

## Socio-Cultural Renaissance through Music in the 19<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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**Abstract:** Music is a universal language and has been a powerful tool of influence on societies and cultures from time immemorial. As composer Felix Mendelson once remarked, "Music has the power to express, convey and illicit powerful emotions". In the words of musicologist David Tame: "Music is more than a language; it is the language of languages"

The 19th and 20th centuries was a significant period in the history of the world called the 'Period of Renaissance', which witnessed maximum upheavals throughout the world with rapid industrialization, the two World Wars, widespread agitations and revolutions, the Civil War, fights against social and racial inequalities, to name a few. During this period, sweeping changes and transformations were brought about through the inspiring and soul-stirring music of some great music composers and musicians, who could minutely read the pulse of the people and connect with them through their music, thus inspiring them to fight the social evils and injustices prevalent in society.

Though there were several musicians who contributed to the socio-cultural transformations through their songs and compositions, in this paper, we will study the contributions of the African Jamaican singer Bob Marley and the contributions of Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati, the great south-indian poet, freedom fighter and song-writer

**Keywords:** Bob Marley, Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati, Renaissance, Transformations, Soulful Music  
**Contents:**

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### I. Introduction

A simple melodious song with powerful lyrics has a tremendous power to transform a society beyond our expectations. This has been proved by great musicians and composers of the past centuries. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw a quantum shift in the socio-economic and political paradigms that governed the world. These were hard times for the people of the world, who witnessed the various struggles for power that included the two World Wars, the struggles against racial injustices, the Civil War, Nazism in Germany, struggles for Independence, whether in the East or the West. This left people in different parts of the world hopeless about the future. The mindless violence and bloodshed that accompanied these struggles created a feeling of alienation and frustration amongst the people of the world. This propelled a Cultural Renaissance, where Music played a very important role in moulding the thoughts and attitudes of people and in bringing about a wholesome healing by lending a strong voice to their frustrations and demands for peace, justice, freedom and equality.

#### 1.1. Music As A Way To Affect Change In Society

##### 1.1.1 Folk Music

The rise of the popular Folk Music and the popularization of Rock n Roll Music of the 1960s is the best example of Music affecting society. Folk Music is inherently 'Music that is played and sung by and for the common folk and masses, and is closely connected with their day to day lifestyles and activities'. Hence, naturally so, when a culture becomes aware of radical changes in society, that awareness gives way through expression and what better way to express one's feelings, except through Music or singing. During that time in the mid-90s, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing and the largely unpopular war in Vietnam was well underway. Folk singer and song-writer Woody Guthrie began writing 'protest music' and songs in support of the popular movements of the day. Other folk singers like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez also followed suit. And, for the first time ever, music became not only a vehicle for expression, but also a way to mobilize and inspire the listeners to think and act differently. People throughout the world, whether it was the East or the West, particularly the youth, showed favourable responses to this genre of music called 'Folk', as in this genre, they could express their feelings freely, and could also lend a voice to their frustrations, console and also inspire each other. Shifting from the sterile, clean-cut popular image of the 1950s, there was a general trend towards individuality, freedom of expression, and an overall rejection of authority and power structures. The American society was changing drastically and in a lasting way.

### **1.1.2 Rock Music**

The cross-over of African-American 'Race Music' to a growing white youth audience, resulted in popularizing 'Rock n Roll', that involved both black and white performers performing for a mixed audience, and this was the best thing to happen at a time when racial tensions in the United States were reaching a zenith, and this paved the way for the Civil Rights movement for desegregation and rights to equality for all races. The growing popularity and world-wide scope of Rock music resulted in a powerful impact on society, as this genre of music influenced daily life, fashion, attitudes and language in a big way, a way which few other social developments have equalled. Rock songs became a universally accepted and deeply interwoven thread in popular culture. Love and peace were two common themes in rock music during the 1960s and 70s. Famous rock musicians have adopted and addressed social issues and causes directly as a commentary or as calls to action.

