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CONFERENCE PAPER

MUSIC EDUCATION AND SOCIAL HARMONY: INSIGHTS FROM INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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Abstract

Music education has long been recognised as a powerful medium for cultural transmission, emotional development, and social integration. In the Indian context, particularly within the traditions of Indian classical music, music education plays a crucial role in fostering social harmony, ethical values, and cultural continuity. This paper explores the role of music education in promoting social cohesion and sustainable development, with reference to Indian classical music traditions. It also examines how contemporary educational frameworks, especially the National Education Policy (2020), recognise the importance of arts education in building inclusive and innovative societies. By analysing the cultural, psychological, and social dimensions of music education, the study highlights how musical training contributes to emotional intelligence, collective participation, creativity, and social inclusion. This study adopts a qualitative research approach based on expert interviews and questionnaire responses. The data for the study are collected from music educators, classical performers, and scholars associated with Indian classical music institutions. The questionnaire method helped in understanding expert perspectives on the relationship between music education, cultural transmission, and social harmony.

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Introduction:-

Music has historically functioned as a unifying force across societies. In India, classical music traditions have not only served aesthetic and spiritual purposes but have also contributed to the development of social values and communal harmony. Music education plays a significant role in nurturing discipline, cooperation, empathy, and respect among learners. Beyond artistic training, music education influences psychological well-being, emotional expression, and interpersonal communication. In a diverse society such as India, where differences of language, caste, religion, and region often shape social identities, music provides a common cultural platform that encourages unity and mutual understanding.

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In contemporary educational discourse, music is increasingly recognised as an important component of holistic education. It contributes to cognitive development, emotional balance, and social awareness while also strengthening cultural identity.

Objectives of the Study:-

- To examine the role of music education in promoting social harmony within the context of Indian classical music traditions.
- To analyse how Indian classical music education contributes to emotional, ethical, and cultural development among learners.
- To explore the significance of music education in transmitting cultural values, discipline, and social responsibility.
- To study the relationship between music education and sustainable development, particularly in terms of creativity, social responsibility, and inclusive growth.

Music as a Universal Language and Medium of Social Harmony:-

Music transcends linguistic and cultural barriers and therefore functions as a universal mode of communication. Indian classical music communicates emotional states through ragas, rhythmic structures, and expressive interpretation. Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow, is a prestigious institution dedicated to the study and promotion of Indian classical music and performing arts. Established in 1926 by Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, it aims to make music education accessible to all. The university brings together students from diverse backgrounds, fostering cultural understanding, unity, and social harmony through music. When students learn music collectively, differences of social background often become secondary to shared musical goals. Ensemble practice, group singing, and collaborative performances encourage teamwork and mutual respect among learners. These collective experiences generate a sense of belonging and foster social harmony within diverse communities. Moreover, musical expression helps individuals articulate emotions that may otherwise remain unspoken. Through this emotional communication, music cultivates empathy and strengthens social bonds.

Guru Shishya Parampara and Institutional Platforms in the Promotion of Indian Classical Music:-

One of the most distinctive features of Indian classical music education is the Guru– Shishya Parampara, a pedagogical tradition grounded in close mentorship and experiential learning. In this system, musical knowledge is transmitted through sustained interaction between the guru and the disciple, emphasising values such as humility, discipline, dedication to *riyaaz* (regular practice), and deep respect for the teacher. Traditionally, the student lived with the guru and learned through continuous guidance, observation, and imitation. This immersive environment enabled not only the transmission of musical techniques but also the internalisation of artistic sensibilities and ethical values associated with the musical tradition.

With the expansion of modern educational systems, this traditional model has gradually been supplemented by institutional forms of training in universities and music colleges. Structured curricula, scheduled classes, examinations, and degree programs have made music education accessible to a broader and more diverse group of students. Even within these institutional contexts, the teacher–student relationship continues to play a central role. Students from varied social and cultural backgrounds learn together under the guidance of a mentor, creating an environment that nurtures patience, dedication, and mutual respect. In this way, the pedagogical principles of the Guru– Shishya Parampara continue to support cultural continuity while fostering social harmony and collective learning.

Music-related activities such as workshops, concerts, festivals, and collaborative performances serve as important platforms for social interaction. These events create spaces where performers and audiences share collective aesthetic experiences. The promotion and dissemination of Indian classical music are significantly supported by various cultural institutions, academic centres, and festival platforms that organise concerts, workshops, and educational programs. These institutions not only provide performance opportunities but also contribute to the preservation and transmission of musical traditions. Institutions such as the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) regularly organise workshops, lecture demonstrations, music concerts, and cultural festivals that bring together scholars, performers, and students from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, the Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra in New Delhi has played an important role in promoting Indian classical music and dance by offering professional training and hosting regular cultural performances. Academic institutions such as Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya in Lucknow also contribute significantly by organising classical music festivals, seminars, and

events such as the Dhrupad workshop, khayal and thumri master class, and Sharangdeva Samaroh, which provide platforms for both established artists and emerging musicians.

