PREFACE

This work is an attempt to study church music in general, and in particular, the “Role of Indigenous Tunes in church music in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills” with special reference to the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian and Catholic Church denominations.

The term ‘Church music’ relates to that form of music meant for performance in a religious rite of worship. The word ‘Indigenous’ means a native, and ‘Tune’ implies a melody or melodious piece of music which comprises both, vocal and instrumental music. Hence, ‘Indigenous Tunes’ is music that belongs naturally to a place and is born out of the culture of a particular race. It is created by a particular culture and reflects the traditions, concerns and activities of that culture. Like other cultures Khasi culture possesses its own indigenous music which reflects the rich tradition of Khasi music – folk and traditional which has developed a long time ago. To differentiate it from other music forms, Khasi indigenous music is found to possess complex beats, staccato rhythms, regular chanting, distinctive lilting and occasional slurs. It consists primarily of melody and lyrics used in the truly Khasi traditional terminology.

Church music is a term which is most commonly associated with Christian tradition. Therefore, like the early churches, church music continues to be an important element in the worship services of worldwide Christian denominations. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, church music in the context of the Presbyterian Church is known as Welsh hymnody. It came to light with the advent of the Welsh Calvinistic
Methodists Foreign Missionaries in 1841. This was followed by Latin hymnody or Gregorian Chants of the Catholics brought by the German Salvatorian Missionaries in 1890. Henceforth, with the spread of Christianity, church music began to take firm roots in other Christian denominations and Churches of Indigenous Origins alike, as an indispensable component in all worship services.

A good number of books, songbooks, music compositions, articles, seminar papers and the like have been produced by local writers, composers and songwriters on Khasi music. But so far, there has not been any study conducted on church music as such, nor has there been any work done on the role of Khasi indigenous tunes in church music. The various chapters of this study will therefore focus on this aspect and examine the extent to which Khasi indigenous tunes have been introduced into the church music of Christian denominations in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The work has been approached on the basis of Primary and Secondary Sources. The Primary Sources include official Church written documents, church hymn books, statistical handbooks, music compositions, questionnaire schedules and personal interviews. The Secondary Sources have been drawn from published works, journals, magazines, articles, seminar papers, research dissertations, weeklies, dailies, website and other printed materials.

In this study frequent mention has been made of the Vatican Council. Il: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents (1962-1965) as the official written document of the Roman Catholic Church. It is indeed the most important primary source of information which contains instructions and guidelines on matters relating
to the liturgy and church music. Besides church music in general, the document also comprises relevant portions and articles with specific instructions on indigenous music. For instance, with regard to traditional music and its place in the church, the Council clearly instructs that other musical settings and indigenous tunes taken from traditional heritage should be held in honour, encouraged and used. This attitude is said to have had a tremendous impact on the indigenization process of the church and its liturgy among the people. In the Presbyterian Church however, no such written document is available. Therefore, in the absence of this, whatever instructions pertaining to the church and its music is being taken care of by the respective Synods and Executive Committees operating in different mission areas. It is perhaps the lack of such standing instructions that has made the Presbyterian Church to remain content with its traditional practices and conservative outlook. This so called native character of Protestantism is noted to have created a negative impact on Khasi traditional music and its place in the church. This again, might have immensely contributed to the negative attitude of the Presbyterians towards the rich cultural elements and music traditions of the Khasi people in its evangelization work.

The above native mindset of Presbyterianism is further seen to have had its adverse impact on many prominent Khasi thinkers and believers in subsequent years. Frustration over the negative attitude shown towards Khasi culture and indigenous elements, coupled with dissatisfaction on the manner in which certain Biblical doctrines and teachings were interpreted, led them to show their reaction against their Parent Church. Consequently, many Christians either went back to the Khasi traditional religion or formed new Christian denominations of indigenous character.
Henceforth, they became free to follow their own doctrines and teachings with special attachment to their culture. This finds expression in their open mindedness to accept their rich cultural elements, particularly, Khasi indigenous music which they have in fact, introduced in their respective church worship services.

From the number of Khasi indigenous hymns that have so far been incorporated in the hymn books of the Presbyterians, Catholics and other denominations, their tunes can be notated in both the staff and tonic sol-fa notation systems, and are found to blend well when accompanied with western musical instruments like the piano, organ, guitars and drums. However, being primarily melody based, these hymns are found to be better expressed when accompanied with Khasi traditional drum beats like ka Ksing Shadwait kynting Dieng (Sword dance by tossing up the stick), Ksing Shadwait Tem Beit (sword dance), Ka Padiah Ardieng (small drum by using two sticks) and others, whose illustrations have been explained in chapter IV.

The various discussions on the subject indicate that indigenous tunes have a prominent role to play in all functions and celebrations held outside the church, though still marginal in the church as appeared in many churches. This also follows from the manner in which the term church is defined. If the word ‘Church’ refers strictly to a place or building for worship, then indigenous music has a very limited role to play, but if the word is extended to the Christian community that worships, then indigenous music has already a great role to play since worship can be held not only in the church but in the open space as well. The findings of this study as could be drawn from the various chapters have therefore driven home an important
conclusion, that Khasi indigenous music occupies a prominent place in church music. Therefore, with the on-going process, backed with the positive attitude shown by various Christian denominations and church communities, indigenous music is forging ahead on a positive trend in exhibiting its role and enriching church music in the Khasi and Jaiftia Hills.

In the pursuance of this research, I have tried to present the work based on facts and information drawn from the various sources as stated, though at the same time, I admit that it may not be free from its own shortcomings. There has not been any intention whatsoever; to misinterpret or overlap any statements or observations as such, but as far as possible, every care has been taken to maintain a balanced approach on each and every aspect of the work.

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