

Singing the Laudainha

Written by Tony Fernandes

As a young boy just growing up, I joined other children along with the elders in singing the 'Laudainha' (Litany) at the various feasts, functions or events, and somehow in my innocence, I could not help but think that the "the laudainha" was to pray not only for our own goo--d health, wealth and prosperity, but also for the well-being of the village people

Some of the people from our village worked in Goa. Others were employed in Bombay, Karachi, Arabian Gulf, Aden and East Africa. As a child I was under the notion that thinking about these people and praying to God at the same time by including their names in the litany itself was a novel and awesome idea. There couldn't have been a better way devised to remember these kind folks.

Believe me, I am not making this up or pulling a fast one. The only reason I did not write about this all this time is because I thought God would punish me for having had this impression and in making fun of the beautiful 'Laudainha'. But I say this in all sincerity, and He may still punish me, but the fact that I thought about my neighbours and others when I was that young, must be commended, especially when I prayed for the good of everyone. Nowadays, we hardly sing the Litany, let alone think of anyone else, but ourselves. I hope that perhaps singing the Litany in the near future will absolve me, and in addition I will be reciting the 'mea culpa'.

As a young lad, I knew that the "Laudainha" was sung in Latin language, and that it was dedicated to Our Lady - the Blessed Virgin Mary, and also recited as a prayer after completion of the five decades of the Rosary, but then I thought it was so appropriate to think of our own village people, neighbours, relatives, friends and those who worked abroad while having the joy not only in singing, but also being rewarded with 'ukoddlele chonem' (boiled gram) after the blessing at the end of the Litany.

The richer the celebrant, better the chances were of being handed out with two or more types of snacks. A celebrant returning from Africa or Kuwait would mean 'bolinha', sweets or biscuits, and 'tambdo soro' (red wine) too being generously distributed.

The description below may sound akin to the famous narration of the 'Deck of Cards' by T. Texas Tyler, but in a different sort of way. My thought was that our rendition was unique in some way as real people from our community were involved. What was amazing to me were the similarities between what we sang and the names of the people around us, involved in different trades and professions.

To start with, take for instance, when we sang 'Sancta Virgo Virginum' or 'Regina Virginum'. My godmother's name was Virginia, her sister was Maria; Assumption was my godfather and the village chapel was dedicated to Nossa Senhora de Assumpta where the batkan's (landlady's) daughter, Angela, sang in the choir every Sunday; Christie, Bonnie and Rosario were my classmates, Rosa and Gracy were my cousin's neighbours in Siolim where I went to spend my summer holidays, Conception was my aunt, Salvador Jr. was my younger uncle, Violant was the strict lady in the next village on the way to the church in Guirim (we jumped over

the high stone compound wall to savour some of the exotic fruits that she grew), Prudencia was the woman who came over to grind curry masala and helped around the house for my grandma, Leticia was my paternal grandmother, Consulem was the one who had petty fights with everyone in the village, Esperança was my next door neighbour and the oldest surviving lady in the village, Piedade worked at thebatkar's (landlord) place, Clemente worked in Vasco de Gama and Remedios worked for Obras Publicas (Public Works Dept.) in Panjim. These guys seemed to have lived up to their names too. Succur was the village handy-man and offered help to any one who needed it, Salvador Sr. was an expert and an authority in house roofing and saved many sagging roofs from caving in. Benedict, God bless him, worked in Kuwait and gave me 'Marie'biscuits when he came down on a vacation every 2 years. Fidelis, who had spent 20 years in far away East Africa, was now our village leader and never gave up wearing a hat. David was my older uncle who worked in Bombay, and smoked a pipe when he came to Goa in April or May (aroma of which drifted over the entire village). Stella was my cousin who taught Cathecism, Salu was the well-known 'caçador' (hunter) from Parra who often passed by our house with his rifle on the way to the hills of Bastora and beyond, and Agnel owned a motor-repair workshop in Ahmedabad. His brother Vaz was a well-known tailor and smoked 'Capstan Navy Cut' cigarettes, and Aura was my class-teacher in the village Aula. And as if that was not enough, as a bonus prayer, I also thought we were invoking the blessings of the Angels, Patriachs, Confessors, Apostles and Martyrs and Saints. As an extra bonus even the famous 'advogad' (lawyer) from neighbouring Parra wasn't left out, when we sang the words 'advogada nossa' in the Salve Rainha.

