

CHAPTER NO.VIII

OTHER RECENT ATTEMPTS AND TRENDS

In the last few decades, especially after the Independence (1947) there have been many attempts by various sections of people and different denominations of the Christians who have tried to depict Christian themes in various ways and forms. Many of these productions have not been restricted to a single style or form of dance. Hence the productions have come out as dance-dramas or ballets. Guru Gnana Prakash (Fr.George Proksch SVD) is the pioneer who started this new trend. In the past two decades many institutions and individuals have produced and staged many dance-dramas depicting Christian themes and ideals. In 1970s there have been some noteworthy attempts made to depict Christian themes in one single dance style, i.e. Muliya Keshavayya, a Hindu poet and a noted Yakshagana exponent wrote and presented Christian story in the classical Yakshagana form in 1975. There are a few dance-dramas written and staged in Kathakali dance style too. A systematic and scientific approach has been attempted by me in this line where I have depicted Christian themes in the Bharata Natyam Dance form.

Guru Gnana Prakash (Fr. George Proksch SVD) (1)

Ever since he arrived in India in 1933, got interested in the Indian music and art-forms. His first book in Hindi called 'Christ the Guru' was very well received by the people and was a big success. After studying Indian languages and music and with support of late Cardinal Gracias he staged his first dance-drama on Christ at the Bombay Marian Congress in 1954. Those who performed in his dance-drama began to stay with him, so in 1958 the Gyan Ashram was founded on a plot of land in Andheri East, Bombay. He travelled with his troupe, far and wide, both in India and Europe where he once spent one full year and performed almost everyday. His programmes made a great impact on the audience during the 1964 Eucharistic Congress in Bombay, when Pope Paul VI visited India. The most successful Ballet was 'Meshaal Bhagwan' (the Shepherd God). He has successfully used folk-elements and at times a few classical dance movements in his productions. Besides the stage productions, he has produced sound and slide programmes keeping a certain theme, like Woman at the Well, the Lord's Prayer, Our Father etc. A 16 mm documentary film on Christian theme is also produced by him. The Gyan Ashram is affiliated to Lucknow University and can issue degrees and diplomas on music after its courses. Fr. Proksch is now 80

years old, due to his failing health is in Europe at present for treatment,

IRAIMOZI KALAI MANRAM:

Iraimozi Kalai Manram, affiliated to culture and communication of Madurai Jesuit Province, is an organization for the study of Tamil Arts and the Bible. It was started in 1969 by Dr.S.Michael Irudayam S.J. who is the director of this cultural centre. Approximately there are 4-5 performances a year and are all written, directed and produced by Dr.S.Michael Irudayam S.J. Each performance is staged by the help of different groups of dancers with a semi-permanent core group of orchestra. The dancers are picked up from the local place and trained where the performance is going to be staged. This of course does not make it a professional venture; however a few professional musicians are engaged. Majority of the artists are non-Christians. The 80% of the audience is urban and just 20% is rural. Middle-aged and youngsters consists of 40% each of the audience, the rest old people and children respectively. The motivation of the dance is Religious and aim is inculturation of Christianity in India and proclamation of the Gospel. The themes of the dances are only Biblical. The dance movements used in the productions are taken from the

dance forms like Bharata Nāṭyam, Kathakali, Mohiniāṭṭam and Gujarathi and Tamil folk-styles. Majority of the choreographic patterns are created from folk dance elements and allied indigenous practices. Dr. Michael⁽²⁾ emphasises that he depicts the poses and postures inspired from the great works of Michael Angelo - Creation, Pieta, Leonado da Vinci's Annunciation and Last Supper. The music is mostly on the Indian classical style into which folk tunes are incorporated. The instruments used are southern and the lyrics are all in Tamil set to the Carnatic Tāl system. The songs of the dances are interpreted with hand gestures, facial expressions and foot work.

