



Dr. Joseph J. Palackal's speech on the occasion of the release of the film, Kerala the Cradle of Christianity in South Asia: The Cultural Interface of Religion and Music. Kerala House, 3 Jantar Mantar Road, New Delhi 110 001. August 2, 2008

Honorable Justice, Shri Cyriac Joseph, Justice of the Supreme Court of India, Mr. Amit Kant I.A. S, Special Commissioner, Kerala House, Members of the Media,

Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to a few people who have made this event possible. I would like to thank first of all the Government of Kerala for its collaboration on this venture. The idea of collaboration emerged during a conversation with Dr. Venu, I.A.S, the Secretary of Kerala Tourism, during his visit to New York. Dr. Venu saw the first edit of the film and thought it would make Kerala more intimate to an international audience by adding one more dimension to the famous Tourism logo: "God's own Country." After further discussions with Mr. Sivasankar, I.A.S, Director of Kerala Tourism, the Govt. decided to give permission to use the Tourism Logo and take responsibility to organize this release function at Kerala House in Delhi. I thank Dr. Venu and Mr. Sivasankar for their efforts. I also thank Mr. Mohanan, Deputy Director of Kerala Tourism, for making the local arrangements for the release function.

This film was in the process of making during the last fifteen years. There were two different experiences that went into the creation of the concept. Both happened during the first six months of my cultural disjuncture in the big city of New York. My first friend in New York, Robert (I respectfully withhold his last name) was a brilliant young man of Jewish faith. We attended a course on the Music of the Middle East at the City University of New York. Robert was curious about India. One day Robert asked me a question: "so, Joseph, what is your real Indian name?" There were a few moments of silence after which I gave him a blank look. It never occurred to me that my name was not Indian. The underlying presumption was that India is a Hindu country and that I changed my name in order to go to America. The second experience happened a few weeks later. I was having a telephone conversation with another friend, Dr. Joseph Aquilina, a medical doctor of Maltese origin who made it in America. Dr. Aquilina had read extensively about India. He asked me from Saginaw, Michigan, how I was feeling in New York. I said that I did not have many friends and that I was feeling lonely. Without missing a beat, he said: "Joseph, there is no reason you should feel lonely; you have the Mahabharat." There were a few moments of silence on my side. Did he say Mahabharat? Or Maha Bharat? Did he intend the pun? Did he say that I had the Mahabharat? The phrase played on my mind for several months. It lifted up my spirits. Both these conversations prompted me to choose the area of my doctoral research: Christian music of India. The research was in fact a re-search of my own identity. This film is an extension of one of the chapters of doctoral dissertation and forthcoming book. I dedicated my doctoral dissertation to Dr. Aquilana for reminding me that wherever I live, I shall always be a part of the Mahabharat.

This film is for Robert, my first friend in New York who challenged my identity as an Indian Christian. This film is for numerous people outside Kerala who are not aware of the many layers of history and the cultural complexity of this tiny state on the southwest coast. This film is for Katherine Morehouse, my first doctoral student at the University of Maryland, who has traveled all the way to do field work in Kerala. This film is for many future students like Katherine who will do research on Christian music of India. This film is for Ajay Appadan, the young actor in this film, and youngsters like him born and raised outside India who at one point or the other will encounter questions on identity. And finally, this film is for my friend and philosopher Dr. Joseph Aquilina who reminded me that I have the Mahabharat, that I am part of the Maha Bharat. My Maha Bharat has more than a billion chapters, and Christianity is one of them.

Om Jagat jyothi Yesu Bhagavan
Nawya sanathana thawasatyaroopam
Bhuwil jwalikkum prabha jeevanaalam
Om jagat jyothi namo namo

JAI HIND