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Curriculum, Culture, and Policy: Why We Need "Sociology of Music" as a Sub-Discipline

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Abstract

In the context of India's expanding international engagement, cultural diplomacy has become a strategic pillar of foreign policy which is evident in frameworks like the ASEAN-India Connectivity Policy, which emphasizes people-to-people interaction and cultural exchange. Music, as a key component of intangible cultural heritage, offers deep insights into community identities and worldviews. However, music education in Indian academia, particularly in Central Universities, remains cantered on classical traditions and performance techniques, often neglecting sociological and anthropological approaches. This paper argues for the institutional inclusion of a "Sociology of Music" sub-discipline within music studies to bridge this gap, and highlights how integrating cross-disciplinary frameworks, particularly from Ethnomusicology, can enable deeper cultural understanding and prepare students to engage with India's international cultural initiatives. Regions like Northeast India, rich in diverse musical forms, are often overlooked despite their relevance to South-East Asian connectivity. Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates holistic and multidisciplinary learning, this study supports incorporating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Indigenous Knowledge (INDI-IKS) into music curricula. Drawing on UNESCO's principles for safeguarding intangible heritage, the study concludes with recommendations to reframe music education as a tool for intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and sustainable cultural development.

Keywords: Cultural Policy, International Cross-cultural Exchange, Ethnomusicology, NEP 2020, Indian Knowledge System, Indigenous Knowledge System

Introduction: Music as a Social Skill:

Music serves as a powerful medium for conveying the cultural knowledge and social identity of communities worldwide. Mastery of the theoretical frameworks and structural grammar of a musical tradition, combined with an empathetic understanding of the community that sustains it, are essential complementary skills for meaningful cultural comprehension and exchange. This study examines India's cultural exchange policies through the lens of Musical Anthropology, aiming to identify potential gaps within the academic discipline of music at the undergraduate and graduate levels. The goal is to assess how current music education prepares students to actively engage and contribute to India's international cultural diplomacy efforts.

Objectives:

1. To examine the alignment of music education with the goals of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, especially its emphasis on holistic, multidisciplinary learning and inclusion of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS).
2. To assess UNESCO's frameworks on intangible cultural heritage and their implications for safeguarding diverse musical traditions,
3. To assess Asean-Indian connectivity Policy and Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) for cross-cultural understanding.
4. To identify gaps and opportunities in current music syllabi that could enhance students' preparedness for contributing effectively to India's cross-cultural exchanges.

Methodology:

A review of literature focused on music education in India, emphasizing the nature and structure of curriculum content, pedagogical strategies, and the degree to which sociological and anthropological perspectives are the primary methods of this study. The key policy documents such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, ASEAN-India Connectivity reports, and relevant UNESCO publications on the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage are read. The nature of the objectives of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS) and Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) as study areas are also explored.

Evaluating the representation of classical, folk, and contemporary music traditions, the approach assesses the extent to which interdisciplinary frameworks, especially sociological and anthropological worldviews, are integrated into the syllabi. Through the review of initiatives such as the ASEAN-India Music Festival, collaborative artist residencies, and inter-university cultural networks, the study explores the utility of music in building and encouraging cross-cultural understanding and exchange.

Policy Review and Synthesis:

The 'Sociology of Music' and 'New Education Policy 2020'

The 'Sociology of Music' explores how music functions within society, reflecting and shaping cultural identities, social structures, and power relations. In the Indian context, this field reveals how music changes in character in response to caste, gender, class, and regional dynamics. Historically, access to classical music was confined to upper castes and patriarchal structures, while folk and tribal music forms, though rich in heritage, were often marginalized (Neuman, 1990; Manuel, 1993). These sociological insights are critical for reimagining impartial and inclusive music education in India.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a transformative structure of the Education system that aligns with many sociological insights into disciplines. Because it emphasizes holistic, multidisciplinary education, and positions the arts, including music, as essential to the curriculum rather than as extracurricular (Ministry of Education, 2020). The policy's focus on "learning rooted in Indian culture and values" opens space for integrating

diverse musical traditions, classical, folk, and tribal, into mainstream education, thereby democratizing access and representation.

