Abstract

The thesis entitled The Pepper Paper People: A Portrait of the Syrian Christian Community as Reflected in the Works of Selected Authors is an attempt to study the Syrian Christian community through selected works of literature. Such a study is undertaken in accordance with the principle that literature is a reflection of history. While history reveals the external features of events, literature tries to understand the mental and moral characteristics of the people who made these events happen. Just as literature is a tool that helps in the understanding of other disciplines, literature is also a tool which helps in the ultimate search for truth. Literature is also a magic mirror which not only reflects present truth but also prophesies future possibilities. Literature warns the reader about the writing on the wall and exhorts him to mend his ways or face the consequences.

The study is a portrait of the Syrian Christian community of Kerala as perceived by six authors in certain of their works. The Syrian Christians who form the subject of this study belong to the Anglican and Syrian Protestant, Episcopalian denominations of Central Kerala. The works studied are The Slayer Slain by Frances Collins, Take My Hands by Dorothy Clarke Wilson, Fault Lines by Meena Alexander, A Video, a Fridge and a Bride by Nirmala Aravind, The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy and Something Barely Remembered by Susan Viswanathan. As all the authors are women their perspective about the Syrian Christian community is essentially the female perspective.

The study is about the community between 1866 when the first work was published to 2000 when the last came out. All the works share certain basic features. Eight characteristics have been identified and they are analysed comprehensively. It is possible to trace changes in each of
these characteristics over the last hundred and fifty years. Some of these have mutated into new forms while others are slowly dying out.

The methodology that is employed is one of comparison and contrast. Each feature of the community that is described in each of the works is placed against their counterparts actually practised by the community. Such practices and customs are the ones that are recorded in published works, the ones culled from unpublished material like diaries, letters and other manuscripts as well as from customs and observances that are either observed or recounted. Nine chapters are devoted to the exposition of the features that make up the portrait of the Syrian Christians. There is also a preface and a conclusion that tie up all loose threads. At the end of the study one arrives at the truth that the pristine nature of the community is fast declining.
List of Key Words

1. Syrian Christians
2. The Slayer Slain
3. Take My Hands
4. Fault Lines
5. A Video, a Fridge and a Bride
6. The God of Small Things
7. Something Barely Remembered