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“Because We Are Catholic”: Music as a Bridge Between Identities Within the Catholic Community of South India

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“Because We are Catholic”: Music as a Bridge Between Identities within the Catholic
Community of South India

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the College Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Johnathan Rhodes

June 2020

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Title: "Because We are Catholic": Music as a Bridge Between Identities within the
Catholic Community of South India
Advisor: Dr. Sarah Morelli
Degree Date: June 2020

ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I argue that the music of the Catholic Church of South India, which draws from Indian and Western music genres, functions as a cultural bridge allowing the worshiper to express a distinctively Catholic identity without distancing themselves from their Hindu roots. This cultural connection reinterprets Karnatak musical styles, practices, and traditions as distinctively Catholic rather than Indian or Hindu. Thus, Indian cultures are recontextualized within a Catholic paradigm, as these practices are regarded as Catholic regardless of their historical, cultural, or religious origin. These identities, Indian and Catholic, are not in tension with one another, but instead, reinforce each other. This concept of identity formed through both international and local perspectives emerges as a primary motivation behind the use of local musics and other traditions within the Indian Catholic Church. Local parishes utilize Hindu practices, themes, and symbolism in ways that reinforce international Catholic identity.

Moreover, the historical or theological origins of these local practices do not overtly supersede or undermine their intended religious message. Rather than using these songs as a compromise between Catholic and Hindu beliefs and practices, the Catholic Church in India recognizes these practices to achieve an international Catholic identity using local traditions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For my father

Byron Cole Rhodes

May 24, 1949 – May 14, 2019

“we learn more in valleys”

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Introduction

The Catholic Church in India has long suffered from an identity crisis. Following the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), the Church has sought to integrate Catholic and Indian identities by adopting local beliefs and traditions into the Catholic liturgy. In the context of this push for “interculturalization,” local Catholic parishes and dioceses attempted to structure their use of diverse cultural practices and musical styles in a way that attuned to both Church teachings and Indian customs. The church saw music as a particularly effective bridge between the Catholic liturgy and local customs. In the decades following Vatican II, local bishops began incorporating Karnatak music and other genres of Indian devotional music into the Catholic Mass and publicizing their use across Indian media. Karnatak music, in particular, gradually became both the dominant musical form for regional dioceses and the standard performance practice for the Mass. Much of this music, however, was inextricably tied to Hindu religious beliefs and practices, creating problems for many within the Church who found these extra-musical associations incompatible with Catholic doctrine. Nevertheless, the use of these musical practices allowed Indian Catholics to establish a sense of locality to their religious belief and identity.

In this thesis, I argue that the music of the Catholic Church of South India, which draws from Indian and Western music genres, functions as a cultural bridge allowing the worshiper to express a distinctively Catholic identity without distancing themselves from their Hindu roots. This cultural connection reinterprets Karnatak musical styles, practices, and traditions as distinctively Catholic rather than Indian or Hindu. Thus, Indian cultures are recontextualized within a Catholic paradigm, as these practices are regarded as Catholic regardless of their historical, cultural, or religious origin. While this cultural

interconnection exists through the Catholic Church, the adoption of Indian music holds a distinctive place because of music's strong association with Hindu culture and spirituality.

The Indian Catholic Church restructured Indian cultural traditions according to the ways Catholics define and make sense of their own cultural identity both locally and internationally. For the past several decades, Catholic philosophers and theologians have explored how Catholic identity relates to both local cultures and the wider Catholic Church. They have reached two major conclusions. First, Catholic identity generally supersedes local and national identities. Moreover, Catholic scholars define the Catholic community as an overarching international body rather than a community restricted by one's cultural or national status.¹ In fact, the very name of the Church, "Catholic," translates to "universal." Second, the Catholic Church defines the "church" itself as the people who make up the community, not the political and governmental bodies that make

¹ Norbert Greinacher, "Catholic Identity in the Third Epoch of Church History," in *Catholic Identity* ed. James Provost and Kunt Walf (London: SCM Press, 1994), 13.

up its hierarchy.² This idea manifests in the Church's emphasis on community practices, such as festivals and pilgrimages, which reaffirm Christian identity through shared communal practice with both their fellow Catholics and the Catholics of previous generations.³ Thus, the Catholic community is simultaneously international and local.

Through the analysis of music from the Catholic Church in India and interviews with several Catholic priests from the region, I have uncovered a distinctive relationship between Indian and Catholic identities in the Church. I argue that these identities, Indian and Catholic, are not in tension with one another, but instead, reinforce each other. Catholics in India express their international Catholic identity precisely through the use of local music traditions rather than despite them. This concept of identity formed through both international and local perspectives emerges as a primary motivation behind the use of local musics and other traditions within the Indian Catholic Church. Local parishes utilize Hindu practices, themes, and symbolism in ways that reinforce international Catholic identity.⁴ Local identity reinforces the international. Moreover, the historical or theological origins of these local practices do not overtly supersede or undermine their intended religious message. Rather than using these songs as a compromise between Catholic and Hindu beliefs and practices, the Catholic Church in

² Norbert Greinacher, "Catholic Identity in the Third Epoch of Church History," 14.

³ The Catholic Church takes this mentality of community identity one step farther during the Mass as Catholics fundamentally believe that the Mass itself exists in the same time and space as all masses both throughout history and in the future. According to Catholic philosophy, all masses throughout history, dating back to the Last Supper itself, exists in the same moment as the ceremony taking place at church every Sunday.

⁴ This relationship primarily exists between the Catholic and Hindu communities, rather than India's numerous other religions. This is a result of Christianity integration with Hinduism before the arrival of the Catholic Church.

India recognizes these practices as a way to achieve an international Catholic identity through the use of local traditions.

Historiography and Methods

While many ethnomusicologists have studied Karnatak music and its relationship with Indian Christianity, the use of local music by the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church has received less attention.⁵ Most studies of Catholic music in India focus on the Eastern and Western Syriac Rites which were brought to India from the Middle East in the 6th century.⁶ Additionally, the introduction of Western liturgical music and its reception by Indian Christians has been thoroughly analyzed by ethnomusicologists. However, the use of Karnatak music in the Catholic Church, specifically within the Mass itself, has been largely sidelined in favor of focusing on the introduction of Syrian and Latin music traditions. Moreover, very little research has been directed towards modern compositions or how Western and Karnatak styles are combined within the contemporary Catholic Church.

Several ethnomusicologists have published works dedicated to the study and comprehension of the Karnatak–Catholic relationship. Dr. Joseph J. Palackal was the first major ethnomusicologist to study Catholic music in South India; he founded the Christian

⁵ The Catholic Church is made up of the Latin Church centered in Rome and twenty-five Eastern Rite Churches. These Eastern Churches can maintain their own customs and traditions while still being in communion with the Latin Church and the Holy See. These customs are known as Rites and the Latin Rite is the practice most commonly associated with the larger Catholic Church.

⁶ The Eastern and Western Syriac Rites are used by the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara churches respectively. These two churches split from one another following the introduction of Catholicism into the region. However, both Churches individually joined the Eastern Catholic Church community.

Musicological Society of India to catalog and study the diverse array of Catholic musics in the region.⁷ While his scholarly writing largely focuses on the music of the Syro-Malabar church, Dr. Palackal also actively promotes, composes, and performs Catholic hymns and songs in the Karnatak style. The songs used in my analyses are drawn from the Christian Musicological Society of India's online archive and include Fr. Palackal's personal performances of Karnatak hymns.

Dr. Fr. Paul Poovathingal, C.M.I.⁸ became the first priest in India to receive a Ph.D. in Karnatak music and his research specifically addresses Catholic music from an ethnomusicological perspective.⁹ A dedicated performer, Fr. Paul regularly tours overseas to perform classical Karnatak music with Catholic themes. While Fr. Paul devotes much of his writing to the performance practice of Karnatak music, his research provides a strong ethnomusicological foundation for the study of Indian Catholic music by tying modern performance practices to the history and identity of the regional church. These writings examine how local Catholics use music in constructing individual and group identity.

⁷ Considerable research exists about the Syriac Rite churches in India. For further reading, please seek out the works of Joseph J. Palackal: "*The Survival Story of Syriac Chants among the St. Thomas Christians in South India*" in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and World Christianities*. Ed. Jonathan Dueck and Suzel Reiley (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2016). "Oktoechos of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in South India," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 48, no. 2, pp. 229-250, and "Interface Between History and Music in the Christian Context of South India" in *Christianity and Native Cultures: Perspectives From Different Regions of the World*. Cyriac Pullapilly, et al., eds. Notre Dame, Indiana: Cross Cultural Publications 2004, pp. 150-161.

⁸ C.M.I stands for Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, which is a clerical religious congregation of priests from India.

⁹ Dr. Fr. Paul Poovathingal provides the most in-depth analysis of the relationship between the Catholic Church and Karnatak music. For more information please see "Inculturation of Music in Indian Church" in *The Church and Culture in India, Inculturation: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Paul Pulikkan and Paul M. Collins (ISPCK, 2010), 124 – 139.

Zoe Sherinian's *Tamil Folk Music and Dalit Liberation Theology* is one of the most impactful studies in the field of Indian Christian music. Specifically addressing folk music in Tamil Nadu, Sherinian's research details how Christian communities in India use music as a conduit for resistance against class, caste, and gender restrictions.¹⁰ While her work focuses on music outside of the Catholic Church, Sherinian provides the most in-depth analysis of Christian music in the region and outlines how local Christians use and recognize music as a tool to affirm cultural identity and to enact cultural and political change.

While not as well-known as the ethnomusicologists cited above, Stephen Frederick Duncin, and his 1991 dissertation "Christian Bhajans: A Study of the Uses of Indigenous Music in the Rites of the Catholic Church on the Subcontinent of India since the Second Vatican Council with Particular Attention to Bhajan and Kirtan" outlines the use and practice of traditional Hindu musical forms which were adapted by the Catholic Church following the Second Vatican Council.¹¹ While largely explanatory, this work outlines the theory and practice behind the various Hindu musical traditions adopted by the Catholic Church. Additionally, Duncin's work maps out the official position of the Catholic Church regarding the adoption of Hindu devotional music. However, I believe that Duncin's work only scratches the surface of this subject as he addresses the use of

¹⁰ Zoe Sherinian, *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

¹¹ Stephen Duncin, "Christian Bhajans: A Study of the Uses of Indigenous Music in the Rites of the Catholic Church on the Subcontinent of India since the Second Vatican Council with Particular Attention to Bhajan and Kirtan" (PhD diss., Memphis State University, 1991).

