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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF HIP HOP IN ADDRESSING SOCIO-POLITICAL SITUATIONS IN INDIA- A PERCEPTION STUDY.

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Abstract

Music has always occupied a central place in the imagination of Indians. Over the years, the audience started welcoming different genres of music. Hip Hop, a popular form of music which evolved itself from oppression has its share of audience in India. The freedom to "express" oneself without class barriers and conventions popularise this genre. In India, non-commercial Hip Hop has a serious take on social and political issues through strong lyrics. Hip Hop artists are addressing the issues that are more relevant to the times rather than blindly rapping about living in a place with gun fights and racism which imitates the scenario in the West. Issues of poverty, lack of employment, environmental problems, drugs, Kashmir, corporate influence, caste barriers, child care etcetera which are severe issues to be considered in India, are approached through Hip Hop which acts as protest music. This paper analyses the Role of Hip Hop in addressing the social and political issues in India. By analysing the lyrical content qualitatively and by using an online this paper examines how the audience perceives and respond to non-commercial Hip Hop which has socially and politically charged lyrics.

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Introduction:-

Music plays a central role in people's lives. Lull (1985) suggested that people select music for particular reasons and are personally involved with their favourite types of music on physical and cognitive levels. Musical content (e.g., rhythm, tempo, melodies) amplifies the message of songs. It "is designed to invoke the emotional state, the state of consciousness, or mental state as it is experienced with the self and others" (Chesebro, Foulger, Nachman, & Yannelli, 1985, page 118).

Rap music is considered as one of the most controversial forms of popular music to find its way into the mainstream popular culture as far as texts go. However, rap has an interesting history. It is said to have evolved from "Reggae", one of the popular music genres in the Rastafarian subculture attributed to the Jamaicans. The Rastafarian subculture had its religion which included music and lifestyle. As far as the music goes, it sounded like a "fusion of rock, soul and calypso underscored by a heavy syncopated bass guitar line and drums" (Neil.J.Savishinsky). This island music espoused a lot of social, political and religious ideologies which expanded the repertoire of transnational music culture. While the music created ripples, the Rastafarian culture was known for its 'set-against-the-flow' style. The music started at an off-beat, which itself is a convention broken in the first place. The idea was to convey the

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disagreement to rules and conventions. From there, different types of subcultures were born, and rap is one among them.

The early 2000s saw a sudden surge in Indian rapping population who mainly rapped in English. The year 2011 saw many new underground artists sprouting up with what they call independent music. These rappers from all corners of the country rapped in their regional language and delivered several hits occasionally which proved rap to be futuristic for fresh talents.

When these rappers finally started developing their lyrics, it still had the influence of the American rappers they adored.

However, in recent years, more youngsters have emerged with non-commercial Hip Hop with lyrics that addresses issues that are relevant to the society that they are familiar with, rather than plainly aping the American rap which has stories of gunfights and gang wars.

What draws many musicians to Hip Hop is the lyrical freedom it offers. Many artists raise sensitive issues through their songs which otherwise remain grounded due to political or social pressure. Rappers do not hesitate to sing about the governmental policies and programs and the politics behind everything.

Usually, such take on government is considered as an “attack” to defame the government when other methods, apart from music are used to express one's opinions. In the case of Hip Hop, no such restrictions have been imposed so far which makes it a choice for many to raise an issue.

Literature Review:-

Content analysis and use of language were the focus of previous researchers about rap music. Started out in the form of protest music, rap soon got the attention of many because of its lyrical content. Initially, the musicians came up with responsible protests which were predominantly relevant to the times and represented a larger community. Some research findings show that this genre indeed relates to some communities which can identify the problems as their own and form a system of themselves. Studies suggest that "the core essence of hip-hop is shared by marginalised groups" Motley, Carol M. and Geraldine Rosa Henderson. "The Global Hip-Hop Diaspora: Understanding The Culture". Journal of Business Research 61.3 (2008): 243-253. Web.

