

Nadopasana, Thodupuzha: Twenty-five Years of Leadership in Music

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From its humble beginning at Thodupuzha in 1986, Nadopasana has grown in the last quarter of a century to a recognizable name on the cultural map of Kerala. Envisioned more as a movement than an institution, Nadopasana endeavors to:

- spread music literacy among the general public
- impart training in liturgical music to church choirs with emphasis on choral singing
- explore the emotive power of human voice in communal singing
- further enrich Indian culture by expanding a Christian classical music and dance repertoire
- develop music and dance as tools for community building
- provide a platform for singers to express national pride through patriotic songs
- and, above all, encourage an intellectual approach to music among the youngsters

In order to achieve these goals, Nadopasana conducts regular classes in vocal and instrumental music and dance, organizes workshops and music appreciation courses on and off the campus, provides weekend music retreats for church choirs, schedules performances by veteran artists, encourages experimental compositions, collects books and audio visual materials on performing arts, and arranges commercial releases of albums and television programmes.

A Brief History

The inspiration for starting and naming Nadopasana came from Upasana, the premier cultural institution in Thodupuzha, founded by Fr. Albert Nambiaparambil, CMI. During construction of the commercial complex of Jyothi Super Bazar at the very heart of the town, Fr. Nambiaparambil convinced the members of the Carmel Monastery, Vazhakkulam to set apart a considerable amount of space for public service to the local community. Upasana and Nadopasana function at the prime space provided freely by the Monastery. The members and benefactors of Upasana and Nadopasana continue to draw their inspiration from the founding Fathers of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI) who reached out to different communities in Kerala irrespective of caste, class or creed.

Fr. Joseph Palackal, CMI, while working as Dean of Studies at Kalabhavan, Kochi, proposed the idea of a new musical movement based in Thodupuzha, and started Nadopasana with the help of

Sunny Vempillil, an accomplished musician and composer. Soon, Fr. Antony Urulianickal, CMI joined the team after his music studies at M. S. University, Baroda. The trio received unstinted support from Fr. Joachim Puzhakkara, CMI, Prior of Carmel Monastery, and Fr. Romeo Pattassery, CMI (1934-2011). Jerry Amaldev, the award-winning film music director, extended his whole hearted support. Initially, Sunny Vempillil's business office at Jyothi Super Bazar provided space for the meeting of minds and musical ideas, and became the birthplace of several compositions that set the tone and direction of Nadopasana.

Fr. Antony Urulianickal, CMI took charge as Director in 1987. His extraordinary talents as singer and composer became an asset to Nadopasana. Fr. Urulianickal added new dimensions to Nadopasana by starting music classes for guitar, violin and keyboard; he also embarked on an intense programme of composing Christian devotional songs for commercial releases. These songs carried the fame of Nadopasana beyond the boundaries of Kerala. Fr. Kurian Puthenpurackal, CMI, a singer and composer, served as Director from 2001 to 2008. With his excellent managerial skills, Fr. Kurian extended the activities of Nadopasana by starting dance classes; he also equipped the Nadopasana choir with a professional sound system and a modern keyboard. Fr. Urulianickal resumed directorship in May 2008 and continue to guide the manifold activities of Nadopasana, some of which are listed below. Since the beginning, Sunny Vempillil has been serving as Secretary, and Jaison Joseph as Officer-in-charge.

Music Appreciation Classes

Making music literacy a privilege of the general public is one of the cherished goals of Nadopasana. The purpose is to build audiences that are capable of informed appreciation and intelligent application of music in everyday life. At a time when Government agencies in Kerala are shying away from providing music education to school children, Nadopasana attempts to spread awareness among the youth about the layered past of the rich cultural heritage of our country. With this purview, Nadopasana periodically organizes lecture demonstrations and music appreciation classes by experts; they provide the participants, including those who are less musically inclined, with basic information on the theoretical and practical aspects of music, and the conceptual tools that are necessary to unravel the mystique of Karnatak and Hindustani classical music. These classes are also occasions for participants to interact with famous composers and performers.

Choral Music

Promotion of the choral style of music is the trademark of Nadopasana. Nadopasana made its debut on July 16, 1986 with a solemn and spell-binding presentation of liturgical songs at the Carmel Monastery Church, Vazhakkulam. The occasion was the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. The choir, which consisted of 70 singers and 3 musical instruments, under the direction of Fr. Joseph Palackal surprised the worshippers with the affective power of human voice in communal singing. That unforgettable experience set the tone for the future course of Nadopasana as a concept. The singers came together again to use the same idiom of choral singing for the celebration of India's Independence Day on August 15, and at the Pushpamela (flower show) at Thodupuzha on November 19, 1986. Encouraged by the public and the media response, and supported by such connoisseurs as Dr. Joseph Chazhikadan (1930-1998),

Nadopasana presented a unique Christmas Spectacular on December 23, 1986, in which 300 singers and 50 dancers performed simultaneously on two sides of the same stage. This unprecedented programme changed for ever the musical landscape of Thodupuzha. The mission of promoting the choral style of singing continues today through the choir leaders who receive training at Nadopasana.

