kings seeking the musical notations being used in their courts, as the kings encouraged notation that allowed both Western and Indian music. Through these societies and the help of kings, a musical renaissance occurred in India as music transformed into a form available to all classes of people. Additionally, this Renaissance brought with it a monumental change with the introduction of the harmonium, which altered Indian music drastically, reducing it from its microtonal scales to tempered scales.

⁷⁴ Farrell, 54

⁷⁵ Ibid., 54

Out of the new love and ownership of Indian music, and the nationalistic movement arising in India, composers and performers who had interesting and original ideas about Indian music emerged. One such musician was Sir Sourindro Mohun Tagore. He was from a well-to-do Indian family who studied in a British style university, studying both Indian and comparative music.⁷⁶ He was a central proponent of the musical renaissance in India in the late 19th century.⁷⁷ The complex loyalties between England and India that many Indians experienced during this time can be seen through the compositions of Sir Mohun Tagore. He put together a collection of musical books with songs glorifying Queen Victoria, containing Sanskrit and English texts, notated using both staff and Bengali notation.⁷⁸ His music was part of the emergence of the true amalgamation of Western and Indian musical styles which is brought to further agreement by his relative Sir Rabindranath Tagore.

Further interest in Western music in the South developed because of the interest the rulers took in Western music. During the late 1800's Chamaraja Wodeyar, a significant ruler who influenced several important political, legislative and infrastructural improvements, developed a significant interest in Western music.⁷⁹ He had an English bandmaster named Defris who lived and worked in his court. Chamaraja Wodeyar himself was an accomplished musician who was reported to play the violin along with a singer and a vina player.⁸⁰ His successor also received training in Western music by the bandmaster Defris. There were several bandmasters in the court of the Wodeyar kings who were responsible for Western music. In fact, the king was so fond of Western music that he sent

⁷⁶ David Tratsoff, *Sir Mohun Tagore*, In Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Farrell, 65

⁷⁹ Maharaja Chamaraja Wodeyar, Karnataka Samskrit Univeristy.

<http://www.ksu.ac.in/en/maharaja-chamaraja-wodeyar/>

⁸⁰ Vedavalli, 26

one of the scholars of the court to London for training, where he learned to play the theremin and the piano.⁸¹ Western instruments were encouraged, especially for the playing of Karnatic music. Nalwadi Wodeyar, another ruler collected Western instruments. He had a piano and electric organ for use of the royal family. Additionally, he himself mastered the violin, clarinet, harmonium, and the saxophone.⁸² During this century, the rulers were integral in spreading Western music in India as they incorporated Western elements actively in their courts. Because of the encouragement provided by the rulers, several musicians learned to play Indian music on Western instruments, directly combining the Western and Indian musical styles.

The demand for a national sound for India, attempted by several composers, was brought to completion by the universal folk inspired compositions of Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath Tagore grew up in an aristocratic home with his grandfather, a student and performer of Western music, who in 1845 impressed many Westerners in Paris with his piano playing and singing of Italian and French arias. He studied in India and in Britain, and was an influential patron of the arts.⁸³ Tagore grew up in his grandfather's footsteps, learning and appreciating Western music. Tagore was especially captivated by the 1846 edition of Thomas Moore's Irish melodies. He heard the music of Chopin and other Western composers and was even known to sing Beethoven's *Adelaide*.⁸⁴ Rabindranath Tagore was

⁸¹ Vedavalli, 34

⁸² Ibid, 36

⁸³ Bob van den Linden, *Music and Empire in Britain and India: Identity, Internationalism and Cross-Cultural Communication*, (Palgrave MacMillan Publications, 2013)

⁸⁴ Ibid., 109

a Renaissance man with an aptitude for visual art, music, teaching, and writing. However, he found his purest art to be music.⁸⁵

Tagore went to London from 1878- 1880 and was welcomed to play music and English folksongs at soirees. On a later trip to England he studied and sang Western compositions including Gounod's *Serenade, If,* and *Ave Maria*. During his trip to Europe, he was specifically impacted about the ease through which Western music "conveyed emotions such as laughter or merriment" easily.⁸⁶ After his return, Tagore took to writing several Bengali songs inspired by folk songs that he heard on his trip to Europe and incorporated them in his musical plays, which were inspired by his viewings of operas and stage productions. One of his famous compositions, *Kotobaro Bhebechinu*, is directly based on the English melody *Drink to me only with thine eyes*.⁸⁷

