CHAPTER SIX

THE PROPHET'S WAY

AS A BIOGRAPHICAL JESUS RECONSTRUCTION IN THE CREATIVE UNDERSTANDING MODE

"I pray that they may all be one"
(John 17.21)

6.1.1. O.V. Vijayan was born in 1930 in Palakkad, Kerala. His mother’s house was at Mankara. His father Velukkutty was a police officer in the Malabar Special Police (M. S. P.) and so he grew up at the hills of Eranadu in a camp of armed constabulary which his father commanded. As there were no schools near the camp and he was a weak child, he didn’t have any formal schooling till the age of twelve. So he spent his childhood in reading fairy tales. Later he passed intermediate in Science and took BA in Economics. Then he took a Master’s degree in Politics from Madras University in 1954 and became a teacher of literature. After teaching two years in Thanjavoor and one year in Malabar Christian College, he left the teaching profession to become a cartoonist and a writer (Jayakrishnan 4). In a Newspaper interview he claimed that from 1958 onwards for thirty years he had been drawing cartoons for some English newspapers (Chitetukulam 2). He got the Priyaraj Cartooning and Lapooning Award in 1999. As he has been living in various Indian cultural centres like Delhi and Hyderabad, he has acquired a deep personal knowledge of multicultural Indian milieu and mind. In a memoir published in a newspaper, O.V. Usha, Vijayan’s younger sister speaks about his youth dedicated to communism. It was from
his maternal grandfather, T. K. Chamy that he got this political inclination (4) Usha speaks of the influence of Navajyothi Sree Pothenkodu Karunakara Guru upon Vijayan in his later years. Karunakara Guru is a tradition-breaker who received religious life from a Swamy belonging to Islamic- Sufi race. This produced a spiritual turn in him who however had not been interested in any religious formalities till then. Anil Mangalathu quotes his description of the Guru who transformed his world: "It was a good experience The Guru was a man of great love" (4).

6.1.2. Vijayan experiments with diverse innovative and unusual techniques in his novels and stories K. P. Appan remarks, "Vijayan's stories elucidate the confounding variety in having in the same person the existence of the humorist. tragedian, absurd poet, anarchist, and a yogi" (Translated by the researcher from Appan 1998, 94) In this novel The Prophet's Way¹ (Pravâchakante Vazhi), he assumes the role of the yogi. This novel depicts the picture of the communal dissension in post-colonial India. In the words of Rajasekharan, this novel depicts Narayanan's travels into the inner reality of India, into the cruel realities of Nationalism and the safety of the nation (70) The Prophet's way is a journey from the external reality about the national outlook established by Indian politics to the inner core or uniqueness of the truths of races This novel is a search for a panacea for the Indian dilemma of multi-racial co-existence

¹ All citations from the novel are translations by the researcher with the concurrence of the author from Vijayan O V Pravachakante Vazhi Kottayam D C Books. 1994
6.1.3. It discusses the interminable problems of human relationship with God, with other human beings and with himself. In the story of Joseph, one of his Christ figures, Vijayan elucidates how one's life-ideology decides his/her relationship with God, with the external world and with himself. Joseph begins his active life as a Marxist. During this period he lives without giving any value to God or the world or himself. He organises anti-social activities like riots and murders (83-84). At the second stage, Joseph becomes a Capitalist through the books on wines given to him by Rahim while he was in the prison. He views society with indifference, God and life appear meaningless (99-100). At the third stage, he becomes a servant of God. This makes him a humanist full of love and compassion for the world (202-3). According to Tony Chitetukulam, Vijayan suggests absorbing the problem and expressing it in creative writing as the only solution to the problematic situation of modern man (Chitetukulam 2).

6.1.4. George Ônakoor views this novel from a different angle and states that it has the characteristics of a 'strip cartoon novel'. In The Prophet's Way the illusions of fake nationality that engulf modern India are scrutinised through the eyes of a cartoonist (171). In the place of laughter, Vijayan uses here lamentation. Vijayan speaks about the job of the cartoonist in this novel itself through his mouthpiece Narayanan: "Even the cartoon picture is a search for a path. Artists with elegant fingers catch eminent men of history in their nets and make them play in paper columns. But sometimes amusement becomes as compassionate as lamentation" (33). Cartoons aim at making people laugh by pointing out the weaknesses of life and make them think through mirth. But this novel uses grief as the
means of self analysis and attitudinal change. It is a cartoon novel woven around deep and abiding sorrow. Like cartoons, this novel has no definite theme or an ordered story. Through the stream of consciousness of Narayanan, the story of different religions, their prophets and their impact on the Indian society and the mutual conflict among them are slowly unravelled. Christianity being an inevitable presence in the Indian society. Jesus Christ is given a prominent role among the prophets discussed.

