



REDISCOVER THE BEAUTY OF TAMIL LYRIC SINGING

Coimbatore a city entrepreneurs, has always been in the forefront, be it in the manufacture of textile machineries and pumps or promotion of Basketball. Now, the church members in the city have taken the lead in rediscovering the mystique of Tamil Lyric singing in Christian Worship. Genuine effort has been taken towards promoting Tamil Lyric singing in Christian worship and those involved in this new missionary effort deserve our cooperation and encouragement. Late Bro, D.G.S. Dhinakaran, the most famous evangelist of our times, sang some lyrics like "Aatharam Nee Thaan Aiyya". "Sornthu Pogathe Maname" with such heart touching effect.

This proves that our Tamil lyrics can be effective vehicles to convey our Lord's mission. Singing creates liveliness in our worship besides renewing and rejuvenating in the Spiritual Life of the worshipping community. Tamil Lyric singing is organizing in the Mother tongue, binds all creating togetherness and a sense of fellowship. "Togetherness is the experience and expression of the Body of Christ".

With increasing urbanization and influx of "aliens coming to live in cities", the city churches are all functioning with multiple gradations. In the prevailing westernized culture in the church both, Tamil language and Christian Tamil Lyric singing have been sidelined. Mushrooming of

"convent schools" and proliferation of "International Schools" has only added to the misery of our children's inability to read their own mother tongue. They appeared to be functional illiterates as far as Tamil as language is concerned and are unable to comprehend the depth of Christian message in our Lyrics let alone reading, of the verses.

They use the English alphabet when pressed into writing in Tamil. This is an alarming situation and we need to take corrective measures before our worship service in Tamil is changed to English Service. This danger is looming large and in the long run it would not be a healthy change. Therefore need to start a movement to re-induct Tamil and Tamil lyric singing in Christian Worship to recapture its beauty and its emotional appeal.

The legacy left behind by Western Missionaries in worship continues to dominate our liturgy and our style of life while worshipping. Even six decades after the formation of CSI many of the churches refuse to see realities. Some of them want to be more Anglican than the churches that enjoy membership with the Church of England in the U.K. This tendency is worrying. We must ensure that Tamil Lyrics regain their pre eminent position in Christian worship. Lyric singing has been reduced to a sort of tokenism, like one piece per service as against four or five Hymns from the book of Hymns "Ancient and Modern" We seldom realize that some of the "modern" hymns have become ancient now. Because of our passion for English and anything Western, not just the life style of Jacket and Tie worn even in hot summer months, the opportunists in politics have branded us. Christians, as Western aliens and anti Indians. Our contribution to the uplift of the poor, education for all, health for

all etc. are conveniently forgotten by the cynics. It is NOT for this negative political label, but, for the sheer pleasure of rediscovering the mystique of worshipping in Tamil, that an effort to strengthen Lyric singing in Tamil is being made.

Lyric singing must not only be an important aspect of corporate worship but this should also find a place in homes either a House altars or while humming. No ill will or any sort of hatred is being promoted against Western Hymn singing in our Church Worship. However precedence of Hymn singing over. Lyric singing is not acceptable. It is admitted that there is so much of beauty in Hymns and the song writers have excelled in penning theological and Biblical truths in the Hymns. While this is acknowledged, one finds no reason for not using our own LYRICS, in our worship service for their sheer beauty and in our own idiom.

There are the day of Key Boards, CDs, VCD, and DVDs which have flooded the market and are not expensive and so Christian homes have easy access to them. Some of the music that are available at homes and are played are "Americanized Praise and Worship in Tamil" with a few lines from well known lyrics added here and there. One does not have to go after this easy form of Rock or Jazz with words stanzas in Tamil which lack in grammar and in times that can be called un-Indian, There is no grammar (yaappu) or Biblical depth in some and the songs. It is painful to see that some of our churches, even CSI have introduced this form of "American Praise and Worship" with guitar and drums, discarding our own songs using indigenous instruments like violin, mridangam etc.

