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Dr. Anilkumar S
 Associate Professor,
 Govt Sanskrit college,
 Pattambi, Palakkad,
 Kerala

Correspondence:
Dr. Anilkumar S
 Associate Professor,
 Govt Sanskrit college,
 Pattambi, Palakkad,
 Kerala

Life and Works of Prof. P.C. Devassia

Dr. Anilkumar S, Dr. Sheena. V. J

P.C. Devassia was born on March 24, 1906 at Kudamaloor, a village in Kottayam, Kerala, India. His father was Plakkiyil Chacko, who managed some agricultural and business activities in the village of Kudamaloor. His mother was Annamma. His full name is Plakkiyil Chacko Devassia. C.P Das and PCD were the pseudonyms of P.C. Devassia. Kudamaloor is a well-known place where the famous St. Mary's Forane Church which is also known as Kudamaloor Church is situated. It is also famous for the Brahmin family of Vedic tradition and the great temple of Kudamaloor Devi (Durga) (which is said to be 2400 years old) and the royal family of Chembakassery Illam. He passed away on October 10th 2006. He lived for 100 years and 6 six months.

Educational Background

PCD got his primary education in the government school of Kudamaloor. Later he went to St. Ephraimes, Mannanam for his high school education. For his intermediate studies, he went to C.M.S College, Kottayam. He took his B.A Degree from Govt. Arts College, Trivandrum. Later he went to Madras and he took his Master Degree in Malayalam and Sanskrit from the University of Madras in the year 1937.

He studied the basics of Sanskrit traditionally from Olassa Mathu Asan. He studied Kāvya and drama from the great scholar Pantalām Krishna Warriar and he studied Vedas, Upaniṣads, Dharma Sūtrās and other Champu kāvyas from the well-known scholar Vaidyabhūṇaṇṇam Sri Venkatarama Sharma at Thiruvananthapuram. His preceptor was very kind towards him especially in teaching this great Vedic literature. He mastered Vyākaraṇa from another great scholar Vaiyakaranabhooshanam Sri Ramappothuval at Thrissur.

Professional Background

PCD started his career as a lecturer in Malayalam at St. Thomas College, Thrissur in the year of 1931. He worked there till 1945. Later, he joined as a senior lecturer in the department of Oriental language at Sacred Heart College, Thevara, Ernakulam, during the period 1945-1958. Later, he worked as a professor and Head of the Department at Mar Ivanios College, Thiruvananthapuram, till 1966.

Honourary Background

He was a recipient of awards and honours. He got President's Award for Sanskrit promotion for the year of 1998-99. He also got Kendra Sahitya Academy Award for his great Sanskrit work Kristubhāgavata in the year of 1980. He got around 21 awards and 4 honorary degrees.

Family Background

It is quite surprising that during his academic journey he led an ideal family life with 3 daughters, two sons and two wives. The first wife was Mrs. Mary. After 2 years of marriage, she delivered a baby girl. Unfortunately, the baby passed away after 22 days.

After 5 years she got a baby boy named Jose. She then lived only for around 3 months. Then she passed away. After a few years, P.C. Devassia got married to another lady named Mary (Ammi). Both his wives were quite helpful in his literary activities.

The Major Works of P.C. Devassia

Kathāsaritsāgara - Prof. P.C. Devassia gives an elaborate Malayalam translation of the work, 'Kathāsaritsāgara' written by Somadeva. He says that just like the rivers enrich the sea, Kathāsaritsāgara enriches the literary tradition. In the preface, he explains about the historical background of the formation of the text phonologically. He agrees with the view of Keith, and says that, the root of almost all 'Katha literature' of India can be found in the 'Brihatkatha¹' of Gunadhya composed in the 'Paiśāchi script'². The Malayalam translation of the Kathāsaritsāgara is a complete translation of Somadeva's work, published by Jayabharatam publication in September 1978. It was summarized in 988 pages.

The Malayalam translation by Devassia is quite pleasing and expressing various stories in a very attractive and indepth Malayalam language. The Malayalam work maintains a flow from beginning to the end. This work is a unique contribution to Malayalam language and literature. This task enshrines the name of P.C. Devassia, as a link between Malayalam literature and Sanskrit literature, especially in the case of 'Kathā Literature'.

This work of P.C. Devassia highlights his translating skill, knowledge on Rasa etc. The index given in the text very useful to ordinary readers and also to make the text ready for reference. It is the greatness of PCD that he got the privilege of the translation of the great work Kathāsaritsāgara among a lot of bilingual experts. Even today the children, the students and the youth of Kerala acquire the knowledge of Indian literary tradition or 'kathā' literature largely based on P.C. Devassia's Kathāsaritsāgara. This attempt of PCD reflects his unique feature of childishness.