Hindu musical traditions solely from a practical standpoint, rather than addressing this music from a cultural standpoint.

While the aforementioned academics provide an extensive overview of Indian Catholic music, my study differs from their work in several ways. First, while their research focuses on official writings of the Church hierarchy or general societal analysis, my study specifically addresses the beliefs and ideology of ordained priests within the Catholic Church and how these priests understand Catholic music on a personal level. Moreover, I endeavor to establish how they understand the use and practice of Hindu culture within the Catholic Church and its community. Overall, my methodology goes a step farther than the current body of research by specifically connecting studies of Catholic music in India to the wider theological and philosophical concepts of Catholic identity. While their research focuses on official writings of the Church hierarchy or general societal analysis, my study specifically addresses the beliefs and ideology of ordained priests within the Catholic Church and how these priests understand priests on a personal level. I hope that this work, and the insights of the priests interviewed and quoted herein, will help illuminate the nature of Catholic identity in India and how this affects the Catholic communities' relationship with both Hindu and Catholic traditions.

Much of this study's primary source information comes from interviews with two Catholic priests from India who currently live in the United States. Due to a vast surplus of priests in India, the Church regularly sends Indian priests to parishes in the United States, mostly across the South where there are fewer Catholics, to prop up the small Catholic population. I interviewed two priests, Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli and Fr. Chinnaiah

Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, who were both ordained in Tamil Nadu and have been actively serving in Arkansas since the 1990s.

Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli was ordained on April 24, 1989. Coming from an impoverished family in Tamil Nadu, Fr. Alphonse originally joined the seminary to further his education after his family could no longer afford to send him to school. While at the seminary, Fr. Alphonse had the opportunity to study music for the first time; his education included instruction in both Western and Karnatak music. He tried his hand at composing while at the seminary and eventually became a choir director at several parishes. Because of his strong musical foundation, Fr. Alphonse was able to illuminate the nuances of Indian church music from a composer's perspective. Although he did not have access to any of his compositions here in the United States, he outlined his compositional style extensively and directed me to other hymns I could use for this project. Fr. Alphonse currently serves as pastor at the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Fr. Chinnaiah Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, known by parishioners in the United States as Fr. YC, was born into a large Catholic family in 1964. The son of a Catholic school principal, Fr. YC joined the seminary at the mere age of 11. Ordained in 1992, Fr. YC served extensively across South India before being transferred to the Diocese of Oklahoma City in 1999. After a brief stint back home, he eventually took up a position within the Dioceses of Little Rock, Arkansas in 2013. Unlike Fr. Alphonse, Fr. YC had little professional understanding of music outside of his work as a priest. However, this professional and somewhat independent relationship with music allows for a perspective on liturgical music that remains less bogged down by theoretical analysis. Unfortunately,

Fr. YC passed away a month after our interview, on the 25th of January 2019 at the age of 54.

Both priests provided considerable insight into the relationship between Catholic and Indian identity as reflected in their relationship with music. More importantly, both priests held completely different beliefs about the relationship between Indian Catholics and the music of India. During his interview, Fr. YC had a more humanistic approach and focused on the cultural connection between the community and their music. Fr.

Alphonse, per his background in music education and composition, focused on the technical capabilities of the parish musicians. These two separate approaches to liturgical music provide a diverse perspective despite my limited sources. While my decision to interview priests living in the United States rather than India was in large part a practical one, I hoped the distance from their home parish might provide them with additional insight into their home church's relationship with music from both India and the West. Moreover, while my access to priests currently living in India was limited, priests based in my home diocese in Arkansas were both available and eager to assist with my project.

History of Christianity in South India

In order to understand the nuances of Christian music in South India, one must first have a proper understanding of the history of Indian Christianity itself. In the first century C.E., the fledgling Christian religion first spread to India from the Middle East.¹² The new Indian Christian population, known as St. Thomas Christians due to the belief that they were founded by the Apostle Thomas, grew alongside the Hindu population and adopted many local cultures and practices.¹³ During the 4th century, Persian Christians from the Church of the East, a Christian faction that was excommunicated from the wider Christian Church following the Counsel of Ephesus a century earlier, adopted the Indian Christian Community into their apostolic structure under their patriarch in Antioch.¹⁴ For the next several centuries, these Persian immigrants integrated with the local Christian

¹² Kerala, the Cradle of Christianity in South Asia: The Cultural Interface of Religion and Music, directed by Jain Joseph FTII, aired August 2, 2008 (Delhi, DVD Home Video, 2008), DVD. According to Christian tradition, the roots of Christianity in India stem from the first mission of St. Thomas the Apostle to the subcontinent in the first century. Christian tradition teaches that St. Thomas arrived at the ancient port city of Mussiris, today known as Parur Pattanam, in 52 C.E. and spent the next twenty years establishing Christian communities across the region before being martyred in Tamil Nadu. Historians debate the authenticity of this semi-historical narrative and many believe Christianity was actually brought over by early Christian merchants. Regardless, the seven Christian communities founded in this century remained a strong demographics within the societies of Kerala and Tamil Nadu, intermingling with the local Hindu cultures until the migration of Persian Christians to the region in the 4th century.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kerala, the Cradle of Christianity in South Asia: The Cultural Interface of Religion and Music, directed by Jain Joseph FTII, aired August 2, 2008 (Delhi, DVD Home Video, 2008), DVD. Christian tradition states that the Persian church was brought to India by the merchant Thomas of Cana. However, this remains disputed by historians who argue that Persian Christian culture was brought to India through trade and migration.

population and developed a fusion of Persian and Indian culture within the Christian community. The St. Thomas Christians adopted the Persian church's language, symbolism, and customs for use in the Mass and eventually fully integrated with the Church of the East.¹⁵

Despite adopting Syrian liturgical structures and using the Syrian language for their services, the St. Thomas Christians otherwise largely maintained local cultural practices. The St. Thomas Christians took this multiculturalism to heart and described their identity as *maar thomatte maargganum wazhipaatum* which translates to “the way and the lineage of St. Thomas” and utilizes words from Aramaic, Sanskrit, and Tamil.¹⁶ This phrase characterizes the identity of the local Christians as a hybrid of multiple cultures restructured within a Christian paradigm.

This ideal of multicultural Christian unity came to an abrupt halt with the arrival of Portuguese Catholic missionaries in the 16th century.¹⁷ The Catholic Church, while surprised to find Christians already living in India, attempted to supplant the local Persian churches as they believed a rival faction would prevent European dominance over the region's Christians. The Portuguese missionaries decried the interfaith mingling of the St. Thomas Christians and attempted to establish a European-style church that maintained a cultural distinction between local Hindus and Catholics. Many local Hindus and

¹⁶ Kerala, the Cradle of Christianity in South Asia: The Cultural Interface of Religion and Music, directed by Jain Joseph FTII, aired August 2, 2008 (Delhi, DVD Home Video, 2008), DVD.

¹⁷ The Roman Catholic Church follows what is known as the Latin Rite which are the rituals and customs of the churches under the authority of the Roman Pope. There are multiple different rites throughout Christianity and, as many of these rites often share the usage of the term “Catholic,” I will use the term “Latin” to describe the ritualistic nature of the Church and “Catholic” to describe the Church authority itself. The various other rites will be designated by their respective Eastern Rite titles.

Christians flocked to this Latin religion as European culture provided a way for lower caste Hindus to circumvent and escape their oppressed status.¹⁸ Moreover, as the Syrian Church practiced Nestorianism, a belief regarded as heretical by the Catholic Church, the Church of the East in India threatened the Catholic presence in India by calling into question Catholic doctrine.¹⁹

In 1597, a schism within the Church of the East provided an opportunity for the Catholic Church to assume control over the St. Thomas Christians. The divided Persian church was unable to send a new Bishop to India following the death of the last Persian Archbishop Mark Abraham several years before. During this interruption in ecclesiastical leadership, the Catholic Bishop of Goa, Alexio de Menezes, called a synod of all Indian Bishops where he appointed himself the Archbishop of all Christian churches in India and unilaterally claimed these churches for the Holy See.²⁰ This created a schism within the St. Thomas Christian community as many refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Catholic bishop or their forced conversion to Catholicism.²¹

This ecclesiastical coup eventually broke the Indian church in two; those who joined the Catholic Church were reestablished as the Eastern Rite Syro-Malabar Catholic Church while the dissenters abandoned Catholicism entirely; their community became a

¹⁸ Zoe Sherinian, *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology*, 2 – 3.

¹⁹ The division between the historical Christian church and the Syrian church stems from disagreements over the nature of Christ; Nestorian Christians believed that Christ was made up of two natures, one divine and one human, that were joined by will rather being a singular entity. This puts the Syrian church into direct conflict with all most other Christian sects as they are the only one to create a distinction between the two natures of Christ.

²⁰ *Kerala, the Cradle of Christianity in South Asia*.

²¹ *Ibid.*

branch of the Oriental Syrian Orthodox Church.²² However, several centuries later, members of the Oriental Church joined the Catholic Church as the Eastern Rite Syro-Malankara church. These two Eastern Rite churches are allowed by the Vatican to maintain their own cultural traditions so long as they attune to Catholic teaching and submit to the authority of the Pope in Rome.²³

Today, the three branches of the Catholic Church in India – the Roman Catholic Church (also known as the Latin Church), the Syro-Malabar Church, and the Syro-Malankara Church – work together under the Roman papacy in serving the greater Catholic community in South India.²⁴ All three branches utilize different liturgical and musical traditions in church services while sharing a common cultural background in secular society. While this happens throughout the Catholic Church to some extent, the distinctiveness of all three major Catholic denominations combined with their proximity creates a unique cultural landscape.

²² The Oriental Orthodox church is a loose collection of churches that broke away from the Christian church during the Council of Chalcedon in 451. These churches believe in Miaphysitism which interprets the nature of God as both Divine and Human united into one being. As opposed to the Catholic Church which follows Diophysitism, meaning that God is entirely human *AND* entirely divine.

²³ Alongside the Latin Rite, the Roman Catholic Church recognizes 25 Eastern Rite churches that are in full communion with the Catholic Church. While they hold their own traditions and customs, they are fully recognized theologically and politically as a part of the Catholic Church.

²⁴ The modern kaleidoscope of churches also includes four Oriental Orthodox Churches; The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, The Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, and the Malabar Independent Syrian Church. There also persists a Nestorian offshoot of the reestablished Assyrian Church of the East; the Chaldean Syrian Church, and the evangelical St. Thomas Evangelical Church.

