

LYRICS IN THE CHURCH

In his foreword to "Christhava Thirupadagal", in 1977 Rt. Rev. Sundar Clarke, the then Bishop of Madras Diocese wrote, "it has been rightly felt that much of our singing at Worship in our Churches is rather lifeless and insipid. We are not contemporary and contextual. The Hymn book released at the time of XVI Session of the Diocesan Council contained "lively music, contemporary language and perhaps much -liked lyrics by the people of Tamilnadu". Singing creates liveliness in our worship besides "bringing about a liveliness in the spiritual life of the people". The book cited has a number of lyrics, both old and new besides a few well-known Hymns.

Worship is the heart - throb of a Christian Community. Singing makes Christian worship vibrant and it is the best way of expressing the corporate dimension of it. Liturgy, chanted or said has been the vital inner rhythm and the pulse of the Church from the very beginning. Worship is a time of celebration. When the ark of God was being brought back, there was much celebration, joy and singing during the journey. (I Chronicles 13 : 8 & I Chronicles 15 : 28). Singing forms an inherent part of celebration. We read a similar expression of joy, soon after the Institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26:30). The Book of Psalms has many instances of celebrations and occasions of singing with trumpets and cymbals and similar musical instruments. The Protestant Churches from the very beginning have given importance to music and singing. On the 9th of July, we remember the landing of the Protestant Missionary Ziegenbalg 300 years ago in Tharangambadi.

It is this Dane, who gave us the Scripture in the Tamil language and in the printed form. Without his pioneering effort, would we have our lyrics in printed

form? They would have been written on palmyrah leaves and white ants would have had a roaring time, tasting these sweet melodious songs or they would have been in private custody "for researchers only".

Later we had people like Caldwell who enriched the Tamil language. We must be grateful to the Missionaries for bringing Abundant Life to us. However, it must be pointed out here, that whichever background they came from be it LMS, CMS, or SPG, the Missionaries from the West gave us not only structured worship with litany, but also Western Music as part of our Worship. The English Hymns that were translated into Tamil, we call HYMNS, "PAAMALAI" or GNANAPAATTU. Through this, a sort of marginalizing indigenous effort took place and not promoting with enough vigor and resources Tamil or Indian Talents in local worship. The Indian Christians wrote and composed LYRICS in Tamil for enriching worship in local Churches. These lyrics are rich in meaning and also in Theology. The Tamils could sing these lyrics which are rich in meaning and also in Theology. The Tamils could sing these lyrics with gusto whether written by Thanjai Vedanayagam Sastriar or Rao Sahib Abraham Pandithar, or M. Vethmanickam or Periannan or Santiag . Sadly, for many reasons, singing Hymns from the Paamalai stole a march over the lyrics. Churches began to use the Organ or Piano and not the Violin, Harmonium or Mridangam, thereby allowing the singing of HYMNS to gain a supremacy over singing of lyrics. The lyric has been pushed out in many Churches, and in many places just one is sung as a token against five Hymns.

Lyrics have been composed with features of Carnatic Music, although they are generally sung in the light classical style. The pure (shuddh) classical singing has been made the sole preserve of the high caste who know Sanskrit

whereas majority of Tamil / Telugu Christians are from Dalit or low caste or of rustic background and they either had no access or had been denied access to Sankrit or to classical carnatic music. Not all were privileged to sing in the august presence of a Maharaja in his Court or Darbar. The ordinary devout Christians in villages or in small towns are not aware of the features of Carnatic Music, like Thaalām, Raagam, Alapanas, Ghamaka, Shruthi etc and not ., many Hymn singers know western classical music. Adaptations from genius like Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and the like have crept into the Hymns we sing and so why should we grudge similar dilutions (the purists might term it distortion) in Lyric singing? The organized worship therefore handed over by Missionaries who found it rather inconvenient to have many Lyrics, sung in classical style and thus very unjustly the lyrics got pushed into tokenism. In many places, even lyric singing is in four parts, aping the western Hymns. And Hymns sung though not in western classical style are still popular. * Did the Church choirs consciously contribute to the western style of singing or did the Missionaries from the West plant their way of singing here overlooking the local indigenous style? Ultimately Lyrics are the victims: But who is the culprit? For the last three centuries, colonial monetarism and Missionary evangelism were intertwined, and result was that Lyric singing became a sort of victim.

As we prepare to uplift Lyric, we are faced with another form of inculturation. Fusion music or a sort of American Jazz, using guitars, key board and high powered amplifiers that play a significant role during "Praise and Worship session" has crept into regular worship, thanks to Fellowships and Assemblies. This is definitely western or should we call it the "American Invasion into the Indian Culture" We may fool ourselves as promoters of "a culture without walls". This must be recognized as

part globalization and correctives are to be initiated.

To promote lyric singing we must use Indian Instruments like Veena, Sitar Harmonium, Tabla or Mridangam, Cymbals etc in our worship service, instead of repeatedly using western instruments like guitar, organ/keyboard etc. We need Christian leaders who know carnatic music to train our church choirmasters.

Remember, a Raga is always linked to Rasa, which is a mood or emotion. Lyrics sung on Good Friday are certainly different from the ones sung on Easter. That means, different moods like joy, grief, pity, devotion etc can be evoked while singing lyrics in various ragas. Each raga has its own individuality and character. Each is unique and needs to be recognized.

This is not an attempt to belittle the importance of great Hymn writers like Charles Wesley, Fanny Crosby, Issac Watts, Graham Kendrick and so on, nor to give undue importance to Sastriar (Learned Composer), Pandithar, (essentially a top class singer of lyrics), Periannan (a medical doctor/surgeon, social worker), who wrote songs and sang with a passion to emphasize the social gospel and so on. Contextually our authors have been very good. The lyrics are full of meaning and are theologically very sound and scripturally contemporary and contextual. The immortal classics are age-old songs like "Deva Pitha Enthan Meipanallo", Jeeva Vasanam Kooruvom", 'Ellam Yesuve' 'Saruvalokathipa Namaskaram' and many more. These songs have a deep meaning and display the eminence of Biblical knowledge of the authors. But the more recent ones for instance, Periannan Savarirayan Yesudasan's work like 'Deivanbin Vellame', depict very clearly, the Indianness of the author - composer. Even before the first world talked about gender parity, Tamil

Lyricists wrote about the need to liberate Women - "the author of "Thaasare Itharaniyi Anbai Yesuvuku Sonthamakkuvom" sings about "Indu Desa Mathu siromanigal" and in another lyric don't we ask the "Singara Kannimar" to worship the Bridegroom, decorating themselves with "aarangal." It is very sad that in recent years, the publishers of the Book of Lyrics chose to omit some stanzas and particularly removed from print some of the verses connected to Women's liberation from the Book of Lyrics, given to us to be sung at Public Worship.

Lyric singing needs to be encouraged, as our young people are not able to read the mother tongue. This sort of illiteracy has an adverse effect on the efforts of the parents who seek to promote lyric singing. Before lyrics stop reverberating from the Pews, it is necessary that conscious efforts are made to sing them both at Family Prayers and at Corporate Worship, where tokenism must give way to proper singing time. At Wedding Services, we could sing "Inda Mangalam Chezhikave" in the place of "O Perfect Love" written by Dorothy Garney or any other suitable lyric. Before "Praise and Worship" time consumes our worship time and energy and pushes Lyrics into Archives, let us sing full throatedly songs like "Agamangal Pugal Veda Namu" of Sastriar or H.A Krishna Pillai's "Sathai Nishkalamai" and so on, so that our own Lyrics will come back alive and get out of Tokenism.

W.S.J Thambudurai