From a sociological standpoint, NEP 2020's push to incorporate local knowledge systems and regional languages into education promotes cultural inclusivity. If implemented thoughtfully, this can challenge historical hierarchies in music education and foster recognition of marginalized musical traditions (Kumar, 2021). Furthermore, the policy's support for vocational education and digital learning platforms provides opportunities for wider dissemination of music training, especially for underrepresented groups.

However, sociologists caution that without structural reforms, such as teacher training, curriculum redesign, and adequate funding, the inclusion of music in education could remain symbolic. The success of NEP 2020 in transforming the sociology of music education will depend on how these policies are operationalized at the grassroots level (Agrawal, 2021).

Understanding Cross-cultural Heritage through Music: UNESCO

Music is a vital expression of cultural identity and a powerful medium for promoting and cultivating intercultural understanding. As a form of intangible cultural heritage, music transcends borders, facilitating dialogue among civilizations and promoting social cohesion. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) plays a crucial role in safeguarding musical traditions globally, especially through its Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), which recognizes music as a living heritage that must be preserved and transmitted across generations (UNESCO, 2003).

UNESCO's initiatives emphasize that music embodies the values, beliefs, and histories of communities. Traditional musical practices are not merely artistic expressions but deeply rooted cultural systems that reflect environmental, spiritual, and social knowledge (Schippers & Grant, 2016). By documenting and promoting these traditions, UNESCO facilitates cross-cultural education and mutual respect among diverse populations.

From a sociological standpoint, UNESCO's cultural heritage framework highlights how music contributes to the collective identity of communities while also revealing the power dynamics involved in heritage recognition. Critics point out that certain traditions receive more visibility due to political influence or tourism potential, raising questions about whose heritage is valued and preserved (Hafstein, 2009). Nonetheless, UNESCO's global platform enables marginalized cultures to gain international recognition, fostering pride and continuity in their musical legacies.

Furthermore, programs such as the 'UNESCO Creative Cities of Music' initiative demonstrate how cities can use music as a driver of sustainable development, cultural diversity, and global cooperation. Through international exchanges, festivals, and documentation efforts, music becomes both a tool for peace-building and a bridge for cultural diplomacy (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, understanding cross-cultural heritage through music, especially through UNESCO's frameworks, encourages not only the appreciation of cultural diversity but also a critical reflection on how global institutions can equitably represent and sustain the world's musical wealth.

Cultural Diplomacy and Arts-Based Initiatives in 'ASEAN-India Connectivity'

The ASEAN-India Connectivity Policy is framed to strengthen multifaceted linkages between India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). One of its primary goals, as outlined in the ASEAN-India relations brief, is to "enhance connectivity between India and ASEAN in the broadest sense", covering physical, digital, and people-to-people dimensions (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022). Cultural and educational exchanges are vital components of this vision, with music playing a significant role as both a performing art and a vehicle for cultural diplomacy.

Several sectoral dialogue mechanisms and initiatives under the 'Work Plan for ASEAN-India Cooperation' focus on education, digital connectivity, and cultural exchange. These provide a platform for music to function as a bridge for mutual understanding. Notable commemorative activities where music has featured prominently include:

- The establishment of an ASEAN Cultural Heritage List, with a feasibility study approved in August 2022.
- The ASEAN-India Network of Universities (AINU) meeting held in Jakarta in August 2022, promoting academic cooperation.
- The ASEAN-India Artist Camp (Udaipur, October 2022) and the ASEAN-India Music Festival (New Delhi and Shillong, November 2022), showcasing musical collaboration.
- Initiatives like the ASEAN-India Media Exchange Programme and the ASEAN-India Youth Festival, which create additional spaces for cross-cultural artistic dialogue.
- The publication of *Connected Histories of India and Southeast Asia: Icons, Narratives, Monuments* aims to deepen historical and cultural understanding.

Music, as part of India's soft power strategy under the "Act East" Policy, functions as a tool of people-to-people connectivity (MEA, 2014). From a sociocultural perspective, music can be considered a universal medium akin to language, capable of reflecting societal values, worldviews, and historical memory. It facilitates cultural literacy and mutual empathy, particularly in tourism, intercultural education, and artistic collaboration (Nair, 2020).

Furthermore, cross-cultural musical engagement fosters anthropological insights into the symbolic and ritual significance of music across Southeast Asian societies. Indian researchers, artists, and students, if equipped with rigorous methodological training, can benefit from these interactions by developing a deeper understanding of Southeast Asia's diverse musical traditions and epistemologies.

