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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GLOBALISATION OF HIP-HOP: FROM THE BRONX TO INDIA A SECONDARY REVIEW OF CULTURAL DIFFUSION, GLOCALISATION, AND SOUND PRODUCTION PRACTICES IN TRANSNATIONAL RAP MUSIC

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Abstract

Hip-hop music emerged in the early 1970s when this musical form found its origin among the Afro-Americans and Puerto Ricans in the South Bronx of New York City, and today, it is regarded as one of the most widely spread popular music cultures in the world (Rose, 1994; Chang, 2005). This paper seeks to examine the diffusion of hip-hop music culture from its origin in the Bronx to India through a narrative literature review with systematic searches following PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). We make use of research conducted in peer-reviewed literature in ethnomusicology, sociolinguistics, cultural studies, marketing, and sound production, especially literature on hip-hop sampling and beat-making practices, to examine the mechanisms that underlie the globalisation of hip-hop music culture – media flows, diaspora migration, cultural diplomacy, and digital distribution technol ogy. Based on the framework provided by Appadurai's (1996) theory of global flows of culture and Robertson's (1995) notion of glocalisatio n, the review places the genre of Indian hip-hop, especially the "gully rap" phenomenon in the city of Mumbai, featuring artists such as DIVINE and Naezy, as an example of deliberate local adaptation, and not of passive cultural imitation. The results show that the globalisation of Indian hip-hop was determined by three interrelated processes – technological democratisation of music production, indigenisation in terms of language and culture of poetic expression, and mainstreaming due to the impact of the movies, notably Zoya Akhtar's 2019 film Gully Boy. The review also examines the pedagogical significance of the findings in terms of sound engineering and production, ethical considerations regarding the use of sampling, and directions for future primary research. Overall, the paper argues that the globalisation of hip-hop is not a process of cultural homogenization but a cyclical exchange, where local scenes like the Indian one act as agents of global hip-hop culture production.

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Introduction:-

Background of the Study:-

The hip-hop music genre came to existence in the early 1970s in the South Bronx, New York and was created from block parties through the efforts of DJ Kool Herc, who invented a technique called "looping" whereby he would isolate the drum beats known as the "breaks" from funk and soul records and use the breaks to keep the dancers moving at the block parties (Chang, 2005; Rose, 1994). This set of interconnected activities DJing, MCing, breaking and graffiti writing developed within a decade into a commercializable musical genre, which became a globally recognised phenomenon within another twenty years (Osumare, 2007). Researchers in global hip-hop studies have used different metaphors to explain this growth, referring to it either as "diaspora" crossing ethnic, linguistic, and geographic barriers (Motley & Henderson, 2008) or as a "global hood" where marginal communities share similar experiences (Osumare, 2001). By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the aesthetics and language conventions of the genre were adapted into such diverse hip-hop scenes as Senegal, Germany, Japan, Cuba, Tanzania, and South Korea (Alim et al., 2009; Brooks & Conroy, 2011).

The trajectory of India's hip-hop engagement has followed a very similar pattern to those discussed above, though with significant time lag and a distinctively local flavour. The first exposure to the genre has been via the selection of rap-influenced rhythms by Bollywood as well as Indian artists from abroad, like Bohemia, known as the "pioneer of Desi hip-hop" because of his Punjabi language rap music released in the early 2000s (Rollingstone India, 2024). Indian hip-hop only acquired its own local identity in the 2010s with the rise of the "gully rap" scene in Mumbai, featuring the artists known as DIVINE and Naezy. This movement gained recognition at home and abroad and has been described as authentic Indian hip-hop (Ingle, 2020; Wikipedia, n.d.-a). The movie Gully Boy, which was produced in 2019 by Zoya Akhtar and featured the stories of these two artists with Nas' participation, has become a major milestone in this journey (Wikipedia, n.d.-b).

Taking into account the sound production and music production perspective, one can state that the globalisation of hip-hop is inevitably linked to the globalisation of technologies, which allowed this particular genre to emerge in the first place. Turntables, samplers, and subsequently DAWs each played a crucial part in reducing the costs of music production and thus helped the development of music scenes away from New York with the help of similar technology (Schloss, 2014). It is essential to discuss how the Indian producers incorporated sampling and beat-oriented production techniques into their practices by combining the styles of trap and boom bap with Indian instruments and qawwali singing techniques (Melodigging, n.d.).