So, you see, all the names of people mentioned above are included in the Litany in some form or another, and now as readers are fully convinced, I guess I will be pardoned. Even 'doce' and the jack-fruit were included when we sang "Rogai por nos". (Honestly, 'doce' was often served too after the Laudainha, and what sounded like 'ponos'(jack fruit) I thought we were praying for a better yield of that fruit during the season).

The Litany is also still sung in the homes, at road-side Crosses or in the village chapels in Goa, prior to a member of the family, a husband, a son or a loved one leaving in search of greener pastures for employment abroad, or those returning to work abroad after spending their holidays in Goa. A sung Litany orLadainha is also held in honour of a saint for favours granted or prayers answered. It is customary to invite all the village folks around, sometimes for adjoining villages, relatives and friends. Beside this sort of a prayer meeting also serves as a social gathering, a convention, a reunion or a farewell, thereby preserving the social fabric. The village chapel served also as a community centre. Immediately after the Litany was completed and the final blessing granted by the village elder, the benches would be brought out from the inside of the chapel and all the children and village folks would sit, awaiting their hand-out - their share of boiled or roasted gram, biscuit and "Branco", Portuguese wine. For me the 'ladainha' will remain as one of the best-loved and most well-known sung prayers of all time. It still remains very much as a part of the Goan culture. I am trying to paint that picture through my poem below that I hope will convey and summarise those eventful and fun-filled days of yore.

THE SUNG LITANY IN THE VILLAGE.

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Early in the hot afternoon sun
Two young lads come over to our home
"We have come to invite you for the ladainha"
They falter as they announce.

"In our chapel, eight o'clock sharp it will start"
"You must come along" they insist
"And bring your son too" says the other
I will, I promise, says my mother.

Later in the evening that day I hear the sound
Of the triple chimes of the village chapel bell
As firecrackers accompany
They beckon the folks
To join them for the sung litany.

The violinist and his son decide
On the key and pitch;
The elders among the folks
Strike the initial chords;
As quite eager are the youngsters
To join in the chorus
Full of hope, without any hitch.

The kids sang in perfect unison
And in choral harmonization
Their high-pitched voices
Were heard at their loudest
Specially with the "Ora pro nobis"

One young lad keeps dozing;
But the thought of sweets and boiled gram kept me waking
When it was time for the village elder
To recite the final prayer at the finale of the litany
He complied with a special request in honour of St. Anthony.

Have I to say any more special prayer?
Asks the village elder of the celebrant
As the burning candles grew smaller
"Yes, please" replies the lady
Could you please say one more "Amchea Bapa"
For my son's safe departure?

The ladainha was finally over
Bringing the youngsters much relief;
The "branco" wine spilled

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As the greying elderly man
In his shaking hand
held up
for the saud the tiny cup.

Someone behind in the congregation
Was quick to mention without hesitation
"This is the best ladainh by far"
"No comparison whatsoever to the one before”.

To the family and the host
To their son wishing a safe journey
in his homily,
Full of praise was the village elder
with his toast
And for his eventual successful return
Was his earnest prayer.

Almost with a skill honed
with words specially chosen
The "Saude" was complete
in the briefest time having done his best
To cover as much he could,
His wits were put to a real test.

And before he could tip
The contents of the tiny glass over
He was stopped short in the nick of time
By the local village crooner
With a timely start of
“Uddon guelem
parveanchem birem.”

Some said "Good-night",
Others wished "Boa Noite"
But the evening was not complete,
Not quite, without those words so memorable
That still in my ears linger
In a language like no other:
"Deu Bori Rath Dhium",
"Meuche Ami Faleam".

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