

CHAPTER NO.X

CONCLUSION

The study on the Christian Scriptures, both Old and New Testament has clearly shown that Dance has a very prominent and important function in Christianity. The frequent references to dance in the life of the people, explanation and description of the type of dance performed at religious and social occasions are some of the compelling proofs which further strengthen the prominent position that dance occupies in the Christian Scriptures. The existence and practice of dance throughout the Church history further stresses the functional value of dance in the religious and social life of the Christians. However, the history of the Religious dance in the Church is marked by misuse, the degradation, degeneration and finally in its revival. This phenomenon is common to the Religious Dance of India too. If the early Church elevated dance to the spiritual heights, the medieval and the subsequent period brought it down to the low level of misuse and disfavour. But in the late 19th and 20th centuries one finds the spirit of revivalism in the form of Sacred Dance groups in the Church especially, in America, Europe, Australia and to some extent

in India too after the first half of this century. In all these above development of dance, one finds continually the emphasis laid on the group dances. The individual or solo dances, if not totally absent are found minimum in practice.

It was very revealing to observe that in India too all the early dance forms of the Christians were performed in groups and no individual dance is to be found. Mārgamkali and Parisumuttukali of the Syrian Christians which are still practised, are all performed in groups. The same tendency can be observed in the middle ages and the contemporary period too. This is keeping in line with the Christian Scriptures and the early traditions of the Church where congregational or group dancing is encouraged and individual dances are not so common. This feature is also the reflection of the Christian theology where God is mainly encountered in group and people worship and praise him as group and in a congregation. The worship pattern, art-forms, Church architecture etc. of the early Syrian and Knanaya Syrian Christians in Kerala were similar to those of the native Hindus. The remnants of the old Church architecture and a closer look at the form, style, mode of presentation, music etc. of the early art-forms like Mārgamkali and Parisumuttukali substantiate this contention.

It takes a long time for any performing art-form like dance to be expressed in visual forms like sculpture. The works of this kind do furnish us with the missing links in art-history and supply us with the needed information to the past. Unfortunately with regard to the Kerala Church most of these have been destroyed due to the suppressive attitude and decrees of the Synod of Diamper (1599). However, the dance sculptures of Mārgamkali and Parisumuttukali on the basement of the granite Cross at Kaduthuruthy Valiapalli, erected in 1597 are some of the silent witnesses of the existence and practice of these art-forms among the early Christians for many centuries. The style and form of these sculptures is very Indian and not at all influenced by the west. While studying Mārgamkali and Parisumuttukali of the Syrian Christians as they are practised today, it can be seen that they are least affected by the western influence and the European Theatre. With the coming of the Portuguese to India, a Church that was very much indigenous was forced to be westernized. This process was intensified by the Synod of Diamper in 1599 which practically forbade the existing art-forms of the Christians as superstitious and scandalous. However, the people couldn't suppress their artistic instinct to express religious, spiritual and joyous experience in different art-forms.

The outcome of this strange situation gave birth to a number of new art-forms mainly in Goa and Kerala. These art-forms are greatly influenced by the western theatre. The western influence is clearly seen and felt especially in the aspect of theme, costume and presentation, though less affected in the technique and the system of training. Caviṭṭunātakam is one such example where compared to the other elements of this dance form, the technique is comparatively less affected by the western theatre.

In Kerala, the art-forms which came into existence after the coming of the Portuguese, were based on the earlier art-forms of the Christians and Hindus. Parisumuttukali of the Latin Christians and Orthodox Jacobite Syrian Christians is based on the Parisumuttukali of the Syrian Christians both in technique and the mode of presentation. However, one notices that the emphasis laid on the choice of the themes differs. In the technique and training system, Caviṭṭunātakam has been immensely influenced by Kathakali, Mohiniāṭṭam and other local art forms. In Goa some of the art-forms of the Christians like the Mando are adapted to the local situation, though the origin could be traced back to the European opera. Others like Mussal Khel, Dekhni, Mēll etc. have a strong Hindu influence and background. The Hindu influence is maintained inspite of the

vigorous suppression of the local customs norms ,language etc. by the Portuguese and the Church authorities. In the course of time , most of them tended to assume more social and less religious significance except for the occasion and time when they are performed. Whereas in Kerala the religious connotation and significance of these art-forms in their performance and practice is easily felt and observed.

