

Childs Play India Foundation - exploring a new mode of community music making in India

Sebanti Chatterjee
University of Delhi

Abstract

El Sistema, a music education programme with social upliftment as its core belief, began in Venezuela under the directions of Jose Antonio Abreu in the year 1975. It acquired Governmental support in 1977 when it became a youth development program. Since then, this pedagogic framework has spread across various countries. Not only does it allow the children to immerse into the process of making music in an ensemble, it also opens up interaction opportunities between the educators, patrons and parents (Witkowski 2015). Geoffrey Baker gives an insight into the autocratic and competitive elements of the El Sistema Programme (Baker 2014).

When physician, musician, and a keen supporter of the arts, Luis Dias discovered about this international movement accidentally, during his visit to the BBC Proms in the year 2007, it moved him deeply. He felt that his native State Goa would immensely benefit from replicating such a model. In 2009, he founded the Childs Play India Foundation.

This paper reflects on various questions. It explores how El Sistema framework functions in India (Goa), a country receiving moderate support from the Government in terms of music education, particularly, Western Classical music. Due to their Western Classical legacy and a Catholic ethic, Goans nurture music by introducing community participation. How does music pedagogy impact the underprivileged kids and the educators? In closing off the elitist associations of classical music, how does it expand the scope of music pedagogy? What role does performance and entrepreneurship play in this process?

Keywords: El Sistema, Childs Play India Foundation, music education, western classical music, Goa.

Introduction

In Goa, Fr. Francis Xavier, one of the early missionaries, brought in singing during catechism classes in the year 1542. Parish schools were established as early as the 16th century (1545). The syllabus in the parish schools had a variety of topics that included alphabets, spellings, reading, writing, arithmetic, conducting mass in Latin, Gregorian chant, prayer songs in Latin, Catechism, Bible history, Portuguese and Konkani, solfeggio,

singing, violin and organ (Miranda 2014; Martins 1997). Gasper Barzeu got choir masters, singing of masses and chants accompanied by organ in motion (Pereira, Martins, Da Costa 2010). Works of many native composers began to be circulated in the process. Church became prominent only when Goa was made the headquarters of the Portuguese activities in the east. It acquired the status of the suffragandicocese in 1533 and earned the rank of a metropolitan archdiocese in 1557. Religious orders had an overwhelming influence in the missionary field until they were suppressed in 1834-35. The college at Confraternity of the Holy Faith, built in 1541 at Old Goa trained young converts to take up evangelization in their own countries. Formal instructions were in Portuguese but a lot of importance was attached to one's local language. Ignatius Loyola also stressed on local language (D'Souza 1994). Jesuits nurtured the study and practice of Konkani language. They studied grammatical and literary Konkani. In the 18th century, works written in Konkani by a Czech Jesuit named Karel Prickryl, who was in Goa from 1748-1761 and a Spanish Jesuit named Hervas y Pandure, who was in Goa from 1735-1809 were circulated (Mascarhenas 1989). Bastora (Bardez, Goa) had the first musical notation printing press by Rangel in the year 1886 (Martins 1997). A brief history on music, language and the role of church already gives a sense of the importance of community music making in Goa.

This paper emerged out of a partial ethnography conducted at the Hamara School in St. Inez between November 2013 and January 2014 and a brief follow up in November 2015 at the Santa Cruz Church. The methodology involved non-participant observation, interviews with the founder, educators and volunteers alongside attending the Christmas concert for the year 2013.

Presently, a lot of changes have taken place in the process of music education whereby the earlier system of music pedagogy is no longer followed¹⁶¹. Based out of Goa, currently, Childs Play India Foundation has the Hamara School Project, Auxillium School Project in Caranzalem and the Santa Cruz Village Project. They also have two orchestras - Camerata Child's Play India and Junior Camerata Childs Play India made up of amateur local and visiting musicians. They work with various sponsors and supporters for different projects. There are many forms of donations which include Adopt a musician and Endow a Chair. They also have merchandise like greeting cards with photographs of the Childs Play India Foundation kids from the various projects. There are many fund raising concerts as well. This year, they also have a new studio cum office space at St. Inez. They are looking for violin/viola teachers (April 2018), choral director (January 2019) and

¹⁶¹ I have been informed by the founder over an email how the music education system has entirely changed and resource persons, both educators and volunteers, have altered over time. They no longer follow the Suzuki method or the Dalcroze method.

teachers for any other orchestral instruments¹⁶². In a recent instagram post on the Childs Play India Foundation page (February 2019), they mentioned that their students get at least three classes per week and perform in two or more concerts every year¹⁶³.