History of Catholic Music in India

These three branches of the Catholic Church in India create a considerable amount of musical diversity. As stated, the liturgical traditions of the Syro-Malabarian and Syro-Malankara churches come from Persia and utilize the Aramaic language.²⁵ However, outside of these ritualistic structures, the St. Thomas Christians retained many local Hindu beliefs and practices such as caste distinctions, spiritual cleanliness, architecture, and quasi-religious social festivals.²⁶ Moreover, the music of the Syrian church in India, despite retaining its use of the Syriac language, slowly began to incorporate local Karnatak tonalities into their services. By the time the Portuguese invaded the continent in the 16th century, the tonal and melodic structure of these chants largely mirrored the music of local Hindu temples.²⁷ Today, these two churches primarily use a combination of Persian and Hindu musical traditions while using the Syrian language for their services.

The arrival of the Portuguese in the 14th century marked the first major break between Indian Christians and local musical culture. The Roman Catholic priests who traveled to the subcontinent disapproved of local Christians' use of Syrian and Hindu

²⁵ Paul Poovathingal, "Inculturation of Music in Indian Church" in *The Church and Culture in India, Inculturation: Theory and Praxis*, ed. Paul Pulikkan and Paul M. Collins (ISPCK, 2010), 128.

²⁶ Zoe Sherinian, "The Indigenization of Tamil Christian Music: Folk Music as a Liberative Transmission System" (PhD diss. Wesleyan University, 1998), 56.

²⁷ Sherinian, "The Indigenization of Tamil Christian Music", 58.

cultural practices. The Catholic Church in India was placed under the authority of the Archbishop of Lisbon because the Papacy regarded colonies as extensions of the homeland's ecclesiastical domain. These Portuguese religious authorities believed in a strict uniformity of the Latin Rite across the entirety of the Church. Additionally, the Church believed that local Indian music was incompatible with Church doctrine as this music was too closely associated with Hinduism.²⁸ Thus, the Latin Church in India instituted Western musical ideas, such as men's choirs and Gregorian chant, while abandoning the longstanding Syrian and Hindu traditions of the St. Thomas Christians. As a result, Western musical traditions became the dominant form of music within the Latin Church in India. Due to Portuguese dominance over the region of Goa, Goan Christians developed the strongest Western liturgical tradition in India, which persists to this day.²⁹

However, outside of the Mass, Christian music flourished as a combination of Eastern and Western tonalities and musical structures. While Western hymns were being introduced to the musical dialogue of the subcontinent, Indian hymns, known as "lyrics" and "*bhajans*," were developed based on the Karnatak musical system and began to spread into the secular culture of the Church.³⁰ While the Catholic liturgy used Western music and Latin hymns, these Indian hymns were performed regularly outside the Church and remain one of the more commonly performed styles in South India while functioning

²⁸ Poovathingal, "Inculturation of Music in Indian Church," 129–130.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Paul Poovathingal. "Karnatic Music and Christianity: An Ethnomusicological Approach." *Journal of Dharma* 40, 1 (January-March 2015): 77–94.

as a popular response to the introduction of Christianity into the region. This popular music draws musical inspiration from all styles of music from across India as well as Western popular musical traditions.

The dominance of Gregorian and Western music persisted unabated until the Second Vatican Council in the mid-20th century. Designed to “open up the windows and let the fresh air in,” this council threw out the homogeneous nature of the Latin Rite and allowed regional bishops to incorporate local customs and traditions into their church services.³¹ Throughout the Church, local dioceses began adopting local music traditions ranging from cultural links to their communities rather than relying on the homogeneous Latin music which dominated liturgical music in the previous decades. The rules laid out during this Council completely transformed the musical tradition of the Catholic Church in India as the College of Bishops decided to abandon older traditions in favor of interculturalism and modernity. As stated by the constitution of the Second Vatican Council:

In certain countries, especially in mission lands, there are people who have their own musical tradition, and this plays a great part in their religious and social life, for this reason, their music should be held in proper esteem and a suitable place is given to it, not only in forming their religious sense but also in adapting worship to their native genius.³²

With its rich musical legacy encompassing multiple different traditions, the Catholic Church in India created prime conditions for a musical revolution. While the Syro-Malabar and Syro- Malankara churches were allowed by the Vatican to keep their

³¹ Pope John XXIII, quoted by Stephen Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 5.

³² The Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, quoted by Stephen Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 7.

traditional music, the Roman Catholic Church developed a cultural lexicon that combined Eastern and Western traditions in a unique musical landscape.

The Relationship Between Karnatak Music and the Catholic Church

The introduction of local traditions following the Second Vatican Council enabled a diverse and unique blend of music and traditions to take root. When it comes to Karnatak music, the Catholic Church in India faced a unique dilemma as the Church community already had a cultural connection to the music, but not a religious one. As a result, the Catholic Church tried to reintroduce local Christians to their own musical culture in a new context. This process had varying results as local communities tended to have different preferences concerning the music of the Mass. To accomplish this intercultural goal, parishes across India adopted a variety of musical styles including fully Karnatak masses, fully Western masses, or a hybridization of both styles. This project will primarily focus on fully Karnatak mass traditions and hybrid traditions to provide a more focused analysis of how Indian churches use and understand music.³³

The dominance of Karnatak music across the Indian Catholic Church originated with the Portuguese missionaries' efforts to convert upper-caste and upper-class Hindus. While Catholic missionaries extensively converted lower-caste populations, the Vatican believed that the conversion of people from *Brahmin* and *Kshatriya* castes would help the Catholic Church establish a foothold in the region through its acceptance by aristocratic

³³ The term "Semi-classical style" has multiple definitions in Indian musical tradition. For this paper, I am using the definition outlined by Joseph J. Palakal. He states that the semi-classical style is a simplified form of Karnatak music which is easier to sing than traditional Karnatak classical music.

circles.³⁴ While there was no widespread conversion among upper-caste Hindus, a significant number did convert to the new faith. However, these upper-caste converts convinced local bishops to adopt discriminatory practices against lower-caste Catholics including restrictions against the attendance by lower-caste Hindus at many seminaries.³⁵ Upper-caste converts obtained a favored status in the Church and, while this exclusion was later removed under pressure from the Vatican and lower-caste priests, the legacy of this discrimination persists in the cultural dominance of upper-caste Hindu culture and traditions.

The Church's focus on upper-caste Hindus combined with the early prevalence of priests from this demographic resulted in the widespread adoption of upper-class music and traditions. Folk music was largely excluded from early discussions of adopting local music in favor of incorporating Hindustani and Karnatak traditions.³⁶ Immediately following the Second Vatican Council, the leading bishops in India proposed establishing two specialized schools of music for the incorporation of Karnatak and Hindustani music.³⁷ However, despite South India holding most of the Catholic population, the Church only founded the northern Hindustani school. Karnatak music largely flourished under semi-independent Catholic organizations such as the Jesuit-run Kala Darshini Institute of Fine Arts and Culture in Andhra and the Chetana Sangeet Natya Academy.

³⁴ Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Caste, Class and Catholicism in India: 1789-1914* (Surrey, Curzon Press, 1998), 113-114.

³⁵ Ballhatchet, *Caste, Class and Catholicism in India*, 124.

³⁶ Stephen Duncan, *A Genre in Hindustani Music (Bhajans) as Used in the Roman Catholic Church* (New York: Edward Mellen Press, 1999), 10-11.

³⁷ Duncan, *A Genre in Hindustani Music (Bhajans) as Used in the Roman Catholic Church*, 11.

However, these organizations still favored classical Karnatak music over folk traditions which furthered the enshrined Karnatak music as the dominant musical tradition within the Church.³⁸

³⁸ During my interview with Fr. YC, he showed me video productions of music and dance performances from several Catholic Schools and Colleges in southern India. Throughout the entirety of my research, I did not find any professional studies of music outside of Classical Karnatak music or dance. While some folk music was used for outside religious services, traditional religious education focused on established art and musical forms. Catholic colleges in the west also tend to give classical music a distinguished place so this may have international foundations. Moreover, ecclesiastical organizations like the Catholic Bishops conference of regularly promote traditional Indian arts and dance during their festivals.

Karnatak Music and Catholic Identity

The Catholic Church in India holds Karnatak music in a distinguished place and regularly uses its music for liturgical purposes. While Western music remains common, the Catholic Church in India has attempted to push Karnatak music to the forefront of the liturgical process. These two masses demonstrate the use of local Hindu music traditions as adapted by the Catholic Church in South India and how they hold a centralized place in Catholic media. The first mass, an Ordination Mass of Fr. Jerome Dhas Varuvel in December 2014, demonstrates the use of Hindi style hymns with Karnatak music and the adoption of the dance style of Bharatanatyam.³⁹ The opening begins with an instrumental intonation of the rag, or in this case, a major scale, followed by Christian Bhajan. The music also begins with a synthetic bell tone which is a commonly rung at the start of other Hindu hymns and Bhajans. The music itself includes traditional Karnatak instruments such as the Veena and the tabla while the vocal line, while simple, takes utilizes the *meend* (the bending of notes for ornamentation).

These masses also include music and traditions commonly associated with Hindu temple worship and spirituality. The procession includes Bharatanatyam dancers in traditional clothing. Regarded as one of the oldest dancing traditions in India, this style of classical Karnatak dance stems from Hindu temple worship before the practice was

³⁹ Miriyam TV, Holy mass | Bishop Ordination | Kuzhithurai diocese|Miriyaam tv | tamil christian mass | jerome dhass, YouTube video, 3:32:38, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWTuyg4aF24>.

outlawed by the British Raj in 1910. The second video is from the Catholic Bishop of India Conference from January 2019 and demonstrates the use of the *nadaswaram* (a double-reed wind instrument) and *thavil* (a barrel-shaped drum used in temple and folk music), which were borrowed from traditional Hindu ceremonial processions.⁴⁰ The adoption of these musical and religious traditions, and the centralized space that they hold in a prominent televised religious service, indicates their recognition by the Catholic Church as a part of Catholic.

Figure 1: *nadaswaram* and *thavil*



The prevalence of Karnatak music in the Church can be seen through this genre's central place in Catholic popular media and these online productions. While hundreds of

⁴⁰ Arputhar Yesu TV, Catholic Bishop Of India Conference 13-01-2019 Part 2 Grand Holy Mass, YouTube video, 1:49:23, Jan 16, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSEsIJJGhYY>.