Another feature can be observed is that the dance forms practised in the coastal line are relatively more influenced by the West and the European theatre than the interior regions. Cavittunātakam , Munrurajakūthu, Nātakams, Kummiāṭṭam of Palghat area and the dance forms of the Christians in Goa, all originated after the coming of the Portuguese to India. Here, it can be observed that Cavittunātakam and the art-forms of Goa are comparatively more influenced by the European theatre than the art-forms of the Palghat area , a relatively interior region.

While the early dance forms of the Syrian Christians have their themes on the lives of the Saints who lived in Kerala and the geographical locations connected with the local Churches, the later forms take their themes from European history or the enactment of the outstanding lives of the Saints of the

Western Church. However, at times the story content is found to be modified and adapted to the local situation. The main themes of Mārgankali and Parisumuṭṭukali are on the life of St. Thomas, the Apostle, and on the development and construction of some local church. But the Parisumuṭṭukali of the Latin Christians, Cavittunātakam, Nātakams of Palghat region and many other contemporary art-forms of this period have to a great extent borrowed themes from European history and from the lives of the Western Church. This must have been a conscious dual effort by the Portuguese rulers and the Church to alienate the people and to teach them European history, customs, norms etc. to their own advantage. Even in the sphere of costume and decor the same trend carried on. It is believed that even Kathakali is influenced to some extent by the Western theatre, here i.e. headgear of Hanuman.

Each community ,depending on its social , regional and professional background, has developed its own dance movements, gestures, choreographic patterns etc. However, the basic choreographic patterns always remain a circle and two parallel lines. Dancing in the circle pattern and in circles is common and popular in all parts of India and the world. The couple formations and circular patterns accompanied by rhythmic and other movements and songs is common to all Indian group dances.

It is interesting to note that the traditional dance forms of the Christians are all done in a circular pattern, keeping a lighted lamp or an idol of a deity in the centre. This symbolizes the micro and macro cosmos, relation of man to God, etc. It is interesting to note that the traditional dance forms of the Christians have a lighted lamp in the centre symbolizing Christ. The circle pattern is common to all the dance forms of the Christians whether they are ancient , medieval ,modern or contemporary in their origin.

However, in the second phase which starts from the medieval period, a striking choreographic pattern in two parallel lines is developed without giving up or minimizing the importance of the circular pattern. This is clearly seen in Cavittunātakam, Parisumuttukali of the Latin Christians, Kummiāttam and other forms which had their origin in the medieval and subsequent period. The pattern of two parallel lines must be the result of dance during the religious processions of the Christians, which are normally well-organized in two parallel lines.

The post Independence period has ushered in an innovative phase in the history of dance. Many attempts have been made by various people to depict the Christian message in Indian dance forms. Most of these attempts have not followed a

particular form or style. Hence , hardly any form or tradition has developed in this direction. As a result the continuity and follow-up of these efforts has not been attempted. Again, the new trends have over stressed the themes to such an extent that technique has been neglected, if not completely lost. The primary purpose and aim of these attempts according to a survey and a questionnaire conducted by me is for the proclamation of the Gospel, preaching, adaptation, adoption, inculturation etc. Some use phrases like 'presenting the Gospel through Dance forms', others proudly talk about promoting the use of indigenous art-forms for the proclamation of the Gospel. This idea is somehow in contrast to the earlier dance forms of the Christians. Mārgamkali, Parisumuttukali, Nātakams etc. were developed in the Christian community to understand, experience and comprehend Christian message. But the present trend tends to be utilitarian, using art-forms for delivering Christ's message. Further this sort of understanding also gives the impression that the Gospel is a ready-made product, neatly bound and packaged. Commenting on this point Rev.P.Nirmal says "art-forms are not primarily meant to propagate, proclaim or communicate a static and well-formulated Gospel. Their primary value lies in the fact that they enable us to understand and grasp the Gospel in a new way. They offer us fresh, new insights

into the Gospel. They offer us new visions of the Gospel. Art and art-forms, therefore, have a tremendous hermeneutical and heuristic value. They make possible new understandings, and formulations of the Gospel. They make the Gospel an 'event' a 'happening' and an 'emergence'. Art and art-forms unfold new Gospel mysteries, new Gospel dimensions and new Gospel of God in Jesus confessed to be the Christ is inexhaustibly rich. All art-forms and culture are not merely means and media for proclamation and communication of the Gospel. Rather they are an integral part of that process through which the Gospel is understood, comprehended and appropriated, nay, realised in ever new ways". (Abstract from the keynote address of Rev.P Nirmal, The Festival of Performing Arts and Literature, Jabalpur, Oct.1982)