Rock musicians like Marvin Gaye's 'Mercy Mercy Me' that addressed the social causes like 'ecology' or 'environment', Peter Gabriel's 'Bike' that addressed the 'Anti-apartheid movement', the group U2's 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' that addressed violence in Northern Ireland, and Dead Kennedy's 'Kill the Poor' that addressed the world-wide economic policy, and the notable protest song by Patti Smith on 'People have the power' go to prove that these musicians went beyond mere song-writing and not only addressed social issues but also raised lots of money for many charitable causes, and awareness of global issues through televised and spectacular concerts

### **1.1.3. Pop Music**

Pop music is a genre of popular music, which originated in its modern form in the Western world during the 1950s and 60s, deriving from rock and roll. Popular and Pop music are used interchangeably, even though the former is a description of music while the latter is a specific genre containing qualities of mass appeal. Pop music emerged in the late 50s, as the initial rock and roll craze began to die down, and a lighter or a smoother alternative to rock was needed. The Beatles are the first bands that became popular as pop music, and the pop music of Beatles had a tremendous impact on society, especially on the youngsters, who began to talk, dress, and wear long hair styles like the Beatles. They too addressed several social issues to impact society

### **1.1.4. Music of The African-American Community**

Music is one of the most consistent and important elements in the African-American culture. And is almost a part of their daily language as talking. Songs were used as a vehicle to tell about the culture's history, to announce a notable deed or event, to synchronize a group effort or task, to tell of some emotional crest or valley, and most importantly, an important tool used in comforting and healing each other. The African-American music of the 1960s and 70s was rich, powerful and diverse. Community or congregational singing like gospel and spiritual singing played a very crucial role in bringing people together during the Civil Rights Movement. Groups and Choirs like 'The Stylistics', 'the Chi Lights' and 'The Delphonics' created beautiful harmonics and melodies with a pulsating sound of Rhythm and blues and came 'Jazz' which was the beacon of the musical evolution of African American music, and came to be known as 'America's Classical Music'. African-American music motivated an entire generation, as this music supported them in their struggles against racial injustices and helped soothe their pain. This music set new standards and styles, and became the source of succeeding music styles.

### **1.1.5 Music of The Bhakti & Sufi Saints & Independence Activists of India**

The Bhakti and the Sufi Movements, two important reform movements in India, played an important role in bringing harmony between the Hindus and the Muslims. These movements preached the 'unity of the god-head' and emphasized that devotion to God and faith in him led to salvation.

These movements became popular among the common masses as its teachings were spread in the form of music such as through hymns, songs, bhajans, abhangs and the like. These movements were liberal in their outlook and helped to bring a feeling of unity and oneness in India. The music composed by the Bhakti saints like Meerabai, Tukaram, Eknath, Namdeo, and Haridasas like Sri. Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa helped fight social evils prevalent in India like the caste -disparities and discriminations on the basis of birth and lineage, Untouchability etc. and brings a feeling of compassion and tolerance in society towards one another.

Apart from these saints, India had some great and illustrious freedom fighters, who were also great poets and song-writers, who, through their songs, could inspire intense feelings of love for their country in one and all, like Gourde Rabindranath Tagore of Bengal, and Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati of Tamilnadu

## **II. Purpose Of This Paper**

To re-emphasize the immense potential of Music as a powerful medium and a catalyst to bring about positive changes in societies and cultures and those powerful lyrics set to good music can positively carry strong messages, capable of evoking strong political, social, and nationalistic sentiments in people, inspiring them to bring about a change.

In this context, music is used as an effective tool in spreading religious harmony, and solving or minimising the problems of religious unrest. Where as in a country like India where several religions are practised, music can help to bring about greater tolerance and religious harmony.

To realize that Music can bring about a pervasive sense of well-being through congregational singing and collective devotional chanting and encouraging collective participation called 'sathsangs' could lead to a sense of personal enhancement, help to spread positivity, tolerance and understanding and bringing people of each community together. Infighting and misunderstandings within the country weaken the country and music can act as a strong building force to strengthen the country.

Music helps to bridge the gap in communications, and to overcome geographical boundaries and this leads to peace and harmony which fosters greater understanding amongst people of different communities and nations. To foster world peace through cultural exchanges, starting from schools and universities. Music appreciation lectures, cultural programs, and workshops would go a long way in understanding the cultural diversities of different countries and music can act as a pivotal unifying force in building lasting friendships between different countries of the world

## **III. Work Done In This Area Of Research**

3.1 Glenn C. Altvuler of Cornell University studied how popular culture and the Rock n Rollers like Elvis. Presley influenced daily life, fashion, attitudes, and languages in the American society and culture in the 1950s-1960s, and helped transform society as it coincided with the Civil Right movement and brought Race music into many white-American homes in America for the first time ever, at a time when racial tensions were at an all-time high. Rock n Roll music changed American culture and laid the foundation for the social upheaval of the sixties.

