

ML 1040

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SANATAN DHARMA MAHA SABHA

STATEMENT NO 1

MUSIC IN SCHOOLS



The present controversy which surrounds the issue of Pan as opposed to Harmonium requires careful study and analysis.

In order to do this we should first look at the music that is to be played on both these instruments. There is no doubt that the pan was born of the African experience in Trinidad and Tobago. One of the first tunes played on the Pan was the European nursery rhyme "Mary had a little lamb whose fleece was white as SNOW!!!"

Having unfortunately lost much of his heritage to the onslaught of the European, the Afro-Trinidadian's greatest aspiration is to play the European's Classics and be recognised for it. The greatest credits to pan comes from the Eurocentric and the American experience; and pan became acceptable to the upper class when steelbands began to play Beethoven.

The pan is definitely a percussion instrument. It is an attempt to formulate notes of the *Temperate* scale. It cannot play the subtle srutis so basic, essential to Indian music.

It is extremely unfortunate that the people of Pan-Trinidad and some officials at the Ministry of Culture view the Maha Sabha's claim to the Harmonium as a means of disseminating Indian Music, in the negative. Instead of looking at this claim with empathy they ignorantly blame us for being unpatriotic. What the critics fail to appreciate is that each time a Hindu sits for Puja he first offers prayers to the land on which he was born and lives - *Janam Bhoomi*.

Patriotism and expressions of patriotism are daily rituals of the Hindus. We love our country. Every bit of T&T is dear to Hindus born in our country.

A studied analysis of the music of the Indian Trinidadian will assist our critics to better understand the Maha Sabha's position on music in schools. In their confused minds, fanatics totally disregard the view that the society needs to facilitate the free creative growth and expressions of its citizens. We need freedom to choose which instruments our children should learn music on.

The music of the Indian Trinbagonian has its basis in our scriptures. It emanates from the primal sound *AUM*. The Indian scale is divided into twenty-two microtones called *shruties*. The Western scale is divided into twelve divisions called semitones.

The use of these microtones or shruties is the life or *prana* of Indian Music. If this is compromised Indian music then loses its identity. The unique religious feeling of the bhajan cannot be evoked without the sruti; and pan cannot produce sruties. These very same microtones are sometimes heard in African music. The Blue notes of a good African Jazz musician employs these microtones. The bending of the notes of the Jazz Guitarist is an attempt to recapture some of these notes. Indian Trinidadians have this naturally in their voices.

Let any musician who has studied European music listen to an Indian Trinbagonian style of playing and try to imitate it - see what happens. Three years ago the Ministry of Culture made a feeble attempt to write Bhajans; the Music was no doubt written by the celebrated Merle Albino-de Coteau. It was a laughable attempt, which showed contempt for the music of the Indian Trinbagonian.

Only the musically illiterate will hold on to the point that the Harmonium is a Western instrument introduced into India. This ill-founded conceit clouds their vision to the fact that the Harmonium has undergone a series of adaptive changes which resulted in an instrument which expresses the ethos of Indian

music.

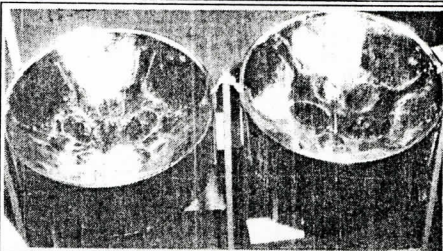
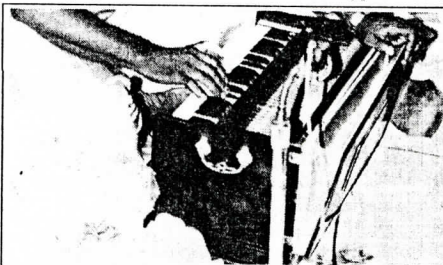
Many invaders went to the Indian shores and conquered the land. The fortunate fact was that they failed to conquer the minds of the people whose very culture is inextricably tied to their religion. The musical instruments carried to India all underwent changes.

The Harmonium as introduced by the French missionaries is not the same instrument that is played today. The technique of playing it is also different. If the missionaries who introduced it to India in an effort to undermine the integrity of the Indian scales were to hear it in the hands of an Indian player, he would not dare touch it. Those people who write and criticise the use of the Harmonium as a means of learning Indian Music should listen carefully to its use in the singing of Indian songs.

