

A Study of the Traditional Lenten *Pasan* Singing

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The paper is a research on the *Pasan* chants of the Catholic communities in Doowa, Pitipana and Wahakotte in Sri Lanka. The Catholic Church has organized its worship into five different phases spread throughout the year, namely Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time. *Pasan* is sung during Lent. In commemorating the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Catholics observe numerous rituals. From Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday there is a 40 day period during which the Catholics (besides other religious rituals and practices) use prose and verse chants and prayers to deepen the Lenten spirit in homes and in churches. One of these special chants is the singing of *Pasan* songs by small groups of persons. It is believed that Sri Lankan Catholics inherited this tradition after the arrival of the Portuguese. At present the Catholics in Sri Lanka follow the *Pasan* tradition established by Jacome Gonsalves, transmitted from one generation to another orally over four centuries. In the present ethnographic research, many *Pasan* singing styles practiced by the Sri Lankan Catholics have been identified.

There are many versions varying according to regional differences. During the Lenten season there are many prose *Pasan* styles and verse *Pasan* styles. The present research is a comparative study of the singing styles and other related variations in the *Pasan* singing of the Doowa (Negombo), Pitipana (Negombo) and Wahakotte (Matale) regions. Both primary and secondary sources were used in accumulating the data. The methods used were intensive field studies, indepth interviews and participant observation.

Keywords: Lent, passion of Christ, folk singing style, *Pasan* songs, Catholic life style.