

Krishna Pal's "O Thou, My Soul, Forget No More"
and "Global Hymnody" Among Nineteenth-Century Baptists

David W. Music

Early Western missionaries to Asia, Africa, and South America have often been criticized for bringing not only the gospel, but also Western culture to the lands in which they worked. In such instances, native peoples received the clear message—whether stated or unstated—that, in order to be truly Christian, they must adopt Western modes of dress, thought, church architecture, and preaching.

In particular, Western missionaries often brought with them the hymns they had sung "back home." Translated into the indigenous language and sung to their original (imported) tunes, these often became the standard repertory for churches in the mission lands, just as they were for the countries from which the missionaries had come. Native productions were considered to be inferior, even for use among the indigenous people themselves.

This, at least, has become the received wisdom. However, while such procedures were undoubtedly characteristic of some missionaries, some times, and some places, there were also notable exceptions. This is particularly true of some of the earliest modern missionaries, those of the

British Baptist mission to Bengal during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including William Carey, John Thomas, Joshua Marshman, and William Ward.

These early missionaries not only seem to have encouraged the writing and use of native hymns among the population with which they worked, but also made certain of these works available for English-speaking people and churches in their own native lands. The most important of these is a hymn that was written by the first Bengali convert and printed in a number of British and American hymnals during the nineteenth century.

When William Carey sailed for India in 1793, informal mission work had already been carried on there for some seven years by John Thomas, a one-time ship's surgeon who had established what was essentially a medical mission station.¹ One result of Thomas's pioneering work was the attraction to Christianity of his *munshree* (or teacher), Ram Ram Boshoo. In 1788, Ram Ram Boshoo told Thomas that after falling ill and recovering, he had "found Jesus to be the answerer of his prayer." Later in the same month, the *munshree* brought Thomas the words and music of a hymn he had written in Bengali. The words of the hymn were translated into English several times and were published in John Rippon's *Baptist Annual Register* and elsewhere.

The tune appeared in at least two different printed arrangements in British sources.²

Unfortunately, when Thomas, who had returned to England for a visit in 1792, came back to India with William Carey in 1793, he discovered that Ram Ram Boshoo had returned to idol worship. While the *munshee* expressed regret at his relapse and promised future faithfulness, he never gave up his caste—seen by the missionaries as a necessary step in conversion from paganism—or requested baptism, and in 1796, he was accused of adultery, embezzlement, and worse. The missionaries continued to work with Ram Ram Boshoo, but he never fulfilled his early promise, and is not considered to have been the missionaries' first convert.

That distinction belongs to Krishna Pal, a Bengali carpenter whose arm had been dislocated by a fall as he was bathing. John Thomas reset the arm, also taking the opportunity to tell his patient about Jesus.³ Krishna became a frequent visitor to the mission house, ultimately testifying “that the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life up for the salvation of sinners, and that he believed it.”⁴ Krishna later sat down to eat with the missionaries in public, thus renouncing his caste. Despite various difficulties that he encountered as a result of this action, Krishna persisted in his belief and, on December 28,

1800, he was baptized, the first fruit of seven years of missionary labor by Carey and fourteen by Thomas.

Krishna was ordained in 1804 and became an effective preacher among his countrymen. He died in 1822, respected and loved by the missionaries with whom he had labored.

Krishna seems to have turned his hand to hymn writing almost immediately after his conversion. In a letter to John Ryland, dated March 5, 1801, missionary Joshua Marshman included the text of a hymn by Krishna he had translated into English, titled “The Shipwrecked Sinner Looking to Jesus,”⁵ which appears on your handout. This hymn was written just over three months after Krishna’s baptism. Nineteen days later, a letter from missionary William Ward to another recipient noted that Krishna “has composed a hymn to sing in the family.”⁶ Whether this was “The Shipwrecked Sinner Looking to Jesus” or a different text is not known.