Indian music is basically melodic in structure with particular types of grace and note patterns that are not prominent in Eurocentric music. A harmonium, dholak or tabla and a metal percussion instrument is sufficient to produce Indian music.

Instead of trying to judge Indian music on its own merit, uninformed critics use the borrowed standards of the European. Indian Music is much closer to African music than the music of the colonial masters who conquered our bodies but not our spirit.

Let us once again take an objective look at the Steel Pan. We wish to reiterate that although the Pan is the product of the African experience it has never been used to play African Music. Even the Calypso that is



well loved has borrowed its structure from European Chord Progressions.

Where are the beautiful microtones of the Ancient Chantwells. Where are the minor scales that so beautifully express the nature of the Africans. Some are ready to give up their culture to satisfy the whims and fancies of the European and American.

They are yet to capture the beauty of original African music heard in Ethiopia or Senegal. Having traded their beautiful linear harmony for the eighteenth century harmony of the Europeans, they must not expect us to give up ours also. The critics of the Maha Sabha must re-claim what is theirs and feel proud of it, only then could they understand our claim for Harmoniums in schools and alternatives to pan. Don't let the George Orwell's syndrome of 'Animal Farm' cloud judgements.

The notes of a steelpan contain discordant microtones, interferences which would destroy the subtle

deliberate microtones of the Indian Trinbagonian singer. It would serve as a hindrance to our devotional music. Not because you are not aware of it, it is not there. At night the sun is not apparent yet, it is still there.

IT WAS MARTIN LUTHER KING WHO SAID THAT WHEN HE TALKS ABOUT HIS RIGHTS AS AN AFRICAN THE WHITE MAN SAYS HE IS RACIAL. Pride in the integrity of our ancestral legacy has nothing to do with racial prejudice. Is it because we are Hindus or speak Hindi, we are less of a Trinbagonian than others?

In the U.S.A. the African minority is vociferously claiming the right to multi-culturalism and rightly so. But here attempts are being made to force integration; but cultural integration must happen naturally. As citizens of Trinidad and Tobago we must all enjoy the legacies of the varying races that inhabit this beautiful land. Each has its contribution to make.

Pan cannot be replaced in panorama, but it has its limitations. The Pan is nowhere near a perfect instrument like the Piano, Guitar, Cuatro, Sitar or Harmonium. Trinidad and Tobago has given the world an Idea, a beautiful musical idea. This idea is being perfected but not here. Pan Trinbago does not have the foresight to see that Canada, Sweden, Japan, Germany and other countries are perfecting the Pan; they may even patent it and take it way from us. Instead they prefer to fight with Sat Maharaj and the Maha Sabha, using half baked ideas that originate from prejudiced minds.

We have absolutely no doubt that the steelpan would one day produce a perfect 440 cent 'A' note. Meanwhile we should not allow ill-founded conceit to spoil the ears of our children by pushing pan down everyone's throat. Government has a duty to nurture an understanding of the various cultural roots of the peoples of this country. Instead what we have witnessed over the years is afro-Trinidadian cultural arrogance, a denial of some ethnic groups of their cultural identity.

And it all started with the PRIME MINISTER'S BEST VILLAGE PROGRAMMES. What was the focus of Best Village? Who are the people employed as Best Village Officers? Who are the Supervisors of this monstrosity? We challenge the organiser to name one officer who is not of African origin. Yet Indians are accused of not participating. How can they participate in an activity that is Afro oriented and where the criteria for judging does not take account of the Indian.

Expenditure of public funds on culture, with particular reference to the Arts, has to reflect and respect a certain degree of equity. It must show returns to everybody and not to a particular section of the society.

Every single one of our scriptures is sung according to the *raga* system and any attempt to force pan on all schools will adversely affect the Hindu Dharma. Apart from imposing a cultural artifact on young impressionable minds without the approval of their parents, should our daughters now start practicing for Panorama two o'clock in the morning?

Empathy, perception and orientation in Music-Education are major considerations which elude the brains of our critics who use the word patriotism to support an aggressive, jaundiced view of Culture.

True patriotism is very closely associated to the Anthem "where every creed and race find an equal place."

SATNARAYAN MAHARAJ
SECRETARY GENERAL