Here, we must speak about the cultural Christ rather than just relate Him to the culture. There are many versions of this cultural Christ within the New Testament. St.Paul's Christ is the 'Lord'. St.John's Christ is a 'Friend' and the 'Logos'. The Christ of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is the 'High Priest'. St.John's Christ in a pastoral perspective is the 'Lamb', the 'Shepherd' the 'Door' through which a flock of sheep goes- a curious mixture of metaphors indeed. The Latin American Christ is the 'Liberator'. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's

Christ is the 'preceptor' and Swamy Vivekananda's Christ is an 'Advaitin'. The point is that culture through its expressions in arts, art-forms, literature and language shapes the very understanding of Christ and His Gospel. We should now begin to speak in terms of a cultural comprehension and realization of Christ and His Gospel, rather than just 'propagation', 'proclamation' and 'communication' of the Gospel through indigenous art and art-forms. That kind of language speaks of an exploitative use of arts and art-forms. In the light of this an artist should stress on the aspect of comprehending, understanding and realizing Christ's message in Indian art-forms, especially Indian dance. It is only then that one can give or share that God-experience with others. Here the communication goes more deeper than just imparting Christ's teachings on a superficial level which is done in most cases. Once, the famous ballet dancer Anna Pavlova was asked the meaning of the particular dance, 'if I could tell you, I wouldn't dance', she replied. Many people working in this field of dance put the cart in front of the horse. They want to communicate a ready-made Gospel, a static one which is self-defeating in its approach both in relation to the Gospel, which should be dynamic, moving and life-giving, and to Indian dance which speaks for itself as regards its origin, nature and end.

The attempts made by many people at various level and different denominations of the Christians who have tried to depict Christian themes in various ways and forms have made the Christians conscious of the cultural heritage of our land and have opened new doors for innovation and experiments on the Gospel themes in the Indian dance forms for the artists. However, sadly so, most of the traditional art-forms of the Christians are at the verge of dying out. This is mainly due to the lack of encouragement and indifferent attitude from the part of the Church authorities and loss of interest on the part of the Christians themselves. During the survey it is observed that only in the Diocese of Kottayam Mārgankali and Parisumuttukali of Syrian Christians have received attention and patronage by the authorities since the last few years.

It is high time that other Dioceses, Bishops and responsible and prominent people concerned take active steps to revive these art-forms before the final curtain is drawn.