3.2. Stanford musicologist Stephen Hilton in 2012 studied Kurt Weill's and the influence of his music on Nazis Germany, by studying his popular compositions and works. Compositions like the Three-penny opera greatly impacted German society, and provided the much-needed healing for the Nazi-inflicted German society

3.3 Ulrich Adelt of the University of Iowa, in his paper on 'Research on Black, White, and Blue' in the 19<sup>th</sup> Studied how the Blues Music influenced people to raise their voices against racism, and fight injustice during the Civil War Movement, by empowering the African-American community to fight racism

3.4 Rudolf Hecci of the Masaryk University of the Czech Republic, in his research on 'The Beatles & their Influenced on Culture', studies how their music had an immense impact on British culture and society, and also in the Soviet Union. The Beatles became not only a musical but also a cultural phenomenon, not only within Britain, but also outside. He quotes a musician of the Soviet Union as saying that 'The Beatles gave us the opportunity to look each other in the eye and say, look! We are the same! And the terms like capitalism, socialism, communism, they mean nothing because we are human beings'

## **IV. Contributions Of This Paper**

A lot of work has been done by different researchers at different periods of time on how Music has impacted society, but this paper will be significant as it will be addressing two totally different song-writers who belonged to two different genres of music, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. They lived in two different parts of the world, one in Jamaica and the other in India. Also their music created social transformations of different kinds, as the societies that they lived in were plagued with different types of problems. The Africans were fighting slavery and racial inequalities and injustices, while the Indian society was fighting to gain independence from the British rule, and faced grave social evils within its national framework in the form of Caste discriminations, Untouchability, and the like that was alienating one from the other.

The African community was greatly inspired to fight against racial divide by the soulful renderings and the inspiring lyrics of Bob Marley, the legendary Jamaican African singer, music composer and song-writer, who composed each song with a message, called Reggae Music.

The prolific South-Indian poet, composer, independence-activist and song-writer Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati, used his pen as a strong wand to ward off the multitudes of social evils that were lurking within the Indian ethos during that era. Some of the social evils included Casteism (discrimination

amongst people on the basis of their caste or birth or lineage), Untouchability, Inferiority towards women, superstitious beliefs and also penned memorable patriotic songs that created a strong bond of love for India amongst the people of India and propelled them towards freeing India, their motherland, from the hands of foreigners, meaning the British

#### **4.1 Bob Marley (Feb 1945,-May 11, 1981) &The Impact of His Music**

Nesta Robert Marley was born on February 6, 1945, in St. Ann Parish, Jamaica. His father was a white British naval captain named Norval Sinclair Marley, who was nearly 60 at the time. His mother, Cedella, was a 19-year-old country village girl. Because of his mixed racial makeup, Bob was bullied and derogatorily nicknamed “White Boy” by his neighbours. However, he later said the experience helped him develop this philosophy: I’m not on the white man’s side, or the black man’s side. I’m on God’s side

#### **Bob and His Band ‘The Wailers’**

He and his friends Bunny Livingston (given name, Neville O’Riley Livingston) and **Peter Tosh** (given name, Winston Hubert McIntosh) spent a lot of time listening to rhythm and blues on American radio stations. They named their band the Wailing Wailers (later shortened to the Wailers) because they were ghetto sufferers. As practicing Rastafarians, they grew their hair in dreadlocks and smoked marijuana because they believed it to be a sacred herb that brought enlightenment

#### **Music and Politics**

When Livingston and Tosh left for solo careers, Marley hired a new band and took center stage as singer, songwriter and rhythm guitarist. He produced a string of politically charged albums that reflected the keen social consciousness that came to define his lyrics. He wrote about the soaring unemployment, rationed food supplies and pervasive political violence he saw in Jamaica, which transformed him into an influential cultural icon. In 1976, two days before he was set to play a free “Smile Jamaica” concert aimed at reducing tensions between warring political factions, unknown gunman attacked him and his entourage. Though bullets grazed Bob and wife **Rita Marley** they electrified a crowd of 80,000 people when both took to the stage with the Wailers. The gesture of defiant survival heightened his legend and further galvanized his political outlook, resulting in the most militant albums of his career.

#### **Bob Marley and Rastafarianism**

Bob’s ideology changed during the year he spent in America. Haile Selassie visited Jamaica and influenced Marley’s life. Haile Selassie was the Ethiopian Emperor, who was cherished as a saviour by Africans in Jamaica. While working in America, Bob was introduced to Capitalism and the evils of the free market society. Upon returning to Jamaica, Marley began practising the religion of Rastafarianism and wore his hair in dreadlocks.