Indian Knowledge System and Sociology of Music:

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) encompasses a vast corpus of indigenous philosophies, sciences, arts, and cultural practices that have evolved over millennia. Music, if seen as a core component of IKS, reflects the spiritual, metaphysical, and social dimensions of Indian civilization. Rooted in the Vedic traditions, Indian classical music, both Hindustani and

Carnatic, has traditionally served not only as an aesthetic practice but also as a means of spiritual upliftment and social cohesion (Katz, 2001).

Sociologically, music in India operates as a medium of cultural identity, social hierarchy, and communal bonding. The Sociology of Music can examine how musical practices are shaped by and reflect caste, class, gender, and regional dynamics. For instance, access to classical music training was historically restricted to upper-caste communities, reflecting broader patterns of social stratification (Neuman, 1990). Folk and devotional genres, in contrast, have often served as expressive outlets for marginalized groups, challenging orthodox norms and promoting social change (Manuel, 1993).

The integration of music within the IKS is not limited to performance but extends to its pedagogical and philosophical dimensions. The 'guru-shishya parampara' (teacher-disciple tradition) exemplifies a relational and experiential model of knowledge transmission that contrasts with modern institutional modes. Furthermore, Indian music theory, with its emphasis on 'raga', 'tala', and 'rasa' (emotional resonance) demonstrates an intricate understanding of human psychology and cosmology, thereby offering fertile ground for interdisciplinary inquiry within sociology, philosophy, and cognitive science (Rowell, 1992).

In contemporary times, globalization and digital media have transformed the landscape of Indian music, introducing new forms of hybridity and democratizing access. Yet, traditional frameworks rooted in the Indian Knowledge System continue to influence the way music is taught, performed, and experienced across communities in India and the diaspora.

Indigenous Knowledge System and Sociology of Music:

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to the complex set of knowledge, practices, beliefs, and innovations developed by local communities through generations of interaction with their environment. Music within these systems is more than artistic expression; it is deeply embedded in rituals, storytelling, education, and social organization (Battiste, 2002). Indigenous music serves as a living archive of cultural memory, values, and cosmology, reflecting the community's relationship with nature, ancestry, and spirituality.

From a sociological perspective, the study of indigenous music reveals its function in maintaining social cohesion, transmitting oral history, and regulating moral codes. For many indigenous communities, music is integral to rites of passage, healing ceremonies, and seasonal celebrations, thereby reinforcing communal identity and solidarity (Sheehy, 1992). Unlike the commodified music of the global mainstream, indigenous musical traditions are often participatory and community-cantered, blurring the lines between performer and audience.

The Sociology of Music within Indigenous Knowledge Systems understands how music can both reflect and resist power dynamics. Colonialism, globalization, and cultural assimilation have historically marginalized indigenous musical forms, but they have also sparked revitalization movements where music becomes a medium of resistance and cultural resilience (Diamond, Cronk, & Von Rosen, 1994). Music thus plays a critical role in asserting indigenous rights, preserving endangered languages, and encouraging intercultural dialogue.

Moreover, the epistemology underlying indigenous music challenges Western paradigms of knowledge production. It emphasizes embodied learning, ecological awareness, and the sacredness of sound, principles that align with contemporary calls for decolonizing education and knowledge systems (Smith, 1999). The integration of these perspectives into socio-musicological and\or Ethnomusicological discourse can expand our understanding of music's role in shaping both individual and collective identities.

Music Education and Cultural Connectivity in India: Curriculum and Regional Significance:

The academic syllabus for music in Indian institutions primarily emphasizes classical music and dance as core components of performing arts education. Courses offer theoretical and practical studies in Indian classical forms—both Hindustani and Carnatic; and often include folk music as supplementary or elective units, typically within the framework of classical music studies.

Theoretical components of these syllabi provide substantial insight into the aesthetic principles, historical development, and structural elements of Indian music and dance traditions. In a culturally diverse country like India, acquiring foundational knowledge of one's own musical heritage, including classical and folk forms, is essential to cultivating a holistic understanding of music as a discipline. The focus on classical music provides a structured approach to musical pedagogy, while folk music remains an expansive and underrepresented field, encompassing rich local traditions and cultural narratives that warrant deeper academic engagement, especially when music is understood through Ethnomusicological perspective which enquires the meaning of sound to different cultures.