Liturgical Music Training

Nadopasana became an endearing name to parish priests and church choirs because of the free music training, on the first and third Sundays of every month. Singers come not only to learn songs, but also to learn about the place of vocal and instrumental music in liturgy, and how to sing the meaning of the texts according to the liturgical context. About ten thousand singers in the Thodupuzha, Idukki and Adimaly areas have already taken advantage of this programme. Also, in collaboration with the famous Rex Band, a committed Christian ensemble, Nadopasana organizes training camps and music retreats in churches and college campuses. With the experience gained through the conducting of such programmes, Nadopasana has been able to develop a syllabus for such camps and retreats.

Many Faces, Multiple Voices, but One Nation

Early on, Nadopasana embarked on the project of promoting national unity through composing and performing patriotic songs. These songs help the singers from different walks of life and diverse religious backgrounds to experience a sense of solidarity and at the same time share the spirit of patriotism, all the while celebrating India's unity in diversity. The first such performance took place at the Independence Day celebration on August 15, 1986. Doordarshan televised the performance of patriotic songs by the Nadopasana choir on several occasions from its Trivandrum station. Currently, Nadopasana is in the process of expanding the repertoire of its patriotic songs.

Music and Dance Classes

Since 1986, about 5000 thousand students have received training in various branches of music and dance at Nadopasana. Currently, there are about 300 students enrolled in different classes. Accomplished teachers give training in Karnatak classical music, piano, organ, violin, guitar, and tabla. Students also receive lessons in such classical dance forms as Bharathanaatyam, Kuchippudi, Mohiniyaattam and folk dance. Nadopasana provides facilities for talented students to appear for the grade exams in piano, violin and organ conducted by the London Trinity College. The annual Talent Day celebrations, *arangettam-s* and other stage programs at different institutions provide the students with ample avenues to showcase their talents in front of a variety of audiences.

Performing Arts Library

Still in its initial stages, Nadopasana is home for the first performing arts library at Thodupuzha and one of the very few such ventures in Kerala. At present, there is a modest collection of books, journals and audio-visual materials on music and dance; they are accessible to students of Nadopasana as well as the general public. The library is also intended as a place for networking

with scholars in India and abroad. Nadopasana welcomes anyone who is willing to donate autographed copies of books and other materials on performing arts; the names of the donors and benefactors will be gratefully mentioned in the database of the library.

Christian Classical Music Repertoire

Nadopasana is in the process of building up a Karnatak classical music repertoire with Christian themes that can be used both for pedagogy and performance. Nadopasana organized a Christian classical music concert by George Panjara on April 20, 1986; a selection of Shri Panjara's compositions were released in a pre-recorded cassette in 1987 under Nadopasana's banner. It turned out to be a pioneering attempt. Shri Panjara's compositions became useful to young singers who participated in the Christian classical music competition organized jointly by the Christian Musicological Society of India and the Media Commission of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Conference (KCBC). Occasionally, Nadopasana organizes bhajan programmes in semi-classical music style.

Commercial Releases

Commercial releases of Christian liturgical and devotional songs became the carrier of Nadopasana's fame beyond the boundaries of Kerala and India. Nadopasana has produced more than twenty albums of Christian devotional songs. Some of these songs are currently in circulation among Kerala Christian communities around the world. Famous singers and lyric writers of Christian devotional songs in Malayalam have participated in these projects. Besides, Nadopasana contributes devotional and inspirational songs to Rex Band, Christeen and other Christian ensembles and retreat centers.

TV Programmes

Nadopasana entered the world of Television with the broadcast of the choral presentation of five patriotic songs in connection with Independence Day celebrations in 1986. Shalom Television periodically televises 30-minute long episodes with devotional songs and prayers prepared by Nadopasana; the station also televised an hour-long music and dance programme for Christmas on December 24 & 25, 2008. Currently, Fr. Antony Urulianickal is representing Nadopasana as a member of the permanent jury panel for the Dewageetham reality show on Amritha TV; the show is running into about 200 episodes.

Vision for the Future

Nadopasana looks forward to providing intellectual leadership in the field of music and other performing arts in Thodupuzha and Kerala by creating a congenial space for exploring and experimenting new ideas and assisting budding scholars in their pursuit for research.

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