The costumes used for men are of the Biblical times, the women wear the Indian classical dance-costumes or from the folk tradition corresponding to the type of dance. There is an interesting hair-style adopted for the women. Āndal type of hair-style for Bethlehem children, Tamil folk style for Cana-girls and Gujarathi for Jerusalem women. Use of particular colours for different character is apparent. White and red for Jesus, blue and white for Virgin Mary, White for angels. These colours are taken from the Jewish tradition which correspond to the principles of Indian aesthetics. The paramount production of Iramozi Kalai Manram written and directed by Dr. S. Michael

Irudayam is 'Thotta Nenjam' (Heart that is touched) based on the Gospel according to St. John 20:24-29. Other important productions are: i) "Eve and Virgin Mary" (entry of the angel: (183), The Annunciation: (184), performed on the 8th of September. ii) "Risen Lord and St. Thomas" (Noted Bharata Nāṭyam exponent Dr. Padma Subramanyam as Jesus; Jesus and St. Thomas: (185), (186) Jesus and Mary Magdalena (187), Jesus Carrying the Cross (188), Crucifixion (189) staged during the Easter season. iii) 'St. Ruth', performed during the harvest season.

Kalai Kaviri Music and Dance Troupe, Tiruchirappalli, under the directorship of Rev. S.M. George was started in Dec. 1978 by the diocese of Tiruchirappalli. Their productions are mostly dance-dramas not restricted to any single dance form to which modern techniques like sound and slides are widely used (190). Approximately 25 performances are given per year. Majority of the dancers are amateurs, but majority of the musicians are professionals. 65% of the audience is rural and 35% urban. Performances are attended by youngsters, middle-aged, children and old people respectively.

Motivation of the dance is Religious and social. The aim is inculturation of Christianity in India and proclamation of the Gospel. The specific themes are taken only from the Bible.

The main dance forms used are Bharata Nāṭyam, Tamil folk-dances and free dance movements. The music is accompanied by mostly South Indian musical instruments, however, Tabla and Sitar of the North are also frequently made use of. The lyrics are all in Tamil. The mode of music is light classical with folk tunes and western melodies blended into the Carnatic Māḷ system. The lyrics are interpreted with facial expression, hand gestures and dialogues. Costumes used for men is taken from the Tamil folk-dress, women use classical dance dress, folk-dress of the region, gypsy etc. as per the need of the situation and the character. Simple make-up and appropriate ornaments are used by every character. The performances are conducted mostly in the open-air auditoriums and at times in the churches. The group has performed in Tamilnadu Germany and Italy.

Besides the performances, Kalai Kaviri has started a dance school, Kalai Kaviri Nāṭyapalli on Oct.1983 which offers Diploma courses and Certificate courses in Bharata Nāṭyam and Mohiniāṭṭam.⁽³⁾ The strength of the students is over hundred. This new venture is a very good move for bettering the standard of the production. The centre also has produced 23 sound and slide programmes in the same line. The writing of 'Yesu Kāviam' by Shri.Kannadasan and later on publishing it in 1982, was sponsored by the above centre as a lasting contribution to the

Tamil literature. This epic could be considered a very good source-material for the classical dance recitals and ballet productions.

Narcheithi Murasu Dance Troupe, Tuticorin, Tamilnadu, under the directorship of Rev. Gomez Stephen was established by the Diocese of Tuticorin in 1981. The troupe puts up an average of 2-3 productions every year. Musicians engaged for the performance are all professionals and the dancers are amateurs. The participants are 50% Christians and 50% Hindus. 75% of the audience is urban and 25% are rural. The motivation for the dance is religious and the aim and goal is proclamation of the Gospel. The dance themes are only on the Bible (191: parable of the good Samaritan). The dance form mainly used is Bharata Nāṭyam together with allied indigenous practices. The music and instruments used is mostly South Indian folk-tunes with some classical renderings here and there. The lyrics are all in Tamil. The songs are sung only in solo. The songs are interpreted by facial expressions and hand gestures. The costumes used are all in the line of Bharata Nāṭyam dance-form. The performances are held only in the open-air and in the state of Tamilnadu.

