

When the Novelist Writes History

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Sri Ravi Varma Thampuran is a writer who has established a reputation for himself in the field of Malayalam literature through his literary works on social, cultural and political issues. Mudippech is his fifteenth book and fifth novel published by Manorama Books. This novel is a continuation of Ravi Varma Thampuran's novel Bhayankaramudi written in 2014. In a nutshell, the theme of the novel is the history of the Kerala Renaissance. The book contains biographies of about sixty Renaissance heroes.

The postmodern Malayalam novelists began to pursue a narrative style that transcends the boundaries between history and fiction in 1990s. There are many instances that showcases historical background in which lived characters enter into novels in Malayalam literature. M. Mukundan who entered the Malayalam literature as a powerful advocate of modernity embarked this trend. Mukundan's novels Pulayapattu and Pravasam are perfect examples of this technique. Mukundan himself becomes the narrator in Pravasam. The living novelist (persona) himself becomes the narrator (character). Similarly, Ayyankali and Ambedkar appear in the novel Pulayapattu. Thereafter, many novels have entered the field. Many instances of this style include Thakshankunnu Swaroopam (U.K. Kumaran), Paleri Manikyam Oru Pathira Kolabathakathinde katha (The Story of a Midnight Murder), K. T. N. Kottur (T.P. Rajeevan), Janakatha (N. Prabhakaran), Manushyanu Oru Aamukam (A Preface to Man) (Subhash Chandran), Akkaporinde Irupath Nasrani Varshangal (Twenty Christian Years of Conflict), Manthalirile Irupathu Communist Varshangal (Twenty Communist Years in Manthalir) (Benyamin), Andhakaranazhi (E. Santhosh Kumar), Karikottakari (Vinoy Thomas). Writings based on imagination are not happening at present. A tendency to look beyond imagination and alternately look at real facts developed. Famous theorist Linda Hutcheon argues that fiction and history are not two separate entities but they travel in the same direction. Historical writing is similar to fiction. Writing history is the same as writing a novel. On account of this, postmodern novelists bring history into the fiction. Ravi Varma Thampuran's Bhayankaramudi and Mudipechu are scrutinizing the deeply rooted religious and racist consciousness in Kerala society. In both novels there is an inquiry into the transcendental understanding of the Renaissance. Ravi Varma Thampuran is making a conscious attempt to present history by transcending narrative. The novelist adopts an approach that revolves around the history of Kerala and rereads and reconstructs the history of Kerala by deviating from a theme that presented the occurrences in the lives of only a few individuals.

Ravi Varma Thampuran's aim is to present the cultural history and the renaissance history of Kerala through this novel. In fact, it can be asserted as a novel that goes beyond history. We can affirm that such a novel has never existed in Malayalam literature before. This is because the novelist introduces the characters and the plot to the novel, abandons them, takes the reader back to time and travels through the centuries-old history of Kerala. Such an approach is contemporary in novels of Malayalam literature. There are myriad historical events and historical figures who come into this novel with very few characters. Ravi Varma Thampuran begins the novel like a depiction of a dilapidated

illam (traditional house of a Namboodiri). The dilapidated illam is not just an imagination or description of a house. Beyond that, the novelist presents some of the problems that are entwined somewhere in the psyche of the contemporary Keralites associated with savarnas and caste system with this description. What the novelist really wants to articulate is not a description of the house or the life of the character named Sruthakirti who lives in the illam. Moreover, he brings the history of Kerala in the novel. The novel is a journey through disregarded historical documents. History, anti-casteism, racism and extremism are the themes in the novel. Sruthakirti and Azad Mohan are the victims of the mysterious conspiracies of contemporary media. The novel gives us a picture of the present state of media activity as factories that produce communal detestation. A situation where the land is terrified. There are many other minority racial conflicts behind the anti- Brahmin movement that has been discussed in our land for ages. It is related to the economic power and one of the most discussed issues presently. The Namboodiris and the ancient landlords are impoverished today. This work explicates that those who come to power in favour of progressive politics or progressive activists ... or claim to be progressive activists in society ... all have another side of racism and money domination. The misfortune endured by Sruta Keerthi in the panchayat office as well as in the village office illustrates this situation.