The influence of Rastafarianism was apparent in the Wailers music. Marley and his band wrote about how Africans have been suppressed by the oppressive white race, and this influence can be seen in the lyrics of many songs, especially in the lyrics of ‘Buffalo Soldier’ and ‘Could you be loved’. Rastafarians are people who have mentally divorced themselves from a socially oppressive system. Rasta’s devote their lives to ‘Jah’ or peace and love. Through Jah, Rastas feel that someday, Babylon referring to the oppressive white race, will be overthrown. Bob dedicated his life to Jah, as was reflected in all his songs

#### **Bob’s Music Is Reggae Music-That Is Music With A Message**

Reggae music is described accurately in the Journal of Popular Culture, as a type of music that is important in spreading the Rastafari movement against oppression, exploitation, and racism. It is best expressed in the protest music of Bob Marley, who used metaphors to communicate a universal message to the listeners. ‘Jah’ represents goodness and love, and Babylon is a destructive force. The theme of war is used to stress human rights problems. Metaphors of oppression and freedom, such as chains and birds, depict social problems and ways of liberation. Music is an effective form of communication in regions of illiteracy and poverty

As Bob Marley and the Wailers became internationally known, their popularity increased the Rastafarian Movement. The movement gained popularity, thanks to Bob Marley and his music.

The movement is about three thousand strong today and has expanded from Jamaica to several countries around the world, such as America, Great Britain, Canada, Africa, and the West Indian Islands

His songs ‘Could you be loved’ and ‘Buffalo Soldier’ use action verbs to motivate the listeners and tell them to speak out and speak up for their rights. Below is an analysis of Bob Marley’s song ‘Buffalo Soldier’-

.Buffalo Soldier, Dreadlock Rasta, There was a Buffalo Soldier  
In the heart of America

Stolen from Africa, brought to America.

Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival

In the context of the above song, 'Buffalo Soldier', refers to Africans, who were brought to America, and forced to fight against the Native American Indians, who called the black men Buffalo Soldiers, because their hair was tightly woven and to them, resembled that of a curly and matted Buffalo's coat. It is ironic that the Africans who were being oppressed, fought for the American Cavalry, who was fighting against the Native American, which were another oppressed race. The Dreadlock Rasta signifies Bob Marley and the Rastafarian movement.

The background in which Bob wrote and sang this song, was the time when the war of suppression was being fought by Rastafarians, wearing their hair long in dreadlocks. They, who were Africans by birth were fighting for their freedom for centuries. Africans were struggling for their freedom when they were in Africa. They kept resisting the best they could upon being captured in Africa. The resistance continued when they were put on ships for Jamaica and America, although the resistance was survival because of the misery on the ships. The Africans were forced from their homes, families, and forced to live a life without freedom. They continued to fight after their arrival. Few lines from the song 'Buffalo Soldier'

I mean it, when I analyse the stench

To me, it makes a lot of sense

How the Dreadlock Rasta was the Buffalo Soldier

And he was taken from Africa, brought to America

Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival

In the arms of America

Trodding through Jamaica, a Buffalo Soldier

Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival

Buffalo soldier, Dreadlock Rasta

Both in America and Jamaica, the Buffalo Soldiers have been in a perpetual struggle against the dominant society to establish their rights and to ensure their dignity.

Bob began working on Buffalo Soldier in 1978, after reading about the black American soldiers decorated in the late 1800s. This song helps many learn the way history truly happened. Jamaicans are still affected by past injustices. Abigail Bakan summarizes in her book on Ideology of Class and Conflict in Jamaica, why many in Jamaica still remember injustices of the past vividly. She writes that 'The majority of this population are the descendants of African slaves, forced to leave their villages some two hundred years ago to labour on Jamaican plantations for white masters. In contemporary Jamaica, the legacy of slavery is still very much a part of popular consciousness

Buffalo Soldier is a clear reflection of Marley's life and the class divisions he witnessed growing up in Kingston, Jamaica. A short way up the road from the slums of Kingston was the Crossroads. The area was named this because it divided the poor neighbourhoods from the affluent. Throughout his life, Bob Marley was deeply troubled when his people were not judged by their character, but rather by their skin colour and their bank balances. Through songs like Buffalo Soldier, Marley was able to voice his message of freedom and allow his voice to be heard world-wide, creating an audience for Reggae Music that is even now increasing in popularity each year.

### **Bob Marley, The Legend, Celebrated Even Today**

To celebrate its most famous son, Bob Marley's home country of Jamaica hosted a six-day, star-studded concert festival that started February 1, 2015 in Negril. The Bob Marley Museum in Kingston hosted a symposium on reggae's influence on music, fashion, and culture on February 6th. In addition, The Grammy Museum has designated February 6th as Bob Marley Day. Before his death from cancer in 1981 at age 36, Marley received The United Nations Peace Medal of the Third World in 1978. He was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1994. The BBC proclaimed Marley's "One Love" as Song of the Millennium. In 2001, Marley was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Grammys. Marley's music certainly continues to inspire and influence music, fashion, politics and culture around the world.