Two years later, a hymn by Krishna with the title “Salvation by the Death of Christ” was sung at the funeral of another Bengali convert.⁷ This hymn apparently saw widespread employment among Christians in India, particularly at death-bed scenes, for there are at least two recorded instances of such use.⁸

Exactly when Krishna wrote “O thou, my soul, forget no more,” the hymn by which he became best known to English-speaking congregations, is not certain. In his article on Krishna Pal in Julian’s *Dictionary of Hymnology*, W. R. Stevenson indicated that Joshua Marshman had translated the text into English in 1801.⁹ However, no direct reference to the hymn has been discovered in the missionary accounts of that period.¹⁰ If the hymn had been written and translated in 1801, it may be questioned why the first known references to and publications of the text did not occur for nearly twenty years. It is possible that Stevenson’s information on “O thou, my soul, forget no more” got mixed up with “The Shipwrecked Sinner Looking to Jesus,” which had also been translated by Marshman.

At any rate, the earliest located printings of “O thou, my soul, forget no more” in English-language sources occurred in November, 1820, in two American newspapers, the *Christian Herald* (Nov. 18) and the *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*. The text was picked up by other American newspapers and published several times in the early 1820s.¹¹ In all of these printings, the text appeared in six stanzas in more or less identical form. The first located publication of the hymn in England was in the *Methodist Magazine* of July, 1821.

All this newspaper attention probably brought the text to the notice of hymnal compilers. One of these was John Buzzell, editor of *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Selected for the Use of the United Churches of Christ, Commonly Called Free Will Baptist, and for Saints of All Denominations*, published in 1823.¹² Buzzell printed the text as found in the newspapers, with two changes, one slight and one important. The minor change occurred in the last line of stanza five, where the word “of” was changed to “in” (“And join the chorus in the sky”). The more significant alteration was in the second stanza, where the name of Jesus replaced the word *Brumhu*, a transliteration of the Hindu name of the “one God.”

Following this early publication, the text appeared sporadically through the 1820s and 1830s in American hymnals, mostly in books published by Baptists. It was printed in two hymnals of 1826, Noah Davis’s *The American Seaman’s Hymn Book* and Gustavus F. Davis’s *The Young Christian’s Companion*.¹³ It appears that neither of the Davises knew the version in Buzzell’s *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, or else they preferred the one found in contemporary newspapers, for they did not include the alterations Buzzell had made.

Beginning in the 1840s, Krishna’s hymn saw significant use in American hymnals, with at least 84 printings between 1823 and 1973.¹⁴

From 1840 until 1900 there were one or two printings nearly every year. One of the most unusual of these was in John Dowling's *Conference Hymns* of 1849. Here, the text was given in four stanzas (the original stanzas two and six were omitted), but with a two-line camp-meeting style refrain added to each stanza: "I am bound for the kingdom,/With glory in my soul."

Fortunately, the tune that was originally used with Krishna's text has been preserved. This was printed in January, 1830, in the "Quarterly Papers, for the Use of the Weekly and Monthly Contributors to the Baptist Missionary Society," together with a transliteration of the Bengali words.¹⁵ According to a note published with the tune, the transcription was the work of "our late excellent Missionary Mr. [John] Lawson," who also supplied a free translation of Krishna's hymn. The note informs the reader that the hymn was "made by Krishnu, one of the native converts, and adapted to a Bengalee tune."¹⁶ This suggests that the music may have been that of a traditional melody to which Krishna fitted the words, but it can also be read to mean simply that the tune was of Bengali rather than Euro/American origin, and thus might have been written by Krishna himself.

Whatever the specific background of the Bengali tune, however, it manifestly could not have been used in normal British or American congregational singing because of its (to Western ears) strange phrasing and

melodic movement—not to mention the fact that it would not fit Marshman’s long meter translation. American hymnal compilers opted for a variety of tunes by their contemporaries as settings for Krishna’s text, including Lowell Mason’s *HEBRON* and T. E. Perkins’s *REPENTANCE*.¹⁷

After 1900, the number of publications of Krishna’s text dropped off dramatically, with large gaps in the record and only about ten printings in all during the twentieth century. The words have not been located in any of the standard hymnals issued during the last quarter century or so—the most recent publication noted in the *Dictionary of North American Hymnology* was in 1973¹⁸—and it is not likely that the text will again achieve even sporadic use, at least in part because of the archaic language of the translation. Still, Krishna Pal and Joshua Marshman should be remembered and honored for their pioneering efforts in providing one of the earliest examples of “global hymnody” for practical use in English-speaking churches, an effort that would ultimately bear significant fruit over 150 years later.

¹ Thomas had sailed to India twice on board the *Earl of Oxford*, leaving the ship after the second voyage (1786) to remain in India.