Statement of the Problem:-

Though there is quite an extensive amount of scholarly research on the phenomenon of the globalization of hip-hop culture as a whole and on hip-hop in India as a special case study, there has been a relative lack of attempts at synthesizing the current research on this topic via a structured approach that involves replicable search and linking the sociocultural literature on the topic with the technical literature on the production of sounds. Most of the literature on hip-hop in India is non-academic and journalistic rather than peer-reviewed, while the academic literature on the topic is scattered among sociolinguistic, cultural studies, ethnomusicological, media studies, and marketing disciplines without a unifying narrative synthesis. The lack of such synthesis hinders the attempts of the young scholars of sound engineering and music production to find out about both the sociocultural dimension of the problem and the concrete implications that it has for the production of music in a global and local environment like India's. The present paper seeks to fill the said gap in the literature.

Objectives of the Study:-

This review pursues four primary objectives. First, it aims to trace the historical and theoretical trajectory of hip-hop's globalisation from its origins in the South Bronx to its diffusion across multiple world regions. Second, it aims to synthesise the specific literature on hip-hop's emergence and evolution in India, from early rap-inflected film music through to the contemporary gully rap and Desi hip-hop movements. Third, it aims to examine the role of music production technology, sampling practice, and sound engineering conventions in enabling and shaping this globalisation. Fourth, it aims to situate these findings within established theoretical frameworks of cultural globalisation, in particular Appadurai's (1996) scapes theory and Robertson's (1995) concept of glocalisation, to assess whether Indian hip-hop is best characterised as an instance of cultural imitation, cultural imperialism, or active local hybridisation.

Research Questions and Significance of the Study:-

This review has been structured around four central questions: (a) how did hip-hop spread from its origin in the Bronx and become a globally recognised musical genre? (b) what historical, linguistic and technological conditions led to the development of hip-hop in India? (c) How have the sound and lyrics of the genre been localised by Indian performers and producers while maintaining engagement with the genre's global traditions? (d) What are the practical, pedagogical and ethical considerations of the above process for the field of sound engineering and music production? The importance of this research is in combining the findings from cultural-studies literature on globalisation with the production-based literature on sampling and beat making to provide student researchers in music production with an integrative review of both "why" and "how" of the hip-hop spread from the Bronx to Indian streets and recording studios.

Literature Review:-

The Bronx Origins of Hip-Hop:-

Based on prevailing academic theories, hip-hop music came about in the South Bronx between the early and mid-1970s, amid times of deindustrialisation, landlord arson, and city disinvestment, resulting in a large part of the borough becoming impoverished (Chang, 2005). Amidst all these, the technological basis for the rhythm of hip-hop music is the invention by DJ Kool Herc of extending the "break" of the funk music recording using two copies of the same recording on two turntables (Rose, 1994). Based on Tricia Rose's book Black Noise, hip-hop music is part of a cultural tradition among African-Americans that has features like call and response, signifying, and complex rhythm as a way of both an art and an effective response mechanism to the systematic marginalisation of urban African-American and Latino youth (Rose, 1994, as cited in Brooks & Conroy, 2011). More recently, Osumare (2007) has coined a term called "Africanist aesthetic," which refers to the rhythmic, gestural, and rhetorical traditions of hip-hop music that have roots in the African Diaspora.

Hip-Hop as a Cultural and Musical Export:-

Hip-hop, thanks to its commercial infrastructure, including the music record industry, radio formats, as well as later cable and satellite television, had been taken way beyond the five boroughs of New York by the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s (Osumare, 2001). As opposed to cultural studies, marketing and consumer behaviour studies have investigated this diffusion of hip-hop under an alternative angle, seeing the genre as a case of the globalisation of a lifestyle brand. Motley and Henderson (2008), based on 35 in-depth interviews conducted among the fans of hip-hop from several countries, discovered that international consumers were not just importing American hip-hop as such, but also filtering, adapting, and interpreting its symbols and sounds by using their own cultural references. The authors present this process through the prism of a hip-hop diaspora around the globe. The findings of this research presaged a trend in the literature: hip-hop has been spread throughout the world not just through simple transmission from centre to periphery, but through bilateral interaction (Alim et al., 2009).