As Tagore was creating his own personal style in music that combined Indian and Western styles, especially though elements of folk music, Tagore's father started to engage rigorously in the Hindu Nationalist movement, the Brahmo Samaj. This group adopted Western traditions in their gatherings. They composed patriotic literature and adopted congregational singing with the harmonium, inspired by the English, Christian practice of hymn singing.⁸⁸ Inspired by his father, Tagore started to participate in nationalist movements, sometimes by writing nationalist songs. The official Indian national anthem came from one such composition, originally written in 1896 for the Indian National Congress, another patriotic group. Tagore premiered it by singing it in their meeting.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ William Radice. *Rabindranath Tagore* in Grove Music online. Oxford Music Online.

⁸⁶ Linden, 110

⁸⁷ Radice. *Rabindranath Tagore*

⁸⁸ Linden, 110

⁸⁹ Ibid., 110

Even though Rabindranath Tagore started his compositional career by composing nationalistic songs that resembled Western tunes closely, his ultimate style was formed only after a time of solitude. Between 1890- 1901, Tagore adapted a simple life on the banks of a river in rural Bengal where he reconnected with beauty and spirituality, inspired by the rural way of life.⁹⁰ Here, he composed songs regarding nature and the simple life of the rural folk known as the Bauls. Tagore believed that the Baul songs he composed here would be a unifying thread among all of the Bengali tribes as they contained elements of simple folk music that resonated with all of India.⁹¹ Under the influence of Western classical composers and British folk songs against the strict rule of Indian classical music, Tagore sought universality in music by synthesizing folk songs from various cultures.

After his time of solitude, he returned to society to make several significant contributions in the field of Indian music. He was the first real proponent of modernizing Indian music making. He supported the music program at the National University in Madras, where he was a proponent of the utilization of Western staff notation to notate all of his compositions.⁹² His main problems with Indian music was that Indian musicians lacked stage presence and that Indian music in general ignored instruments. He stated, "India goes to the extreme of almost holding with contempt any finesse in singing, our master singers never undergo the least trouble to make their voice and manner attractive."⁹³ He was one of the first important Indian composers to pay attention to not just the virtuosity of the singer but also the timbre of the voice. He especially preferred the

⁹⁰ Linden., 116

⁹¹ Ibid., 117

⁹² Tagore, Rabindranath., *One Hundred songs in staff notation.*, (New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi, 2007)

⁹³ Linden., 128

attractiveness of the Western voices in people such as William Bake, who studied under him. His favorite singers were actually all European, including Swedish Soprano Christine Nilsson and the English contralto Clara Butt.⁹⁴ He was specifically impressed with the simple fact that Western singers and musicians tuned up before they went on stage, a practice not followed in India. Due to his preference of musical Western practices, he concentrated on showing the voice off by keeping his music simple. He regularized the rhythm of his compositions and left out detailed ornamentation and rhythmic ambiguity.⁹⁵ He questioned many Indian conventions that were present just for the sake of tradition and not aesthetic quality. His attitude toward the state of Indian music is summarized by his statement: “Bengalis really do need a strong dose of Western influence- not in order to denationalize her music, but to make Bengalis appreciate and nurture it better.”⁹⁶ Tagore, through his inspiration of the western ideals of notation, stage presence, and beautiful singing, simplified his compositions to feature the lyrics and voice, creating a true unifying, national, and Indian sound.