Later on, it shrank into a thin form of expressing the artists' frustrations which usually had explicit content. Rap, considered as “intensely violent, both sexually explicit and sexually violent, misogynistic, drug and gang oriented, and politically radical”(Derek Bushton,1986) is said to reflect on the artists as well.

Rap music contained themes depicting gang fights, drive-by shootings, and widespread gang violence. Johnson, Jackson, and Gatto (1995) suggested that those attitudes extend to using violence against women. They observed that those who viewed a violent rap video were more likely than those in nonviolent-music and control conditions to accept the use of violence against women, and to intend to use violence to resolve a decision making conflict.

Conceptualization of Hip-hop:-

Psychological studies provide a different approach to the content of hip hop. There are many conceptualizations of hip-hop as it was not solely a musical phenomenon; it embodied an entire way of existence for those immersed in or touched by its culture. One factor that distinguishes hip-hop from other genres of music is its primary focus on the spoken word”(Kobin and Tyson 343-356)

Cultivation Theory:-

The influence on audience perception was studied by applying Cultivation Theory which proposes that continuous exposure to media content over time can subtly cultivate or instil beliefs about the world that the audience has been part of.

Research Questions:-

1. What is the perception of the audience to socially and politically charged lyrics of Hip Hop?
2. Do the lyrics have any influence on audiences' decision-making?

Method:-

This study incorporated cultivation theory to examine the effect of rap/hip-hop music on shaping the audience attitudes and influencing decision making. By using a qualitative content analysis and an online survey, this study analysed the lyrical content of 10 rap/hip-hop songs released during the year 2010-2016.

The sample set was chosen based on the level of socially and politically charged lyrics that were present in the songs.

Qualitative Content Analysis:-

The study incorporates qualitative content analysis guided by the cultivation theory. The study examined the presence of protest lyrics found in 10 popular rap and hip-hop songs released during the year 2010 to 2016. The lyrics of the songs were obtained from various internet sources and the portion which had the presence of protest was coded. The level of protest was coded based on the presence of words which points towards political and social issues: inequality, discrimination, poverty, hunger, scam, shooting, political injustice, invasion of corporates in public matters, illegal trade and business, drugs and sexual assault.

Coding Descriptions:-

- Songs which had reference to political content was coded as such if they contained words that included: political parties, government, military, scams, etc.
- Songs which had reference to social content was coded as such if they contained words that included: poverty, inequality, hunger, corporates.
- Songs which indicated sexual conquest was coded as such if they contained phrases like: feel the pain, don't have to fight back.

Frequency or Emphasis of Protest Lyrics:-

The songs which had portions indicating protest terminology was first coded, and the amount or emphasis of content was labelled accordingly to determine the protest levels.

- Lyrics which had one or two references to protest- Low level
- Lyrics which had three to four reference to protest- Medium level
- Lyrics which had reference to five or more reference to protest- High level

Survey:-

In addition to a qualitative content analysis, the study performed an online survey administered through Zoho. The respondents were asked to respond to the survey which consisted of 10 questions by clicking on the link provided through email or social media. The survey considered a total population of 100 participants of women and men in equal numbers (N=100).

The first five questions asked the respondents general issues to determine the age, gender and listening habits.

The remaining questions tested the attitude of the interviewees towards non-commercial Indian Hip-Hop. It involved a series of multiple-choice questions graded on Likert Scale.

The questions also tested if the lyrics had any influence on the respondents' decision making.

Findings:-**Content Analysis:-**

Following are the list of popular Hip Hop songs with their year of release and the issues they address. By using a content analysis method, this study analysed the lyrics of 10 rap/hip-hop songs from 2010-2016. The sampling set of music was selected based on the strong political and social themes appearing within the lyrics of these popular hits.

Table 1:- List of songs taken for content analysis.