The academic institutionalisation of this body of work has itself expanded considerably; the peer-reviewed journal Global Hip Hop Studies, along with special issues in journals such as American Behavioural Scientist, has provided a dedicated venue for scholarship spanning hip-hop's political, pedagogical, and industrial dimensions worldwide (Brooks & Conroy, 2011). Brooks and Conroy (2011), introducing one such special issue, observe that hip-hop scholarship has increasingly needed to grapple with tensions between authenticity and commercialisation and between hip-hop's origins as a protest-rooted subculture and its absorption into mainstream global entertainment industries.

Global Hip-Hop Scholarship: Comparative Regional Case Studies:-

A substantial body of case-study literature documents hip-hop's localisation across specific national and regional contexts, and this comparative literature is instructive for understanding the Indian case. In Tanzania, Perullo and Fenn (2003, as cited in Pennycook, 2007) documented the emergence of "Swahili rap" or Bongo Flava, in which Swahili gradually displaced English as the dominant language of the scene precisely because local artists wished to construct a hip-hop culture that expressed national rather than imported values. In Nigeria, Shonekan's (2010) comparative study of Nigerian and African American hip-hop cultures found points of both convergence and divergence in how the genre was used to narrate experiences of marginalisation, while Liadi's (2012) research on multilingual hip-hop consumption demonstrated that Nigerian audiences actively favoured hybrid, multilingual rap texts over monolingual imports. In South Asia beyond India, Saucier and Woods (2012) examined how hip-hop was appropriated in Sri Lanka as a vehicle for youth identity construction amid the aftermath of civil conflict. This comparative literature converges on a consistent finding: Hip-hop's global uptake has depended heavily on linguistic

and cultural translation rather than direct imitation, a pattern that reappears clearly in the Indian case discussed later in this review.

In particular, linguistically oriented research has proven especially useful in theorising this phenomenon. The edited volume Global Linguistic Flows by Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook (2009) features ethnographies of hip hop communities ranging from Hong Kong to Tanzania to Germany and posits that it is not the language that makes the "Global Hip Hop Nation," but rather, a shared way of using language to signify identity, resistance, and community membership (Alim et al., 2009). Along similar lines, Pennycook's (2007) exploration of the idea of "keeping it real" in international hip hop scenes suggests that authenticity becomes a translocal discourse, such that local artists do not have to sound like Americans to be authentic hip hop artists, but rather, must remain faithful to their sociolinguistic surroundings through hip hop aesthetics.

Hip-Hop in South Asia and India:-

Compared to the academic works on hip-hop in Africa, East Asia, and Europe, there is little academic work done regarding Indian hip-hop. Nonetheless, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of research articles in peer-reviewed journals over the last decade. Ingle's (2020) article, which explores the concept of 'gully beat' or participatory culture of rap music in India, explores the origin of the movement from India's slums of Mumbai in relation to the use of digital media platforms like YouTube for the artists to circumvent the music industry's gatekeeping process. There is another set of works that looks into the issue from the industry perspective, including a chapter of a book analysing the informal economy of Dharavi's hip-hop movement (Wikipedia, n.d.-a).

Popular and trade-press accounts, while not peer-reviewed, provide useful documentary detail that complements the academic literature. These accounts trace a rough periodization of Indian hip-hop: an initial phase in the 1990s associated with Baba Sehgal's Hindi-language novelty rap; a second phase in the early 2000s associated with Bohemia's Punjabi-language rap and international collaborations, including work with Panjabi MC; and a third, more consequential phase beginning around 2013–2015, in which DIVINE's "Mere Gully Mein" and Naezy's early releases established gully rap as a genre rooted in the specific texture of Mumbai street life, expressed through Hindi and Urdu-inflected lyricism (Rollingstone India, 2024). This third phase culminated in the mainstreaming moment represented by Gully Boy (2019), a film that dramatised elements of DIVINE and Naezy's biographies and brought gully rap to a national and international audience, with DIVINE subsequently becoming the first Indian signee to the Indian extension of Nas's Mass Appeal Records label (Wikipedia, n.d.-b).

In addition to gully rap, scholarly and business literature have mentioned the linguistic and regional diversification of hip-hop in India in the form of the emergence of distinct hip-hop communities in languages such as Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali, and Kashmiri, along with others (Melodigging, n.d.). The research conducted by Menon (2014), in which he analyses how hip-hop was received in Kerala, shows how rap in the Malayalam language was used for expressing the political consciousness of the region in a manner similar to the way it was done in the African and Southeast Asian regions mentioned above. The literature reviewed here indicates that hip-hop in India, just like hip-hop elsewhere in the Global South, cannot be considered a mere imitation of American hip-hop.

