

William Carey University
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Lecture on the Topic

**“Congregational Music in India and William Carey’s Contributions
to Congregational Liturgy in India”**

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To MUC 335—SURVEY OF CONGREGATIONAL SONG

MUC 604—HISTORY OF CONGREGATIONAL LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE

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1. Introduction

I am excited to be in this Hymnology class where I can meet many talented friends who are enriching the music and worship life of the William Carey University and eventually the life of the Church at large. In this short paper, I am happy to deal with the subject given to me to speak on **“Congregational Music in India and William Carey’s Contributions to Congregational Liturgy in India.”** The subject ‘Christian congregational music in India’ might take us back to the earliest times of the Christian era, as it is a commonly discussed and debated fact that Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself. It is said that the Chaldean and Antiochean liturgies were in use by the St. Thomas Christians in India from the earliest times. Then onward with the arrival of Missionaries from all over the world, India opened its windows to breathe in the fresh airs of various forms of worship and music from other parts of the world. India being a country with multi cultures, languages and religious backgrounds has invented and adopted Christian music in and through its complex multi cultural interactions. Let us look into some of those to enlighten ourselves in our quest.

2. Indian Congregations

The Indian Christians, approximately 30 million in number, constitute about 2.5 percent of the total population of 1.25 billion Indians and thereby the Christians represent diverse language, culture and religious backgrounds of India. The Indian congregations are composed of different Christian spiritual backgrounds such as Evangelical, Pentecostal, Congregational, Hierarchical and so on with numerous denominational backgrounds and break-ups such as Church of South India, Church of North India, Marthoma, Syrian Orthodox, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Anglican, Assembly of God, Brethren Assembly, Lutheran and numerous independent Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. Some of the denominations like United Church of Northern India, the

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Church of India, the Methodist Church (British and Australian Conferences), the Council of Baptist Churches in Northern India, the Disciples of Christ and the Church of Brethren in India have been merged into the Church of North India in 1970² and similarly some Churches were merged in the Church of South India in 1945. Apart from these mainline Churches, there are numerous independent House Churches and Congregations growing up day by day increasing the numbers of faithful Christian adherents through various evangelistic attempts and programmes.

3. Indian Congregational Music

India being one of the most ancient countries of the world has developed over the years its own musical instruments and styles and at the same time adopted various musical instruments and styles from the Missionaries coming from various parts of the world. As we have mentioned before, India has approximately 30 million Christians and they represent various linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds. As a result, the Indian Christian Congregational Music comprises of Classical and Regional music as well as Western Music. Even today the Indian Churches and Congregations cannot be thought of without the Western Music. Most of the Churches have continued with the Popular English hymns translated into various regional languages. The Organs, Pipe Organs, Pianos, Keyboards, Violins, Guitars etc. are still in use in many Indian Churches to accompany with the singing of the translated hymns. On the other hand, the Indian Classical and Regional Music, Songs and Tunes are also used in the Churches/Congregations, particularly in rural Churches/Congregations in accompaniment with Harmonium, Flute, Cymbals, Khol/Dhol (These are kinds of Drums of different shapes), Tablas (Two small round shapes of drums of which the left one is bigger and the right one smaller, which are played with two hands generally by sitting), Ektara (small stringed instrument made of ripe Cucurbit or wooden shells) and so on.

4. William Carey's Contribution to Congregational Music in Bengal and India

William Carey the Father of Modern Missions cannot be understood completely without his deep involvement in Christian Congregational Music. From the beginning of his arrival in India William Carey's deep concern was to bring closer as many Indian natives as possible to the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that they also might be able to worship the one and only Almighty God whom he worshipped. So, wherever Carey travelled before settling at Serampore, he made sincere attempts to worship God with his family, friends, companions and the natives. He not only began to translate Scriptures in native language from the beginning, but he also composed and tuned quite a few Bengali Songs for singing in the congregational worship services on various occasions of the Church life. For example, I am giving here one of his songs which he composed in 1796 while he was in Mudnabatty for singing in the congregational worship there. This song was composed on the theme of Palm Sunday. Meaning is given on the right side of every line in first bracket.

² *The Constitution of the Church of North India and Bye-Laws*, as amended up to 21st October, 2005 (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2013), p. 37.

Hymn on Palm Sunday, based on Matthew 21:9

Tune: S.A. 15.

Hosanna! Hosanna! E-elen Shantiraj! (Hosanna! Hosanna! King of Peace has come!)

Dhanya! tini dhanya! Path khulo Jisur janyo - (Blessed is He! Open the way for Him)

nijo rajyo loiben aaj. (For He will receive His Kingdom today.)

1. Jirusalem dike jaay gadhaay chorie ke? (Who goes on the donkey towards Jerusalem?)

Lok koto aage pichhe dhaay ki bawle pothike? (Large crowd around Him, what do the passersby say?)

2. Apurbo shaje shajie, Sri Jisur shoinik jaay, (Beautifully dressed, the followers (soldiers) of Jesus go.)

nij bawstro pawthe patie khejur pata uraay. (Spreading their cloths on the way they sway palm leaves.)