S. No	Song	Artist/Album	Release Year	Remarks	Level of Protest
1.	Haq Hai	Naezy	2016	Talks about the inequality in India and addresses government frauds.	Medium
2.	Takkaru Takkaru	Hip Hop Tamizha	2016	Addressed the need for Jallikkattu in Tamil Nadu. Became the Anthem of pro-jallikkattu protesters.	High
3.	Tragedy Mein Comedy	Naezy	2016	An attempt to mock the system which is corrupt and hollow.	Low
4.	Kodaikanal Wont	Sofia Ashraf	2015	Issue of mercury poisoning by Unilever Limited in Kodaikanal	High
5.	Sunlo Gall	Krull172	2014	Drug abuse in Punjab	Low
6.	Listen, My Brother	MC Kash	2012	Insurgency in Kashmir	Medium
7.	My People	MC Kash (Rebel Republic)	2012	Military attack on civilians in Kashmir	Medium
8.	Why We Rebel	MC Kash	2012	Explains the torture by Indian military troops on young Kashmiri youth in Indian jails.	Medium
9.	Re-introduction	Cryptographik Street Poets	2012	The battle between Uranium Corporation of India and environmental groups in Shillong.	Low
10.	I protest	MC Kash	2010	Protest demonstrations in Kashmir and remembering every youth who lost his life in mass military firing.	high

Inequality and poverty in the fastest growing metro:-

India is a developing country. However, if one needs to fill the stretched chasm about ultra-rich and ultra-poor, Mumbai is the place to be. The songs by artist Naezy, who hails from Mumbai, reflects the issues that the common man is familiar with. The level of protest is medium. The song involves criticising the government and its unsuccessful programs and policies. The song also talks about how government looted a humongous amount in the name of setting up a telecom network in the country. The artist calls the politicians "thief" and vents out his frustrations about how his city still has kids who go to sleep on an empty stomach. Thirty of India's sixty-eight billionaires live in Mumbai. Though it is a commercially strong city, more than 40 percent of Mumbai's population lives in the slums. The inequality is evident.

The following lyrics refer to the 2G scam in this verse which took the country by storm. The scam involved the teaming up of government officials and politicians to illegally allocate frequencies to telecom companies. This act resulted in the missing of a massive sum of rupees 1,76,645 crores. This scam was ranked second by the TIME magazine's list of top 10 cases of abuse of power.

" Sarkaar apni so ri hai, Paiso ki padi bori hai
 2 g 3 g kyu ji kitni inki chori hai?
 Chori toh chori uppar se seena zori muh par jhooti choli hai
 ye raakshaso ki toli hai."
 "Habastiq Hai
 n Prod By Sez Lyrics Meaning | Artist- Naezy /
 Dohaz.Com". Doha
 z.com. N.p., 2017. Web. 10 Mar. 2017.

Lyric Translation:-

2 g 3 g, how much was the whole theft worth?
 They steal and lie about it; they wear masks and cheat
 They are an evil gang
 What a neighbourhood this is? Tell me

The State of Tamil Nadu and “Jallikkattu” Protest:-

South India is a culturally-rich region. Though westernisation is a part of development, people from Tamil Nadu are well rooted in their culture. The recent peaceful protest by the youngsters demanding permission to conduct "Jallikkattu" which is a traditional bull-taming sport of Tamil Nadu is a proof of it. One of the reasons which initiated this protest was the album Takkaru Takkaru by Hip Hop Tamizha, released during early 2016. The lyrics of the song was found to have a profound impact on youngsters. The sport was banned in 2014 upon petitions filed by PETA which stated that animals were mistreated in the name of tradition. However, it was in the year 2016, the release of the song slowly started creating ripples. The song went viral on social media which attracted supporters who demanded a lift of the ban. The song did not plainly talk about the sport. The artist rapped about how large corporations are intruding into the culture and practice of the farmers and grass-root level population.

The artist did not hesitate to lash out on corporations, and PETA whom the artist says has vested interested in this matter. The artist talks about how these non-governmental bodies are so powerful and influential that they are trying to eradicate the culture of a state which puts its population in question.

The song created large-scale protest across Tamil Nadu which was supported by movie artists and was known as the most non-violent protest by youngsters in India. The protest finally resulted in the lifting of the ban on the sport. The song falls under the High-level protest category. The song soon became an anthem for the protesters.