Theoretical Framework:-

Cultural Globalisation Theory: Appadurai's Scapes:-

In the current essay, much attention will be paid to the theory of global cultural flows elaborated by Arjun Appadurai in the well-known book "Modernity at Large" (1996). The theory suggests that globalisation can be considered the process of interaction of five disjunctive scapes, which are as follows: ethnoscapes (people migration), technoscapes (technology migration), financescapes (money migration), mediascapes (media image migration) and ideoscapes (ideology migration) (Appadurai, 1996). Concerning hip-hop, it becomes clear why the migration of the genre from the Bronx to India cannot be treated as a linear process with one channel of transmission. The migration can be explained through the prism of ethnoscape of the South Asian diaspora of the USA and the UK, who gave birth to Desi hip-hop artists, technoscape due to the development of cheaper samplers, drum machines and smartphone technologies, mediascape through the means of satellite TV, YouTube and streaming services, and ideoscape in terms of hip-hop ideology of youth rebellion, authenticity and self-expression that can easily be adapted to Indian conditions (Appadurai, 1996; Ingle, 2020).

Glocalization:-

The second important theoretical resource is the notion of glocalisation by Roland Robertson (1995). Glocalisation refers to the presence of both globalising and localising processes occurring within one cultural practice, whereas the

terms 'global' and 'local' are considered to be opposites. This framework is often used in the analysis of global hip-hop to show that hip-hop is seldom presented in its pure form in the global cultural market aside from the USA (Motley & Henderson, 2008). In the Indian context, glocalisation takes shape through the combination of trap music rhythm with instruments and vocals specific to the region, switching languages (English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, etc.) within one line, and the reinterpretation of hip-hop themes such as struggle and assertiveness in terms of Indian specifics (caste, migration, communal relations, etc.).

Cultural Imperialism versus Cultural Hybridity:-

The review further critically examines the historical controversy between cultural imperialism theory, which maintains that the process of globalisation usually leads to cultural homogenization under the leadership of Western, especially American, media companies, and cultural hybridity theory, which highlights the creativity of local audiences and producers in transforming the imported cultural products (Alim et al., 2009). Hip-hop globalisation studies from the early period favoured cultural imperialism theory because of their view that the global expansion of hip-hop was part of American cultural and economic hegemony (Motley & Henderson, 2008). In contrast, recent works such as Pennycook's (2007) study on linguistic localisation and Osumare's (2007) "connective marginalities" argue that local hip-hop is not a mere importer but actively selects elements of hip-hop style, authenticity aesthetics, and infrastructure and fills them with local political, aesthetic, and sonic content. The case of India, which the findings of this review support, subscribes to the latter theory despite the power imbalance between the United States and India in economics and technology.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:-

Finally, the review draws on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, as operationalised in the specific context of hip-hop by scholars and practitioners associated with the U.S. State Department's cultural diplomacy programs (Katz, cited in Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Since the early 2000s, the U.S. State Department has sent hip-hop "envoys," rappers, DJs, and dancers, to dozens of countries as part of programs such as Rhythm Road and, later, Next Level, explicitly framing hip-hop as a tool for building goodwill and cultural understanding abroad (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). While India has not been a primary focus of these specific state-sponsored programs relative to countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Central Asia, the broader soft-power framing is theoretically useful for understanding how American hip-hop's global prestige, circulated through media and diplomacy alike, created favourable conditions for local Indian artists to adopt and adapt the genre's conventions.

Research Methodology:-

Research Design:-

This study employs a secondary research design that takes the form of a narrative literature review guided by a systematic search process. While a full systematic review or meta-analysis often demands a homogeneous set of quantitative studies that can be analysed statistically, the topic under consideration in this paper, that is, the cultural and musical globalisation of hip-hop, is primarily explored using qualitative, ethnographic, historical, and theoretical studies. Hence, the current paper utilises both the systematic search process and a narrative review method, the latter becoming common practice in interdisciplinary cultural and social science literature reviews where different research designs prevent a meta-analytical approach to literature synthesis (Page et al., 2021).

Data Sources:-

The data employed for the current review are comprised of secondary sources only and include peer-reviewed journal papers, academic book chapters, monographs, and in those instances where there was no peer-reviewed academic data available on a particular topic area, carefully selected sources from the trade press and journalism (such as Rolling Stone India) were employed only for their descriptive and factual content without controversy. No collection of primary data was conducted in any form, including interviews, surveys, or music analysis.