### **4.2 Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati (11 Dec, 1882-11 Sep, 1921) The Social Impact Of His Music**

Subramanya Bharati was born on December 11, 1882, at Ettayapuram, in Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu, to mother Lakshmi and father Chinnaswamiyer, who was a court poet of the Zamindar of that place. His father was a Brahmin, well-versed in Tamil, English, Mathematics, Logic and Western Technology.

Bharati played truant from school, being more interested in the book of Nature and Life, and even as a child of 8 years, he was given to composing impromptu verses in Tamil, and showed precocious genius in Tamil Literature, because of which he was conferred the title of 'Bharati', meaning 'one blessed by Saraswati, the Goddess of Learning.

A multi-faceted poet Subramanya Bharati is a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry from Tamil Nadu, India, an Indian writer, poet, journalist, independence activist and iconoclastic social reformer. Also known as Bharati and Mahakavi Bharati, the laudatory epithet 'MahaKavi' meaning 'Great Poet' in many Indian languages. He had a prodigious output penning thousands of verses on diverse topics like Indian Nationalism, love songs, Children's songs of nature, glory of the Tamil language, and odes to prominent freedom fighters of India like Tilak, Gandhi and Lala Lajpat Rai. He even penned an ode to New Russia and Belgium. His poetry not only includes works on Hindu deities like Shakti, Kali, Vinayakar, Murugan, Sivan, Krishna, but also on other religious gods like Allah and Jesus. His insightful similes have been appreciated by millions of Tamil readers. He was well-versed in various languages and translated speeches of Indian National Reform leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Swami Vivekananda. Though he composed in the south-indian language 'Tamil', many of his works have been translated to many languages.

### **Singer Of Unity In Diversity And National Integration**

Bharati is a poet singing of unity, universal and national. He is the poet of national integration, the crying need of the nation during that time. He had beautifully sung-

"She has thirty crores of faces  
But her heart is one  
She speaks eighteen languages  
But her mind is one"

Thirty crores have risen to seventy and may become a hundred, and eighteen languages may become twenty-eight or more, but her heart will remain one, her mind will remain one. She will remain the beneficent Mother of all, blessing all. This was Bharati's proud, prayerful song. Egypt is gone, Babylon is gone, but India lives on.

Bharati's vision was that of a free India without caste differences, which was the root cause of all of India's social problems, and this was expressed in song as a social message- 'Bharat Desam Enru Peyar Solluvai'. This song shows the aspirations of this great patriot -poet, envisioning an India, wherein all regions and religions are living in harmony, and happiness, casting aside all differences. He reiterated that there were only two castes; people who are righteous and helpful unto others are the superior castes while the rest are inferior.

### **Bharati's Spirited Words of Womanhood**

Bharati wrote in his poems that 'Among our women, many have been born as the incarnations of supreme Shakti. Our ancestors were great apostles of this mother worship. Para-Shakti or supreme energy is the name whereby they knew her. Mother worship will save humanity, for the supreme energy renders immortal, all that reflects her beauty and her fire. Do not think of women as chattles, he said. To Bharati, women are the personification of everything high and great. He was for total emancipation of womanhood and hits out at atrocities against women. He said "If only it is decreed that men and women are equal, learning will thrive to uplift the world"

'Bhooloka Kumari', a Sanskrit song on woman and motherhood, songs like 'Penmai Vaazh Gavendru', speaks of women's empowerment. Other songs he composed on women's rights, liberation, empowerment, boldness, briskness, alertness, self-discipline ability and leadership are 'Potri-Potri', 'Nenjukku Neethiyum', 'Om Shakti Shakti Thunbamilla Nilayae', 'Thumamilla Nilayae', 'Innum Orumurai Solven'.

## **V. Conclusion**

The important findings of this paper goes to show that legendary song-writers have successfully brought about a socio-cultural transformation in society, through the strength of their powerful lyrics that had the potential to create an impact in the minds of the listeners, and bring about a positive change in their attitudes, thus inspiring them to fight racial inequalities and live with pride as in Bob Marley's songs and fight social evils like casteism, untouchability, inferiority towards women in Indian society, inspiring them to stand in unity and fight for the independence of their motherland as in Mahakavi Subramanya Bharati's songs.

The applications suggested through this paper is that Music can be used as a harbinger of peace and unite people within the country and also unite different nations of the world by bridging the gaps in communications, thus making the world a much better place to live. Music can also effectively be used as a medium through which socio-cultural changes can be brought about and certain problematic issues can be addressed on its own cordially.

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