

From 1940's to Present : Tracing the Development of Music in Punjab

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Abstract

Any form of art is a carrier of cultural values, customs and codes. It is the connecting thread between the society and its traditions. Novels, poems, movies and songs reflect its milieu. Music is one of the most widespread forms of art, creating an instant rapport with its audience. This paper would focus on the changing trends and patterns in music with focus on lyrics and the values attached to songs in the current times. Its adverse effects on the younger generations and the distance it has created from the previous meaningful lyrics. The main aim is to highlight the existence of English words in Punjabi songs and how the essence of the Punjabi culture it kills. This shows the effect of English language on the people of vernacular speaking strata, and it is due to the privilege attached with the foreign language, that gets mirrored in the popular culture these days. It is not done consciously but the duality of languages that exist in our cognitive structures make it happen. This arises the question where does the purity and originality get lost in the process of becoming modern. The mass migration to their land of dreams, due to socio-economic reasons is a matter of concern, and the songs depict the lament, loneliness, and pangs of coming back to their motherland. The paper would trace this development from singers of the past to the present singers.

KEYWORDS: Culture, Popular Culture, dual language, popular music

In *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* Ngugi wa thiong'o lays emphasis on retaining one's mother tongue and sidelining the colonizers language rather than the other way around. The impact of colonization and imperialism is deep rooted in our history, and is difficult to completely erase it from the past. Ngugi himself was affected by the process of colonization and stresses on the dominance of English language as the main reason behind the increasing distance between him and his language (Gikuyu). The culture of his own was shown to be inferior and speaking in their native tongue called for punishment and meant insult, "Thus one of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school"(11)

Whereas on the other hand speaking in the English language brought laurels and applause. Thus, inculcating disgust for their own culture and language in the minds of the little kids, "thus language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds"(12) This is a scenario not only in African countries, but where ever colonizers settled. Thus writers like Chinua Achebe, and Ngugi wa Thiongo make an earnest effort to decolonize the mind of their people. They shun the colonizers language and take up their own to make careers in writing, to the utter shock of the English audience. They go to their roots, and strengthen them for their future generations. They want to inculcate respect and esteem in the citizens for

their own culture, roots, customs and especially language. Colonizing the mind is a political activity and decolonizing the mind involves equal efforts and even more.

Coming down to India, colonization has left a deep impact which could not be undone. The deep rooted respect for their culture, and language makes us look down upon on our own nativity. The panchtantra stories, the culture of oral story- telling and characters from our own culture have gradually disappeared. They have been overshadowed by reading of their culture, their writers and their myths and folktales. This further trickles down to the question of what consists of a culture. Culture is a reservoir of the environment and everything surrounding it, a connection between one's past and the present which further seminates to future generations. It is a carrier of values and traditions. A reflection of the society with its customs and codes, it is not static as the society assumes it to be. Cultures get affected by socio-political environments, foreign influences , changing trends in society., etc. and any forms of art is a cultural representation. John Storey in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, gives three definitions of Culture as given by Raymond Williams. Firstly culture is “ a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development”(1) , secondly “ a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group”(2) and thirdly culture can refer to, “the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.” (2) Popular culture in this sense is a combination of second and third definition. In the recent changing scenario of our society the artists and writers from different genres are putting in a lot of effort to retain the pure culture which is getting polluted by various factors. The younger generation is moving away from their own roots and traditions. To keep the raw culture alive for the future times native forms of art are being performed and kept alive. The age of technology and modernism have influenced the lifestyle and activities that the popular culture vividly reflects.

Popular culture is an entirety of everything that surrounds us. The kind of environment in which we live comprises our popular culture. It is an important part of our lives as it shapes us, it comprises of all products of cultural significance, be it art, music, fashion, dance, literature, films etc. John Storey in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction* gives many definitions of popular culture and stresses that it arose following industrialization and urbanization. He believes it mainly erupts from among the people and not imposed upon them, it is appreciated by many people and also targets mass audience. It is the left over culture by the higher or the elitist's in the society. It is a residue category. He quotes Raymond Williams views on popular culture as, “well liked by many people';' inferior kinds of work';' work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people,' culture actually made by the people for themselves”(5)

This paper would focus on the development of lyrics in Punjabi songs , what all effects the change and how the English language has seeped deep in the mindset of people, and how the concept of pure language has vanished. The lyrics in 'Punjabi music these days is a clear depiction of the sad state of affairs in the land of five rivers. Because of the thriving Punjabi popular songs the language and culture have degraded. Punjab is no more the same image the songs of the past created in our minds. The paper aims to highlight the factors influencing the youth of Punjab and how the current popular music has transformed over the years.