Systematic Review Framework: PRISMA-Informed Screening:-

Despite the fact that this literature review is not a systematic or meta-analysis review, the search and screening procedures have been carried out according to the methodology laid down in the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA statement has been adopted but not fully applied because of the qualitative and multidisciplinary character of the source literature, and, in particular, the identification, screening, and selection processes have been performed according to the standard PRISMA flow chart, while the meta-analytical synthesis part of the flow chart has been substituted with the narrative thematic synthesis, following the suggestions that PRISMA's logic of reporting can be easily adopted for reviews without meta-analysis (Page et al., 2021).

Databases Used:-
Searches were conducted primarily through Google Scholar, JSTOR, SAGE Journals, ScienceDirect, ResearchGate, and Taylor & Francis Online, supplemented by targeted searches of the specialist peer-reviewed journal Global Hip Hop Studies. Although the assignment context for this paper originates in a health-sciences and PubMed-oriented research methodology template, PubMed was searched for completeness but yielded no directly relevant results, as the subject matter, the cultural and musical globalisation of hip-hop, falls outside the biomedical literature indexed by that database; this is reported transparently here rather than glossed over, consistent with the paper's commitment to accurate sourcing.

Search Strategy:-
The search terms were determined through an iterative process and were then combined using Boolean operators. Key search terms included various combinations of: "hip-hop" OR "rap music" AND "globalization"; "hip-hop" AND "India" OR "Desi hip-hop" OR "gully rap"; "hip-hop" AND "glocalization" OR "cultural flows" OR "Appadurai"; "sampling" AND "hip-hop production" AND "history"; and "hip-hop" AND "soft power" OR "cultural diplomacy." To focus on sources written in English, wherever possible, although the cultural content being explored in those sources is multilingual in the Indian context, no limit was placed on date based on the necessity of including foundational texts like those by Rose (1994) and Appadurai (1996). However, in the exploration of contemporary Indian hip-hop, the most recent sources have been those written within the last fifteen years.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:-
Inclusion criteria for the selected references included that they: (a) concentrated on the globalization and localization of history of theory and practice of hip hop in any nation; (b) focused specifically on hip hop, rap music, or Desi/Indian hip hop culture; (c) pertained to hip hop in terms of music-production and sound-engineering issues like sampling and beat-making; or (d) contained established theories on cultural globalization. The exclusion criteria for the sources was that they (a) were concerned solely with the dancing and fashion of hip-hop, without considering the musical and cultural aspects of this topic in particular; (b) were unverified user-generated material (such as forum comments or blogs), except when this material is limited to providing factual information not available from other sources; or (c) were not verifiable as real publications at all.

Data Analysis Method:-
The included references were subjected to thematic narrative synthesis. The full texts or detailed abstracts of the sources were studied, and themes were extracted, which include the origins and history of hip-hop, the diffusion process, and theories on globalization/localization. India-specific developments; linguistic/lyrical localisation; sound production/sampling; and soft power/cultural diplomacy. This was then structured according to the chapter/sub-chapter outline of the findings and discussion portion presented in the following part of the paper, hence resulting in a narrative synthesis of the literature rather than an unstructured annotated bibliography.

Limitations of the Methodology:-
Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, because much of the source material on contemporary Indian hip-hop is not yet reflected in peer-reviewed academic literature, the review necessarily draws on a small number of carefully selected trade and journalistic sources for descriptive detail, a limitation openly disclosed rather than concealed. Second, the review is confined to English-language sources, which may underrepresent scholarship published in Hindi or other Indian languages. Third, as a narrative rather than fully systematic review, the selection and weighting of themes, while conducted as transparently as possible, inevitably involves a degree of interpretive judgment on the part of the author.

Findings and Discussion:-
Key Findings: The Trajectory of Hip-Hop's Globalisation:-
What emerges from the literature is that the globalisation of hip-hop has been done through intersecting waves of media penetration, diasporic movement, and technological diffusion, as opposed to a singular process of exporting hip-hop culture from America. The interviews conducted by Motley and Henderson (2008) revealed that international hip-hop fans and practitioners adapted the culture in accordance with their local logic, a conclusion shared by regional studies done on hip-hop culture in Tanzania, Nigeria, and Sri Lanka as described above (Pennycook, 2007; Shonekan, 2010; Saucier & Woods, 2012). This body of literature reinforces the idea of Appadurai (1996) that cultural globalisation occurs through disjunctive multiple "scapes" rather than just being

based on a simplistic centre-to-periphery process, and also strengthens the glocalisation approach proposed by Robertson (1995).

