

Ethnomusicology and Carnatic music

**Dr.Vasantha Kalyani David,
Professor ,Computer Science,
Avinashilingam University, Coimbatore
Ethnomusicology**



Ethnomusicology is the study of music of any group of people or community with a specific culture. God has given various talents to every group of people and they with their wisdom write their own lyrics and compose new tunes and play their own musical instruments with great skill. Local believers who write songs and poems, compose tunes and with singers jointly create songs for different groups in the church like children, youth, women and adults enabling all to have meaningful worship. They also write songs for community needs like literacy, health and for their people and growth of their language. Thus we are made to understand why, how and when this group of people use music and what is the meaning the members of that community convey to each other through their music.

Ethnomusicology may be described as a holistic investigation of music in its cultural context. Combining aspects of folklore, psychology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, comparative musicology, music theory, and history. Ethnomusicologists look at music within culture, music as culture, and music as a reflection of culture. Ethnomusicologists focus on human beings with the stance that "music is culture" and "what musicians do is society."

Church ministry

Churches can play a great role in their mission field along with the ethnomusicologists. The songs they teach the people will be in the native tunes of their mission fields. The people can memorize the Scripture in their own language and compose songs. The awareness of their culture and uniqueness of their traditional songs can be encouraged. Guiding them to know their own music systems and hence to have culturally relevant music for all believers in their church will be of utmost importance in saving the most valuable treasures and resources of those language groups. Thus various cultural resources can be used to worship our true God. India is a land rich with both natural and cultural resources. It is our duty to actively preserve and grow our cultural resources or else we may lose these treasures from each language group.

Ethnomusicology in Local churches

If we do not develop the use of ethnomusicology in Christian ministry the local church members will have difficulty in living according to the Gospel fully. They should be allowed to pray in their mother tongue, encouraged to wear their traditional dress and due regard must be given to their traditional dances and music.

The melodies that they sing together with their attire and traditional dances should touch their hearts and make them feel at home. We need to develop them by deeply engaging in planning, prioritizing, praying, making resources available and encouraging them to develop the use of ethnomusicology. The songs sung comfort them and help them to share the good news and also to bring them to have a personal relationship with God. Culture and instruments are made by God and should be used for His glory. These songs when they are recorded and CDs are made available touch many from far off places. The songs can be used for baptisms, funerals, worship services, marriages and gatherings. People will understand the meaning of

singing with spirit and wisdom. The songs attract non believers of the same language too and they are drawn towards Christ.

Bible and the use of art forms

In Psalms 33 :1-3 ,the Bible says . "Sing joyfully to the LORD, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skilfully, and shout for joy".

Psalms 81: 1,2 says "Sing for joy to God our strength; shout aloud to the God of Jacob! Begin the music, strike the tambourine, play the melodious harp and lyre".

Exodus 15: 20, 21 "Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing."

Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."

2 Chronicles 20: 28 says " They entered Jerusalem and went to the temple of the LORD with harps and lutes and trumpets"

Mathew 26:30 says Jesus sang a hymn. "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives".

Christian Music under the British Rule

The first Indian composer attracted to Western music was the Maratha King of Thanjavur Serfoji II (1798-1832). He collected score sheets of music of popular works published in England from British officials, residents, missionaries, and musicians belonging to the Governor's band, Serfoji II became more familiar with military band music and established the Tanjore Band attached to his palace and composed music for the band. Serfoji II had a close friendship with the Christian missionaries who introduced him to Western learning and culture thereby nurturing his knowledge of Western music. Friedrich Schwartz (1726-1798), a German Protestant missionary who had learnt Tamil to assist in a translation of the Bible was the most important among them. Schwartz decided to be a missionary to India. He taught Prince Serfoji along with another pupil, Vedanayakam Sastiriyar (1774-1864).