² A three-part arrangement, attributed to “S.R.” was printed on a fold-out sheet inserted at the end of the first number of *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, vol. 1 (Clipstone: J. W. Morris, 1800), following page 276. (This sheet and the following one containing a note about the hymn and

a translation of the text do not appear in the digital edition of the book found in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*). The copy examined by the writer, found in the archives of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, is missing part of the second sheet. A four-part setting of the “Hindoo Tune” was printed in Thomas Walker’s *Second Appendix to Dr. Rippon’s Selection of Tunes* (London, [1802]). See David W. Music, “‘The First Indian Tune That Ever Was Wrote Out’: An Early Example of ‘World Hymnody’ from the Subcontinent,” *Asian Music* 37/2 (Summer/Fall 2006), 122-140. At the time this article was written the publication of the tune in *Periodical Accounts* was not known.

³ According to a footnote accompanying an article on Krishna in *The Religious Intelligencer* (August 9, 1823), Krishna’s first name was derived from “the Hindoo idol” and “pal” means “flock,” thus, “flock of Krishna.”

⁴ *The First Hindoo Convert: A Memoir of Krishna Pal* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Missionary Society, 1852), 11.

⁵ Printed in *Periodical Accounts*, vol. 2 (Clipstone: J. W. Morris, 1801), 167-168. The first line of the text is “The feeble vessel of my soul.” Marshman indicates that it was sung to the tune GLOUCESTER.

⁶ The letter was printed in the *New York Missionary Magazine*, January 8, 1802.

⁷ The funeral was for Krishna’s fellow believer Gokol, who died in October, 1803. See F. A. Cox, *History of the English Baptist Missionary Society, from A. D. 1792, to A. D. 1842* (Boston: William S. Damrell, 1845), 49. The account of Gokol’s funeral in *The First Hindoo Convert*, 46, indicates that Krishna’s hymn has a “chorus,” “Salvation by the death of Christ.” However, the text as given by Mary E. Leslie in *Eastern Blossoms: Sketches of Native Christian Life in India* (London: John Snow & Co., 1875), 10-11, does not include a refrain, and it is possible that the anonymous author of the biography did not have a copy of the hymn and got the title mixed up with a “chorus.” The translation in Leslie begins “Jesus took our human body,/came into this mortal dwelling.”

⁸ See *Periodical Accounts*, 3:172-173 (death of Petumber Shingo, 1805), and 3:361 (death of Debnaraian Ghose, 1807).

⁹ John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, 2nd ed. (1907; reprinted, New York: Dover Publications, 1957), 633.

¹⁰ The text does not appear in vols. 1-6 of the *Periodical Accounts*, which cover the years from 1791 through 1817. “O thou, my soul, forget no more” may have been the unnamed hymn mentioned by William Ward in 1801, or perhaps it is the same text (in Bengali) as “Salvation by the Death of Christ” but in a different translation. However, the present writer sees little correlation between the English versions of “O thou, my soul, forget no more” and “Salvation by the Death of Christ.”

¹¹ *The American Baptist Magazine and Missionary Intelligencer* (Jan., 1821); *The Latter Day Luminary* (Feb., 1821); the *Connecticut Mirror* (Mar. 12, 1821, “from the *Baltimore Morning Chronicle*”); *Gospel Trumpet* (Dec. 1823). In the *American Baptist Magazine* and *The Latter Day Luminary*, the translation was attributed to “Rev. Mr. Ward.”

¹² John Buzzell, *Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Selected for the Use of the United Churches of Christ, Commonly Called Free Will Baptist, and for Saints of All Denominations* (Kennebunk, ME: James K. Remich, for John Buzzell and Elias Libby, 1823), no. 104.

¹³ Noah Davis, *The American Seaman’s Hymn Book: a Collection of Sacred Songs for the Use of Mariners* (New York: Jonathan Gray & Co., 1826), no. 88. Gustavus F. Davis, *The Young Christian’s Companion* (Boston: True and Green, 1826); the copy examined was the second edition, published in 1827 by Lincoln and Edmands, no. 75.

¹⁴ These figures are drawn from the Dictionary of North American Hymnology.

¹⁵ “Quarterly Papers, for the Use of the Weekly and Monthly Contributors to the Baptist Missionary Society” (January 1830), no. 33, in *News from Afar or Missionary Varieties; Chiefly Relating to the Baptist Missionary Society*, 4th ed. (London: for the Society, 1830), 129-130.