This mass serves as a choice example for the use of the *Nadaswaram* and *Thavil* in the Catholic processional. This performance functions similarly to traditional Hindu processions which use the same instruments.

recordings of Catholic masses using a variety of musical styles can be found in Indian media, the official channels of the Indian Dioceses and productions by Catholic TV in South India favor Karnatak masses for larger productions and higher profile church services.⁴¹ While some Masses include elements of Western music, hybrid music, or Gregorian chant, Karnatak music typically takes center stage in these media productions.

The prevalence of Karnatak music in media from the Indian Catholic Church largely stems from the dominance of wealthier churches. These churches are often under the direct authority of bishops who hold considerable influence over church practices. As these bishops often preside over Karnatak masses, their influence sequentially reinforces the position of Karnatak music as the official tradition of the Church. Moreover, as Karnatak music requires extensive training and expensive instruments, only wealthier churches can afford to utilize this style of music in the Mass. However, due to this media presence, Karnatak music becomes the de facto musical standard for the Church as a whole. While problematically hegemonic, in establishing Karnatak music as a center point of Indian Catholic music, the Church in India nevertheless manages to establish a bridge between the musical traditions of the larger Catholic Church and local cultural dynamics. In effect, this creates a trickle-down cultural exchange where the wealthier churches, through their media presence, spread the performance of Karnatak music and

⁴¹ Miriyam TV, Holy mass | Bishop Ordination | Kuzhithurai diocese|Miriyam tv | tamil christian mass | jerome dhass, YouTube video, 3:32:38, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qWTuyg4aF24>. Recordings of Catholic masses can be found throughout Indian media and across YouTube. These productions use a wide variety of music ranging from entirely Western English masses, traditional Karnatak music, to hybridization using 21st century instruments and electronic audio. However, productions involving the ordination of bishops of largescale masses place these Karnatak traditions at the forefront of the Mass structure. While there are many examples, this Ordination mass serves as a principle example as it includes everything from traditional Karnatak instruments and musical forms to traditional dancing during the procession.

the cultural beliefs associated with its performance, throughout the Catholic community in India.

Fr. YC had some experience serving in larger urban churches that used Karnatak compositions. When asked about his experience, Fr. YC provided considerable insight into how Catholics from South India adopt local music traditions into the Mass. He stated

In the past, there have been many attempts to bring our own music into the Church and to connect the Mass to our history. In the Church, we called this “interculturalization” which tried to blend our religious beliefs with our cultural ones. The style of music, this Karnatak music, and in the north, Hindustani music, is still our own culture. Only it has been refocused to incorporate the Catholic faith. This faith remains the most important part of the music and as long as the music does not impede this belief it is allowed in the Mass.⁴²

When asked what he considered to be the most appropriate music for Indian Churches, Fr. YC argued that Church music should cater to the interests and tastes of the parishioners. As Catholics believe that “those who sing pray twice,” whatever inspires the community to take an active role in praying during the Mass constitutes appropriate music.⁴³ Fr. YC insisted that all styles and genres of music, Karnatak, Western, or otherwise, can be regarded as Catholic in nature when accepted and performed by the Church community in common prayer. Due to this belief, any music “can be Catholic music because that is who we are.”⁴⁴ In this regard, the Karnatak music performed in

⁴² Fr. Chinnaiah Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, Personal Interview by author, December 20, 2018.

⁴³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church attributes this quote to St. Augustine. The original text states: “For he that singeth praise, not only praiseth, but only praiseth with gladness: he that singeth praise, not only singeth, but also loveth him of whom he singeth. In praise, there is the speaking forth of one confessing; in singing, the affection of one loving.”(St. Augustine, Commentary on Psalm 73, 1)

⁴⁴ Fr. Chinnaiah Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, Personal Interview by author, December 20, 2018.

Catholic churches across South India becomes identifiably Catholic, due to the Church's understanding of identity as something dependent on the communities' collective prayer. As Fr. YC states quite clearly: "We are Catholic, and our own music is appropriate because we are Catholic."⁴⁵

This phrase, "because we are Catholic," appeared several times during our conversation. As our discussion shifted to the Church's support for the arts and the establishment of Catholic-run music schools, Fr. YC continued to describe any kind of music performed by Catholics as "Christian music" rather than Karnatak or Indian, despite the distinctively Hindu and Indian cultural foundation of the music. This phrase provides considerable insight into Fr. YC's relationship with the Indian and Catholic aspects of his individual identity. He centers his identity on Christianity and, by extension, the Karnatak music he sings or performs becomes Christian. This music simply resonates more with Fr. YC's identity as a Catholic rather than his identity as an Indian which, in turn, reflects his larger ideas about both music and religion in general.

The collective act of singing or performing within the Church itself further cements an interpretation of this music, at least from the perspective of the Catholic community, as distinctively Catholic. The Catholic Church professes that the word of God manifests through the actions of the community. Thus, by acting as a community in the process of worship, this action creates a three-way connection between the community, the Christians of the past, and God. The music of the Catholic Church functions in the same manner as it serves as both a spiritual and cultural connection

⁴⁵ Fr. Chinnaiah Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, Personal Interview by author, December 20, 2018.

between the community itself, God, and the wider Catholic Church. Thus, “because we are Catholic” constitutes a much more significant mindset as it reflects the idea of the Christian community as the centerpiece of both cultural identity and religious belief. These musical traditions, regardless of their history, practice, or musical form, are regarded as Catholic music because they are used to unite members of the Church community both to one another and to God.

Fr. Alphonse went into firsthand detail about the cultural implications of the Church’s introduction of Karnatak music into the Mass. As he describes, following the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the bishops of India instituted a conclave to establish what changes would be permitted to the local Catholic liturgy and how local musical traditions could be adapted into the Mass. Fr. Alphonse outlined this concept in our interview, stating:

...in the 80s some priests have influenced the Catholic Church with the ideas of culturalization. As people find it difficult to understand the Western way of worship, we include aspects of Hindu worship so that they can understand well. For example, we have in Hindu culture called *halati* where we welcome guests when they enter your house, which is with coconut or camphor lit plate they show they wave three times around you and cast the evil eye away from you. These kinds of things in the churches, they do the *halati* to welcome the priest to the Mass [and] the people to celebrate mass. Those kinds of things, although not liturgically correct, we do them before the Mass starts or some things after the Mass has ended, just to be in touch with Indian culture.⁴⁶

To achieve this fusion of Indian culture with the Catholic mass, the Bishops of India began by focusing on local Hindu religious practices, traditions, and philosophies to create a bridge between local cultures and the Church. The Church underwent this

⁴⁶ Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli, personal interview by author, March 22, 2019.

process in two phases. First, the local bishops began bringing more superficial aspects of religious worship into the Mass such as the use of local religious garments, flowers, objects such as lamps and trays, the removal of footwear in the Church, and the use of *anjali hasta*, a type of bow used instead of traditional Western genuflection.⁴⁷ This allowed the Church to develop a stronger connection to both local Christians and the wider Hindu community as the common use of these shared practices creates a more uniform cultural mindset which attunes the Catholic community to broader Indian society.

Catholics in South India also incorporate many traditional Indian festivals and celebrations into their cultural practices. As outlined by Margaret Meibohm in her work “Past Selves and Present Others: The Ritual Construction of Identity at a Catholic festival in India,” these festivals incorporate various Hindu practices.⁴⁸ Catholics regularly adopt traditional elements such as the procession and the carrying of an idol through the town. This practice was easily incorporated into the wider Church as Catholics regularly use processions as a form of religious devotion. Indian Catholics simply replaced their Hindu symbols with statues of Mary, the saints, or other religious figures.⁴⁹

Moreover, Catholic communities regularly hire local Hindu musicians which strengthens their relationship with the local Hindu community. As previously stated,

⁴⁷ Stephen Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 17.

⁴⁸ Margaret Meibohm, “Past Selves and Present Others: The Ritual Construction of Identity at a Catholic Festival in India,” in *Popular Christianity in India: Riting Between the Lines*, ed. Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 69.

⁴⁹ Joanne Punzo Waghorne, “Chariots of the God/s: Riding the Line Between Hindu and Christian,” in *Popular Christianity in India: Riting Between the Lines*, ed. Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), 12-13.

Catholic parishes often hire Hindu musicians to perform the *nadaswaram* and *thavil*, staples of Hindu festivals and ceremonies, in large scale media events such as the ordinations of Bishops. This shared use of instruments for similar religious practices further reinforces the cultural fluidity between Indian and Catholic societies.⁵⁰ As Meibohm states, this practice “clearly calls to mind Hindu references. Hindu practices are not only ... of the religious majority, but also of the past Self.” She continues, stating: “the sharing of elements with Hindu temples, while enabling an encounter with the Other, can be simultaneously viewed as valid Catholicism, since the Roman Catholic Church now encourages interculturalism.”⁵¹ The use of these traditions rationalizes and legitimizes Indian cultural practices as distinctively Catholic rather than a foreign addition to the Church’s societal foundation.

While both Fr. YC and Fr. Alphonse described how their home parishes took part in local festivals, the Festival of Light Redeemer and the Harvest Festival respectively, Fr. Alphonse’s description primarily revolved around pragmatic aspects of the Church’s attempt to connect with their community. Moreover, Fr. Alphonse presented the notion that these practices are embedded into the modern church due to their popularity and local historicity rather than for any cultural or religious purpose. He argued that the Catholic attendance of these festivals primarily comes from a cultural reverence for community worship regardless of its historical origin.⁵² Moreover, he argues that both

⁵⁰ Meibohm, “Past Selves and Present Others,” 71.

Examples of these instruments as used by the Catholic Church can be seen in the ordination mass and the Mass from the conference of bishops provided earlier on page 17.

⁵¹ Ibid., 70.

⁵² Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli, personal interview by author, March 22, 2019.

Hindus and Catholics share a deep appreciation for the act of pilgrimage which promotes the popularity of these festivals to both religions.⁵³ Again, due to the community-centric nature of the Catholic Church, the popularity of these festivals constitutes the reason for their use within the wider Indian Catholic community as they promote collective prayer and a connection to the past.

Fr. YC's discussion, per his culturally-focused approach to these traditions, centered on the community's relationship with these practices and how they impact the identity of local Catholics. He specifically referred to these as "Catholic" festivals regardless of their historical origins and Hindu connotations. When asked about the Hindu origins of these practices, Fr. YC elaborated on Fr. Alphonse's idea, arguing that "the most important part of these festivals is the people who attend them. Catholics love their community and when we worship together as Catholics, the faith of the people becomes stronger. It connects us to both our culture and our faith in God."⁵⁴ This relationship with the divine reinforces the notion that these practices, music and all, are regarded as identifiably Catholic. Local Christians do not regard these traditionally Hindu practices as part of a foreign religion, rather the Catholic Church in India uses these festivals to connect to their understanding of God through an established form of community worship.