If something has to be dethroned, in order to enthrone Tamil Lyrics, then we know what to dethrone. "Americanized Praise and worship in Tamil" that seem so alive. We need to resist this form of neo colonization and enslavement from weakening or richness. Let us sing lyrics like "Aagamangal Pukazh veda namo namo" and the like, which lyricists like Sastriar have given to us. Lyric no 13, (in Lyrics published by CLS in 1988) by Marian Upadesiyar, is in simple Tamil, without any Sanskrit words. "Sutha Suvisesha Sathia Mozhiyai Viththarikka Varamtharum" A simple supplication asking God to empower us. There are any more awe inspiring lyrics like this, which we have not been singing. Even sixty years after formulation of CSI, any CSI churches seem to thrive only on the past continual hang over. We need to taste the beauty of our lyrics. If we have to totally indigenize worship they let us do it. In the past, Western missionaries have done exceedingly well and gave us a good model to worship, modeled after their own style. It is time we discovered the beauty of worship in our context, in our own language and in our own tune and without musical instruments.

Our Tamil Lyrics have been composed to be sung in classical carnatic tunes. We have sung them in our corporate worship in our own way without causing injury or insult to the writers and composers. The problem with lyric singing in churches lies with our Choirs and Choir Masters, who have a fascination for Western music. They often use Western instruments to playa carnatic tune, thereby attempting a virtually impossible fusion, viz westernizing an oriental culture.

Broadly, Lyric singing in our churches can be classified into four traditional lyrics taken from the book printed first in 1853. Puthezhuchi Padalgal incorporated in the CLS editing in 1988. Convention or Fellowship songs and fourth is the new songs that come out with a certain amount of regularity. While the traditional lyrics include those by Sasthiyar, Santiago etc, we have a few by the next generation authors like Savrirayan Yesudason. Thomas Thangaraj, Israel Selvanayagam, D.A. Thanapandian, T. Dayanandan Francis, P.A. Sathia Satchi. Emil Jebasingh, Saral Navaroji and a few more like these and their songs find a place in "puthezhuchi padalgal". Convention songs and fellowship songs are plenty. They come out like morning dew and go away when the warm rays of better songs spread (though there are a few that have enjoyed longer life). Fr. Bergmann leads here who uses print as well as electronic media well in promoting his style of singing and his songs. We must remember people like Paul Thangiah for his uniqueness in presenting his version of song and dance.

New songs like "Lesana Karriyam" "Kuyanvane Kuyavane" are based on the scripture besides being melodious and easy to sing and I do not find any reason why such songs have to be left with "the new brand of evangelicals" and cannot be sung during worship in main line churches. There are so many songs in the Official Book from CLS, that we do not sing, but which should be sung. Such an act will minimize the danger of our singing the same old songs mechanically.

Our congregations must be taught new songs and also the old ones from the book. We need a different HR management in the Choir, instilling in them a new attitude towards our Keerthanais.

These must be innovation and a willingness to use gifted singers to inspire others. We are not advocating carnatic style of singing, Thiruvaiyaru or the Chennai Music Academy style. The Choir's one responsibility is to teach and help the worshippers to "sing a new song". One song writer in Puthezhuchi padalgal no. 336 wants us to rejoice in the Spirit and sing thousands and thousands of songs "pudhiya pudhiya padalgalai punainthe pankalum serungale". Are we inspired to sing new songs? The song leaders are not there only to lead, but their role is much wider, like helping the worshippers sing a new song (Psalm 149 versel). Are our choir masters willing to equip themselves to learn and teach ? They along with the choir must be willing to tread the path native to our land rather than follow the easy path of repeating the old songs week after week like an act of drudgery.

When did we last sing the lyric by S. Yesudason, "Thondu Seyya Tholare" Lyric 331(395) ? This lyric tells us about indebtedness in villages and song writer (Periannan) wants us to work for Rural Development with a sense of urgency and he tells us to go with "thudippu" (fervour as against an easy way).

Let us try to bring back life into our worship with lyric singing. Our congregations must be taught that our lyric can add richness to our worship and that "a new song" will bring in newness. For such a message the pulpit should be the source - we are keeping in mind the small rural congregations who are more comfortable with out native tunes and instruments, who can use a harmonium and a thabla instead of longing for a keyboard and drum.

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