

# Language and Socio-cultural Attitudes of Youth in Jammu and Hyderabad, India towards Rap Music

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**Abstract.** The interaction between language and culture has been well established by theorists all over the world. However, the impact of language and culture is not limited to each other. In day-to-day lives, they influence a wide array of entities and are in turn affected by them. Music is one such factor which has a strong dominion over language and culture and at the same time is also the reflection of these in a society. This dissertation aims to be explorative in this dimension and examines the language and cultural attitudes of youth via a survey involving school going and undergraduates, in Hyderabad and Jammu towards Rap music in particular. One of the key findings of this study is that all of the respondents confirmed to the inevitable relationship between music, language and culture. Language of Rap served as both the influencer as well as a mirror to their thoughts and acted as a social marker that instilled in them a feeling of uniqueness.

**Keywords:** Language, Culture, Music, Rap, Hyderabad, Jammu, India, Language Attitudes.

## 1. Introduction

Music has always been a great tool to assess the cultural attitudes of the society. And language forms an intrinsic part of this framework. Throughout time, lyrics of the songs have been a popular mean to reach out to the world and establish communication. From expressing political opinions to love and heartache, songs play the role of communicator in diverse ways. Among the wide array of genres of popular music, Rap comes out to be one of the most influential one, especially among the younger generations. Rapping refers to “spoken or chanted rhyming lyrics” and is the primary element of pop music like hip-hop and reggae. Rap has its origin in Africa and stylistically, it involves rhythm (known as flow) and breath control.

Globally Rap has a large following and is most popular among youngsters. Its vocabulary, which is very different from the regular language, has found entry in the mainstream society. Rap which was earlier primarily associated with the black community of America has gained acceptance of all over world. The youth in particular are deeply influenced by its style and the use of language. Consciously or unconsciously words like “watzup,” “ya”, “dude”, “chillin’”, “talkin’”, etc are now being used commonly, especially on social networking sites. These words are comfortably understood by everyone and yet they carry with them an essence of distinctiveness. These linguistic utterances are the products of the youth’s desire to label and codify their own realities with novel expressions. These expressions carry with them new ideas, new searches, new thoughts, etc.

The youth of India are not oblivious to this trend either. With the advancement of technology and the popularization of visual and audio media as well as the internet, Rap has now found an immense fan base. The popularity of Indian Rappers like Honey Singh, Bohemia, Blaze, RDB, Dr. Zeus etc testify to this fact. As Hyderabad is a metropolitan city and is a confluence of many cultures, the well acceptance of Rap comes as no surprise. And Jammu because of its proximity with Punjab (which is a hub of renowned Punjabi Rappers), is well exposed to this genre of music. Also, the youngsters who have been schooled in the elite English medium schools have more exposure to Rap, which is primary done in English. This is because in these schools English is the only established medium of instruction and exerts supremacy over the vernacular languages.

Keeping in consideration these notions, a research to study the socio-cultural attitudes of the users and its relationship between linguistic assemble of Rap would be interesting. In the following parts of the paper, an

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attempt has been made to explore the above discussed theme through a survey done on the students in Hyderabad and Jammu in India.

## **2. Aim and Methodology of the study**

The survey was aimed at the students who were either presently studying in English Medium Elite Schools or were pass outs of such schools. A questionnaire was forwarded to around 25 people out of whom 20 responded back. For sample size, the age group of 15-22 year old was chosen as during this age people are more conscious about their peer networks and are easily influenced by them.

Through the study, it was hoped that the attitudinal patterns of the respondents towards the relationship between language, culture and Rap music could be observed.

## **3. The Questionnaire**

The purpose was to create a simple and easy to fill questionnaire that consisted of questions which required subjective answers. The partakers were encouraged to elaborate on their thoughts wherever possible. The questionnaire was designed to gather information about their background, feelings and attitudes towards Rap, the usage of Rap style in various contact situations, opinions about the extent of influence it had on language and culture and the attitudes towards the non users of such style.

## **4. Observations**

The key finding of this study is that the language of Rap (also known as Rap language) has a preordained dominion on the cultural attitudes of its users. Almost all the respondents believe that music has an influence over people's lives. Perhaps this is because of its ability to bring people together transcending different beliefs, cultures, races, ethnicity, etc. The endeavor people take to look like celebrities and imitate their lifestyles exhibits how deep their influence can be on the cultural framework of a society. From clothing to personality, almost everything comes under the purview of music's impact.

According to the study, 90% of the students feel that Rap has had an influence over their own use of language and they feel intimidated by it. Rap as genre is quite different from the conventional music. The use of elocution, novel vocabulary and breathing control marks this variety. Words like "tryin", "walkin", "dancin", etc have been conveniently squeezed into the everyday conversation. Phrases such as "watzup" (hello), "peace out" (good-bye), "bust out" (to leave) and the extremely popular "chill out" (relax) are frequently used in television shows, movies, and even commercials. Also, the addition of the words in Rap like "bling-bling", "crunk", etc in the Oxford English Dictionary and Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary establishes its wider acceptance in the society.