⁵³ Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli, personal interview by author, March 22, 2019.

⁵⁴ Fr. Chinnaiah Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, personal interview by author, December 20, 2018.

The Use and Rationalization of Hindu Musical Traditions in the Catholic Church

In our conversations, both Fr. Alphonse and Fr. YC indicated that the Catholic Church in India maintains a two-tiered system for adopting Hindu cultural elements. Whenever some theological foundation can be rationalized for the adoption of these practices, the Catholic Church, in some regard, acknowledges the theological connection and attempts to bring its philosophies in line with church teaching. This can be seen in the Catholic adoption of Hindu practices such as *bhakti* (the practice of devotional worship).⁵⁵ However, traditions such as *halati* (a ritual welcoming of guests) and the use of *dhrishti bommais* (images of demons used to ward off the evil eye) do not attune to Catholic teaching but are still used occasionally by the Catholic community.⁵⁶ The Catholic Church rationalizes the use of these incompatible traditions within the Catholic community and the Church itself by dismissing them as mere cultural traditions rather than religious belief. This allows Catholics in India to maintain some of their local cultural practices while still bringing their beliefs, at least in a liturgical sense, in line with the wider church.

⁵⁵ In Hindu tradition, *bhakti* refers to both the yoga dedicated to worship of a divine being and the practice of worshiping itself. In this context, the Catholic Church is adopting the practice of *bhakti* and the music associated with *bhakti* worship. However, the Church does officially recognize the yoga of *bhakti* in a liturgical sense. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be using the latter definition of devotional practice.

⁵⁶ In southern India, the evil eye is a symbol of bad luck and misfortune. The symbolism stems from the idea that bad luck can be drawn by a malevolent glare from a jealous person. This concept appears in numerous cultures throughout southeast Asia and there are myriad of practices aimed at warding off its bad luck.

During the second stage of “interculturalization,” as it became known, the Catholic Church focused on the adaptation and utilization of local religious traditions and their musical customs. The Catholic Church utilized the Hindu practice of *bhakti*, or devotion, in order to create a bridge between Hinduism and Catholic teaching.⁵⁷ In Hinduism, practitioners regard *bhakti* as one of the paths to spirituality and enlightenment alongside *jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (works), and *raja* (meditation).⁵⁸ Of these paths, *bhakti* holds a unique position as it explicitly focuses on the worship of a deity rather than obtaining spirituality through personal works or actions. Moreover, in *bhakti*, the devotee (*bhakta*) recognizes their capacity for a personal relationship with God.⁵⁹ Moreover, this tradition already incorporates group worship and an established musical tradition. These two aspects made the *bhakti* tradition of Hinduism a prime starting point for intermingling Hindu and Catholic beliefs, as both traditions hold remarkably analogous spiritual philosophies and practices.

Due to this significant philosophical overlap and *bhakti*’s emphasis on communal worship, its musical traditions, called *samvet bhajan* (devotional songs), were easily adapted into the Latin rite of the Catholic Church.⁶⁰ As described by Fr. Amalorpavadass, the founding director of the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (N.B.C.L.C.),

⁵⁷ Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 21-22.

⁵⁸ In Hinduism, these practices are regarded as the Yogas. The Yogas are different paths for one to reach Brahman or enlightenment.

⁵⁹ Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 22.

⁶⁰ Fr. Amalorpavadass, as quoted by Stephen Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 23

[The bhajan] has contributed very much towards the inculturation of Christian worship. It has helped create an atmosphere of recollection and prayerfulness in our liturgical celebrations and prayer services. The N.B.C.L.C. presents these bhajans in order to help people learn them and thus promote their use, more and more, in our Christian communities. It is our earnest desire that all those who make use of [these publications] may be blessed with deep listening to these bhajans.⁶¹

These musical traditions were introduced slowly throughout the latter half of the 20th century as Indian Christians had become accustomed to the Western and Gregorian musical styles that dominated the Latin church during the previous decades. Apart from the state of Goa, where the Church continued to predominately use Western liturgical music, the Catholic Church in South India eventually moved to intertwine, and in some cases completely replace, Western repertoire with Karnatak music. However, it is important to note that much of the Church's adoption of Karnatak music primarily comes from Hindu devotional music rather than classical Karnatak performances that use Karnatak structures such as *kriti*. However, both the priests I interviewed and most scholars in this field continue to describe this music as Karnatak music rather than Hindu music.

⁶¹ Fr. Amalorpavadass, as quoted by Stephen Duncan, "Christian Bhajans," 23

The *Kirtan* and *Bhajan* as used by the Catholic Church

A primary genre of music found in *bhakti*, known as *kirtan*, can be described as a form of repetitive and sustained chanting on a spiritual text.⁶² Largely taking the place of the orders of the Mass such as the *Gloria*, *Angus Dei*, and the *Holy, Holy, Holy*, this form of traditional Indian music revolves around a sustained chanting accompanied by traditional Indian instruments from both the Karnatak and Hindustani traditions.⁶³ The performance of *kirtan* depends on the practice of collective chant in addition to a specific focus on worship.

While other forms of religious music used by the Catholic Church, such as *bhajans*, utilize similar practices, *kirtans* hold a distinctive place in both Hindu and Catholic cultures as it is intended to be a collective form of prayer rather than a musical reflection for the individual. In traditional Hindu musical practice, worshipers primarily use *kirtan* in a group musical process that depends on collective chanting and worship. In the Catholic Church, *kirtans* focus on a singular idea, in contrast to *bhajans*, which revolve around one's musical reflection.⁶⁴ As *kirtans* singing is restricted to traditional religious texts, the Catholic Church in India primarily uses this form of chanting during

⁶² It is important to note that the definitions of *bhajans* and *kirtans* are relatively flexible throughout Indian religious music. For the purpose of this article, I am adopting the definitions as outlined by Stephen Duncan in his theses which designates *bhajan* as a call and response hymn and the *kirtan* as a unison chant.

⁶³ Duncan, "Christian Bhajans," 34 – 35.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

the Order of the Mass, as it is already a collective form of worship with a primary focus on the praise of God.

The second form of music, *bhajans*, utilize a choral form of music centered on a call-and-response structure like an antiphon in Western Catholic music. In this style, the cantor, often the priest, recites a phrase that the congregation repeats in unison. In forms of Hindu *bhakti* worship, devotees sing well-known Hindu poetry using a pre-established structure.⁶⁵ According to Stephen Duncan, these songs exist in two forms, *thodaya mangala*, pieces dedicated to Hindu saints, and *bivyanama bhajans*, which invoke the divine through various gods and goddesses of Hindu scripture.⁶⁶ While the worship of other gods has many incompatibilities with Catholic teaching, the very nature of worshipping a divine being through this musical process parallels the Catholic belief that singing is a form of musical worship and devotional practice. Thus, the Catholic Church rationalizes its use within the liturgy as this shared philosophical foundation allows for *bhajans* to become fully integrated into the Catholic mass without fundamentally changing its original religious *raison d'être*.

In the Catholic liturgy, the *Bhajan* follows a similar pattern as the priest or cantor recites passages of chant which the congregation then repeats. However, the main difference between Hindu and Catholic Bhajans is the text itself as the Catholic Church uses a pre-determined liturgy for the Mass interspersed with devotional hymns.⁶⁷

⁶⁵Duncan, "Christian Bhajans," 25.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 24.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 25.

Additionally, the Catholic Church in India utilizes this musical style in religious practices outside of the Mass proper, such as group renditions of the Rosary, the Stations of the Cross, and the Liturgy of the Hours.⁶⁸ The use of *bhajans* embodies the strongest musical connection between local Hindu culture and Catholic liturgical practice and becomes the most commonly used style of singing within Karnatak-style masses in South India.

Moreover, the Catholic Church also uses *bhajans* in the place of hymns throughout the Mass. While many of these songs are based on Psalms or religious scripture, the Church allows for religious poetry to be used if it has been approved by a Catholic bishop. These *bhajans* can serve as an intellectual and musical bridge between the Catholic Church and the outside Christian community as they are commonly sold outside of the Church as CDs and albums and are used regularly for unofficial religious worship.

The texts of many of these *bhajans* include significant aspects of Hindu culture and theology. For example, Fr. Joseph J. Palackal, a priest and composer from South India, composed the *bhajan* “*Om, Jagat Jyothi*” (“*Om, Light of the World*”). Adapted from the poetry of Fr. Johnny Manavalan, CMI, and released by Cardinal Joseph Parecattil in 1979, this *bhajan* demonstrates the Church’s adoption of Hindu symbolism and philosophies by interspersing them with Christian beliefs. The song text reads:

*Om, the Light of the world, Jesus, Lord
Ever new and eternal is your embodiment of truth
The effulgent luster of light on earth
Om, the Light of the world, I bow to Thee.*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 25.

⁶⁹ Joseph J. Palackal, “*Om Jagat Jyothi* sung by Joseph J. Palackal,” YouTube Video, 2:09, April 10, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=la3yehOYt_g.

This text depicts a powerful parallel between the traditional Catholic concept of Jesus as “light” and the Hindu concept of *Om*. Often spelled A – U – M, this concept holds a distinctive place in South Asian spirituality as one of the most sacred symbols in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, and Jainism. This sound, written as ॐ in the traditional Devanagari script, or ஐ in Tamil, or ॐ in Malayalam, represents the fundamental sound of the universe as well as the only physical form of *Brahman*, the Hindu understanding of the Universal divine. In the *bhajan* “*Om, Jagat Jyothi*,” rather than completely replacing Hindu philosophy with Catholic doctrine, the composer treats *Om* as a philosophical steppingstone to establish the nature of Christ within a local understanding of spirituality. Moreover, this parallel gives the abstract nature of *Om* a concrete form through the image of Jesus as the “Light of the World.” Thus, the composer presents Christ as the true concept of *Om*.

A simple song, this *bhajan* begins with a series of virtuosic solo instrumental lines outlining the notes of the piece. In this case, the music follows an Ionian scale. According to Fr. Ambrose, the major and minor scales are common throughout Christian music in India as the congregation finds it easy to sing. The music then utilizes traditional Indian instruments beginning with a *tanpura* whose drone persists throughout the entirety of the piece. In the interludes between vocal verses, sitar and bansuri (bamboo flute) are used to mirror the vocal lines and create a continuous melody.