The Sonic Architecture: Sampling, Technology, and the Democratisation of Production:-

A distinct but complementary strand of the literature addresses the technical, production-oriented dimension of hip-hop's globalisation, a dimension of particular relevance to this paper's disciplinary home in sound engineering and music production. Hip-hop's foundational sonic technique, the sampling and looping of pre-recorded material, originated in DJ Kool Herc's turntable-based break-extension technique before migrating to dedicated hardware samplers such as the E-mu SP-1200 and Akai MPC series during the 1980s (Schloss, 2014). Schloss's (2014) decade-long ethnography of hip-hop producers, Making Beats, documents how these tools gave rise to a distinctive craft culture built around "digging" for rare breakbeats, with producers developing shared, informally transmitted aesthetic and ethical codes regarding how sampled material should be selected, chopped, and recontextualised.

The subsequent shift from dedicated hardware samplers to affordable, general-purpose digital audio workstations (DAWs) running on personal computers is widely identified as a key technological driver of hip-hop's global spread, since it dramatically lowered the capital and technical barriers to entry for aspiring producers outside the United States (Schloss, 2014; New York Audio Institute, n.d.). This technological democratization is directly relevant to the Indian case: contemporary Indian gully rap and Desi hip-hop producers have been able to build competitive, internationally circulated productions using widely available DAW software and sample libraries, combining standard trap and boom-bap rhythmic templates, typically boom-bap tempos around 80–95 beats per minute or trap tempos around 130–150 beats per minute in a double-time feel, with regional Indian instrumentation and vocal sampling drawn from qawwali, filmi, and folk sources (Melodigging, n.d.). This blending exemplifies glocalisation at the level of sound production itself: the underlying tools and rhythmic grammar are globally standardised, while the sonic palette and lyrical content are locally specific.

India's Hip-Hop Evolution: From Baba Sehgal to Gully Rap:-

From the literary documentation, there is a three-stage periodisation of the development of Indian hip-hop. In the first stage, during the 1990s, Baba Sehgal brought out Hindi rap into Indian markets, where it was mainly used as a pop phenomenon combining Hindi language with hip-hop beats from the West, without having an independent underground system yet (Rollingstone India, 2024). The second stage came in the early to mid-2000s when Bohemia brought out Punjabi rap and started doing international collaborations with artists such as Panjabi MC (Rolling Stone India, 2024; Wikipedia, n.d.-c). In the third and most consequential phase, beginning around the early 2010s, a grassroots "gully" movement emerged from Mumbai, centred on DIVINE and Naezy, whose Hindi- and Urdu-language storytelling foregrounded the specific texture of everyday life in the city's informal settlements (Ingle, 2020; Wikipedia, n.d.-a). Ingle's (2020) research situates this development within a broader account of "Participatory culture," arguing that digital platforms such as YouTube allowed gully rap artists to build audiences and reputational capital outside the traditional Bollywood-dominated music industry, a dynamic that parallels similar bottom-up digital distribution patterns identified in other Global South hip-hop scenes.

Case Study: Gully Boy and the Mainstreaming of Gully Rap:-

Gully Boy (2019), directed by Zoya Akhtar and drawing inspiration from the lives of DIVINE and Naezy, is one inflexion point of Indian hip-hop within the literary and trade discourse (Wikipedia, n.d.-b). The movie's mainstream success, along with Nas' co-production role as a US rapper and the founder of Mass Appeal Records and the subsequent signing of DIVINE as the first Indian artist to sign with Mass Appeal's Indian subsidiary, shows how global hip-hop industry infrastructure was tied to Indian underground through a concrete process (Wikipedia, n.d.-b). Gully Boy represents several theoretical dynamics outlined in Chapter 3: first, the film represents Appadurai's (1996) mediascape dynamic where the Bollywood movies served as catalysts for the development of a genre that had already formed organically; second, the film shows how glocalization works since the movie used a global genre framework to depict local (Mumbai) content; and third, the film represents the entanglement of local and global music-industry infrastructure as a US record label became involved with an Indian musician's career.