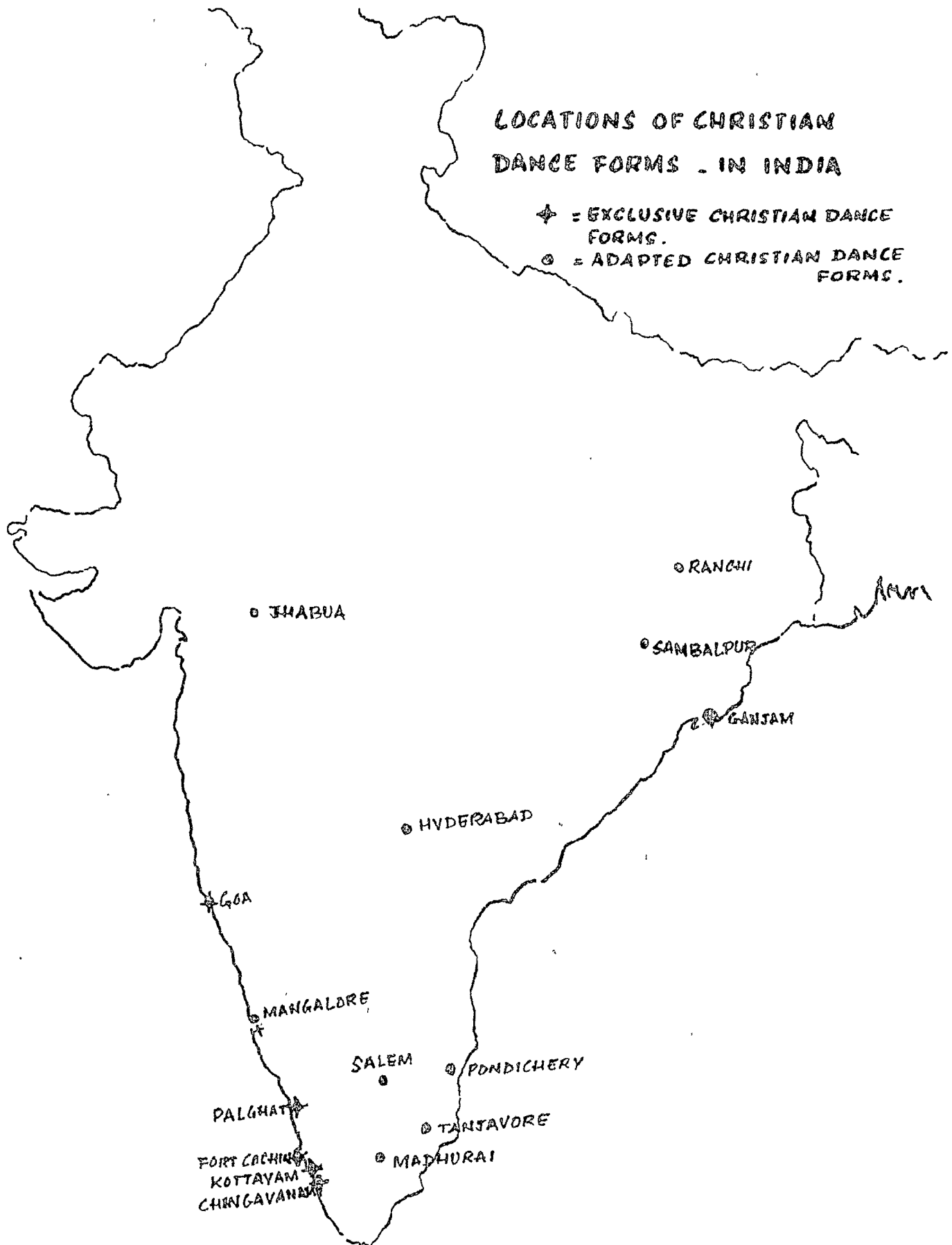
To conclude, it may be stressed that the work of the scholars only provides a background and a general idea about the dance forms of the Christians in India. Their vitality, spontaneity and depth can only be grasped and experienced while participating and observing them keenly in the actual

places and occasions of performances. Christianity with its oral and written traditions has become a reality to be experienced in these visual forms. One just wonders, how, inspite of numerous sanctions, suppression and negative approach of the Church authorities, right from the coming of the Portuguese in 1498, the dance forms of the Christians have survived and many more have come into existence and have developed. Though a host of western influences are felt in many of the dance forms which originated since the medieval period, these factors have not destroyed the 'Indianness' of these dance forms. The Christian Religion which came to India in the first century has become a part of the Indian heritage. My experience and study also has revealed that Christian themes could be introduced in any of the Indian dance forms with a proper study of the Christian Theology and mastery over the technique and practice of the given dance-style . And finally, let the arts, cultures and religions of India build bridges and not walls for human communication and co-existence.

LOCATIONS OF CHRISTIAN DANCE FORMS . IN INDIA

✦ = EXCLUSIVE CHRISTIAN DANCE
FORMS.

⊙ = ADAPTED CHRISTIAN DANCE
FORMS.



DANCE FORMS OF THE CHRISTIANS IN INDIA

<u>S.NO.</u>	<u>DANCE FORM</u>	<u>AREA</u>	<u>COMMUNITY</u>	<u>LANGUAGE</u>
1.	Mārgamkali	Kerala	Syrian(Knananite)	Malayalam
2.	Parisumuttukali	Kerala	Syrian	"
3.	Parisumuttukali	"	Latin	"
4.	" "	"	Orthodox Jacobite, Syrian	"
5.	Paska	Tamilnadu	Latin	Tamil
6.	Pashavom	Mangalore	Latin	Konkani
7.	Passo	Goa	Latin	Konkani
8.	Kūthu	Tamilnadu	Latin	Tamil
9.	Gumtanāch	Mangalore	Latin	Konkani
10.	Dhalo	Goa	Latin	Marathi
11.	Mando	Goa	Latin	Konkani
12.	Mussal Khel	"	"	"
13.	Dekhni	"	"	"
14.	Jagar	"	"	Marathi & Konkani
15.	Mēl	"	"	Konkani
16.	Khel	"	"	"
17.	Kumbi	"	"	"
18.	Cavittunātakam	Kerala	"	Malayalam