At least musically, this work can almost be regarded as a traditional *bhajan* as its instrumentation and structure parallel contemporary recordings of Hindu devotional music. This Christian production also includes the use of bells, a musical element that can

be seen in numerous Hindu and Christian bhajans. The simple music maintains a firm diatonic foundation with only subtle ornamentation on the key phrases such as “Jesus, Lord” and “I bow to thee.” This creates for an easy-to-sing *bhajan* which would have been simple to learn by local Christians while still maintaining a firm connection to Catholic liturgical doctrine and local musical cultures.

“*Om, Jagat Jyothi*” includes several musical practices that are commonly associated with Hindu spirituality. This work begins with intonation on *Sa* (the name for the tonic note in the Karnatak system) around the word *Om*. The practice of establishing the tonal center of the song on *Sa* has several significant connections to both Indian music and culture. In both Karnatak and Hindustani music, musicians typically begin their performances by establishing *Sa* and then building upon this intonation through the development of the raga.

Moreover, this holds some spiritual connotations as Karnatak musicians utilize the intonation on *Sa* as a meditative practice that sets up the act of performing music. In both Karnatak and Hindustani classical music, the practice of performing carries considerable religious significance. Musicians treat it as a sacred practice that is recognized through the removal of footwear alongside veneration and reverence for the performance space itself. Catholic musicians often adopt these practices in their performances both within and outside of the Church which further establishes the connection between Catholic belief and local spirituality.

By adopting the Karnatak practice of intoning *Sa*, the musicians are incorporating aspects of Karnatak music that maintain a distinctive connection to Indian and Hindu spirituality. This is reflected in the performance practices of Catholic

musicians from India, such as Fr. Paul Poovathingal and Dr. Joseph J. Palackal, who also utilize these traditional aspects of Hindu performance despite their connection to Indian spirituality.⁷⁰ However, this practice tends to fall under the same classification as many other cultural traditions regarded as superficial by the Catholic Church. Specifically, these traditions are allowed because the Church dismisses them as leftovers from the Catholic community's original Indian culture rather than a distinctively Hindu practice. In a way, the Church ignores the practice's theological foundation as a rationalization for its persistence in Catholic performance practice. Regardless, the very act of adopting the spiritual aspects of Karnatak musical practices demonstrates the Church's acceptance of local traditions and their place in religious music.

As stated, Catholic composers in India use *Om* regularly to depict the nature of Christ. This unnamed hymn, produced by the N.B.C.L.C. and included in their official hymnal, expands upon the use of this word and its relationship to Catholic philosophy.

O Christ be my savior
Giver of Salvation, have mercy on me
O Giver of the way, by my savior,
Om the Word, have mercy on me,
O the Primeval Word, the Word of God,
Eternal Word save me.

Om the Power, have mercy on me
O the power of the Father, and of the Son
O Eternal power, come to my rescue
Om the Primeval Power, the Power of God,
The Eternal power have mercy on me.
O the Power of desire, Knowledge and work,

⁷⁰ Paul Oivattgubgal, "Dr Fr Poovathingal CMI," YouTube video, 35:07, May 22, 2016.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1qk2B8OkVw>.

Numerous recordings of classical Karnatak concerts by Fr. Paul Poovathingal can be found throughout the internet and on YouTube. In all cases, Fr. Paul follows the traditional spiritual practices of performing Karnatak music including the removal of shoes and the use of a rug for performance. This recording demonstrates one example of his performance practice.

Be my savior
Om the One who is, Have mercy on me
Om the Peace, be my savior⁷¹

In this case, the poet uses *Om* as another name for Christ himself as the root of all the universe. The poem specifically refers to *Om* as the “Primeval Power” which coincides with the Hindu belief that *Om* existed long before the world came into being. By associating this symbol with the Christian understanding of God and Jesus, the poet creates a direct parallel between Hinduism and Christianity that establishes God as one who makes up the entire universe and has existed since time aeternam.

In these two songs, the composers merely interject Catholic doctrine into a previously established Hindu philosophical understanding of the nature of God. This amalgamation of Hindu and Catholic philosophies establishes a cultural pathway between Hindu and Christian beliefs by utilizing well-known religious symbolism and philosophical belief. Thus, Indian Christian converts could easily contextualize the nature of Christ as the provenance of creation without deviating from their established spiritual understandings. The use of *Om* within liturgical music allows the Catholic Church to establish itself as a part of the Indian religious landscape. Connecting to shared religious themes creates an idea of locality and local presence to the Catholic understanding of God. This establishes a firm connection between the local Hindu identity and the wider Catholic Church as it uses commonly-known religious symbolism to express Catholic beliefs in a new context.

⁷¹ 37. *Bhajans: A Collection of 50 songs of praise in various languages as used at the NBCLC* (Bangalore: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre, 1978), 71 – 18.

The *Namajapa* as used by the Catholic Church

The *namajapa*, a form of *bhajan*, has also risen to considerable prominence amongst the Catholic communities in South India.⁷² This musical practice comes from the *Bhakti* tradition of reciting the many names of Hindu Gods, particularly Vishnu.⁷³ As Vishnu and other Hindu deities appear throughout Hindu mythology in many forms and utilizing many different names, Hindus regard the practice of the *Namajapa*, which fundamentally consists of the meditative chanting of various names of the divine, as a spiritual way for one to “seek the appropriate relationship with the eternal.”⁷⁴

This same liturgical methodology commonly appears in Western Christian traditions. Hymns dedicated to the various names of Christ are popular among Christian populations and hold prominent places in liturgical services. Philosophically speaking, the name of Christ has always had a distinguished place in Catholic theology as the various titles themselves are regarded by the Church as representations of the “divine truth” which is revealed “to them that believe on his name.”⁷⁵ As described by the theologian Arthur Pink,

By the Name of the Lord our God is signified God Himself as He is made known to us, including everything through which He has been pleased to reveal Himself: His Word, His titles, His attributes, His ordinances, His

⁷² Duncan, “Christian Bhajans,” 33.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Arthur Pink, *Ten Commandments* (Indiana: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 2003), 23.
John 1:12 (NRSV)

works. The Name of God stands for His very nature and being, as in Psalm 20:1; 135:3; John 1:12, etc.⁷⁶

The Christian Bible contains numerous references to and variations of the “hallowed” name of God including a decree for its reverence in the 3rd commandment.⁷⁷ According to the theologian Louis Berkhof, the many names of God are used to contextualize the infinite unknowable. Thus, the use and practice of the names of God are regarded by Catholic theologians as acts of prayer, reverence, and worship.⁷⁸ This mentality extends to various other Catholic religious figures such as Mary and the Saints whose titles are used, while more symbolically than the names of God, as examples of the vastness and universality of the Church and the teachings of Christ.

While the musical form of *namajapa* primarily appears as a hymn in Catholic services, several segments of the Latin Mass adopt this style due to its similarity in musical structure and liturgical function. For example, the Breaking of the Bread, one of the most sacred sections of the Mass, takes place just before the communion of the Eucharist and consists of a rendition of a series of divine titles of Christ: Lamb of God, Lord of Lords, Prince of Peace, followed by the passage “you take away the sins of the world, grant us your peace.” By using the *namajapa* song form in these sections, the Catholic Church in India is adapting a traditional form of music almost seamlessly into the liturgy. The original musical form contains a strikingly similar structure and

⁷⁶ Arthur Pink, *Ten Commandments*, 23.

⁷⁷ While the Bible includes many sections professing the sacredness of the name of God, the most commonly cited in theological studies are John 1:12, Micah 4:5, and Rev 3:12.

⁷⁸ Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Christian Doctrine* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1939), 19 – 20.

philosophical foundation to what was already used by the Church within the Mass.

Through the use of the *namajapa* song form, however, the Church in India explicitly adopts a local Hindu tradition into church practices.

Another commonly performed musical rendition of the *namajapa* in the Catholic Church appears during the *Litanie Sanctorum* or the Litany of the Saints. In this liturgical practice, primarily used during feast days or the confirmation of new priests and religious (a term for other ordained people, such as monks, nuns, and deacons), the cantor recites an extensive list of Saints followed by a segment presenting the various titles of Christ. In all three renditions of the piece that I have analyzed for this project—in Tamil, Malayalam, and English—the same musical format is utilized with some instrumental and modal disparities. The English and Tamil variations use Western music with some Indian influences while the Malayalam version uses entirely Karnatak music.⁷⁹ While these variations are very different from one another stylistically, their liturgical and structural characteristics demonstrate the fluidity of this musical form across Catholic and Hindu cultures.

Due to the strong liturgical similarity between Catholic and Hindu philosophies concerning the sacredness of names, the *namajapa* song genre finds a solid place within the religious lexicon of South India.⁸⁰ Despite this, there have been several attempts by Catholic composers in India to use this musical form to create a stronger cultural

⁷⁹ Satheesh George, “Litany of all saints – Malayalam,” YouTube Video, 7:40, Published October 31, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCkQh_2UfXI&list=RDaCkQh_2UfXI&start_radio=1. Mercy TV, “புனிதர்கள் மன்றாட்டு | All Saints Litany in Tamil | Punithargal Mandrattu” YouTube Video, 7:58. Published April 12, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CNgSWeqxAVM>.

⁸⁰ However, many of these connections are largely coincidental as these musical forms already existed in both cultures and held major religious significance long before Europeans brought Catholicism to India.

connection between Hindu and Catholic spirituality and philosophy through this shared medium.

The major musical work *Kristu Sahasra Namam, The Thousand Names of Jesus Christ*, by Fr. Francis Vineeth, C.M.I and Fr. Anto Amarnad, C.M.I. to the text of Chev. Illipparampli Cora Chacko, provides a shining example of how the *namajapa* can create a bridge between Hindu and Catholic spirituality. This work's name creates a striking connection between the two religious traditions as it directly references the ancient Hindu poem, *The Thousand Names of Lord Vishnu (Vishnu Sahasranamam)*. However, the form of this piece significantly deviates from the original structure of the *namajapa* song form. Instead of a simple list of names, this work consists of eight movements of poetry dedicated to different titles of Jesus Christ. While Chacko's original poetry does contain a thousand names, the modern composers decided to focus on what they believed to be the best verses due to a lack of recording space.⁸¹

While this piece draws direct inspiration from longstanding Hindu themes, the composer chose to distance the music from the semi-classical devotional style of its roots. Typical *namajapas* follow a restrictive form, often consisting of a singular drone with chanting on a few repeated notes.⁸² However, Vineeth and Amarnad's music ignores this precedent in favor of utilizing distinctive melodies that move with the poetry. In the publication's program notes, Dr. Palackal designates this music as a "semi-classical style" which incorporates primarily diatonic major and minor scales combined with

⁸¹ Chevalier I. C. Chacko, *Kristu Sahasra Namam* (Kerala, I.C. Publications, 2014), program notes.