Indian reconstruction of Western music

The impact on Indian music by western music was a collection of Western-style songs with Sanskrit lyrics composed by Muttusvami Diksitar (1775-1835), . In these songs, the Western major scale and simple beats (three or four beats) was regarded as a typical Indian understanding of Western music.. The violin had been totally indigenized by its tuning, playing techniques, and the way of holding it. Several traditional instruments, the veena, the pitched mridangam, the primary drum of South India, as well as other hand drums including the khanjira frame drum, ghatam clay jug drum, and konakkol, a unique system of vocal percussion were used. (**rhythm is really universal and if one can understand konnakol - the most superior system of learning rhythm in the world – one can understand any rhythm from any country on the planet**).

Missionaries and Native Christians

Indian musicians and scholars hardly learnt European classical music. They adhered to the Indian musical tradition as being as spiritually and scientifically the same as European

classical music. The way of training in music was also interesting. The book of learning Carnatic music for Tamil-speaking Christian students was published by Christian musicians. The music was originally composed by Purandara Dāsa (1484-1564), one of the most prominent composers of Carnatic music, regarded as "the Father of Carnatic Music." Every original lyric of his song was changed to that of praising Jesus while the melody remained the same. This was a common method that Abraham Pandithar, mentioned in and used in his book entitled *Karṇāmirtta Cākarat Tirattu: A "Practical Course in South Indian Music for Beginners."* These songs were recorded and sold widely. A Tamil Christian, Vedanayakam was a proficient poet/lyricist who wrote over five hundred lyrics and a hundred and thirty-three books on Christianity.

Golden era of Carnatic Music

The period in which Carnatic music flourished under Thanjavur Maratha rule is regarded as the golden era. Tyagaraja (1767-1847), Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835), and Syama Sastri (1762-1827), the so-called Trinity of Carnatic Music, belonged to this period. They were all Brahmans who composed either in Telugu, the official language of the Nayakas (local rulers after the Vijayanagara Empire before the Marathas) or in Sanskrit, a literary language used by the Brahmans. They hardly composed in Tamil, which was the local language of this region. The lack of Tamil in Carnatic music prompted the Tamil Isai (music) movement, propagating Tamil songs at the beginning of 1940.

Four distinguished native Christians: Vedanayagam (Pillai) Sastiriyar (1774-1864), Mayuram Vedanayagam Pillai (1826-89), A. M. Chinnaswami Mudaliyar (1813-1901), and Abraham Pandithar (1859-1919) did great work and this was a result of interactions with Christian missionaries, British residents, and officials. Vedanayagam Sastiriyar's purpose was to promote evangelism through Carnatic music. Vedanayagam Pillai was secular by not addressing any personal god. Chinnaswami Mudaliyar tried preserving and promoting the music of his time and Abraham Pandithar constructed a great history of the Tamils and Tamil Isai (music). Though their approaches and intentions varied, their strategic use of dichotomous categories, that is, Hindu/Christian, Indian/European, Brahman/Non-Brahman and upper/lower caste were common to all of them. Thus, they expressed themselves through music as a powerful cultural medium and constructed their identities between the colonizer and the colonized in the transitional period from native rule to the British rule.

After the Second Vatican Council, a number of bishops learnt either Hindustani (North Indian classical) or Carnatic music intensively and composed devotional songs where the popular styles of Hindu devotional song called bhajan and kirtana were preferred. It is worth pointing out that bishops did not enforce a particular style of music on any community, but rather allowed the use of indigenous music and musical instruments to help the local community. These songs were recorded and CDs and cassettes sold widely. Today, the Christian music of India greatly varies and is soul touching praising our true God meaningfully.

Promote Carnatic Music

Ethnomusicology workshops should be conducted to promote Carnatic Music. Let us encourage them to understand and compose songs and check the songs composed with pastors, elders and church members for their meaning. New tunes can be generated and encouragement to play their musical instruments with skill. Let us plan to achieve goals in future to promote Carnatic music. Let every church promote love for Carnatic music, passion for meaningful worship and interest for serving their language.