The Kristubhāgavata - The Kristubhāgavata means the "Kristubhāgavatam", written by Prof. P.C. Devassia and published in 1977. The text contains the birth of Christ and other major events and reforms by the Christ to his salvation to Heaven. The word 'Christ' is derived from the Greek word 'Christos' and its meaning is 'anointed one'. 'Bhāgavatam' is the history of 'Bhagavān' or the Lord. Here the poet has named this poem as 'Kristubhāgavatam' in the sense of the history of the Lord Christ Jesus. It gives

inner light to those human beings who read it. The text the Kristubhāgavata contains not merely the Christian philosophy, it is deeply influenced by Indian philosophy from different angles. To evaluate Indian philosophy in the Kristubhāgavata is a matter of great importance from academic point of view. The text has 33 cantos and it is composed into 1582 verses or sloka-s.

The Malayalam Translation of the Kristubhāgavata –

The credit of Malayalam translation of the Kristubhāgavata goes to the original author P.C. Devassia. Sometimes it may be his wish that the translation by other scholars may result in the deviation of the central theme and spirit of the Kristubhāgavata. Moreover, this translation also reveals his dedication and commitment towards his masterpiece the Kristubhāgavata. It was his great ambition to contribute a Bhāgavata of Christ to the existing Bhāgavata literature. But still it remains as a question to what extent it added to the Bhāgavata literature. This Malayalam translation is very helpful in this regard. Sometimes it may be the inherent motto of P.C. Devassia to make the text as a means for reading and saying about the birth and salvation of Christ for the ordinary members of the community. However, this is a unique contribution to Malayalam language and literature.

The English Translation of the Kristubhāgavata³ - P.C. Devassia himself made an English translation for his Kristubhāgavata. The text is very helpful to those people who don't have the knowledge of Malayalam and Sanskrit and want to know the message of the Kristubhāgavata systematically. The translation by the original author is very helpful to minimize the deviation from the central and core aspects. The text exemplifies his command over English and Sanskrit.

The work in English is highly comprehending and captivating to the attention of even ordinary readers. The text highlights his summarizing skill without any adversely affecting to the central theme and message. Throughout the translation he tries his best to maintain the feeling and emotion as it existed in Sanskrit.

Marubhūmiyile Garjjitam⁴ - It contains nearly 40 pages and it explains the miracle happening in the life of John the Baptist - Snāpaka Yohannān. The text contains 5 chapters. PCD dedicated the work "Marubhūmiyile garjjitam" (The roar of the desert) to Mahākavi Ulloor, who loved him like a father. This indicates a deep and emotional relation between Prof. Devassia and Mahākavi Ulloor.

In the Upodghātam⁵ of the text Dr. M.P Appan says that P.C. Devassia is an “Ubhayakavīśvaran”. In the preface Mr. Adappoor.S.J observes that the text is very poetic have a lot of images. He adds that this text is not a mere poetic text of ready readable nature. It requires logical, emotional and rational skill to comprehend and appreciate. The text is also thought provoking.

At the beginning of the chapter, the poet says about the deep meditation of Snāpaka and also about his spiritual idealisms. The poet says that in the absence of the disciples, he was in deep meditation becoming one with the eternal grace. He was aware that he was a predecessor of Christ and he paved the way for the re-incarnation of Christ.

In the poem the poet makes Snāpaka as a great seeker of knowledge and Truth, namely a Ṛṣi. He compares Snāpaka yohannān as a *Muni, Yogi* etc., of Ṛṣi tradition and concludes that still the Snāpaka yohannān remains as an unquestionable abode of dharma.

Police Stories - Prof. Devassia, because of his linguistic interest and daring quality that he could translate some detective stories into Malayalam. This text is divided into four parts: the first part contains 10 stories, second part contains 8 stories, third and fourth contains 7 stories. He was interested to translate even detective stories because he believed that the traditional society of Kerala will become aware of modern investigative practices and developments in criminology. Directly and indirectly, it makes people aware of the crime. To a greater extend he maintains a status of dharma through this creative and curious story. It makes people aware of the possibility of bravery, robbery, killing and kidnapping etc. These stories were about the latest investigative practices of the time.