In addition to institutional initiatives, several major concert platforms and national organisations actively promote classical music through large-scale cultural events. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's national academy for music, dance, and drama, organises festivals, conferences, and workshops across the country to support and preserve classical and traditional performing arts. Similarly, HCL Concerts has emerged as an important contemporary platform, hosting live concerts, intimate baithaks (small, interactive musical gatherings), and digital performances in cities such as Delhi, Noida, Gurugram, Lucknow, and Chennai. Prominent music festivals also play a vital role in sustaining audience engagement and encouraging artistic exchange. The Saptak Music Festival in Ahmedabad, held annually in January, is one of the most respected classical music festivals in India, featuring performances by leading artists over a period of nearly two weeks. Likewise, the Kalakshetra Foundation in Chennai, a premier institution dedicated to classical arts, regularly organises festivals, workshops, and training programs that contribute to the preservation and dissemination of India's rich cultural heritage. Through these institutions and cultural platforms, Indian classical music continues to thrive as both an artistic tradition and a medium of cultural dialogue, strengthening community participation and fostering a deeper appreciation of India's musical heritage. Such gatherings strengthen cultural networks and encourage intergenerational transmission of knowledge. When communities participate in musical celebrations, they experience a sense of collective joy and cultural belonging. These shared experiences help bridge social differences and contribute to community harmony.

Emotional and Spiritual Dimensions of Music:-

Indian classical music is deeply connected with spirituality and introspective awareness. The practice of ragas involves attentive listening, emotional sensitivity, and disciplined practice, all of which contribute to personal growth. Regular engagement with music cultivates qualities such as patience, concentration, empathy, and emotional stability. These attributes are essential for maintaining harmonious social relationships. The calming and reflective nature of musical practice also supports psychological well-being and promotes inner peace.

Music Education and Cultural Heritage Preservation:-

India possesses a rich musical heritage consisting of classical, semi-classical, and folk traditions. Music education plays an essential role in preserving this heritage while simultaneously encouraging cultural appreciation. National archives and public broadcasting institutions such as Prasar Bharati contribute to this effort by digitising vintage recordings and safeguarding rare gharanas (stylistic traditions) from being lost over time. In this way, the government provides a financial safety net and institutional legitimacy that help classical arts survive in a modern, commercialised world. Through learning compositions from various regions and traditions, students develop an awareness of India's cultural diversity. This exposure nurtures respect for different cultural expressions and reinforces the idea of unity in diversity, a foundational principle of Indian society.

Music Education and Sustainable Development:-

Music education contributes not only to cultural preservation but also to sustainable social development. It enhances creativity, communication skills, and collaborative abilities, which are essential for active citizenship and community engagement. Educational programs that integrate themes such as environmental awareness, social responsibility, and sustainable living through music can help students understand broader societal issues. Songs and musical activities addressing topics such as environmental conservation, social equality, and community responsibility can serve as effective pedagogical tools. Music also influences psychological and emotional development, helping individuals develop empathy and social responsibility. These qualities are crucial for building inclusive and sustainable societies.

National Education Policy (2020) and the Vision for Music Education:-

The National Education Policy (2020) represents India's first comprehensive education policy of the twenty-first century and emphasises the importance of holistic and multidisciplinary learning. One of its major goals is to achieve Quality Education, corresponding with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4). The policy recognises arts education, including music, as an important component of cognitive development, cultural awareness, and personal well-being. By integrating music and other art forms into the educational curriculum, the policy aims to strengthen cultural identity, enhance creativity, and promote emotional well-being among students.

Music as a Catalyst for Creativity and Innovation:-

Creativity and innovation are essential drivers of national progress. Educational systems that nurture creative thinking contribute significantly to scientific advancement, cultural development, and economic resilience. Music education encourages innovative thinking by stimulating imagination, problem-solving abilities, and interdisciplinary learning. Students trained in music often develop heightened sensitivity, analytical listening skills, and creative expression. These abilities extend beyond artistic practice and contribute to broader intellectual and social development.

Conclusion:-

Music education, particularly within the framework of Indian classical music, plays a vital role in fostering social harmony, cultural continuity, and sustainable development. Through the transmission of ethical values, emotional sensitivity, and creative expression, music education contributes to the formation of socially responsible and culturally aware individuals. However, despite these policy recommendations, music education in many Indian institutions remains underdeveloped. There is limited research regarding how widely music is taught across schools and how effectively arts education is implemented in the curriculum. This gap highlights the need for greater institutional support, research initiatives, and effective policy implementation. In the context of contemporary educational reforms and global development goals, integrating music education into mainstream academic curricula becomes increasingly important. By recognising Indian classical music not merely as an artistic discipline but as a significant social and educational resource, societies can harness its potential to build inclusive, innovative, and harmonious communities.

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