

# Music award enmeshed in row

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The Kerala culture minister T.M. Jacob is biting his nails in embarrassment these days. For the second consecutive year the state film music award has got enmeshed in an unseemly controversy.

This year, the fracas began with G.Devarajan, the famous Malayalam cine music director of yesteryears, returning to the government three of the five state awards he had won during his long innings in cine music. He charged the government with honouring pirates in film music.

What stirred the "Naushad" of Malayalam cinema was the best music direction award given to Berny and Ignatius, a newcomer duo in playback music making. The song that got them the award was the one in *Thenmavin Kombattu* (Atop the Sweetly Mango Tree). Mr Devarajan contended that the number that begins *Ente manasiloru naanam* (My mind is shy), is the unalloyed adaptation of the popular Hindi classic beginning with, *Piya milanko jaana*, sung by the legendary singer Pankaj Mallick.

To prove his point Mr Devarajan presented to the minister a cassette giving the two songs. In all, there are six numbers in the film. It is also alleged that another number in the same film happens to be a naked imitation of a Bengali song. Last year, well-known playback singer

Kamukara Purushothaman who was in the state award committee had refused to honour M.G.Radhakrishnan, playback singer, on the plea that the song he sung which later came up for award was an imitation of a Telugu film song. Much acrimony and washing of dirty cine linen in public ensued. It still rages in fits and starts. "I wish to know if the government is rewarding talent or piracy", Mr Devarajan wrote to the culture minister.

"Dear Mr Devarajan", wrote the minister back when he was saddled with the packets containing the state awards the music man had earned in the past, I am helpless in the matter. Once the government appoints a award committee of eminent people the government has no choice but to accept their verdict. At the same time, I cannot but respond when a man of your stature, raise his voice".

Mr Devarajan, ageing and sick, is settled in Nungambakkom in Tamil Nadu. Nevertheless, he took the trouble of recording the songs in a cassette, writing his protest and delivering them to the minister. The awards are now with the director public relations Pyare Lal.

"The issue raised by Mr Devarajan reflects the general malady afflicting every branch of art," says a veteran film actor who wants anonymity. "Mediocrity gets applauded and talents go unsung. The racing new brave world has no time for good melody. This is what is happening everywhere. Look at the Hindi film

music scene," he adds bitterly.

However, lyricist and film director P. Baskaran has no comment. "I am sorry. I do not want to get involved. I have no comment on the action taken by Mr Devarajan".

Meanwhile, the culture minister, troubled by widespread criticism of the state honouring mediocrity, announced yesterday that the government intended to convene a meeting of all leading personalities in the film industry to work out a better methodology to make the award giving a controversy-free exercise.

But I.P.R. Varma, a leading Carnatic music singer and member of the award committee denied the charge. Mr Varma told TOINS that the similarity in the tunes of the two songs was incidental. "In music two tunes may sound similar. Music is made for the film and it is not vice versa. The tune therefore must fit in the story and scene. I don't think the "Piya milanko jaana" is the same as that of the Malayalam number. Anyway, it is puerile of Mr Devarajan to return his awards."

However, a majority of people this correspondent spoke to on the controversy supported Mr Devarajan. They said the awards had become an instrument for self-gratification and mutual promotion.

Meanwhile, the man who is troubled most in this business is Pyare Lal. He does not know what to do with the rejected awards of Mr Devarajan. There is no directive from the government on this count.