*"idhan pinne ulla sarva desa arasiyal,
 viyabharathirkkaaga nadanthidum veri seyal.
 Indha vilaiyaattai thadai seidhaal, naatu maadu azhiyum, veli naatu niruvanangal,
 viyabaaram perugum Ariyaatha tamizha, un ariyaamai pizhaiyaal,
 un adayalaam izhanthaal, nee methuvaaga azhivaai, un adayalaam izhanthaal,
 un thaai naatil neeyum, oor agathiyai maariduvaai.
 Idhu maatta pathina prechana illa, un naatta pathina prechana da,
 naatin porulaathaaram veezhum, naamum edukanum pichchaiyada."
 Takkaru Takkaru Lyrics: Hip hop Tamizha". LyricsRaag.Com. N.p., 2017. Web. 10 Mar. 2017.*

Lyric Translation:-

Behind this ruthless act for trading is international politics. Banning this sport will only result in the extinction of our native breeds, increase the profit of foreign corporations.
 Tamizha! Because of your ignorance, you will lose your own identity in your native land.
 If you lose your identity, you will end up being a refugee in your homeland.
 This is not just about the bulls, it is about the downfall of our economy
 which will result in us begging to the foreign countries.

Environmental Issues:-

Sofia Ashraf, in her protest song “Kodaikanal Won't” addresses the illegal dumping of toxic waste into the Kodaikanal river. The song openly slams the company Unilever by mentioning the name of its products that the consumers are familiar with it. The song calls for support to sign the petition demanding the company to take up immediate remedial measures. The artist raps about how the company, being a big corporation is influential and powerful, bends the laws and regulations. Illegal dumping of toxic mercury into the Kodaikanal River and exposure such toxins resulted in children being born with deformities. However, the company was not held accountable for this. The song brought the issue to light. Unilever finally agreed for an out-of-court settlement with the people affected.

*"They dumped their waste in the local shrubbery
 Now that's some toxic shit
 By the way, what'd they say?
 That their factory was safe as day*

*They don't trust a word of what their workers say
 What about the polluting, the mercury poisoning?
 It's life threatening. There's kids suffering.
 Poison in the soil you don't have us foiled.
 Your clean was a sham, there's poison in the air.
 You ain't done done-da done done done
 Unilever has been hiding behind
 Their fake PSAs and Pepsodent smiles
 They washed their hands off Kodai with Lifebuoy
 There's nothing Fair or Lovely about this trial."
 "Kodaikanal Won't". prezi.com. N.p., 2017. Web. 10 Mar. 2017.*

Kashmir Insurgency:-

Jammu and Kashmir, a state in the extreme north, is an integral part of the Indian Union. Since 1990, the state is under Presidential due to militancy. The Governor runs the administration with the help of Advisors appointed by the Centre. The Constitution of India applies to the State of Jammu and Kashmir as well. The territories of Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Gilgit form the state of Jammu and Kashmir. In 1846, it was the biggest princely state in India before the 1947-partition. At that time, the total area of the state was 2,22,236sq.km. In 1949, due to a cease-fire line between India and Pakistan, 78932 sq.km of the area(Gilgit, Mirpur, Kotli and part of Poonch) came under the possession of Pakistan.

Again, in 1962, 64000 sq.km was occupied by China, now known as Aksai Chin. Later, Pakistan again made illegal possession over Chhamb, Deva, Chakla and Manawar gaining an area of 3999 sq.km. So finally, India is left with the remaining 12850 sq.kms.

After the defeat of the U.S.S.R, which was a superpower by Afghan mujahideen, General Zia, who was the Pakistani dictator initiated a similar move to bleed India. He sent his trained troops of Islamic militants to Kashmir in the late 1980s. During that time, Pakistan was well aware that it cannot declare a direct war with India.

It began expanding as ISIS, Indian Mujahideen, Al-Qaeda planting their personnel in the soil they want to attack. The tension between India and Pakistan hiked with a five-man suicide squad attacking the Indian parliament in December 2001, and the insurgency still continues.

