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Fusion Music And Popularisation of Indian Classical Music Around The Globe

Fusion as a word has been applied in music in different applications such that it has changed its literal meaning. It is today being used so commonly, that it has deteriorated its significance. In the name of fusion, few discordant sounds ruptured its importance. It would be apt to quote Ravi Shankar's words about the present situation of fusion music in classical that it has become more of a commercial gimmick, as he said in an interview to the Times of India,

"I was never involved in fusion music as it is understood today.... I have experimented, but the compositions were always based on Indian classical music.... But I do agree there are many brilliant musicians doing a lot of good work in the area."-I

To attract the audience any artist ought to distinguish self from the mass. And it is a fact that genuine experiments and innovations get immediate responses from the listeners. With genuine, here, I mean concept based and of certain use.

Fusion music is such a genre which ought to be attempted by the experts and connoisseurs and ones who have gained enough knowledge and aesthetics of various styles of music. Only then one can call it Fusion i.e. a well knit piece of musical innovation and improvisations. I would call a proper fusion an elderly phenomenon or a mature music genre, as I find it best suited to the peers.

In the music of all countries there are certain rules to be followed as far as Classical music is concerned. If not treated in proper way keeping in mind all the rules and the style it can become a piece of immobile creation and would rather end then and there. Only when music is experimented by the amateurs or beginners and untrained musicians it

generally becomes what one can say 'confusion'.

In Fusion, on one hand when the artists of one country combine their music with the artist of some other country, it gives a particular and distinct identity to each individual separately while they play the same notes but different in styles, languages, elaborations, improvisations etc. It becomes an awesome way to express and learn at the same time; to play and relax at the same time not to win but to share; to calm the creative pursuit and to offer a friendly interaction of two different musical minds.

UNDERSTANDING FUSION

When we view fusion music as a concept, we can understand it through following equations:

$$A+B+C+D=E$$

In this equation where,

A= Indian music

B= music of West/any other

C= Indian Orchestration

D= Western Orchestration

E= New identity, confusion (product partially understandable/not understandable)

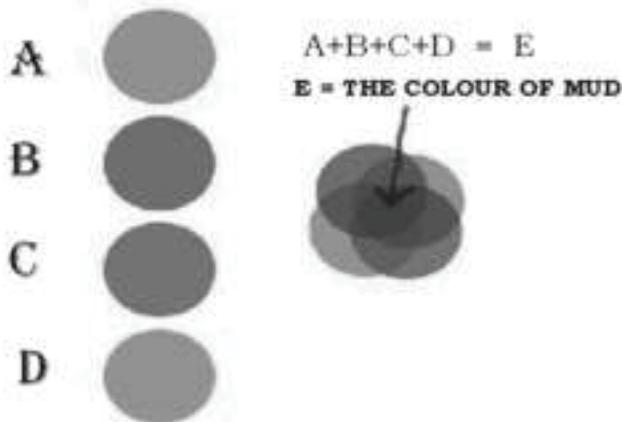
When A, B, C and D are added it forms a new identity E which is either partially understandable to the audience or confused.

Result "E" is a new identity emerged through adding two different genres/styles of music. "E" becomes a third identity and either doesn't convey completely or fails to convey a meaningful concept. This happens when fusion happens with a vague understanding of genres that are mixed or made a fusion, especially when the ideas are opaque and nobody understands or are unaware of each other's point of view.

In a representation of Fusion through colors, incase all four colors are opaque, the result of merging them will be



the color of mud that is not soothing to eyes; thus there is no point mixing or merging opaque colors (ideas) that result into confusion. The point is that, if the idea behind the mixing of two or more colour/music is unclear or if there is less or no knowledge of the result to be obtained then there will be a mess for sure and it may harm the purpose rather enhancing the experience. It can be represented in the following manner:



