
Retrospective analysis of plagiaristic practices within a cinematic industry in India – A tip in the ocean of icebergs

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Enhanced focus in establishing/practicing a culture of integrity within academia, research, industry and politics has been a promising development of this decade. Most importantly, the public awareness on “integrity” and avoiding plagiarism has tremendously increased in the developed countries whilst the concept is welcomed and wilfully embraced by many developing countries, especially by academics and legislative think-tanks. Doctoral thesis of many high profile politicians have been retrospectively analysed, resulting in their public humiliation and resignations. However, it is not clear whether similar focus has been made in the music industry. Music plagiarism is defined as using tune, or melody that would closely imitate with another author’s music without proper attribution. It may occur either by stealing a musical idea (a melody or motif) or sampling (a portion of one sound, or tune is copied into a different song). Several world famous names within English pop, such as George Harrison, and the Gallagher brothers (Oasis) have been accused of “borrowing” musical tone, and/or rhythms from others. In fact, there were some, memorable law suits against many American pop stars.

Unlike the Western countries, the music industry in the East, especially in India has different domains. On one hand, those based on traditional music rhythms that are believed to be originated in ancient times. These include carnatic (Southern India), folk (culture-specific rural songs) and Hindustani (Northern India) music’s. On other hand, music that is inter-woven within cinematic industry. The second type is mostly a mix of traditional and Western music forms. Film industry has been thriving in India more popular than the Hollywood industry. The industry has been well established in different cities based on respective languages (such as Hindi, Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam etc.). Almost all the Indian films have at least 4 to 8 songs, may they be duet, or be the ones with philosophical message. Unlike the traditional music, the cinematic music is extremely popular amongst the community. The industry has become profitable and many new (so called) “music directors/composers” are being born almost every year. Since the expectations of the general public for songs that are enjoyable and/or would make everlasting impressions are high, many music directors are seeking elsewhere to “borrow” tunes. Whilst a vast majority of Indian cinema-goers may not have noticed these plagiarised tunes or “songs that were written inspired by another tune”, some journalists and vigilant music lovers have started noticing these activities and publicising these on main media including YouTube®. However, these types of small scale publicising have not resulted in a mass propaganda against these rogue music directors.

This study has taken the initiative to investigate the extend of plagiaristic activities within



one Indian cinematic music industry. In this working paper, authors would highlight some of the example plagiarised music and the responses from the music directors/composer to the confronting vigilantes or media reporters. As for “excuses” given by these composers, they varied from mere denial to blatant acceptances claiming, “*nothing really comes from scratch*”. This retrospective study was carried out using YouTube® searches for “comparative videos” made by the vigilant music lovers and published news articles about accused/detected music plagiarism. Some of these individuals (vigilantes or otherwise) were also interviewed to understand their views on this. This together with authors own research on the extent of this theft forms the basis of this initial study.

It should be noted that there are at least 20 different cinematic industries established in respective languages in India. Therefore addressing the issue in all these industries would be a Herculean task. Therefore, this study focussed on cinematic songs in one Indian film industry only. During the investigation, it was possible to identify a vast amount of plagiarised tunes, snippets, or even the full song melodies that have been plagiarised. In fact, some of these examples dates back to 1954, during the era when no one would have noticed plagiarism (mainly due the limited cross-world music experience/exposure). Authors have compiled an example list of songs that have been (accused of) plagiarism. The paper would highlight the similarities of these music files (videos and/or audio recordings for comparison). It will also show some examples of the excuses/denial given by the composers and would try to highlight the attitudes of general public towards these type of activities.

Keywords: music plagiarism, film industry, plagiaristic activities, Youtube-videos.