⁸² Ibid.

Indian instrumentation such as the tabla, sitar, and Karnatak-style violin. Many verses also include subtle vocal stylizations. However, these virtuosic additions are used as grace notes on top of the melody rather than a primary component of the music.

In each movement, the cantor establishes the name of Christ in the opening stanza which the chorus then repeats after every verse. Written in Malayalam, these titles consist of:

<i>Kristum kanyasutam wande</i>	Jesus the holy, the healer, and the liberator
<i>Rajarshigotrajam</i>	Jesus the suffering servant
<i>Yajakam yajanadrawyam</i>	Jesus the Sage for India
<i>Swargastam pitrparswastam</i>	Jesus the offeror and the oblation
<i>Martyaputram dewaputram</i>	Jesus the glorious Son of the Father
<i>Saptarkshapanim</i>	Jesus, Son of Man and Son of God
<i>Pawanam bhawanam</i>	Jesus the eschatological Lord
<i>Santaya santahrdayaya</i>	Praise to Jesus, our peace. ⁸³

The verses of *Kristu Sahasra Namam* follow a similar thematic pattern consisting of a brief meditation on the name itself followed by the name's biblical references and social history. These repetitive phrases are often characterized by short passages of devotion and worship, such as "I bow to thee," which reflect the devotional nature of the piece. While all these movements contain references to Indian and Hindu culture, the second movement, "Jesus the Sage for India," contains the most distinctive and straightforward examples of Hindu spiritual belief recontextualized within a Catholic paradigm. The text follows:

⁸³ Chevalier I. C. Chacko, *Kristu Sahasra Namam*.

You are the great ascetic
The patient bearer of sorrows
The self-controlled, the self-luminous
The ever merciful the world's teacher,
I bow to thee.

You are the sole master of mankind
With the disciples from among fishermen
Dharma you preach, the path universal
Praised eternally by choir celestial
I bow to thee.⁸⁴

This movement contains several significant connections between Catholicism and Hindu beliefs and cultures. The most striking image comes in the last verse where the poet specifically states that Jesus preaches *Dharma*, a distinctively South Asian philosophy with no direct correlation with Western Christianity. In this case, the poet refers to the Hindu philosophy pertaining to the religious and moral laws of individual conduct and one's duty in life.

This concept of *Dharma* as something preached by Christ can be interpreted in several ways. To begin, one can easily present this as a Christian endorsement of *Dharma* in the context of Hindu teaching whereas one must live by their calling or place in life, specifically their *varna*, *ashrama* (a stage in life), and *svadharama* (duty or nature). Moreover, one could interpret this as specifically about moral conduct as outlined by Hindu texts such as the Sandilya Upanishad.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Chevalier I. C. Chacko, *Kristu Sahasra Namam*.

⁸⁵ The Shandilya Upanishad is one of the minor Upanishads, holy texts, of Hinduism. This document primarily focuses on yoga techniques and remains the most detailed account of these texts.

However, this text takes a more replacive approach as it insinuates that the teachings of Christ are *dharma*, rather than something that supports it. In this context, the poet insinuates that the teachings of Jesus specifically outline a moral way of life and rules that one should live by. The title of the movement, “Jesus the Sage for India,” reinforces this idea as it specifically connects Jesus to the ancient sages, or *rishis*, who first provided the Vedas which became the foundation for Hinduism. Rather than acting as a part of the Hindu understanding of *dharma*, this depiction insinuates that Christ functions as one who provides a path to the divine like the ancient *rishis*. Moreover, the text continues to establish Christ as someone who has immense self-control, mental stability, and resistance from temptations, which are qualities of enlightened individuals outlined by texts such as the Sandilya Upanishad. By making these connections, the poet establishes Christ as an enlightened being with a direct connection to the divine who imparts true knowledge and a path for achieving one’s own divinity.

Another parallel between Christianity and Hinduism appears in the cover art of *Kristu Sahasra Namam*. Titled “Christ the Guru,” this depiction of Jesus as both a guru and a teacher in South Indian culture further reinforces the establishment of Christ and his teaching as equivalent to the *rishis* of the ancient *Vedic* texts (see Figure 1).⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Elamkunnappuzha, “Christ the Guru,” 1977. This image of Christ as a divine guru can be seen throughout Indian churches. Another example can be seen at the St. Antony’s Friary Church, Madivala, Bangalore.

Figure 2: “Christ the Guru.” Fr. Joy Elamkunnappuzha, C.M.I.



This painting contains numerous symbols associated with Hinduism and Buddhism which would be easily recognizable by local Christians. Designed by Fr. Joy Elamkunnappuzha, C.M.I. for the Chapel of Dharmaram College and Vidya Kshetram in Bangalore, this piece presents Jesus as a yogi sitting in front of a *pipal* tree, a sacred location in Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. Additionally, his hands are placed in the *jnana mudra* position, a physical symbol for the connection between *brahman*, or divine reality, and the individual. The halved coconuts at Christ’s feet, considered “the fruit of God” in Hinduism is a common form of *kalasha*, or offering, which worshippers use in traditional Hindu rituals.⁸⁷ Regarded as a symbol of self-sacrifice, its depiction in front of Christ makes a rather striking parallel between the idea of God as a sacrifice and this Hindu symbol. Finally, the lamp, called a *tuukku vilakku* in Tamil, regularly appears in Indian homes and places of public worship. All these symbols are commonly understood throughout India and would establish a relatively straightforward message establishing

⁸⁷ Joseph J. Palackal, “Churches of Kerala,” Christ the Guru, <http://churchesofkerala.blogspot.com/2008/11/christ-guru.html>.

Christ as an enlightened figure who holds a connection to the divine within Hindu culture.⁸⁸

In addition to this adoption of Hindu spirituality, this song also makes several references to caste and class dynamics within India and Indian culture. While subtle references to resistance against one's lower-class status appear in many Christian songs throughout the international church, these concepts carry additional weight in India as caste and class distinctions, and discriminations, are still deeply ingrained in the fabric of society.⁸⁹ While many verses of *Kristu Sahasra Namam* contain references to class struggles, "Jesus the Sage for India" connects the nature of Christ to both high and low classes, which establishes God as one that transcends local caste conflicts and creates a bridge between all of India's demographic groups. The first verse states:

Though born of the clan of kings
Though rich, you are the poor, the eternal beggar,
The abandoned, and yet the hope of the forlorn
The one Lord of the Universe, I bow to thee⁹⁰

The opening passage spells out the class-based disparity between lower and higher castes and how Christ embodies the connection between the two. This passage serves a dual purpose, both expressing the nature of Christ as both king and sacrifice, while also establishing God as one of both high and low class. Local Christians would easily understand this connection as the image of Christ as one of the downtrodden and

⁸⁸ Joseph Palackal, "Christ the Guru," [thecmsindia.org](http://www.thecmsindia.org), The Christian Musicological Society of India, 2015, <http://www.thecmsindia.org/christ-the-guru>.

⁸⁹ Borooh, Vani Kant, *Caste, Discrimination, and Exclusion in Modern India*, (London: Sage Publishing, 2015), 4.

⁹⁰ Chevalier I. C. Chacko, *Kristu Sahasra Namam*.

oppressed appears regularly in Christian hymns in India and around the world. This hymn merely establishes the concept of God as one of the lowly in the context of Indian culture and history.

This promotion of class fluidity appears once again in a reference to fishermen in the final stanza. While this specifically recalls the original disciples of Jesus, it takes a new meaning when combined with allusions to Indian communities. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the fisher caste, known as the *Paravar*, is believed to be one of the first Indian groups to embrace Christianity in the 1st century and remains one of the largest Catholic communities in the region.⁹¹ However, their designation as a lower-caste group remained pervasive, well after conversion to Catholicism. For decades, members of this class were segregated from higher-caste Catholic services and were barred from regional seminaries.⁹² While this segregation slowly became less of an issue over time through the intercession of the Vatican and local political movements, this identity of a fisherman recruited by Christ often appears in conjunction with larger ideals of unity in faith and equality before the “universal” lord.

These references to class and caste differences demonstrate interesting aspects of Christian music and its relationship with Indian caste consciousness. As stated earlier, lower-class Catholic churches tended to adopt Western music to a greater degree as it provided an additional bulwark against traditional Indian caste and class culture.

However, “Jesus the Sage for India” fully embraces its Hindu roots despite its egalitarian

⁹¹ Duncan, *Christian Bhajans*, 56–57.

⁹² *Ibid.*

message. All these aspects, including form and cultural references, can be seen throughout Hindu culture and thus one can reason that the composer deliberately intended for the music to be understood in this manner. Due to its title, in conjunction with this unified message, we can reasonably deduce that the poet specifically intended to find a unified cultural bridge between the Christian imagery of Christ and Indian cultural dynamics. As stated by the composer in the opening pages of the music, this song was an attempt to establish that “all Churches are parts or limbs of one universal church, the mystical body of Christ.”⁹³ More on this concept will be discussed below.

This concept of using Catholicism and Christianity to transcend local caste, class, and other forms of oppression establishes another bridge between local practice and larger theological philosophies of the Catholic Church. Following the Second Vatican Council, scholars and bishops within the Church began to theorize how the Catholic Church should use evangelization to help oppressed and impoverished people transcend their socioeconomic status and to help them resist oppressive societal structures. Defined as “liberation theology” by the Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez in his work *A Theology of Liberation*, this philosophy adopts what is regarded as a Marxist interpretation of the Bible, describing both Jesus and the Church as a liberating force against institutionalized oppression.⁹⁴

⁹³ Chevalier I. C. Chacko, *Kristu Sahasra Namam*.

⁹⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 4-7.

A branch of this theology, known as Dalit Liberation Theology, emerged from the *dalit* Christian community of India, focusing on how members of the lower castes of India, calling themselves *dalit*, or oppressed, can use Christianity to break free of cultural restraints.⁹⁵ Dalit Liberation Theology differs from Liberation Theology as the former comes from the community itself rather than from the higher church. However, many who advocate for Dalit Liberation Theology disagree with the Catholic Church's methodology of interculturalization, believing that adopting local practices reinforces traditional class and caste structures.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the fact that the verse "Jesus the Sage for India" specifically references biblical themes of class and caste resistance suggests this song as a bridge between liberation theology and this form of liturgical music.