Sociological and Anthropological Dimensions: A Missing Link

While the curriculum includes historical and theoretical knowledge, there remains a notable gap in the integration of sociological and anthropological perspectives. Understanding the social contexts, community-based practices, and cultural significance of musical forms is vital to fully grasp the evolution and function of music in society. Introducing anthropological training within music programs can equip students with tools to engage in cross-cultural studies, thereby preparing them to explore the music of different societies, including those in neighbouring countries.

Music as a Cultural Corridor: Focus on Northeast India

India's northeastern region, which serves as a geographic and cultural bridge to Southeast Asia, plays a vital role in cultural diplomacy and regional connectivity. The music of Northeast India is distinct in form, instrumentation, and cultural function, diverging significantly from the mainstream classical traditions of the Indian subcontinent. Music is a core element of identity and communication among the indigenous communities of this region, reflecting their oral traditions, social values, and spiritual practices.

Positioning music as a cultural corridor enhances its potential as a tool for regional integration under initiatives like the ASEAN-India Connectivity Policy. The unique musical heritage of

the Northeast provides a platform for India to foster people-to-people exchanges and build deeper cultural ties with Southeast Asian neighbours.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study emphasizes the vital role of incorporating sociological and anthropological perspectives within the discipline of music education in India, especially in light of India's expanding cultural diplomacy through initiatives. Current curricula in Indian universities emphasize classical performance and theoretical knowledge but often overlook the broader social contexts that shape musical traditions. Introducing the Sociology of Music as a sub-discipline can equip students with critical insights into the cultural significance and evolution of music, thereby preparing them to act as effective cultural ambassadors in cross-cultural exchanges.

Aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and guided by global frameworks such as UNESCO's safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, integrating interdisciplinary approaches will not only enrich academic learning but also strengthen India's soft power in regional and global arenas. Particular attention to folk and indigenous musical forms, especially from culturally strategic regions like Northeast India, will enhance understanding and collaboration with ASEAN countries. Therefore, embracing the Sociology of Music within India's music education framework will enable more meaningful participation in cross-cultural dialogue, contributing significantly to India's role as a cultural bridge in the Indo-ASEAN region and beyond.

Recommendations:

I. Music programs in central universities and affiliated institutions may introduce dedicated courses on the sociological and anthropological aspects of music. This reform in the curriculum will nurture culturally sensitive and knowledgeable students who can serve as cultural ambassadors in international forums.

II. Establishing practice-oriented courses and degrees in Ethnomusicology, a discipline successfully adopted in many countries, can attract students from ASEAN nations and beyond. This interdisciplinary field provides opportunities not only for academic research but also for folk artists and community practitioners to engage with the academic world, expanding employment and cultural participation.

III. Events and festivals rooted in applied ethnomusicology can stimulate cultural tourism, generating sustainable income for folk artists and associated communities. Such initiatives align with India's "Act East" policy and its "People-to-People" connectivity goals, fostering deeper regional ties through academic and cultural exchanges among ethnomusicologists and artists.

IV. Encourage collaboration between departments of Music, Anthropology, Sociology, and Cultural Studies to create joint courses and research projects. This interdisciplinary approach will provide students with a more holistic understanding of music as a social and cultural phenomenon.

V. Integrate community-based learning and fieldwork opportunities into music programs, especially in regions with rich folk and indigenous musical traditions like Northeast India. Hands-on exposure will deepen students' understanding of music's social functions and foster respect for diverse cultural practices.

VI. Promote projects for the digital preservation and documentation of regional and folk music traditions. These initiatives can be student-led and supported by government and cultural bodies, ensuring that intangible heritage is safeguarded for future generations and accessible for academic study.

VII. Organize specialized training and workshops for music educators to equip them with skills in sociological and anthropological methodologies, enabling them to effectively teach interdisciplinary content.

VIII. Establish exchange programs and joint research initiatives with universities in ASEAN countries and beyond, fostering intercultural dialogue and broadening the scope of musical scholarship.

IX. Collaborate with cultural policymakers to integrate the findings of sociological music studies into national and regional cultural policies, reinforcing the role of music as a tool for diplomacy and social cohesion.

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