Tagore’s music appealed to both contemporary Indian citizens as well as the British. The Indians found his style to be different, easy and nationalistic.⁹⁷ The British found his music to be easy to understand and study because of its steady form, rhythm, and melody instead of the endless improvisations of classical singers.⁹⁸ Tagore, with his inspiration from Bengali rural folk songs as well as English folk music, created a genre that was a true amalgamation of Western and Indian musical styles. Through Tagore, a new national

⁹⁴ Linden, 130

⁹⁵ Tagore, *One Hundred songs in staff notation*

⁹⁶ Fritz Bose, “Western Influence in Modern Asian Music,” (1959) *Journal of International Folk Music* 11, 47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/834857>, (accessed August 27, 2013)

⁹⁷ Linden, 177

⁹⁸Linden, 132

musical style had emerged with conscious imitation of Western style but also conservancy of Indian ragas and language, making it appealing to both cultures.

Other musical amalgamations of the century included the adaptation of the harmonium, which reduced Indian music to a tempered system rather than a microtonal system. The Western practice of hymn singing was incorporated in the meetings of several nationalist societies. Many rulers were proponents of Indian music being played on Western instruments. The formation of bands started to develop in Indian courts, which was a new construct that was not seen before. The highly westernized, classical Indian music of the day was available to all classes of people. The middle class especially became enthusiastic about Indian music. Due to the desire for unification of Indian music, many debates were held about the usage of the types of notation. Ultimately, many schools in India used Western notation for education systems. Tagore himself supported the utilization of Western notation for his songs. Finally, Rabindranath Tagore's Indian art songs, the harmonium, and usage of Western notation led to the creation of hybrid musical styles to bridge the gap between the foreign cultures.

Twentieth Century

The dawn of the twentieth century saw further growth in the taste of the Indian royal populace toward Western music. In the Wodeyar courts of the South, orchestration of Karnatic music was encouraged. The kings wanted Karnatic music to be transcribed and harmonized.⁹⁹ During the twentieth century, Western ballroom music and dance made its

⁹⁹ Vedavalli, 39

way to cities such as Lucknow and Calcutta, bringing with it orchestral music.¹⁰⁰ Since original, classical Karnatic music had no element of harmony or orchestration, incorporating these Western themes indicates the formation of a true Indo-Western style. Additionally during this century, the king Jayachamaraja himself was so interested in Western music, that he encouraged composers such as Nikilas Medtners, a Russian composer, who dedicated a piano concerto to the king.¹⁰¹ The king himself was gifted in playing the piano and pipe organ and became an honorary fellow of the Trinity College of Music in London.¹⁰²

The debates of the societies from the nineteenth century regarding tuning and scales continued into the twentieth century. Some were adamant that Indian music was lost as now music had been reduced from a complex twenty two microtonal system to a simple, twelve semitone system.¹⁰³ Some believed that the shift from ancient Indian music to contemporary Indian music was imminent.¹⁰⁴ Clements and Decal founded the Philharmonic Society of Western Indian in 1911, which was a society aimed at addressing questions about the fate of Indian classical music, to establish a unified system of notation, and to publish a journal in India solely dedicated to music.¹⁰⁵

In the midst of this debate and confusion between musical styles in India, sitar player Ravi Shankar took his place. Ravi Shankar started out his life dancing with his brother Uday Shankar. Uday Shankar was another prominent link between India and the

¹⁰⁰ Bradley Shope, "Anglo Indian Identity: Knowledge, and Power: Western Ballroom Music in Lucknow." *TDR*, 48, no. 4, (2004) 167-182, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4488601>, (accessed August 27, 2013)

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 49

¹⁰² Vedavalli, 49

¹⁰³ Farrell, 54

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 54

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 51

West as he synthesized an interesting dance form connecting Indian and Western dance styles. Uday Shankar's dance company performed all over Europe, dancing in Switzerland, Italy, and Paris. His brother Ravi Shankar only started to be interested in music after his return to India. He met his future *guru* or teacher, Usted Allaudin Khan, at the All-Bengal Music Conference in Calcutta. Khan was an acclaimed classical musician of his time and a pioneer of modern Hindustani instrumental music.¹⁰⁶