Through my conversations with the founder I got to know that after registering as a charity in 2009, the Childs Play India Foundation had its first lesson on the 5th of January 2010 at the Hamara School in St Inez. Initially, they had Winston Colaco from Margao who propagated the Suzuki method¹⁶⁴ in Violin. He is one of two most well known figures associated with the Suzuki method in Violin in India, the other one being Rama Chobhe from Pune. Initially, the organization just started off with lessons during Saturday afternoons as Winston Colaco could not spare a lot of time. He eventually left. Dr. Luis Dias also spoke about how the Camerata Childs Play was formed during April 2013 along with the Goa University Choir. A course on history of Western Classical Music was curated for the Anthony Gonsalves Chair at the Goa University. Santiago Lusardi Girelli from the University of Seville wrote to Dr. Luis Dias regarding collaboration with the Childs Play India Foundation. During the time we met, Dr. Dias was gearing up for participating at the Monte Festival¹⁶⁵ 2013. Both Camerata Childs Play and Goa University Choir¹⁶⁶ were invited to perform at the festival.

During my visits to Goa, there was a young music educator Sia¹⁶⁷ associated with the Hamara school project. I attended one of her group music classes. The day I went, she even had a volunteer from the UK demonstrating to the kids, the technique of using the bow to emit a clean sound from the violin. The first section of the paper will focus on interactions with Sia and Brian¹⁶⁸, the latter was associated with the Santa Cruz Village project during my visit; and their involvement with the kids from the villages. This will address the question of impact of music pedagogy on the educators and the under-privileged kids. The second section will look at the scope of music pedagogy vis-a-vis the role of performance and entrepreneurship in the process.

¹⁶² <http://childsplayindia.org/> accessed on 1.3.18.

¹⁶³ They have received the ABRSM International sponsorship fund 2019.

¹⁶⁴ Suzuki's philosophy of music education as love education and tapping the inherent potential in each child based on lived experiences and oral transmissions makes Suzuki pedagogy different from the other music pedagogies (Karin S. Hendricks 2006).

¹⁶⁵ Performances occur inside the old heritage chapel and in its courtyard having a backdrop of the picturesque Chorão and Divar islands and the River Mandovi. The festival commences during sunset and ends at about 9pm. Monte festival celebrates a cultural dialogue between Western, Indian and Folk music and dance traditions. It had its first edition in the year 2002 after Fundação Oriente restored the chapel. <https://serenademagazine.com/news/monte-music-festival-2018/>.

¹⁶⁶ As a part of my larger research questions for my Doctoral studies, I auditioned for the Goa University Choir and sang with them at the Monte Festival 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Name changed for the purpose of research.

¹⁶⁸ Name changed for the purpose of research.

Impact of music pedagogy on the educators and the under-privileged kids

When I first started out, I wasn't shocked that I had to teach them in Hindi. It's really good because the last time that I spoke Hindi was some time in the market and here it's used on a daily basis and if I mess up and I mess up my Hindi, it's always because of the tenses and genders, the kids always end up helping me out. Hindi wasn't a language barrier - the only thing was teaching them the Music terms in English or ignoring the English music terms like the Crotchet or a Minim. So, I started doubting the way of expressing myself. For instance, I asked them to say the words Crotchet or Minim, and that's quite difficult to say; especially for these kids as they received 1st to 4th standard of education in Marathi medium. It is extremely difficult for them to learn it in English, which I realized after half a month of teaching them. So I stopped that. I stopped the entire crotchet and minim thing and started doing sounds like Ta-a or Taa for a crotchet or a minim and it became so much better. So language barrier was a problem but then after spending a few weeks here, you realize what's better for them. You have to stop doing things that you were taught also. It really wasn't going any direction when I said that this is a crotchet and this is a minim. Say it this way: Crotchet and we spent such a long time saying the sentence - I am learning the violin. It was such a horrible thing getting through that, but after I understood how they were learning in school and their medium of instruction, it became so much easier! Then I just stuck to Hindi and was teaching them in Hindi. Childs Play India Foundation has got a volunteer from England. She came down to teach us- teaching me Suzuki method which I started with the kids and then we got the three Girls from the Oberlin Conservatory, who learnt Suzuki in their first four years of learning the violin. They have imparted all the ideations to me and they have learnt about my teaching methods. (Sia, Personal Interview, January 2014)