Christian Arts and Communication Service (CACS) ⁽⁴⁾, formerly the Lutheran Centre, was constituted in 1950, by the Lutheran Layman's League to be the branch office in India for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel through radio broadcasts. CACS developed department of dance and began to present dance-dramas in South India in 1970. Dr.S.Suviseshamuthu the director of the Institute is the moving spirit behind these dance-dramas. Every year they used to present an average of not less than 20 performances, however, since the mid-1984 the performances are not been conducted due to some internal administrative difficulties. The dancers were mainly Hindus, of which the main dancers were professionals. The musicians were all professionals attached to the institute as the regular employees. Almost 60% of the audience was urban and 40% rural. The motivation of the dance has been religious. The aim is to stimulate the Christians to get rooted in the local culture, to permeate the Gospel into the local culture and to proclaim Gospel in dance. The themes of the dance are only Biblical adapted to the local situation in the treatment and development of the theme. Three types of dance movements and techniques are found in their productions; namely Bharata Nāṭyam, Folk dance of Tamilnadu and gypsy dance. However, a few free movements in the group-dances could be noticed. The music is

mostly Carnatic classical with a few renderings here and there in folk tunes. The instruments used are South Indian to the Carnatic Tāl (rhythm pattern) system. The songs of the dances in Tamil are interpreted with hand-gestures, facial expressions and foot-work. They do follow to some extent the hand-gesture language of Abhinaya Darpanam which is normally followed in Bharata Nāṭyam.

The costume used by the main dancers is exactly same as that of classical Bharata Nāṭyam, besides gypsy dress and other folk dresses of the region are used as per the situation and theme of the dance. The make-up is simple and other decor of the stage is normal except that they use lot of light effects all over the presentation.

Their most successful and outstanding production is Nān Petra Inbam (The Joy I received), depicts the story of a young, Vijaya, who strayed into evil ways. Her sin brought with it heartache and shame. In this desperate condition she decides to commit suicide, but meets Shanti, a girl who had tasted the love of Christ. Shanti patiently bears witness to the love and mercy of Christ, and gently leads Vijaya to the Saviour. She tells her what Jesus, the Lover of Souls did for the woman of Samaria and ademoniac. To emphasize the fact that

the essence of the Gospel of Christ is that God has come down in the Person of Jesus Christ to seek and save the lost. This is demonstrated by dancing the parable like woman who lost and found the coin, the shepherd who found the lost sheep, the love of the father who received the prodigal son back home in the form of dance-drama. The programme is concluded by the joyous dance of the Vijaya and Shanti. The main characters (Vijaya and Shanti) perform in the classical Bharata Nāṭyam form and other dancers have the elements of gypsy and folk dances.

In Nov. 1978 CACS also hosted an International consultation on Dance, Drama and Music. Many delegates came from Thailand, Indonasia, Singapore, Philippines etc. to participate, lecture, demonstrate and to hold discussions. In the state of Tamilnadu CACS have made the Christians aware of the need and importance of Dance in their religious life.

Suvartha Vani, ⁽⁵⁾ Vijayawada, A.P. was started in 1963 as a multimedia project for Christian communication in Telugu language under the Directorship of Rev. Roger C. Cann by the leaders of the Andhra Pradesh Christian Council (APCC), a regional counter-part of the National Council of Churches in India (NCCI). Rev. P. Solomon Raj who became the director in 1968 started experimenting on group-media as well. He prepared

a script for a dance-drama, 'Kim Karthavyam' (what is my duty?) and staged it on Aug.2, 1973. Since then the academy has been keeping up the many performances by the help of the professional musicians of the institute and amateur dancers. A few professional dancers also are engaged as per the need. The majority of the performers are Christians with the participation of some non-Christians. 60% of the performances are given for the rural audience and the rest 40% to the urban. The motivation of the dance is religious and aim is proclamation of the Gospel. The themes are based on the New Testament and Old Testament. The technique used in the presentation are taken from Kuchipudi dance, folk-dances of Andhra and free dance movements. The dress and costume is based on the Biblical characters with a touch of Indian theatre tradition. The music is mostly set in Carnatic style with a heavy folk orientation. At times it resembles to the Burrakatha, Ballad singing of the local place. The instruments used are all South Indian. The lyrics are in Telugu.