This work is one of the rare works on time written in Malayalam. Kalanillatha Kalam (Kunchan Nambiar), Nimisham (Moment) (G. Shankara Kurup), Samaya Pravahavum Sahithya Kalayum (Time Flow and Literary Art) (K.P. Appan), Sthalam, Kaalam, Cherukatha (Place, Time, Short Story) (Soman Nellivila), Akkaporinde Irupath Nasrani Varshangal (Twenty Christian Years of Conflict), Manthalirile Irupathu Communist Varshangal (Twenty Communist Years in Manthalir) (Benyamin) and so on have been rare works in Malayalam that has reference to time. Time and place are seldom mentioned in the novels. It is remarkable how time and pace are addressed in this novel.

It is also noteworthy that the novel examines the term renaissance. The work presents local and foreign (colonial) streams of the Renaissance. We often say that Renaissance was brought from Europe and imported here. But internally, there has been a renaissance here as well. It is done through Sanskrit study by Punnassery Nambi. (Pattambi Sanskrit School and Pattambi College) Unlike the past, the topic of Renaissance is much discussed in this novel. In recent times there has been no real renaissance in the so-called renaissance debates. When the subject of renaissance which was discussed a century ago is presented now it shifted to politics. Furthermore, his novel Bhayangkaramudi, written six years ago, was based on the transformations that global religious extremism has brought to Kerala society. But the situation today is even worse than it was before. Many of the issues mentioned in Bhayangkaramudi previously are happening in Kerala currently. However in this novel, Mudippech, he has made an inquiry into its present condition. He states this fact precisely in his novel. It was the colonial regime that gave the renaissance for us, the renaissance was achieved by the protests organized by subordinate class, and the eminent personalities like Mannath Padmanabhan organized a march for the Avarnas and savarnas with the in the Vaikom Satyagraha.. All these are discussed accurately in the novel. The the history of the renaissance unravels through the solitary struggle of a Brahmin girl named Sruthakeerthi.

The novel has a captivating journey through the time. The time cycle is presented in the novel as something that can be carried forward and backward. Kalangana accompanied with Sruthakirti's sleepless night experiences. Our

subsequent journey is based on the concept of the time cycle. We also become familiar with multitudinous Renaissance heroes in those journeys into the past. The knowledge they impart gives us a whole new realm of experience. Beginning with Thunchath Ramanujan, Ezhuthachan who is meditating on the rock of wisdom on the banks of the river Shokanashinipuzha in Chittoor and goes back to the time of Asan and Ramacharitham. Similarly, the novelist draws back us to the comprehensive history of the Kerala Renaissance through various renaissance heroes including the Zamorin, the Portuguese invasion, feudalism, Pazhashiraja, Veluthambi Dalava, Gauri Lakshmi Bai, Swathi Thirunal, Thycaudu Ayyavu Swamikal, Arattupuzha Velayudha Paniker, Sree Narayana Guru, Muloor, Kerala Varma, Kandathil Varghese Mappila, Chanthu Menon, Raja Ravi Varma, Chattambi Swamikal, Ayyankali, Punnassery Nambi, K.P. Karuppan, V. T. Bhattathiripad, Dr. Pulpu, Barrister, G. P. Pillai, E. M. S. Namboodiripad. In the novel, Ravi Varma Thampuran portrays great personalities like Punnassery Nambi and Sree Narayana Guru vibrantly in the novel.

This novel gives us a direct glimpse at how society is fragmented and functioning towards anarchy. After Shrutakirti gets to know the true history of Bhayankaramudi through time cycle she gets infuriated like Ugrabhadrakali (the Great Goddess) in Mudippechi symbolizing a fire that is going to burn the arrogance of every separatist who is trying to make our country a bayangarmudi. Ravi Varma Thampuran honestly apprised the truths he had discovered in his own style within a restricted framework.

The essence of this novel is the five hundred years of renaissance history of Kerala. Here the novelist is bringing history through a fantasy. Ravi Varma Thampuran has adopted a new narrative technique in the postmodern novel. As a matter of fact, the novel interprets the life experience of an individual through the social, political and renaissance history of Kerala. More than a fiction, a historical investigation is taking place here. It is appropriate to describe Ravi Varma Thampuran as a historian rather than a novelist. It can be described as a novel that investigates the Kerala renaissance. In addition, the process of deconstructing the contemporary Kerala renaissance and rewriting it racially and ethnically is critically approached here. This novel meticulously depicts the crucial moments in the history of Kerala.

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