It is important here to talk about Sia's background of learning to play the violin. She grew up in Bahrain and took up the violin only when she was in the 8th standard. Her teacher was a pupil of a famed violin teacher in Goa, Myra Shroff. After finishing her high school, she came to Goa for her Bachelors in Financial Accounting. It was difficult for Sia to continue with her lessons while staying at the hostel. She had to take a break. Sia resumed her lessons at the Kala Academy in the year 2011. When I met her, she had commenced her Grade 7 preparations under the Trinity College of Music Examination system. Through her violin teacher, she met a few other students and during April-May 2012, an opportunity came along for her to play for the Camerata Orchestra. That was how she got to know of Childs Play. This was Camerata's second rehearsal and she saw one of the students of Childs Play, Irfan, play for the first time. Teaching wasn't the first thing that was on her mind and she was still figuring out her plans. However, when she joined a correspondence course in MBA, Sia felt like she needed to do something else as well. That's how she decided to devote a few hours in the morning, teaching the kids at the Hamara School. It is also important to spell out how the language of instruction is complicated. Goans primarily speak English and Konkani. The Kids at the Hamara School come from migrant communities which makes Hindi a natural tool of communication. It

gets interesting as they undergo a Marathi medium of instruction in school. All this makes English alphabets an absolutely foreign set of syllables.

Because Suzuki is all about listening and right now my kids have to listen. The way I have been teaching them before (I started in October), it was a lot of theory. They should know what they are playing and they should see what they are playing. I used to compensate for the sound that they were making. It was always that if you are looking at the note E, you better be playing an E too. But now it's just as important that you are playing on the right string and you are making the right sound; which is quite an eye opener and I sometimes wish that I also learnt the same way, you know. Because, whatever ¹⁶⁹Clara taught me to teach them, I was so jealous of them- why should I be devoid of the opportunity to learn these? So I was a student when I was teaching my students. I felt that was the best way to be able to teach my kids. I just felt that I had to be learning it too. Because it didn't make sense if I kept telling them- straight bows please, straight bows please and I wasn't doing it! (Sia, Personal Interview, January 2014)

Sia talks about the essence of owning the appropriate methodology to be able to impart it to someone else. Thus, the concept of student-teacher makes the process of education more inclusive and fun. From other conversations I learnt how the music lessons are negotiated rather than being a part of the school curriculum formally. There is the additional problem of the kids being removed from the School, once the parents become slightly well off. The kids are welcome to attend lessons as they remain a part of Childs Play but the distance becomes a factor. As a part of training, she is supposed to teach three kids in a batch. The class is designated to be for 45 minutes but she allocates 15-20 minutes to each kid. This helps to retain their attention and also allows them to return to the ongoing class. Thus music period is shared with the Marathi period and the students attend a bit of both simultaneously¹⁷⁰. I was surprised with the set up but she explained to me that this works out best as the formal music period requires everyone to be present at the same time. During that time, individual attention can hardly be spared for 5-10 minutes. This too happens unofficially. Sia comes early morning at 8 am to tune their violins and the kids have a practice period before their language teacher comes. The hostel kids take the violins to their rooms for practice but have to return it to the School soon afterwards. The day boarders cannot take the violins home so they rely only on the practice period in school.

In November 2015, I met a volunteer from the United States, Brian. During that time, He was a student studying Physics and Piano at the Seattle University and also a vocal coach for singing. He wanted to do Chamber music in future. Through El Sistema, the

¹⁶⁹ Name changed for the purpose of research.

¹⁷⁰ This was during 2013-2014. The classroom structure and allocation of lesson periods may have undergone changes now, given the consistency of the Hamara School Project.

community project he wanted a taste of accessibility and excellence. When he came to Goa, there were about 60 kids between the ages 11-15 years, 6 piano students and the Camerata Orchestra. He was a part of the Santa Cruz Village project. He taught voice arrangement to the kids from the neighbourhood. He found that the boys sing treble but the women in the choir were in proportion. The students were extremely supportive and trusted him a lot. The interest level among the kids was high and children could read music. He said that singing has to be the foundation to play an instrument. Singers are encouraged to know the solfeggio as that allows them to have an idea of the melody. I attended one of their rehearsals at the Santa Cruz Church. While demonstrating, Brian emphasized on gestures: "Feeling round on top of my head; imagine a tall mouth; feel the microphone at the back of the jaw". He did a lot of clapping and gesticulations while explaining the shape of the sound, "Ba- Boom- Ba- stress on Boom and then open your mouth".