3. Hey shion-konne! Puribe aaj shastrer ei bawchon (O daughter of Zion! Scripture will be fulfilled today)

Oi dinobeshe hawbe tomar rajar aagomon. (Your king will appear in meekness)

4. Nawgore shobhe shondhyalok o chura shawrnomo, (The city adorns in twilight and its mountain top looks golden)

rob shuni chhade utthe lok apekkha kori roy. (Hearing the scream people wait on the roofs.)

5. Traneswar kintu mon nirash, 'grohibe ki aamaay?' (But Saviour despairs, 'will they really receive me?')

Ki satyer pokkhe ei ullash na jawgot rajyo chaaay? (Is this scream for Truth or do they want the kingdom of this world?)

6. Awmayeek shishugawner bhab nath heri mondire, (The Lord seeing the emotions of innocent children in the temple)

korilen stawbe priti labh taai mone rakho re. (- had joy in their praise. Remember this story always.)

Thus, when Carey's compositions of congregational hymns as well as his translated Bengali hymns were becoming many in number, he began to feel the need of having Hymn Books for the Congregations. The first Bengali hymnal was published at the beginning of 1802 in Serampore by William Carey with the help of his colleagues, Joshua Marshman and William Ward. According to William Ward, they published this first hymn book with only 23 hymns, as William Ward wrote on 5th March, 1802, as it is cited in *Dharmageet* (Religious Song), I quote, "We have printed a hymn book with 23 hymns in Bengali Language."³ But it is a matter of regret that no copy of this book is available today. In the later periods, this hymn book was edited, reedited and reprinted with additional hymns. As far as we know, another hymn book was published in 1810 from Serampore with 157 hymns and 18 songs from the Psalms.

All of the hymns and songs of that hymn book were composed by Chamberlain in English tune. Then in 1811, another larger and extensive hymn book in Bengali with the title "Hymns Sung in the Church of Jesus Christ" was published. This hymn book was divided into three parts: the First Part had 20 hymns of Carey, Thomas, Marshman and Ward, the Second Part had all the hymns of Chamberlain, and the Third Part comprised of 127 Bengali hymns in Indian (Bengali) tunes some of which are still sung in the Churches and incorporated in the present editions of hymn books. I give here another hymn which was translated by Carey into Bengali in 1796 from a very popular English hymn.

³ P. P. Mondal, et al., *Dharmageet* (i.e., Bengali, *Religious Song*), 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Bishop's House, 1988), Foreword.

**Hymn translated into Bengali from “Rock of Ages Cleft for Me!” based on Psalm 19:4
Tune: Assurance or Ajalon. 7s, Year of Translation: 1811.**

1. Jishu ‘Asroy-Giri’ he, lukao aamay tomate: Tobo parsho-nirgoto bari boy aar shonito;
Ghuchao paper daay o bawl – aamay kawro taay nirmol!
2. Britha Srom o chesta he, tomar bidhi palite; hok mor jawton abirol, poruk nityo netrojol –
Taay na hobe mukto praan, toma bina nahi traan!
3. Haate kichhu naaii aamar, dhoru kebol krush tomar; bostrohinke daeo boshon,
nirupaayke kripa dhon, Molin aami srote dhaaii, dhao pachhe more jaaii.
4. E awsthaaee jibone; kal-o nidraay shoyone; chhari jobe e bhubon herbo tobo shinghashon,
Momo ‘asroy-giri’ he, rekho aamay lukaye.

5. Conclusion

Thus, we find that William Carey, apart from his great contributions in translating Bible, New Testament and portions into Bengali and many other Indian languages for the development and nourishment of the Indian Church, was also a great source of inspiration as a Congregational hymn/song and music leader and writer for the improvement of the worship life and the liturgy of the Church. The Bengali congregational hymns and the translated hymns of William Carey also prove today that he must have been a good music composer and singer as well. Because it would not be possible for a novice to compose such beautiful Hymns and put such beautiful tunes to those hymns. William Carey’s Bengali hymns/songs are still sung in the Churches/Congregations with much joy, excitement and devotion in accompaniment with the Native Musical instruments as well as Western instruments, thus enriching the liturgy of the Church. The Serampore congregations also loved to sing them over and over again. Carey’s hymns and songs seemed to have imbibed and inspired within singers, music players, devotees and listeners a deep sense of faith, courage and spiritual enlightenment. So, always there is a joy in singing Carey’s hymns/songs. I feel that all the hymns/songs composed by William Carey should be preserved properly with notations on tunes which are tuned by Carey; so that these may continue to inspire people generation after generation. I thank William Carey University for taking interest in doing the same task in various ways.

Bibliography

- Mondal, P. P. Et al. *Dharmageet* (In Bengali meaning *Religious Song*). 2nd ed. Calcutta: Bishop’s House, 1988.
- *The Constitution of the Church of North India and Bye-Laws* as amended up to 21st October, 2005. New Delhi: ISPCK, 2013.