However, Rap language also has its gray areas. Most of the vocabulary of the language has negative connotations. Slangs like "bitch", "nigga", "bent" (intoxicated), "diss" (to show disrespect), "dime" (hot girl), etc are widely used by the youngsters. As expressed by one of the respondents, sentences like "Wazzup homie?" "Shutup dog", "Ya talkin to me bitch?" are all now a non-offensive part of face to face conversations and SMSes between friends. These utterances which are considered "negative" in traditional sense are not attributed any such disapproving connotations by the users. To a normal non-user of Rap language, an utterance like "Ya talkin to me bitch?" might sound offensive to but for the regular users, such linguistic constructions are often accompanied by friendly laughs and hugs. This is an exciting observation as it shows how the tendency to use such slangs is not met by negative sanctions anymore, especially by the users. This can also be the marker of the bohemian nature of the users and can be proved by the fact that most of the established and popular Rappers do not confirm to the rules of the society. Famous Rappers like Eminem, Snoop Dogg, Jay-Z, Fergie, etc have had their share of negative publicity and have been involved in the numerous drug cases, over-alcoholism, etc. In this respect, such a trend can also be taken as an alarming sign of the 'changing mentalities' of the newer generations who are now more accommodating to the criminal aspect of the world.

Another clearly observable pattern in this study is the formation of sub culture. As the vocabulary of Rap is very different from the conventional one-a non user of the language might not be able to comprehend the

meanings most of the times. A person who is not equipped with Rap’s vocabulary might not understand the actual meaning of the words like “lunchin” (behaving erratically), “gank” (to steal), “jet” (to leave) and “bumpin” (likeable) and would be therefore unable to participate in the conversations with the users of the language. This imparts a sense of distinct individuality and uniqueness among the users who automatically feel as if they are a part of some subculture, to which the primary access is through language. With the use of this language, a user experiences a feeling of ‘coolness’ and a superiority complex. Also, through clothes, a person’s way of dressing, etc users of Rap language are able to tell whether the person is a part of their culture or not.

The use of Rap language is restricted to the peer group or friends and this comes as another intriguing finding of the survey. All the respondents admitted to employing Rap language among the friends only. No one gave an instance where the same language could be used in talking to elders, or in formal situations. This reveals that the language of Rap is strictly used among friends or peers. And it would not be wrong to infer that Rap language is a ‘hush-hush’ language, at least for now.

Some of the students also felt an emotional connect to the Rap songs and its language. While some compared it to modern poetry, for some it was no less than a medium of telling a story and one’s journey in life. Such inclinations show that Rap is a successful channel to establish communication and reach out to the audiences.

## 5. Analysis of the Survey

### 5.1. Influence of Music on People.

In response to the first question, 95% students believe that music has a major influence on people’s lives (Fig1.).

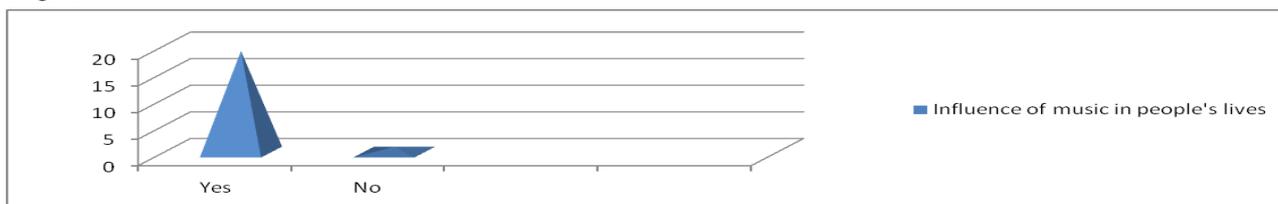


Fig. 1: Influence of music

### 5.2. Extent of Influence.

Fig2. Below shows the areas which according to the respondents can be influenced by music. Majority of the students believed that everything can be influenced by music, while 5 and 4 students went with clothing and personality respectively.

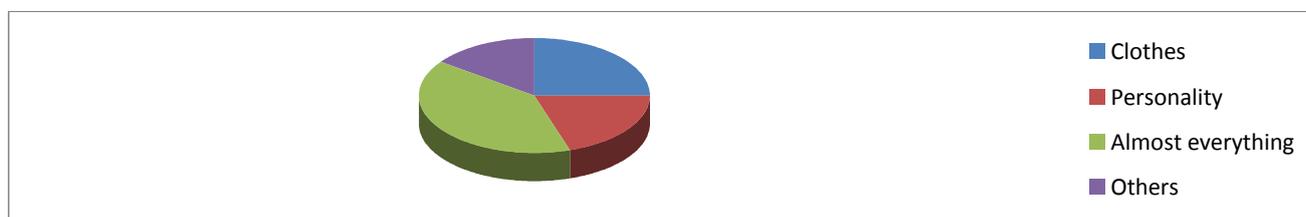


Fig. 2: How they are influenced?