Suvartha Vani has produced the following dance-dramas: Kim Karthavyam (That is my duty?). It begins with a Sanskrit sloka (invocation) and a prayer to triune God. The story has two parts. The parables of the sheep and the goats and Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. The concluding

dance gives the message: Love God and love your neighbour. Shanti Patham (the way of Peace) Chemanthi Chenu (A garden of Chrysanthamums) and the recent Balidānam (the Great Sacrifice) under the direction of Rev.D.V.Daniel have been quite successful on the stage.

Sangeet Abhinay Academy, Bandra, Bombay was founded on 27th July 1980 by Dr.Charles Vaz SVD who has a doctorate in music. The troupe gives average 30 performances a year. The academy officially functions under the patronage of a religious congregation, Society of the Divine Word. The performers about 30 in number; amateurs, young Catholic boys and girls from Bombay in the age group of 16-24 years. The audience is mainly urban about 80% and the rest rural. The motivation of the dance is religious and entertainment. Aim and goal of the production is for the proclamation of the Gospel, national integration through art and artistic endeavour. Choreographic patterns are based on the Western dance elements and free dance movements. The performances are done to the taped music. The lyrics are in Hindi and Konkani.

The mode of music is a unique synthesis of Western and Indian music to the common rhythms. The music is sung in solo and chorus to the accompaniment of the Western and Indian

musical instruments. The songs are interpreted by the help of the hand-gestures, facial expression and stamping of the feet. The costumes are a combination of Indian and Jewish dress with ordinary make-up. The performances are conducted in the open-air, auditoriums and in the churches. The group has performed in many parts of India and in Europe, Germany Holland, Rome etc. Prem Rāgini - melody of Love is the main production of this group (opening dance based on the prologue of the Gospel according to St.John: (192); Adam and Eve:(193); Crucifixion:(194).

Jeevan Darshan Kalapathak, Girij, Vasai, Maharashtra, was established in 1977 by Rev.Hillary Fernandes, who has a diploma in Music , under the patronage of Bombay Diocese as a trust gives an average of 10 performances a year. 70% of the audience is rural and 30% urban. The age group who attend the performance is as follows: 40% youngsters, 30% children , 25% middle aged and 5% old people. The musicians and auxiliary personnels for the performances are all professional, however, only one or two professional dancers take part in the productions. 66% of the performances are Christians and the rest Hindu. The motivation of the dance is religious, educational and social. Aim is inculturation of liturgy, inculturation of Christianity in India, proclamation of the

Gospel and national integration through art. The themes chosen are Biblical and social.

Dance movements of the Ballet are taken from the classical dance-forms like Bharata Nāṭyam, Kathak and Kathakali. The elements like Tamasha and Koli dance of the Maharashtrian fisher-folk are also included. The choreographic patterns are based on free dance movements, folk-dance elements and allied indigenous practices.

The dances are accompanied by vocal music which is at times classical and other times only folk. The solo rendering of the dances are mostly in the classical tunes and group dances are in folk tunes. The musical instruments like Tabla, Dholak, sarangi, Sitar etc. typical of Hindustani style of the North and Mridangam, Ganjira, Centa etc of the Carnatic style of the South are used. Besides these, flute and violin which are common to both the above mentioned styles are also found in the musical compositions. The lyrics are all in Marathi. The singing is both solo and chorus which is interpreted by hand-gestures, facial expression and stamping of the feet. Every character is dressed in Indian style. Angels in purely indigenous style found in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora in the form of Divine beings, the bad characters

(Satans) are dressed in the manner of the evil character of Kathakali style. Apostles, women and other characters are dressed in the style of Maharashtrian fisher and village-folk. The performances are conducted only in the open-air and auditoriums in the state of Maharashtra.