Ravi Shankar underwent an uncertain adolescence as he had a difficult decision to make - he was torn between staying a star and touring the world dedicated to dancing, or giving it up for the cultural custom of the teacher-pupil relationship with uncertain outcomes.¹⁰⁷ Shankar stayed, poor, committed, and learning from his *guru*, for nearly seven years of his life. This was especially hard for him, as he had to give up the comforts and glamour of his early adolescent years to completely devote himself to learning and practicing music.¹⁰⁸ After marrying his *guru's* daughter, Anapurna Devi, he started to travel and perform, becoming a well- renowned musician all over India. His musical style and willingness to perform in instrumental duets, not a common Indian practice, stems from inspiration from his *guru*. Ravi Shankar joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) in 1945, and his first commission was to provide music for an Indian ballet, *India Immortal*.¹⁰⁹ During this phase of his life, Shankar developed his own personal style of music, placing emphasis on folk music to create what Shankar calls a semi- classical style, using mostly Indian instruments rather than Western ones.¹¹⁰ His formation of the semi-

¹⁰⁶ Ravi Shankar, *Raga Mala*, ed. George Harrison, (New York: Rain Publishers, 1999), 63

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 82

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 85

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 106

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 107

classical style is representative of Shankar's idea of the development of the classical Indian sound to best encapsulate contemporary India. He developed this musical style based on the foundations of the nationalistic sound laid by Rabindranath Tagore in the nineteenth century.

Ravi Shankar was an important advocate of creating a true nationalistic, Indian sound. In fact, Shankar was responsible for creating the tune for the famous, patriotic song *Sare Jahaan Se Accha*. He also composed music for a ballet-cum-opera based on *The Discovery of India*, written by the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru.¹¹¹ He became more creative in his compositions, refraining from the utility of Western instruments but embracing sound effects and some innovative Indian instrumentation. He also demanded that Indian music be respected by making demands of his audience to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking while he played. He also insisted that a dais be erected so as to raise the musician on a platform through which he encouraged the regular Indian audience to appreciate the sacredness of their music.¹¹²

It was obvious to everyone around him that Ravi Shankar would be a logical ambassador of Indian music to the West. He was one of the only accomplished Indian musicians of the twentieth century with fluent English and the ability to charm a room. He first tested the waters by touring the Soviet Union with the Indian cultural delegation. His twenty-minute set was very well received.¹¹³ This trip gave him enough confidence to try a tour of the West with Indian classical music. His first tour in the West started with London, followed by Germany, and ending in the United States, covering New York, Philadelphia,

¹¹¹ Shankar., 111

¹¹² Ibid., 128

¹¹³ Ibid., 131

and Southern California. During this tour, he performed not at his conventional, large venues but rather smaller, humbler halls.¹¹⁴ However, the interest he had peaked during his first tour guaranteed his return trip. His second major tour of the West mainly targeted the rock and roll crazed youth, especially with the dawn of the Beatles, who were inspired by Indian spirituality and used Indian sounds in their songs.¹¹⁵ It was difficult for Shankar to perform his 'sacred' music in venues abusing drugs, alcohol, and sex, but his aim of educating the youth was greater than observance of rules. Through this wide international career, Shankar drew respect and awareness to Indian music.

After these years, Shankar returned to classical Indian music, but by this time had caught everyone's attention. He had become a prolific musician who was capable of delivering enjoyable, Indian music to Western ears. He performed and organized several concerts alongside George Harrison, combining the East and the West. Shankar was crucial in introducing the younger generations to the idea of Indian music through collaborations with a Western pop superstar, something that the world had never seen before.

Ravi Shankar's advocacy of Indian classical music and interest in educating Western audiences can be heard through his two sitar concertos, in which he incorporated many Western instruments but managed to maintain the true quality of traditional Indian music. His first sitar concerto premiered in 1971 at the Royal Festival Hall in London with the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Andre Previn. It was the first time a composer wrote a piece completely dedicated to the rich *ragas* and *thalas* of India.¹¹⁶ His second Sitar concerto premiered in New York in 1981 conducted by Shankar's respected friend and

¹¹⁴ Reid, Charles, "Ravi Shankar and George Beatles," *The New York Times*. May 7, 1967

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Shankar, R., 215

musician Zubin Mehta. He named this piece *Raga Mala*, which means a garland of *ragas*, as he introduced around 40 new *ragas* to the listener over the course of the concerto.¹¹⁷ His concertos presented a challenge for Shankar as he found it hard to improvise between the provided number of measures. Following the conductor was something he had to get used to. It was arguably one of the hardest tasks he had to face in his career. The idea of a concerto, an orchestra, and a conductor are fully Western. Shankar brilliantly used these Western musical constructs and overlaid them with the intricate music of his sitar. Because of the difficulties of mixing with the opposite musical style, Shankar's concertos are thinner in texture as they use fewer instruments playing at one time.¹¹⁸ The composition of these sitar concertos was an ultimate amalgamation of Western and Indian classical musical styles, creating a grand hybrid style of music.