Boys Town - Through this story Prof. Devassia himself says that by translating this story, he tries his best to uphold the requirement of a dharmic revolution. That is why he emphasizes the universal human values and ethos. This book contains 26 stories. The first seven chapters of the story explains the effort taken by the hero to choose a lively hood. This work concentrates on the problems of orphans who lack love, care, affection, sympathy and like values which are required to develop a human culture, values and thoughts.

Rājanīti (Royal Justice) - This is a book contained 26 short components which narrated the story about Machiavelli who lived in Florence in the year 1461 May 3rd to 20th June 1527. He was a king and scholar, who got

an award from the world of Eastern and Western. Rājanīti was a very worthy book rich in Machiavellian doctrines (theories), which introduced P.C. Devassia’s deeply thoughtful mind. It has 179 pages. This book was published by Kerala Sahitya Parishat in 1959.

Matam irupatām śatakattil (Religion in the 20th Century) - It is a translated work in Malayalam from a well-known English treatise during 20th century in America. It is a highly thought provoking and inspiration for a positive religious movement.

Oregon Giripatham (The Oregon Trail) - It is a famous travelogue by Francis Parkman translated to Malayalam by P.C. Devassia. It was published by Current Books in February 1966. It has 27 chapters and 556 pages. In this book the narrative is about the red Indians includes the Ādivāsi tribes. It is very interesting to read because of the easy and facile style of writing. The translator characterized that the book is precious like Mahāpurāṇam situated in the history of paryāṭanāgramatvaṃ (Tourism) of Western people.

Janakīyakāvyaṃ (Popular Poetry) - It is the first Sanskrit writing of P.C. Devassia and it was published in 1948. It was a short poem about the contemporary politics see through satire. People were highly fascinated at the time of publishing it in Malayala Manorama weekly. It is not available in the form of a book.

Bhārataśilpikaḷ (Indian Sculptors) - It is the biography of some of the national architects which are ‘Labdhapratīṣṭha’ in people’s heart due to their patriotism, national obligations and idealisms. It was printed in 1952, but did not publish and so no copy of this book is available.

Patimūnnu Cerukathakaḷ (13 Short Stories) - It was published by the monthly book club, Ernakulam in 1955. It has 192 pages. In this book 9 stories were written by P.C. Devassia and other 4 stories were written by 2 other writers. These nine stories are related to Western stories and other four stories are independent. These nine stories were written in simple language befitting to the aptitude of readers and the inspirations received by reading.

American Saṃskāram (American Culture) - The original text by U.S.I.S was written by Albert Harkness. It was translated by Prof. P.C. Devassia in 1962. The book is a short description about the cultural development of the United States of America. This book starts with the Puritan art and continuing with the touch through different zones

of different theories. This is very difficult to comprehend but it deserves to be studied.

Kalāsurabhaṃ (Aroma of Art) - It was published by his own Jayabharatam publication in 1971 and 1983 in two editions. It has 150 pages. It is a book consists of 12 essays. This writing emphasizes on his pedantic spirit, *sarvakalārasikan* (all art lover) and exposes his unprecedented style of writing.

Conclusion

Prof. P.C. Devassia had intense knowledge in English, Malayalam and Sanskrit languages as well. He had a dedication and commitment towards his masterpiece *Kristubhāgavata*. He was a man of deep knowledge in both Indian and Western philosophy. He tries to look at the life of Christ from the '*Bhāgavata*' (one of the famous 18 purana-s) point of view. It is not out of plan to say that both the Malayalam and English translations of *Kristubhāgavata* exposes his linguistic excellence. It is felt as a rare feature that both these works maintain a nature of storytelling, feelings, emotions and attitudes. His ability to make the lines emotional and sensitive is quite appreciable and astounding.

The translation of the Police Stories reveals his linguistic interest and daring quality. The *Kathāsaritsāgara* highlights his translating skill, knowledge on rasa etc. In his works, he tried his best to uphold the requirement of a dharmic revolution by emphasizing universal human values and culture. His writings are very easy to understand even to the laymen.

He lived like a seer and philosopher, yet he did not forget to become an ideal teacher for the students. He was a role model for those who wanted to lead a decent life.

References:

- 1 It is an ancient Indian epic
- 2 It is a largely unattached literary language of the middle kingdoms of India mentioned in Prakrit and Sanskrit grammars of antiquity
- 3 P.C. Devassia, *Kristubhāgavata*, Jayabharatam Publication, TVM, 1977
- 4 P.C. Devassia, *Marubhūmiyilē garjjitaṃ*, Jayabharatam Publication
- 5 Introduction