MC Kash, a youth who hails from Kashmir, talks about everything in Kashmir through his songs as his land remained disconnected to the remaining parts of the country. His songs gained international recognitions. In his song, *I protest*, he speaks about the protest demonstrations in Kashmir and lists the names of every youth who lost his life in the military attack. He refers to his homeland Kashmir as a paradise which is under fire due to the military strike. The murder and rape by Indian troops are unspoken details of insurgency in Kashmir which is covered up by the Indian government.

*My paradise is burning
 With troops left loose with ammo
 Who murder and rape
 Then hide behind a political shadow*
 Other lyrics which relate to such issues are in his song *Why We Rebel* and *Listen My Brother*
*I come from the land of bloody crackdowns
 where silhouettes of life rush to the playgrounds
 you sit your ass down, and don't make a sound
 take off that Pheran, you motherfuckin' clown
 whose son is he? whispers ask
 doesn't matter really 'cause it ain't the last
 faint hearts of men beat a little slow
 doesn't matter when there's a gun down your throat*

Act of torture and violence on Kashmiri kids who are forcibly taken and locked up in Indian jails. They are raped and mistreated. The artist tries to empathise with the victims. The following lyrics imitate the act of rape and sodomy on Kashmiri kids in Indian Jails.

Pressure Up, You hold the hands

Show this motherfucker how to bleed in this land

Push It Push, let him scream and crawl

make his blood ricochet of these walls

thirteen, and you holdin' a stone?

lemme see those scars and yo broken bones

Brother, allow me to hold you

knowing even the Lord can't console you

Results:-

Views on Non-Commercial Rap/Hip-Hop and its Interpretations from the Survey:-

91 out of 100 respondents listen to Indian Hip-Hop as compared to the remaining nine who do not. Over 63% of respondents agree that non-commercial Indian Hip-Hop is addressing many social and political issues. Out of this 60% of respondents agree that they are also able to relate to the issues while 31% responded that they could sometimes relate to the issues.

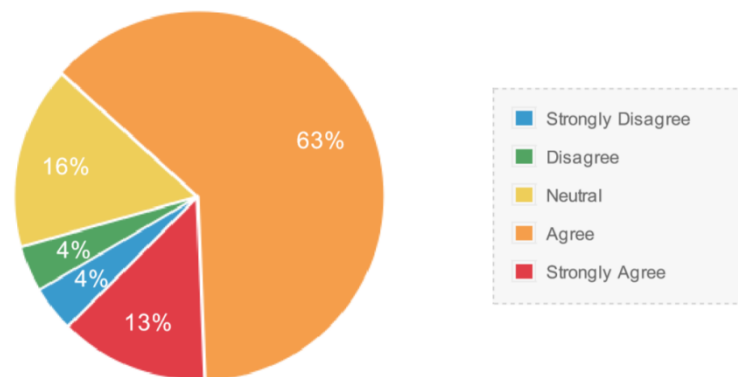


Figure 1:- Population Indicating Agreement/Non-agreement to the Ability to Relate to Societal Issues After Listening to Socially or Politically Charged Rap/Hip-Hop Lyrics.

- When questioned about if the lyrics had any influence on the respondents' decision making, 65% respondents agree that they have been part of/supported a cause/campaign after being influenced by the lyrics

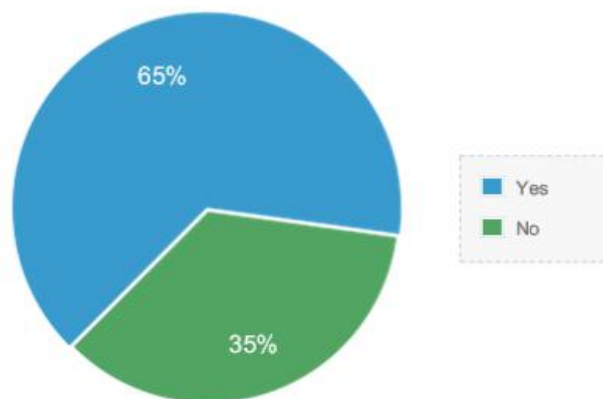


Figure 2:- The population of Respondents who have been a Part of/ Supported a Cause/Campaign After Being Influenced by the Lyrics.