The Time Signature and Beats were demonstrated with hands. They also had an exciting range of body exercises to introduce the happy spirit. To explain the phrasing, he used actions like actual blooming and then through walking, he showed them when to slow it down. He was making them learn the words and texts as different shapes of sound. It seemed to me that he implemented the Dalcroze method by allowing the kids to internalize the rhythm through clapping, stomping and imagining the sound shape.

Scope of Pedagogy in the context of Childs Play India Foundation

While Witkowski and Baker's work reflect on many aspects of El Sistema, I choose to contextualize Childs Play India Foundation with its regional challenges. Tim Ingold while commenting about the two activities embraced by the anthropologists namely the field and the academy says that the field extracts empirical information (data) and the conceptual tools (theory) bring together the ethnographic narratives. This is further perfected in the academy. When language is not seen as devoid of affect, context-independent, mapped around the printed word but simply whereby speech is seen as a situated social activity, the boundaries between language and non-verbal communication become less fixed. Different practices shape various effects or possibilities through the inherent meanings conveyed by the practices. Alfred Gell says that adult language, well guarded in discursive wisdom excludes a sizeable proportion of human population from culture. This arises due to a host of issues cutting across gender, status, class and so on, leaving aside the matters of intellectual ability. Language is not the essence of culture but definitely a starting point to accumulate and comment on thoughts, actions and behavior. The phenomenological position whereby culture and language are considered equivalent is negated as culture generates concepts which cannot be interpreted via linguistic codes

alone. Culture includes language but has ramifications elsewhere too. Thinking is only partially linguistic. Musicians and Mathematicians engage in wordless debates. All these attribute to the global culture with a capital C but cultures with small c need to be addressed in specific contexts. Also, since, language does not determine culture, attitudes and values; cultures may go through conflict as well as conformity (Ingold 1996; Gell 1996). Therefore, taking cues from Alfred Gell, one can see the possibilities of auditory language (emphasis mine) making sense of the basic aspect of music pedagogy in the two sites of El Sistema inspired Childs Play India Foundation that have been discussed. Here, one difference that needs to be acknowledged is that while Hamara School in St Inez has more diversity in terms of community presence, Santa Cruz church and the parish school deals with a Christian community. The precarity of English language and the tradition of learning a Western classical instrument is therefore pertinent at the Hamara School in St. Inez whereas the vocal lessons at the Santa Cruz church is more about familiarizing oneself to a musical tradition that is otherwise inaccessible towards training. Tim Ingold talks about perception and 'attending' to the world through seeing, hearing and touching; where an individual actively engages with the environment that he/she dwells in. The latter emphasises on the co-dependency of persons and environment to enable a reciprocal constitution. He gives an illustration as to how a house becomes a home. The physical features in a domestic space - walls, doors, windows, fixed furnishings, etc. - as every day objects, feature in the lives of the persons who live there. It is their constant negotiation with these domestic objects in tandem with their life activities that transforms a house to a home. In a similar mode, the children exposed to the El Sistema inspired Childs Play India Foundation 'dwell in' the opportunity to learn, create music and explore possibilities (Ingold 1996).

Conclusion

The music pedagogy at the sites of El Sistema inspired Childs Play India foundation follow a localized framework. It borrows only certain elements from Suzuki method. For instance, the Suzuki Method usually involves one parent figure alongside the teacher to aid the learning of a child, which becomes a challenge in the setting of the Hamara School where the students themselves are in a flux due to migrating tendencies of their parents. Looking at the students from the Santa Cruz neighbourhood, some of the exercises introduced help them understand how to organize a performance but because the volunteers come

for short periods, exercises change over time. Language barrier, both¹⁷¹ intra musical and extra musical, undergoes careful negotiations. The process of music education functions effectively with a systematic approach. Volunteers, teachers and students cooperate to identify the language of sound and gestures. This becomes their language of expression as opposed to complicated sets of languages (Hindi, Marathi, English) that they internalise in the other academic spaces. Meenakshi Thapan while writing about the lived and remembered experiences of adults in their private school spaces says that schooling aims to produce 'one kind of social animal', modelled on the Durkheimian notion of transition from an "empty state" or 'tabula rasa' to a 'well-adjusted member of the society' (Thapan 2014). It holds somewhat true for many organizational spaces ordered around a particular pedagogy. El Sistema modelled Childs Play demonstrate the necessity of music education, creating children well attuned to an auditory language that will enable them to dissipate their anxieties by performing music. Further, by dwelling in an environment that facilitates a particular version of music education, a new mode of community music making takes shape.

