

Theological Exploration of History

Dr. Aishwarya Madhavan

Guest Lecture, Malayalam Department

N. S. S. College, Pandalam

Suresh Panangad delves to analyse Benyamin's Pravachakanmarude Randam Pustakam (The Second Book of Prophets) in the milieu of copious disciplines such as history, theology, the Bible and exegesis. The tremendous scripture, which had a profound repercussion on the World literature and triggered much controversy had produced only scarce works in Malayalam based on the Bible. This encompasses some contentious works, such as Krishuvinde Aaram Thirumurivu (The Sixth Crucifixion of Christ). The narratives based on epic, mythological and historical works often replenish the gaps between grand narratives and interpretations of the psyche. The free rein of narrator holds paramount here. It is often disturbing that events and scintillating characters that remain rained in the consciousness and subconsciousness of the people are being deconstructed. Analogous deconstruction takes place in Benyamin's Pravachakanmarude Randam Pustakam (The Second Book of the Prophets). Suresh Panangad's Charithrathinde Polichezuthukal epitomizes a study of this novel.

Taking into account the study of novel it cannot be merely considered as a thematic analysis or appreciation alone. Historical facts, the Bible and later Biblical commentary, theological analysis and examination of the Christian churches are subsequent in Benyamin's novel. Benyamin's novels have been inspired by various Christ-themed novels including Kazantzakis.

It's divided into ten chapters, such as Jesus being the path, the life and the truth; Didymus being Thomas; Pathros you become the rock; Judas is not the traitor; Mary of Magdala- from the playmate to the rebel; the Mother of the revolutionary or the Prophet; Matthew the Taxman; Matthew's Words; The Last Temptation and Other Works; Jesus: Time and Land, and Revelation, thereby the study engages into the novel and biblical history simultaneously. This study is not based on the context of K. P. Appan's Bible studies of Bible Velichathinde Kavajam (Bible: the armour of light) and Madhuram Ninde Jeevitham (So Sweet is your life). The author travels through concepts and controversies on the duality of Christ as the saviour and the Messiah. The author's assessment of Christ as the God-man figure also traverses to the background of Kazantzakis's novel, The Last Temptation of the Christ.

The notable piece of writings in this work are about Thomas, Peter, and Mary Magdalene in the Bible. Didymus also known as Thomas showcases an expedition through history. Apart from being a disciple of Christ who came to India, Thomas demonstrates a character who is closely associated with the credence of the Christians of Kerala. The novelist seeks the life background of Thomas beyond the label. Thomas who does not believe in something without seeing it. Thomas's relationship with Herodias remains pertinent here. Suresh Panangad elucidates meticulously these debates that have connected Thomas with power. Furthermore, it inquires the possibilities, ranging from Villarvattam Swaroopam to Benyamin's acclaimed novel Manjaveyil Maranagal (Yellow Lights of Death).

In Benyamin's novel, Peter who is alluded to a rock in the Gospels is known as the beloved disciple of the Christ, whereas Thomas is portrayed somewhat like an atheist and Judas is historically denounced as a traitor. Here, Suresh Panangad presents Benyamin's discovery that the background of Thomas, who said he would not believe without seeing him in person, remains intricate. The author closely scrutinizes the novelist, who explores the history of Didymus Thomas, who is unrecognized with established religious centres. Judas has been existing ever since Christianity persists as a religion. Judas betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver identifying him with a kiss, later the guilt-ridden Judas returns the bribe and commits suicide, according to the Bible. But Benyamin's novel presents the logical context of Christ and Judas, as well as the social background of Judas Iscariot in an entirely different manner. Judas appears in the novel as a glorious character who has been rejected by the Bible, biblical historians and Christianity. Suresh Panangad discusses this conundrum with utmost significance. It embodies comparatively long writings about Thomas and Judas. Benyamin's Judas was a disciple who stood tenacious with the Lord and died, even when the beloved disciples of Christ were scattered. Here Judas is portrayed as a better person than Peter, who was

cowardly, quick-witted, indecisive, and three times rejected. The logical reasoning and practicality of Judas is perspicuously demonstrated here.

The other reference in the novel is John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. This is not discussed in the novel through the medium of Bible. The novel depicts the revolutionaries John and Christ in the context of detestation, hostilities and bigotry between Jewish tribes. John's revolutionary power and the defeat of Christ are crucial predicaments here. The novel deals with the tribal features of Semitic life, war, aristocratic establishment, and the inclination for liberation.

The influential nature of Benyamin's novel is also part of this study. The author renounces the feasibility that Kazantzaki's famous work *The Last Temptation of the Christ* often remains as an only instance. Suresh Panangad scrupulously notes this in his chapter of *Andhya Pralobanavum Mattu Krithikalum* (*The Last Temptation and Other Works*). It has been observed that in this novel, Benyamin portrays the unfamiliar Jesus and his disciples, while the characters in Kazantzakis' *Last Temptations* are almost placed in the biblical context. Suresh Panangad formulates here that Benjamin's novel is a theological exploration. There has been a kind of distortion of Jesus and his disciples. Judas of Benyamin is antithetical to the earlier models of Judas. Benyamin's Judas is not the Judas encountered in the Gospels and the novel *The Last Temptation*. In the case of Magdalene Mary also the author Benyamin doesn't follow Kazantzakis. In addition Benyamin shows cases Magdalene Mary and Christ conforming to the social norms at that time. The author concludes that Benyamin's work hasn't been influenced by Kazantzakis's *The Last Temptation*, despite that remains as a theological endeavour. The work also examines whether Christ was influenced by Buddhism. The discussion here is in anticipation of the disappearance of Christ after the age of twelve.

Benyamin's novel is about research, exploration, and deconstruction. The works of identic style, the exploration through history, the conflict betwixt credence and logic, biblical interpretations, theological studies, theological disputes, and beyond that, the God and man, and the miracles passed down through the generations through the convictions of the people, the common man and the tribal conflicts, and so on. Kazantzakis's novel deals with such controversies.

Suresh Panangad has ventured the task of studying such a novel. Apart from being a mere ecstasy, there is also a peregrination through the paths taken by the novelist.