- 68% responded positively to when questioned if they would consider raising an issue through Rap/ Hip-Hop as opposed to 13% who chose not to consider and 18% who may/may not consider.

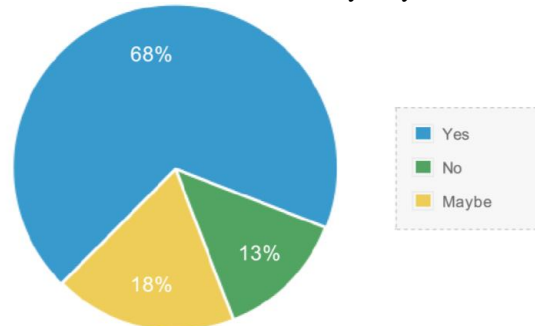


Figure 3:- Population of Respondents who would Consider Raising an Issue Through Rap/Hip-Hop.

Results of Content Analysis:-

Out of the ten songs analysed, three songs were labelled as High-level protest songs. The songs are found to have influenced the audience in decision making and also to support/be a part of the issue raised. Three songs were labelled as low-level protest songs because of the repetition of subjects and poorly influential lyrics. The songs were not successful in creating a mass perspective. They were restricted to a small group or a place that the artist had a personal connection to.

The remaining four songs were labelled as medium-level protest songs as they were successful in bringing out more global perspective and also got attention for the same. Some of them openly criticised the system and threw light upon issues that were kept under folds.

Comparing Results:-

To consensus between content analysis and survey results, both the methods were tested for differences and similarities. While the content analysis dealt with the explanation of lyrics and its context, a similar analysis was drawn from the survey results which described the audience perception about social issues being raised by Rap/Hip-Hop.

The survey results also indicate a positive response to lyrics having influenced the respondent in decision-making. This is similar to the analysis made about 'Kodaikanal Won't' and 'Takkaru Takkaru' albums which had large scale supporters for the issue that these songs addressed.

Conclusion:-

Over the years, protest songs, which were once used as a medium to voice the voiceless lost its significance as people began venting out the anger and frustration on whatever they found annoyed them. A community's view shrunk to an individual's view and it was tagged as violent and inappropriate. The lyrics lost quality and artists were rapping about anything and everything.

In India, non-commercial rap/Hip-Hop scene is better with the artists sticking to its 'Rasta' roots. Socio-political protest constitute the major feature of this "counter-culture movement" (Derek Bishton(1986:2))

The study, with the help of cultivation theory proves that exposure to media content for a prolonged period has an effect on the perception and decision making of the audience. The role of Rap/Hip-Hop in addressing social and political content has an influence on listeners who may develop "similar attitudes in their own lives, including accepting the objectification of women" (Dixon, Zhang, & Conrad, 2009, p. 348).

The study thus proves that non-commercial Indian Hip-Hop has an influence on the perception of the audience.

Scope Of Study:-

Previous studies on Hip-Hop were mainly about the deteriorating content and excessive use of unaccepted language. From this research results, a positive side of protest music can be inferred. With new artists using rap/hip-hop as a tool to voice serious issues, this could probably be a new music movement in India.

The perception study can be performed on a larger scale which can be used in clinical psychology studies to understand the attitudes and behavioural patterns. Rap therapy is another field of study which is gaining popularity.

Limitations:-

The survey used a convenience sample of 100 respondents who were exposed to this survey through emails and social media. As a result, the final findings cannot be applied to a general population. Additionally, the survey was administered to a population of rap listeners and non-rap listeners. A case of such may have affected the evaluation process. This might have resulted in obtaining skewed data which may otherwise have been different if only rap listeners were considered.

The lyrics may be interpreted differently and individual opinions may vary.

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