⁹⁵ Sherinian, *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology*, 2-3.

⁹⁶Ibid, 114.

Hybridization of Western and Karnatak Music in the Catholic Church

While urban and wealthier churches tended to adopt Karnatak musical traditions, the music of rural churches primarily generally involved a hybridization of Karnatak and Western music genres. This combination of styles creates a unique musical experience based on an altogether new form of music. The hybridization of styles appears in the music's form, instrumentation, and cultural references. The music itself functions as a bridge connecting the Catholic Church to local Indian culture. Moreover, this process of combining Western and Indian liturgical music helps solidify the multicultural concept of Indian identity. By combining these two styles for liturgical purposes, the Catholic Church becomes the central identity of the music as opposed to it being regarded as Indian or Western music.

By hybridization, I am specifically referring to the combination of Western and Karnatak musical structures and rhythms. The song "*Vazhvai Alikkum*," published by Tamil Christian Devotional, demonstrates this blending of musical styles. Rather than relying on any Karnatak musical structures, the music uses a Western common time meter with music in the key of D Major. While the vocal solo line does incorporate *meends* and other subtle musical embellishments, the majority of the piece is a simple Western progression. Moreover, the music incorporates consistent chordal progressions and vocal harmonies which is a strong departure from the Karnatak roots of Indian

devotional music. While this is only a simple analysis, the connection between Indian and Western music can be seen in the devotional music.⁹⁷

When it comes to musical style and genre, rural and lower-class churches utilize an eclectic collection of styles. Rather than sticking to the formulaic structure of the Mass, these churches take music from whatever sources connect with local parishioners. As described by Fr. YC:

In my church, we used all kinds of music. Western, Latin, Gregorian, Karnatak ... whatever the people liked to sing. We used a lot of popular music too, things that the people learned outside of the Church. We changed the words to reflect our beliefs and then we sing them in the Mass. Sometimes even popular music and even some music from Bollywood. What is important is that the people sing along with the music. Because we don't have sheet music, we must stick to songs that we already know.⁹⁸

Fr. YC addresses the concept of musical genre from the perspective of cultural popularity. According to him, music needs to have a connection to the society it comes from regardless of style. If the music itself remains popular and well-liked within the society using it, the music can be regarded as suitable for use within the Church. Fr. Alphonse takes a different approach to this, stating:

If it is a song that people know, they sing even here even in India. Choose a song that people do not know. The difference between Western music, the song singing here if you give music sheet then people might be able to follow, however in India, they don't have sheet music, they have lyrics, but they don't know how to read music. So, you must teach them before they sing, so it may be good to have singing practice once a week, or occasionally during the festivals during preparation, we learn the songs we sing from memory [and] we sing... the songs by memory looking at the

⁹⁷ Tamil Christian Devotional Songs, வாழ்வை அளிக்கும் வல்லவா vazhvai alikkum (D Major), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qY1780kCtXE&list=PL33AC1663DD3142E6&index=6>.

⁹⁸ Fr. Chinnaiah Irudayaraj Yeddanapalli, Personal Interview by author, December 20, 2018.

lyrics. But once they learn they sing the song, [they sing it as they sing here].⁹⁹

While the early church in India depended on the larger Catholic Church to outline the music of the Mass, the modern church has access to a wider variety of music through the evolution of recording technology and mass media. Even poorer church communities are aware of popular music trends from both within India and around the world. As these melodies are already within the society's popular musical memory, a simple change of lyrics allows for easier accessibility to the music of the Church. Moreover, due to the lack of musical education amongst the rural populations, the popular understanding of these hymns depends on oral transmission. Thus, music already in popular consciousness allows for easy utilization and integration into the local church.

According to Fr. Alphonse, the accessibility of music to the community remains the predominant importance of liturgical music. However, this creates a fundamental problem for rural churches in their relationship with Karnatak traditions as this music requires a high level of training which remains outside the reach of most Catholics in South India. Furthermore, these rural communities do not have as much experience with Western tonalities either, making those melodies more difficult for local Catholics to sing as well. Fr. Alphonse states:

Karnatak music is very difficult for a choir to sing, and it is an individual he or she could do very well. But Western music is also difficult for people because they are not accustomed to sing Western music. You may find Western music and songs sung in city parishes and in convents and parishes, but ordinary parish people sing songs that are a mix between Karnatak and Western music. That is what I would prefer if I was

⁹⁹ Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli, personal interview by author, March 22, 2019.

composing. In my songs, some parts of Karnatak music we would sing Western music.¹⁰⁰

Fr. Alphonse reiterated this perspective a few minutes later, stating:

The people of the community love to sing simple songs. They can't sing Karnatak music in the sense of classical type. So, they sing simple types.¹⁰¹

This concept of accessibility extends to the use of instruments in churches serving poorer and lower-case communities as well. Both Fr. YC and Fr. Alphonse provided considerable insight into what instruments are used by the Catholic Church in India and how Western instruments are used alongside Karnatak instruments. In both interviews, Fr. YC and Fr. Alphonse outlined the various instruments used in their home churches in India, ranging from Indian instruments such as the tabla (traditionally a Hindustani instrument), bansuri, and violin, to Western staples like the guitar and piano. However, Fr. Alphonse insists that this diversity of instruments is primarily found in urban centers. When asked how Western instruments are received by parishioners, Fr. Alphonse distinguished between the rural poor and urban congregants, stating:

Primarily, because the people can't afford to buy Western instruments, and another reason is that people, most people, are illiterate. ... Going to church itself is a tremendous time spent for God and the Church. Otherwise, they go in the fields to work for others and for landlords and then come home in the evening to prepare food and eat, to take care of their children—all those things maintaining a family, so they have little time to learn and if one wants to learn. There are also no instruments to learn; the Western instruments will be provided. So, when you talk about Western instruments and drums and so on it's mostly in urban parishes it is

¹⁰⁰ Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli, personal interview by author, March 22, 2019.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

available. But I don't think there is a kind of discrimination around instruments, it is only availability.¹⁰²

While both priests insisted that no cultural restriction or prejudice exists against different types of instruments, and both seemed to encourage the idea that Western and Karnatak instruments should be used alongside one another, both Fr. Alphonse and Fr. YC gave strikingly different interpretations as to what constitutes appropriate instrumentation for the Mass. Fr. Alphonse insisted that the primary purpose of church music should be accessibility. Meanwhile, Fr. YC took a more philosophical approach, insisting that the music itself is not entirely relevant so long as the community uses the music as a form of collective worship. While these two priests took divergent approaches to performance practice, they both held the shared idea that the population must have a connection to the music itself, either through an actual understanding of music or simply musical interest, which then establishes the music as suitable to the Church.

¹⁰² Fr. Alphonse Gollapalli, personal interview by author, March 22, 2019.

Conclusion

The evidence I uncovered connects the Catholic Church's use of Karnatak music, along with its connections to Hindu spirituality, to broader concepts of identity within the Catholic Church as a whole. As demonstrated through the testimonies provided by Fr. YC and Fr. Alphonse, the Catholic community in India regularly adopts local traditions in ways that establish a connection between individuals, the local community, and the Church as a whole. Karnatak music and local festivals become identifiably Catholic as they are used as a catalyst to connect local cultural practices with Catholic understandings of the Church itself. The aforementioned songs, despite their firm connection to Hindu practices and Indian spirituality, find new life within the Catholic liturgy as their philosophical underpinnings are morphed into beliefs that align with Catholic ideology. In turn, this fusion of local traditions with Catholic beliefs and symbolism establishes these songs as Catholic in nature, reaffirming Catholic belief and identity within the cultural lexicon. The use and practice of these traditions, musical or otherwise, ultimately create a bridge connecting local identity with both the larger Church and the Church's teaching.

I originally undertook this study expecting to find a compromise between local traditions and Catholic ideology within the Indian Catholic Church. However, the fact that Catholics used Indian genres of music to connect to their Catholic identity on a fundamental level surprised me. To elaborate, Catholic communities in India use

Karnatak music and other genres of Indian music as conduits to establish a Catholic identity because of and through their connection to local traditions. The remnants of this music's Indian, and more specifically Hindu, foundations do not fade entirely. Rather, the music itself evolves into something distinctively Catholic in nature despite its historical origin. The ways in which the Catholic community in India rationalize and use these local traditions strongly suggests that, instead of simply establishing a compromise between Catholic and local traditions, these Catholics utilize Hindu practices to reaffirm an international Catholic identity. In short, they are achieving an international identity through the use of local beliefs and practices, rather than in spite of them.

While the studies of previous academics extensively map the relationship between Indian Christians and Hindu spirituality, my findings expand upon earlier research by synthesizing the multifaceted relationship between local traditions and the philosophical underpinnings of Catholic identity. However, this study leaves many avenues open to investigation, as many aspects of my analysis could easily be expanded upon by other scholars. While my research draws on interviews with ordained priests discussing aspects of Catholic identity in South India, this ecclesiastical focus provides a limited scope into the broader nature of Catholic identity in the region. I recommend those who wish to study expressions of Catholic identity found in the performing arts to investigate the experiences of the broader Indian Catholic community. Expanded investigations can include Bishops from larger dioceses within the Church and laypeople from a variety of different castes and classes within Catholic society. This will establish a more complete understanding of the Indian Catholic community's relationship with both local and international Catholic identities.

Nevertheless, I firmly believe that those who wish to investigate the music of the Catholic Church in India should continue this interdisciplinary methodology, which directly connects local people's relationships with music to wider theological concepts of Catholic philosophy and anthropological studies on the Catholic society. Because the Catholic community exists as both a local and global mindset, a unified approach that addresses the bridge between both sides of this identity spectrum will provide a more complete understanding of how Catholics use art to express their personal and societal beliefs. Moreover, as Catholic identity remains rooted in the Church's theological understanding of the relationship between community worship and connection to God, researchers must have a proper understanding of Catholic beliefs to fully comprehend the nature of identity on a local level. Studies that neglect this larger theological basis of Catholic identity only provide a partial picture that isolates individual communities from the larger Catholic society.

Due to its centralized place in the Catholic liturgy, music holds the most prominent position in the establishment of local culture within the Catholic Church in India. Establishing how the Catholic community recognizes its relationship with culture through the lens of church belief ultimately demonstrates the strongest three-way link between local culture, international culture, and liturgical belief. Thus, the phrase "because we are Catholic" does more than simply define one's relationship with a Church. Rather, it establishes one's identity in conjunction with their relationship with the Catholic community through their relationship with God.

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