WHEN OPAQUE COLORS (VAGUE IDEAS) MERGE THEY INCREASE CONFUSION

In another equation,

$$A+B+C+D=ABCD$$

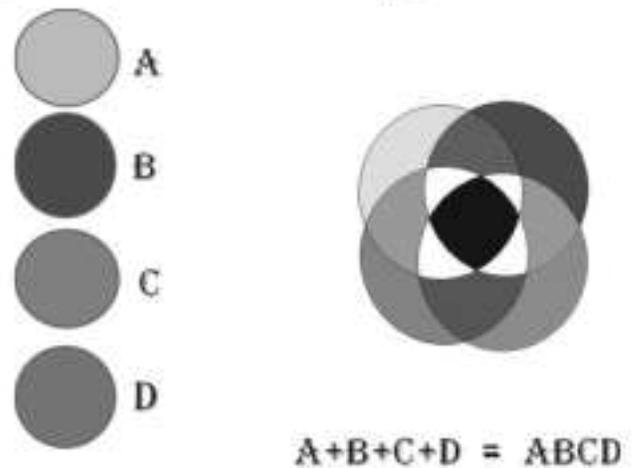
In this equation where,

- A= Indian music
- B= music of West/any other
- C= Indian Orchestration
- D= Western Orchestration
- ABCD= product with visible separate identities (Fusion).

When A, B, C, D are added, it forms identity "ABCD" which merges and differentiates both equally delivering a clear idea and becomes an understandable product. In the final result all come together with transparency, respecting each other's point of view that are not overshadowed. This kind of fusion of two genres is mostly appreciated where the identity of one genre doesn't overshadow the other; rather they complement each other. This is possible only when there is enough knowledge of both the things being merged. It also implies that the artist attempting a fusion must be an expert of both styles that are to be merged. The result obtained can be termed as real fusion.

In a representation of Fusion through colors, incase all four colors are transparent, the result of merging them will be like a spectrum that will be soothing to eyes; thus revealing transparency of colors (ideas) that result into a proper understanding between all. A proper understanding

of each other's point of view will enhance the experience of Fusion exactly as the merging of blue and yellow gives green. This is shown in the following figure:



WHEN TRANSPARENT COLORS (CLEAR IDEAS) MERGE THEY FORM FUSION

The conclusion is that the former fusion with new product as "E" gives either a blurred picture of any blend and is a confused idea. The latter fusion with product as "ABCD" provides the listeners a clear picture of merge and thus is fusion. Therefore,

The blend of genres that is –

- Unlinked
- Scattered
- Non-proportionate
- Opaque
- Unequal and
- Done with less knowledge of both is not a fusion.

A blend of genres that is-

- Proportionate
- Balanced
- Transparent
- Symmetrical
- Arranged
- Organized and
- Done with enough knowledge of both is a fusion.

DEFINITION OF FUSION MUSIC CAN BE STATED AS:

The merge of such seemingly different group of ideas that would combine in balance, maintain individual identities yet compliment each other to form a completely meaningful new idea that must be novel and innovative in style; such that no one had thought before; also that would appeal to the audience and thus justify the genuine purpose and universality of music.



Fusion music as a genre is a part of world music and so it becomes important to also understand world music. World music absorbs styles of cross-cultural origin. Where fusion is done in any genre of music of two or more types, world music involves the indigenous forms of music of the world. In his book, Mathew Montfort has coined the word "World Fusion Music" recently.

Fusion in Classical music has a grammar of its own and each artist creates fusion through improvisations of their ideas and maintaining a mark of their own discipline. An appreciation of the new sound of fusion music requires a deep understanding of myriad social and historical contexts in which such performances and endeavors take shape. A listener not accustomed to the trends of past and the present and is not aware of the future is unlikely to appreciate such endeavors.

At present the fusion music scene has evolved in a vivid manner and is gaining popularity all pervasively. Today we find a fusion of every possible art; of Kathak or Bharatnatyam with flamenco dance; of painting with computerized visual arts; of feature films with animation; of dance/music with theatre; of Indian music genres with other genres of the world and so on. The affiliation of classical, ethnic, folk, and western music with Indian classical music draws its origin from the creative endeavors of Pt. Ravi Shankar with his synthesis of Indian sitar with the violin of West in albums "West meets East" with Yehudi Menuhin in early sixties. Later he collaborated with Bud Shank, Miles Davis and Phillip Glass. Brothers L. Subramaniam and L. Shankar experimented widely with music and have worked in the World Fusion music collaborating with foreign artists. L. Subramaniam toured America and Europe with Ravi Shankar and ex-Beatle George Harrison in 1974, made his first fusion album in Copenhagen (Garland), and wrote material for Stu Goldberg and Larry Coryell in 1978. 'Shakti' was formed in the seventies by Zakir Hussain, John Mc. Laughlin, L. Shankar, Vikku Vinayakram, U. Shrinivas and Shankar Mahadevan. Several collaborations were made by these artists. Zakir Hussain made several bands as Rolling Thunder, Tabla Beat Science (with bassist Bill Laswell), Diga Rhythm Band and the Grammy winning Planet Drum: Global Drum project. Trilok Gurtu, Karsh kale and Sultan Khan had also been a part of these collaborations. Viswamohan Bhatt collaborated with Ry Cooder for a Grammy award winning album "A Meeting by the River". He also collaborated with Simon Shaheen in album "Saltanat".