Punjabiyaat is everything related to Punjab, its culture, language, lifestyle, dance, etc. But its culture has been overshadowed by its own popular music. It is written by the people of Punjab and as Storey had viewed it is for the larger audience. The essence of Punjab and its ethnicity has been washed away by the floods of new kind of Punjabi songs. The tapping bhangra beats which signified pure Punjabi lifestyle has given way to remixes, from the old classics of legendary singers like Surinder Kaur, Prakash Kaur, then to Gurdas Mann, Hans Raj Hans, Malkit Singh and now reaching its climax through Gippy Grewal, Diljit Dosanjh, YoYo Honey Singh and the culture of rap music. The lyricist pens down the emotions of the society with the perspective of preserving his culture and language, and also with sensitivity plays with the words, as it is his responsibility to connect to wider audiences.

As mentioned before, culture is ever changing, moving and adapting with time. On one hand the Punjabi Film Industry is repeatedly focusing on making movies about pre partition times, and making an earnest effort to bring to the silver screen the glorious days of Punjab and its golden days of culture. Movies like *Angrej*, *Lahoriye*, *Bambukaat* depict the simple life of older Punjab untouched by western culture and technology. Presenting the true and pure picture of the gone by days. And on the other hand, the Punjabi music Industry is leaving no stone unturned to bridge the gap between the rural belt to the urban belt of Punjab. The western culture's influence is varied but vividly seen in the videos of songs. It is a sad state of mind, a dual pull in the mind of the youth. As Homi Bhabha discusses in his seminal essay "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" his concept of ambivalence. The generations of Punjab are in a state of ambivalence too. There is attraction and repulsion of the modern trends and lifestyle at the same time. The youth is not positioned permanently anywhere in the locus of culture. There are two forces dominant, each pulling hard in opposite directions. The choice to be made leaves them in a state of flux.

The lifestyle of girls and boys in the olden days was simple and limited to family affairs. The concept of love had deeper significance than it has now. The songs earlier highlighted the beauty of the girl, it sensitively touched upon various facets of women. Then there were songs for occasions as lohri, baisakhi, teej etc. They were written beautifully and presented the accurate meaning of those festivals. Such songs are written even now so as to retain the cultural value for the future generations. The main point of this essay remains to highlight how the new trends of music emphasize and highlight the changing patterns in our culture. Every other song cannot be regarded as a pure Punjabi song. The reason being, lack of Punjabi vocabulary, the Punjabi words are being substituted by its English parallels. After the military revolution in Punjab, many Punjabis migrated to the United Kingdom, USA, Canada and even Germany, thus carrying with them their own codes of conduct and huge traces of their culture. And recently mass migration happening due to sociological and economic reasons have forced the western culture to be mingled with our culture. The younger generations probably think of Punjab as underdeveloped compared to their countries, hence another reason for the music industry to portray the rising lifestyle of youth in Punjab. Drinking culture, guns, jatts, geri's, pubs, proposes are frequent words found in the songs. The transformation of Punjab could be easily traced over the years through its music and lyrics. Punjabi culture has various music styles, folk songs from each region, sufi songs

and classical. Surinder Kaur sang mostly folk songs and had a cultural flavor to them, be it the famous, *Suhe ve cheere waliya*, *Jutti kasuri*, or *Kaala doriya etc* Prakash Kaur's *Sarke Sarke Jandiye*, *Saukan mele di*, *Ni main katan preetan naal charkha chanan da*. These songs were the true carriers of Punjabi culture, depicting turban clad men dancing in festivities, women walking miles wearing handcrafted famous *juttis* from Kasur, or spinning of the auspicious wheel out of love. Then till Gurdas Mann, Surjit Bindrakhia, Hans Raj Hans were singing, the language of the culture was intact, they were still Punjabi songs with a slight effect of the western culture. Gurdas Mann's *Apna Punjab Hove* a landmark song for its depiction of everything about Punjab that is missed when not in the state, *Lakh Pardesi hoyie* was a highlight depicting the diasporas settled all over the world. And this song connected thousands of Punjabis all over the world. The pangs of being away from the motherland and family gets visually represented in Malkit Singh's *Vekh li valait* and how the heart of every Punjabi yearns to be back home when further he sings, *Maa de hathan diyan pakiyan..* And finally due to the modernization the nostalgic looking back at the villages which are slowly vanishing is depicted through *Pind Diyan Gallian*, by Gurdas Mann. A folk couplet that is written before *Pind diyan Gallian* starts, *Kotla shapaki jumme raat ayi e, jehra aghe piche dekhe odi shaamat ayi ae.*, has lost its charm in the technological world. The kids are losing touch with the previous childhood games. There is a huge cultural gap which instead of shortening is widening and widening. The youth probably would sing this couplet as part of the song, without realizing its cultural value, without understanding its meaning and without placing it in a wider cultural context. Ngugi rightfully stressed that when colonization happens it happens gradually and slowly in our minds. The kids' imagination has been shaped by reading of the Colonizers literature and not our own, they would know what *rock a bye* is rather than their own *Chanda mama door ke*. (both lullabies)