The most successful production has been the 'Andharatoon Prakashakade' (from Darkness to Light). Perhaps the most touching aspect in this ballet is the manner in which the teaching of Christ is wedded to the concept 'Satyam Sivam, Sundaram'- The Truth, Purity and Beauty which is the very base of Indian culture. The concept is that Truth essentially has to be beautiful and chaste, when the son of Light (Jesus) came along proclaiming Himself 'Satyam, Sivam, Sundaram'. He was laughed at too. He came to restore the full meaning to it by driving the Darkness away from the world, but the fallen man joined with the Darkness and persecuted Him even to the death on the cross. However, the triumph of the good over the evil is demonstrated by the act of Satan laying down his crown at the feet of the Resurrected Lord is an outstanding success of the production, keeping in mind the Indian theatre - tradition.

CARAVS (Christian Association for Radio and Audio Visual Services) was founded in 1959 at Jabalpur and the dance department was added to this in 1972. Rev.A.D.Bhasker is the founder-director of the institute and Mrs.Lily Singh trained under Shambhu Maharaj and Gopi Krishnan is the Choreographer for the productions of CARAVS. The institute gives average 15 performances per year all over North in the Hindi speaking belt. It is an autonomous Institute registered under the Societies Act. The group consists of professional musicians and amateur dancers with one or two professionals who take the main role. The composition of the performers consists equal number of Hindus and Christians. 60% of the audience is urban and 40% rural. The motivation of the dance is religious and social. Aim is inculturation of Christianity in India, proclamation of the Gospel and artistic endeavour. The themes are mostly Biblical and at times social. The techniques used in the presentation are Kathak and Manipuri dance movements. However, one could easily notice that most of the movements are taken from the Kathak dance style and choreographic patterns from the North Indian folk dances. Besides this, free dance movements and allied indigenous practices are also widely used.

The dance is accompanied by vocal and instrumental music. The music in Hindustani style of folk with some classical

renderings here and there to the Northern (Tāl) rhythm system. The lyrics are all in chaste Hindi. The dancers do not sing while performing. The song is interpreted by them with the hand-gestures, facial expressions and rhythmic variations. For the classical pieces Kathak costume is worn both by men and women. For the group dances folk-dress of the Northern region is used. There is no special significance attached to the make-up and colour selection of the costume. They perform both in the open-air and auditoriums. Over 8 dance-dramas have been produced and were staged by them. The successful productions are Mary Magdalene, Ten Virgins, Woman At the Well (195: Samaritan woman at the well, (196) Jesus and his disciples at the Well with the Samaritan woman) and the Lord's Prayer (Our Father). Rev.K.D.Bhasker and his wife Hemalatha Bhasker have championed the cause of Christian dance at the CARAVS, which is related to the Church of North India. (CNI). Dance drama is a family affair for the Bhaskers who are methodists, as their teenage daughters, Grace and Aruna often take part in the performances. The productions of CARAVS are very close to the theatre traditions of India.

S.M.LALL

Bethany Art Centre, Delhi was established and founded in 1975 by S.M.Lall who is still the director of the academy.

Under the able guidance of S.M.Lall the academy has been staging every year performances on Bible themes during the time of Christmas and Easter. Since 1979 the performance is being staged every year on the 'Ramlila Ground' of Delhi. The performers and the audience include people belonging to different religions, i.e The role of Christ was played by Narendra Pal Singh, a young Sikh, Ramesh Chandra, a Hindu boy and many other Muslims and Hindus, regularly take part in the performance. More than 8000 people attend every performance.