Collaborations made with foreign artists made our music popular in the west. Since then it is continuing to give an opportunity to the artists to create on a larger canvas and a better platform.

AN OVERVIEW

Most of the purists believe in traditionally accepted norms and do not agree with the concept of fusion or experiments in classical music. They view fusion as a fiend or a threat to our culture. Today with the artists growing wide and experimenting with music, the modernized image of a classical vocal artist or an instrumentalist has overshadowed the conservative and orthodox image of few of the gurus of past.

Indian classical music tradition has survived for more than thousands of years. There is a selected audience for classical music even today. Just that few experts find fusion in classical music as a way of expressing their individual creativity; few others find fusion to fulfill an urge for experimenting with new; still few others find it a friendly collaboration; other artist also take it as a wider platform for self; still other artist find it to be a medium of self popularity. Whatever the reason, fusion has become widely accepted among Indian artists and the listeners, through which in some manner or the other Indian classical music gets ears and is heard all around the globe that increases its popularity.

The Indian classical traditional music scene has not entirely been affected by fusion. On the contrary, even at present there are Gurukuls devoted to teaching classical music traditionally, in India and abroad as well. As said by the gurus Gundecha brothers, (who established the Dhruvad Sansthan at Bhopal), students who sincerely devote required time and soul to the learning and practice of music are guaranteed to come out to perform with flying colors. Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasiya also claims of tremendous response from the students of his Gurukul in present time.

Fusion begins with novel ideas and imaginations; it begins with new thought. Today there are thousands of listeners of fusion music concerts in metro cities and a few hundred listeners of classical music concerts. This vast difference is because classical music is generally considered to be either difficult and obscure or dull and boring in our own country. But when the same music from any raga is fused with other alien element which is attractive to listen, it becomes interesting and catchy for the same general audience. It is just like creating a recipe liked by a segregated segment of people and creating other recipe for varied segments of wider taste by adding few more ingredients and just changing the method.

It is the demand of the urban world for urgent, immediate and prompt solutions. Synchronization of the old and new is important with the new world to make the oblivion youth aware of the indigenous roots of our music and culture. One cannot turn back the clock and in this advancing era we ought to welcome novelty with time.



The audience is never content and novelties shall always be seen in any form good or bad. Ideas cannot be constrained to any limits or boundaries and so novelty is always a possibility naturally expected.

Today, there are innumerable fusion groups that have come up with their albums, performances, teachings and tours. It is not that the fusion done by great Indian artists caused any harm to Indian classical music but rather it made classical music more and more adaptable and interesting for all listeners in and outside the country. It definitely expanded the sphere of audience from a selected group to a wider group of audience of all generations. Their fusion made waves for the youth who were brought up in both ways Indian and western. These artists have made Indian classical music more accessible for all kind of listeners even for those who took classical as a slow and dull music.

The thing to remember is that without the support of our elder generation of artists, the new generation may not realize their roots and their potential. There would be no base and foundation without the proper guidance of an experienced Guru. Therefore, under the guidance of the traditional gurus and musicians the generation next will flower their talents with a cultural and national responsibility.

In such a shrinking world of today, it would be significant to state the words of two eminent musicians from the East and the West from a very insightful and conversational book by Peter Lavezzoli,

"Because the world has become so small and you are traveling all over the world, it is very clear that you are going to have influences, either consciously or in your sub-conscious mind," - Zakir Hussain-2

"Basically world music is now a fact. It's not going to happen. It's happened. The fact is that an educated musician today would be foolish not to acquaint himself or herself with traditions from all over the world." - Phillip Glass-3

References:

1. The Times Of India Online, "Ravi Shankar unhappy with fusion music"
2. Lavezzoli Peter, "Bhairavi: The Global Impact of Indian Music", Harper Collins Publishers, India Today Group, Delhi, 2009
3. Ibid

