



CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

ബർമറിയം
Bar Maryam
ܒܪܡܪܝܝܡ

Bar maryam bar maryam
Bar alāhā d'yeldaṭ maryam.

The Son of Mary, the Son of Mary,
The Son of God whom Mary brought forth.

A centuries-old Syriac hymn that loudly proclaims sound Christology and Mariology. The version that is currently available contains 44 couplets that succinctly narrate the life of Jesus. In performance, the first couplet serves as the refrain which reminds that the Blessed Virgin Mary (Maryam) gave birth to Jesus the Son of God (Bar alāhā). In other words, Maryam is the Mother of God. The anonymous author of the song ingeniously elevates the status of Mary. There is a semantic shift to the derogatory comment that people made about Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth: “isn’t this the son of Mary?” (Mk 6:3). The song extols the life and deeds of Jesus and returns to the refrain, saying that this Jesus is the Son of Mary (Bar Maryam), and that son of Mary is the Son of God (Bar alāhā).

The song text, which may be of Middle-Eastern origin, is a common patrimony of the Chaldean Catholics as well as the Syriac Christians in India. The Chaldean Catholics continue to sing this song, albeit with a different melody and Arabic vocal inflection. Sadly, some of the Syro Malabar Catholics disowned this intangible cultural heritage after the vernacularization of the liturgy in 1962. Fortunately, the younger generation is currently warming up to the song enthusiastically to rediscover their identity.

It is not clear if the melody is of Indian origin. We have one example of a Marian song in Tamil in the meter and melody of Bar Maryam (Aramaic Project-5A <https://youtu.be/7CoUySvERHE>). Also, we have two recorded samples of the tune with different texts from the Syriac singers from St. Mary’s Forane Church, Pallippuram, Cherthala, and St. John Nepomucene Church at Kadvanthara, Ernakulam (Aramaic Project-51M <https://youtu.be/hLzqFSfUxZk>). Both churches belong to the Archieparchy of Ernakulam-Angamaly.

The historical significance of the song is noteworthy. In retrospect, the Portuguese missionaries did not have to impose the burden of Nestorian heresy on the St. Thomas Christians. By singing *Bar Maryam* and *Sagdīnan mār*, the St. Thomas Christians had been reiterating in different words the correct Christology of the Ecumenical Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451). By continuing the tradition, the present generation of Syro Malabar Catholics can reverse the course of history and redefine the future, and add India into the international imagination of Eastern Christianity.

See more information at “Bar Maryam,” Encyclopedia of Syriac Chants : www.TheCMSIndia.org

Joseph J. Palackal, CMI (www.TheCMSIndia.org)
copyright ©2019 Joseph J. Palackal