According to S.M.Lall, the aim of the performance is inculturation of Christianity in India, National integration through art, proclamation of the Gospel and artistic endeavour. The themes included in the performance are Biblical, Social and historical. The performance is done by the amateur artists. Of the audience, 75% consists of urban and 25% rural. 50% of the audience who attend the function are old people which is followed by 30% youngsters and other age-groups. The academy is an independent body. They have average 2 performances per year. Very little of dance is found in the performance. The academy has produced the following dance-dramas: Mahābalidan, Birth of Christ, Bhool Bani Afsana, Abrahams Sacrifice, Samaritan Woman and Masterji,⁽⁶⁾ in the last ten years.

Besides being an experiment in national integration, it is a revival of Biblical plays once patronized by the Moghuls at Agra.⁽⁷⁾ The mode of performance is in the line of Ramlila.

A FESTIVAL OF PERFORMING ARTS AND LITERATURE:

A major festival of performing art and literature⁽⁸⁾ was organised by CARAVS (Jabalpur) CACS (Madras) and Suvarthavani (Vijayawada) in Jabalpur, Oct. 12-16, 1982 under the auspices of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) London and the National Association for Christian Communication (NACC) an affiliate of the National Council of Churches in India. The festival was a major leap ahead for the performing arts of the Christians in India. The purpose was to meet and encourage Christian artists, communication workers and other involved in Christian communications, to make the churches aware of the usefulness and effectiveness of indigenous art forms and to promote the use of the same in communicating the Gospel. About 200 delegates attended the festival, including all the denominations of the Christian community. The main participators who gave a full performance in the evening were, CARAVS, Jabalpur under the directorship of Rev. K. D. Bhasker, presented a dance-drama on Samaritan Woman, CACS, Madras, under the directorship of Dr. Suviseshamuthu presented

Nān Petra Inbam (Joy that I received) Suvarthavani, under Rev.D.V.Daniel presented Balidānam and I (Francis Barboza SVD) gave a full Bharata Nātyam Dance recital on Christian themes in the order of traditional Bharata Nātyam repertoire with the newly invented Dēva-Hastās (Gestures for God) to suit the Bible personalities. Besides the performances, many research papers were read on the aspect of the role of Performing Arts in Religion by various eminent theologians like Rev.Dr.Arvind P.Nirmal, Rev.Dr.David C.Scott, Rev.Dr.M.V.Abraham, Rev.Dr. Duraisingh, Mr.J.Victor Koilpillai, artists like Jyoti Sahi. I also read a paper on " Dance in Christian communication and conducted a prayer dance recital (197). However, the festival has not been conducted since 1982.

Besides these, there are many other attempts made in different regions to present Christian themes in Indian Dance by many people and institutions. Nataraja Natana Nilayam of Madras has staged two dance dramas on Christian themes, one on Jesus Christ and the other Annai Vellankanni. Salem Communication Centre under Fr.P.Xavier and others have also staged dance-dramas. Jeevan Darshan, Baroda uses folk and shadow plays in its presentations. Seva Niketan Dance Group of Bombay, under the direction of Fr.Desmond D'Monte has been presenting Bible stories purely in folk style. Snehana Shakdal

was directed by Mrinalini Sarabhai of Darpana of Ahmedabad in 1981 on the life of Christ in Gujarathi. Jyothi Bhavan, Sagar, produced dance ballets based on Mary Magdalene, Song of Songs, The Good Samaritan in 1983. K.R. Ponnusamy of Nāttiya Padakam, Salem also presented a few ballets like 'Yesukāviam' etc. Then in the last few years a number of dance groups have come up and many ballets have been presented at the initiative of the individual and institutions.

However, on a closer scrutiny most of these attempts seem to lack depth and proper study of the given dance-forms in their presentations. Most of them are not based on any one art-form or a few definite dance-forms. Free movements have been used elaborately in the productions. Most of the producers have over emphasized the theme and in the bargain the aspect of technique has been neglected, if not totally lost. However, these various attempts have made the Christians conscious of the cultural heritage of our land and have opened new doors for innovation and experiments on the Christian themes in the Indian dance forms for the artists.

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