The scope that I saw during the time of my fieldwork was that the children were interested to learn more and were excited to be a part of the performance. The Christmas concert that I witnessed in 2013 was mainly a performance by the Camerata Childs Play orchestra and had a recital by one of the students of the Childs Play India Foundation. The entrepreneurship makes sure that teachers and volunteers from many corners of the world can dedicate valuable time training the local educators as well as the underprivileged kids. In addition, approaches to music education have gone through major changes indicating that the organization reviews its methods time and again.

References

Baker, Goeffrey (2014), *El Sistema: Orchestrating Venezuela's Youth*, UK: Oxford University Press

Clausen, Bernd and Chatterjee, Sebanti (2012), "Dealing with Western Classical Music in Indian Music Schools: 'A Case Study in Kolkata, Bangalore, Goa and Mumbai'" in Knigge, Jens; Niessen, Anne (ed.) *Music Education: Concepts, Practices, and Political Dimensions*. Germany: Verlag Die BlaueEule Essen, pp. 112-131

Chatterjee, Sebanti (2013), "What Score Have You Got? Music Pedagogy in Indian Classroom" *Jadavpur University Journal of Sociology, Culture and Social Category*, 6, pp. 102-123

¹⁷¹ Intra-musical processes refer to the notes and extra-musical processes refer to the social circumstances of music's production and reception, such as the social functions or the effects of the music, the dress of the performers, or the lyrics (Lucy Green 2003).

- De Souza, Teotonio R. (1994), "The Voiceless in Goan History" in Souza, Teotonio R. de (ed.), *Goa To Me*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company
- Gell, Alfred (1996), "Against the Motion (1) in 1991 Debate Language is the Essence of Culture" in Ingold, Tim (ed.) *Key Debates in Anthropology*. New York: Routledge
- Green, Lucy (2003), "Music Education, Cultural Capital and Social Group Identity" In Martin Clayton (ed.) *Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, London: Routledge
- Hendricks, Karin S. (2011), "The Philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki: Music Education as Love Education", *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, 19 (2)
- Ingold, Tim (1996), "Introduction in 1991 Debate Language is the Essence of Culture" In Tim Ingold (ed.), *Key Debates in Anthropology*, New York: Routledge
- _____ (1996) "Against the Motion (1) in 1990 Debate Human Worlds are Culturally Constructed" in Tim Ingold (ed.) *Key Debates in Anthropology*. New York: Routledge
- Martins, Micaels (1997), "Musica Sacra and its Impact on Goa" in Mario Cabral E Sea (ed.) *Wind of Fire: The Music and Musicians of Goa*, New Delhi: Promilla and Co. Publishers
- Mascarhenas, Mira (1989), "The Church in the Eighteenth Century" in Teotonio R. De. Souza (ed.), *Essays in Goan History*, New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company
- Miranda, Eufemiano de Jesus (2014), "Goan Music in the Christian Faith and Tradition" *Commemorating Christ in Goa: Some sketches of the life and culture of Christians Yesterday and today; An initiative of the committee for the exposition of the Sacred Relics of St. Francis Xavier*, Goa: Archdiocese of Goa and Daman - Third Millenium
- Pereira, Jose, Martins, Micael, Da Costa. Antonio (2010), *Song of Goa - Crown of Mandos*, Goa: Broadway Publishing House
- Serenade Team, «Monte Music Festival 2018», *Serenade: India's First Western Classical Music Portal*, available in <https://serenademagazine.com/news/monte-music-festival-2018/>, [accessed 22/1/2017]
- Thapan, Meenakshi (2014), "School Experience: An Autobiographical Approach" In Meenakshi Thapan (ed.) *Ethnographies of Schooling in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Sage
- Witkowski, Christine (ed.) (2016), *El Sistema: Music for Social Change*, Omnibus Press