¹⁶ Krishna’s name appears in contemporary English-language sources in a variety of forms, including “Krishnu” and “Kristno.”

¹⁷ HEBRON: *Service of Song* (1871); REPENTANCE: William H. Doane, ed., *The Baptist Hymnal* (1883).

¹⁸ The 1973 publication was in the Baptist Federation of Canada’s *The Hymnal* ([Brantford, Ont.]), ed. Carol M. Giesbrecht.

Hymns by Krishna Pal

“The Shipwrecked Sinner Looking to Jesus”

1. The feeble vessel of my soul,
On life's deceitful shallows sunk;
The foaming billows o'er it roll,
The sails are split, the masts are broke:

Yet why, my soul, this anxious fear?
Say, why thus sinking in despair?
2. If thou indeed wouldst cut the sand,
And heav'n-ward urge thy future course,
Then hear! There's help divine at hand,
The shipwreck'd sinner's last resource:

Then why, my soul this anxious fear?
Say, why thus sinking in despair?
3. In faith, on Jesus loudly call;
This instrument thy bark shall move:
Thus let thy vessel floating fall,
And swim in boundless seas of love!

Then why, my soul, this anxious fear?
Say, why thus sinking in despair?

From *Periodical Accounts Relative to the Baptist Missionary Society*, vol 2 (1801), 168.

“O Thou My Soul, Forget no More”

O thou my soul, forget no more
The FRIEND who all thy mis'ry bore;
Let ev'ry idol be forgot,
But, O my soul, forget HIM not.

BRUMHU for thee a body takes,
Thy guilt assumes, thy fetters breaks,
Discharging all thy dreadful debt;—
And canst thou e'er such love forget?

Renounce thy works and ways with grief
And fly to this most sure relief;
Nor HIM forget who left his throne,
And for thy life gave up his own.

Infinite truth and mercy shine
In HIM, and he himself is thine;
And canst thou then, with sin beset,
Such charms, such matchless charms, forget?

Ah! no—till life itself depart,
His NAME shall cheer and warm my heart;
And, lisping this, from earth I'll rise,
To join the chorus of the skies.

Ah! no—when all things else expire,
And perish in the general fire,
This NAME all others shall survive,
And through eternity shall live.

From the *Christian Herald*, November 18, 1820

The original tune for Krishna's "O thou, my soul, forget no more."
 From "Quarterly Papers for the Use of the Weekly and Monthly
 Contributors to the Baptist Missionary Society" (January 1830),
 p. 129. Transposed down a fourth.

7 Jey jone a - pon pran - o dee - a pa - pee oo -
 dha-rey O mon bhool - o na ta - rey

13 Na bhoo - lee - o ar ko - ro sey - ee saar

19 Na bhoo - lee - o ar ko - ro sey - ee saar Ec -

25 soo Brush - mo nam tran eyr - o to - rey

31 O mon bhool - o na ta - rey Jey jone a -

37 pon pran - o dee - a pa - pee oo - dha-rey

43 O mon bhool - o na ta - rey

"O thou my soul, forget no more" with Lowell Mason's tune HEBRON.

1. O thou my soul, for - get no more The
 2. Bruum - hu for these works a bod - y takes, Thy
 3. Re - nounce thy nite truth and ways with grief, And
 4. In - fi - till life all things mer - cy shine In
 5. Ah! no - no - when all things it - self de - part, His
 6. Ah! no - no - when all things else ex - pire, And

Friend who all thy mis - ry bore; Let ev - ry i - dol
 guilt as - sumes, thy fet - ters breaks, Dis - chang - ing all thy
 fly to this most sure re - lief; Nor Him for - get who
 Him, and he him - self is thine; And Him const thou then, with
 name shall cheer and warm my heart; And lisp - ing this, from
 per - ish in the gen - eral fire, This name all oth - ers

be for - got, But, O my soul, for - get Him not.
 dread - ful debt;-- And canst thou e'er love for - get?
 left his throne, And thy life such up his own,
 sin be - set, And such match - less charms, for - get?
 earth I'll rise, To join the cho - rus of the skies.
 shall sur - vive, And through e - ter - ni - ty shall live.