### 5.3. Influence of Rap on the Respondents.

90% of the respondents admitted to being influenced by Rap music (Fig3.). But the extent to which they were influenced differed from person to person (Fig3.1.). For three students, the influence was only limited. Whereas a clear majority of 15 students felt that they had a deep rooted connection with Rap in their lives. Influences on language, clothing, speaking and writing style, thoughts, etc. were stated. One respondent even claimed to have developed a debating style inspired by Rap. The rest two students did not believe that they were influenced by Rap music at all. One of them though reported having a lot of friends who were deeply ‘inspired’ by Rap music.

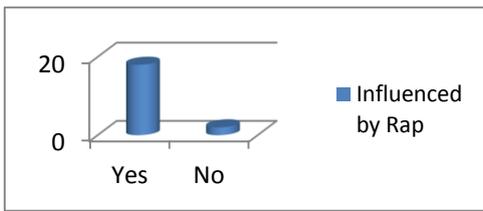


Fig. 3: Is there any influence by Rap?

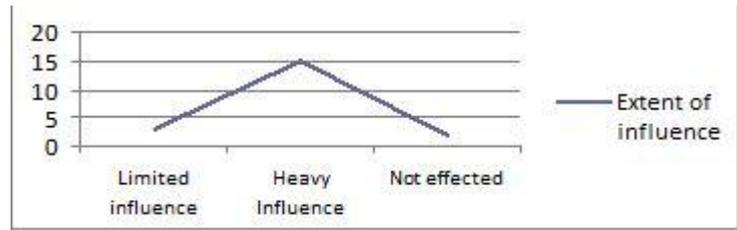


Fig. 3.1: Extent of influence

### 5.4. Influence on language and frequency of the usage.

When asked about whether Rap had any influence on their language, a whopping 18 out of 20 respondents gave a yes as an answer (Fig4.). The two students who said a “No” assigned negative connotations with the usage of Rap inspired language. Among the affirming 18 participants, 16 acknowledged that they used Rap style very frequently in their linguistic constructs (Fig4.1.). And all the 18 students confessed that such language was used only among friends. No one reported using such style in formal situations or while speaking to elders.

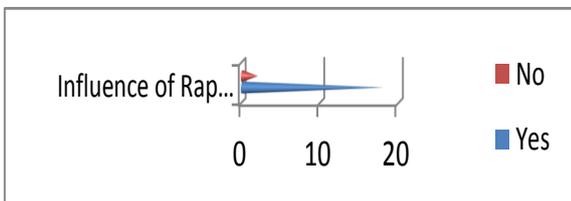


Fig. 4: Influence of Rap on language.

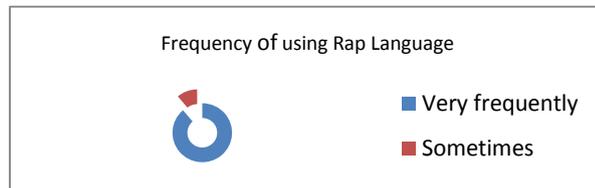


Fig. 4.1: Frequency of using Rap language

### 5.5. Sense of a Subculture.

75% of the students believed that by using Rap language in contact situations, especially in between peers, they felt ‘unique’ and ‘different’ from the non-users (Fig5.). Almost all the respondents (even those who declined that they felt ‘unique’ by using Rap in conversations), asserted that there was a feeling of ‘coolness’ associated with employing Rap style in linguistic utterances. And 12 out of 15 Rap language using participants felt as if they were a part of some subculture. They identified with the other members of the groups mostly through language, but, clothing, personality, etc. were also the markers for some (Fig5.1). Also, 9 students did feel a superiority complex over those who could not speak in Rap style or had no knowledge about it.

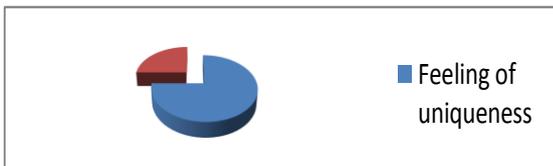


Fig. 5: Did Rap give them a sense of uniqueness?

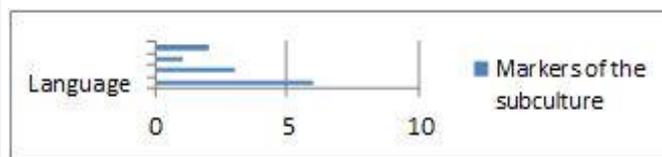


Fig. 5.1: Did it act as a social marker?

### 5.6. Impact of the respondents’ favorite Rappers’ lifestyle on them.

When asked about the influence of the students’ favorite Rappers and whether they had influenced their lives or not, most of them replied in affirmative. While some accepted that the influence was mostly unconscious, some acknowledged imitating the styles of the celebrities consciously. Clothing, hair styles and other fashion styles were the most popular responses (Fig6.). Some also claimed to have an ‘emotional connection’ with the celebs and could relate to them.