Another important contribution that Shankar can take credit for is introducing Indian music to an elite group of Westerners through his sitar concertos. The subscribers to the venues where the concertos were performed were mostly from an elite and musically educated class. Presenting the sitar concerto with the orchestra at these prestigious venues elevated the perception of Indian music to a higher level.

Even though there were several hybrid styles that arose due to the combining of Western and Indian musical styles after colonialism, no one mastered mixing these two styles as successfully as Ravi Shankar. He had the combination of intellect, musical ability, background, training, charisma, and knowledge of the English language that allowed him to open up Western ears to the prospect of Indian music. He was also highly versatile, being

¹¹⁷ Shankar., 215

¹¹⁸ Ravi Shankar, *Sitar Concerto No. 2- Raga Mala*, London Symphony Orchestra conducted by Zubin Mehta, Ravi Shankar (sitar), *India Ravi Shankar: Sitar Concertos and Other Works*, Warner Classics, *Naxos Music Library*

able to perform not just in a classical Indian concert setting, but also rock-and-roll and orchestral settings as well. He also produced compositions for epic movies, theatre, and television shows, earning him several coveted international prizes.¹¹⁹ Shankar learned the art of collaboration, working with jazz artists, classical musicians, and rock-and-roll artists alike. He was the ultimate communicator and mastermind, making Indian music accessible to the Western ear and combining the two styles of music.

Over the course of three centuries, through political disagreements, religious differences and cultural eccentricities, two distinct musical styles came together, with the help of prolific musicians along the way, giving rise to a novel and glorious style of music. This new style of music was only possible due to contributions and risks taken by early Indian musicians such as Mutthuswami Dikshitar and Rabindranath Tagore. Additionally, Western musicians and intellectuals, such as Sir William Jones and Hamilton Bird, were important in the formation of this style as they made the idea of Indian music less daunting and more relatable. Part of the reason for the formation of the hybrid musical style was because of the pop music craze during the 1960's and the introduction of the sitar through famous rock bands such as the Beatles. Without any of these elements, the world would not have been ready to receive the hybrid style of music provided through the sitar music of Ravi Shankar. Centuries of preparation was needed to prepare both Indian and Western audiences for something as original and unexpected as a sitar concerto. Without these several steps along that way, an ingenious hybrid style culminating Indian and Western styles would not have been possible.

¹¹⁹ Shankar, 323

There is no doubt that a new style of music has been created over the centuries. The purpose of these styles and the intent that encouraged their formation have changed drastically over the course of three hundred years. During the seventeenth century, the novel styles created were meek, mostly using imitation by borrowing tunes from each other's cultures. Earlier novel styles such as the Hindustani airs were an attempt by the British to rationalize Indian music by incorporating traditional Indian music into a strict key and time signature. From a post-colonial standpoint, this genre was a British attempt to portray India as a colony. The novel styles of the nineteenth century, characterized by the compositions of Rabindranath Tagore served a nationalistic purpose by incorporating western notation and musical simplicity with the universal quality of folk songs to represent India as a nation with her own identity. Lastly, the novel styles by the twentieth century developed into an equal collaboration between Western and Indian musical styles. Shankar combines a classical sitar sound with a western orchestral tradition to create a novel style that elevates Indian music into elite western society and represents India as a contemporary, independent nation. In the grander scheme, collaboration between India and the West is relatively young, spanning only three centuries. Over the coming centuries, the conversation between Western and Indian styles can be predicted to further grow and flourish into an intricate and dramatic style of music.

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