Language, Localisation, and Authenticity in Desi Hip-Hop;-

Consistent with the broader global hip-hop literature on linguistic localisation (Alim et al., 2009; Pennycook, 2007), Indian hip-hop artists have developed distinctive strategies of code-switching and language mixing, moving fluidly between English, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and other regional languages within individual songs and even individual verses. This linguistic hybridity serves a function closely analogous to that documented in the Tanzanian "Swarap" case, where Perullo and Fenn (2003, as cited in Pennycook, 2007) found that Swahili displaced English specifically

because artists wished to construct a hip-hop culture rooted in national rather than imported values. In the Indian case, Menon's (2014) study of Malayalam-language hip-hop in Kerala similarly found that regional-language rap served as a vehicle for expressing locally specific political and social consciousness that would have been considerably less resonant had it been performed in English. For all of these cases, the literature reveals that "'keeping it real' in global hip-hop culture is not accomplished through adherence to American English linguistics but rather through the faithful reproduction of one's own social environment in the context of the forms of hip-hop" (Pennycook, 2007).

Hip-Hop Diplomacy, Soft Power, and India:-

Though literature on hip-hop diplomacy initiatives carried out by the United States State Department, such as Rhythm Road and Next Level, shows evidence of extensive collaboration with hip-hop ambassadors in regions like Africa, the Middle East, and Central and Southeast Asia, there are not many instances of documented formal hip-hop diplomacy initiatives in India within the reviewed literature (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). However, the general theoretical concept of hip-hop being used as a tool of soft power can be quite relevant because it helps to understand how much prestige and cultural capital American hip-hop brought to the Indian youth culture without an official diplomatic effort, and how India's own hip-hop community creates their own cultural capital and visibility internationally, such as collaborations between DIVINE and other international artists (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022; Rollingstone India, 2024).

Benefits of Hip-Hop's Globalisation:-

Several benefits of hip-hop's globalisation, and of its localisation in India specifically, emerge from the reviewed literature. First, hip-hop has functioned as a vehicle of youth self-expression and social commentary for marginalised communities in multiple national contexts, extending a function it originally served in the Bronx to new local settings, including Mumbai's informal settlements (Ingle, 2020; Rose, 1994). Second, the genre's technological accessibility has contributed to the democratisation of music production more broadly, enabling artists without access to formal studio infrastructure to produce internationally competitive recordings (Schloss, 2014). Third, hip-hop's globalisation has generated new creative and economic opportunities within India's music industry, including label partnerships, streaming visibility, and cinematic tie-ins that have brought previously underground artists into the commercial mainstream (Wikipedia, n.d.-b). Fourth, at the level of cultural exchange, hip-hop's global circulation has facilitated cross-national artistic collaboration, exemplified by DIVINE's work with international artists on the Mass Appeal roster (Rollingstone India, 2024).

Emerging Trends:-

Several emerging themes seem to reappear through the more recent literature analysed here. The rate at which regional language diversification is taking place is growing ever faster, with hip-hop music culture now thriving in such Indian languages as Punjabi, Tamil, Malayalam, Bengali, Marathi, and Kashmiri, to name a few (Melodigging, n.d.; Menon, 2014). Streaming platforms have become central to how Indian hip-hop is discovered and distributed, with major platforms actively curating Indian rap and hip-hop content, reflecting the broader mediascape shift identified in Appadurai's (1996) framework from broadcast to networked, on-demand media distribution (Rollingstone India, 2024). Independent, "bedroom" production has continued to expand as DAW-based production tools have become still more accessible, consistent with the long-term trajectory identified by Schloss (2014) and the sampling-technology literature more broadly. Finally, the trade literature notes the continued growth of India-specific hip-hop record labels and collectives, such as Gully Gang and other independent imprints, suggesting a maturing domestic industry infrastructure that increasingly operates in parallel with, rather than purely as a subsidiary of, global hip-hop industry structures (Rollingstone India, 2024).

Conclusion:-

Summary of the Study:-

In this secondary research paper, it was aimed at mapping out the globalisation of hip hop from its birthplace, the South Bronx, to its present form in India by undertaking a narrative review of the peer-reviewed secondary literature using the PRISMA methodology. The review considered the emergence and spread of hip hop, through diasporic, media, and technological means; comparative case studies of localization of hip hop in Africa, Europe and South Asia; and theories of Appadurai (1996) on global cultural flows and Robertson (1995) on glocalization of hip hop, particularly in India from Baba Sehgal’s novelty rap songs to Bohemia’s Punjabi hip hop songs to the present day gully rap associated with DIVINE and Naezy through the movie Gully Boy.