The recent trend in Punjabi music is heart breaking as it should no longer be characterized as Punjabi songs when the lyrics are half in English. It brings to focus, how colonization has left its hydra roots in the country. No matter how much you try to cut it regrows from somewhere or the other. Every song, has been written with English words, modern trends, western fashion brands, latest cars, slang words etc. The sad reality is that the songs are being born from within the society, by the people of that culture, and for the people of that culture everywhere. Popular songs are those which are written by the people and for the people. It is a depressive condition when even while communicating, the help of English words have to be taken. The question is while the society transforms, where does the original culture gets lost.? It gets lost while imitating the other culture and forgetting one's own. The popular songs these days focus entirely on college going students and thus showing them as reckless and irresponsible which is a damaging image for Punjab. The latest Bollywood movie *Udta Punjab* is a sad reality of the society, no matter how true or factual it is. Recent hits focus on how a drunk girl, her spoilt habits, her physical appearance etc The comparisons of women's beauty are no more made with ethereal things but with destructive objects or addictive things. The songs lay bare the reality of lifestyle. Considering the punjabiness being lost, the lyrics are overshadowed by English words, as it's the reality in the society. For example, Guru Randhawa's *Tainu suite suit karda*, rather than using a word substituting 'Suit' the song is written in popular language, the everyday language of the Punjabi youth. Then Diljit Dosanjh's songs vividly represent the current status of the pidgin language. Dosanjh being considered the

Youth icon represents the youth of Punjab, the kind of mixed Punjabi they speak and the kind of lifestyle they dream of living. *Proper patola nakhra swag*, *Do you know*, reflect the mixed language the Punjabis are speaking. The influence of foreign fashion, high fashion end brands can be seen in the songs too. This emphasizes how the world is becoming a global village. Jasmine Sandlas refers to Roberto Cavalli in one of her song. *Layi Milan to Roberto Cavalli*. The transformation has come a long way from jutti kasuri to Gucci's and Prada's. The latest reworking of Hans Raj Hans famous hit *ik 121 rumaal* into *das Prada naal* is a clear indication how the current Punjab Music Industry is trying to mould the original hits and fit into the popular culture of today. Gucci, Prada, Versace, are fashion brands quiet commonly mentioned in the songs, car brands as Audi, Mercedes, Mustang , Porsche, Lamborghini depict the choice of rich youth of Punjab. Example of such songs being, Dosanjh's *Teri layi Mustang lae layi*, and *Lamorghini* , Hardy Sandhu *Porsche plan kar layi* etc. Hardly any song would be without a mention of Guns, illegal weapons, drugs, nightlife etc. The youth is distracted by these songs, that is the kind of influence the popular culture has on its people. Rather than having good influence they push the youth, the young force into hollow fashion and hollow lifestyle. The push is so hard, it is a irreparable loss forever. They start believing it to be a way of life, and get into illegal activities to afford that lifestyle. No more of classics of the olden times cast a charm today, but songs like *Gaal Ni kadni* , *Banda marna tan das ni*, *baarvi ch munda badnaam*, *pind gangland banya* etc, infuse violence in todays youth. They think it to be a cool way of life and become like them. The times are changing, will further evolve with new trends. It is high time the focus returns to infusing good ways of life through popular arts. The popular culture should aim at redefining their new identity into a stable one rather than leaving it in a fluid state. The songs are correct depiction of state of hybridity, but efforts should be made to retain the original culture which we belong to and for preserve it for the times to come.

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