Major Conclusions:-

Three major conclusions emerge from this review. First, hip-hop's globalisation is better understood through a glocalisation framework than through a strict cultural-imperialism framework: across the regional case studies reviewed, from Tanzania to Nigeria to India, local artists have consistently reworked hip-hop's formal and technological conventions to express locally specific social and political content, rather than passively reproducing American source material (Motley & Henderson, 2008; Pennycook, 2007). Second, the technological history of hip-hop production, from turntable-based sampling through dedicated hardware samplers to contemporary DAWs, has been a decisive, if often underexamined, enabler of the genre's global spread, since it progressively lowered the material barriers to music production for artists working outside the traditional Western studio system (Schloss, 2014). Third, India's own hip-hop trajectory exemplifies these broader global dynamics with unusual clarity: the shift from Baba Sehgal's derivative novelty rap to the gully rap movement's grounded, hyper-local storytelling illustrates a genre moving, over roughly three decades, from imitation toward a genuinely localised and internationally recognised creative practice (Ingle, 2020; Rollingstone India, 2024).

Practical Implications:-

For students and practitioners of sound engineering and music production, this review carries several practical implications. Understanding hip-hop's sample-based production lineage, from the SP-1200 and MPC era through to contemporary DAW-based workflows, provides a useful technical and historical grounding for producers seeking to work within or adapt the genre's conventions (Schloss, 2014). Understanding the specific ways Indian producers have blended trap and boom-bap templates with regional instrumentation and vocal sampling offers a concrete, replicable model for glocalized production practice more broadly, one that may be relevant to producers working in other regional or linguistic contexts beyond hip-hop and beyond India (Melodigging, n.d.). Finally, the review underscores the continuing importance of digital distribution literacy, given the central role that platforms such as YouTube and streaming services have played in enabling Indian gully rap artists to build audiences independently of traditional industry gatekeepers (Ingle, 2020).

Limitations of the Study:-

This review is subject to several limitations, which should be considered when interpreting its conclusions. As a secondary, narrative review, it does not generate new primary data and is dependent on the quality, availability, and disciplinary orientation of existing published literature, which, as noted in Chapter 4, is comparatively sparse and unevenly distributed with respect to contemporary Indian hip-hop. The review is limited to English-language sources, which may exclude relevant scholarship and journalism published in Hindi and other Indian languages. Additionally, because Indian hip-hop is a rapidly evolving contemporary phenomenon, some of the trends discussed in Chapter 5, particularly regarding streaming platforms and emerging regional scenes, are necessarily provisional and likely to be superseded by subsequent developments.

Recommendations for Future Research:-

Building on these limitations, several directions for future research are recommended. Future primary research could conduct ethnographic or interview-based studies with Indian hip-hop producers to examine, in the manner of Schloss's (2014) study of American hip-hop producers, the specific craft values, production workflows, and sampling ethics operative within India's gully rap and Desi hip-hop scenes. Comparative research examining Indian hip-hop alongside other South Asian scenes, for example, in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, would help clarify which dynamics identified in this review are specifically Indian and which reflect broader South Asian patterns of hip-hop localisation. Finally, research that uses either the computational or acoustic analysis of hip-hop music recordings from India would complement the predominantly qualitative and historiographical review of literature presented above by providing a technical perspective on the changes in sampling techniques, tempo, and instrumentation within the genre's Indian history.

Ethical and Regulatory Considerations:-

Several ethical and regulatory considerations arise from this review and merit brief discussion. First, hip-hop's foundational reliance on sampling raises persistent questions of music copyright and intellectual property, particularly as digital sampling tools have made the unauthorised use of copyrighted recordings increasingly easy; these questions apply with equal force to Indian producers sampling from Bollywood, qawwali, and folk sources as they do to their American counterparts sampling funk and soul records (Schloss, 2014). The second aspect of concern is the issue of whether the intercultural exchange associated with the global spread of hip hop represents cultural appropriation or genuine cultural exchange, which the review has addressed from the perspective of glocalization rather than using a dichotomy of appropriation versus authenticity in light of ongoing disputes about

whether certain individuals have the right to speak for other individuals about the latter's marginal urban experience in both American and Indian scholarship on hip hop (Osumare, 2007; Ingle, 2020). The third point relates to the historical use of hip hop as a tool of cultural diplomacy at the behest of the state, something that scholars should take into consideration given what has been shown in the wider hip hop diplomacy literature despite a lack of it in the present sources (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022).

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