6.2.1. Vijayan engages a new technique in creating a biographical reconstruction of Jesus. Like mosaic paintings in which pictures or designs are developed by fitting together differently coloured stone pieces, Vijayan utilises different images, characters, scenes, and Biblical verses to reconstitute the Biblical Jesus. To get the Jesus figure the reader should pick up narrative bits and pieces scattered here and there in the novel and arrange them in the proper order. These narrative fragments fall under mainly five types: icons, iconotrops, and synonyms of Christ, Gospel persons and Gospel quotations.

6.2.2.1. Abrams defines “An icon functions as a sign by means of inherent similarities, or shared features, with what it signifies” (276). A sign has two inseparable aspects — the signifier and the signified. In this novel, Vijayan uses certain signifiers related to the Biblical Jesus as a means to reconstruct the Jesus story. The nail marks on the palms, feet and side are considered the identifying marks of the Risen Jesus. The Gospels clearly state that at His first appearance after His Resurrection, Jesus confronted the disciples with the words, “See my hands and my feet, that it
is myself’ (Luke 24. 39, John 20. 20, 27). Later it has become an icon representing Jesus Christ. And in this novel Vijayan adopts this icon as a significant medium to reconstruct Jesus. This icon is used in the description of Rema’s elder brother “There were wounds on his palms, feet and side” (33= Luke 24. 39; John 20. 20) With the same iconographic narration, Vijayan transforms Joseph into a Jesus figure: “As if in reply, Joseph removed the hands from the iron bars and showed his spread out palms in front of Narayanan. Wounds on the palms, Joseph asked, ‘Why do you become doubtful? Touch my wounds and see!’ Blood sprouted from the wounds. As they watched, there appeared the holy command of blood on the feet and side” (235=Luke 24. 39, John 20. 20). Transfiguration with the stigmata is heeded as a sign, which authorises that the individual has reached the highest level of identification with Christ.

6.2.2.2. The sorrowful God is an additional icon in this novel pointing to Jesus Christ. Rema mentions the Christ who cried aloud in the garden of Gethsemane: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt 26. 39). Narayanan extends the significance of this statement by adding, “It is when we remember that the father and the son were one (John 10. 30; 14. 9-11) that we realise with fear that the sorrow is God’s. To ease the sorrow of God, his sons walked in the way of self-infliction. But above them god and the prophet communicated in endless plains of sorrow.” (43) Similarly Rema reminds Narayanan that “Sorrow is the way to the Father” (237= Luke 14. 27, Rom. 5. 4-5). On a different occasion Narayanan says of “the body of the Guru, like any other body which has flesh and marrow, crying aloud in death pain” (111=Luke 23. 45) Jesus, the
helpless God who had confronted Saul, the persecutor of the first Christians, on the way to Damascus with the fatal question "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9. 1-5) and transformed him into an ardent disciple and staunch missionary, Paul, is reconstructed in the dialogue between Narayanan and Rema. Their discussion leads Rema to the declaration that "This helplessness is the Christ whom I love" (Acts 9. 5). The image of the Son of God is a further icon employed in this novel. Narayanan states that "Martyrdom is possible only in a place where the fatherhood of God is accepted, like the Crucifixion of Christ." (Luke 23 46) Guru being betrayed by the disciple is yet another Jesus icon realised in the novel Sudindran and Brahmadettan who were Joseph's disciples, when he was leading the Communist revolution in Palakkad, betrayed him later when he became a transformed man, determined to lead a quiet life (Matt 26 47; Mark 14 43; Luke 22 47; John 18. 3).

6.2.2.3. The Holy Sacraments are icons of Jesus Christ. In this novel, Vijayan mentions some of the Sacraments. Narayanan speaks about the Sacrament of Repentance: "When we confess the sins, boundless mercy. It is the Christians who made the confession a touching formality." (111) He also mentions the Holy Communion: "Priests argue with the Sikhan who stands in the queue waiting for his turn to receive Holy Communion..." (183): "After breaking the kulcha into two by his mud-stained hand and putting his palm over it Sujan Singh sat there for a while. Then poured red

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2 Sikhan is an adjective coined by Vijayan to denote a person belonging to the Sikh religion.
rum little, little into two glasses. Narayanan realised the meaning of those great symbols."(186)

6.2.2.4. Star and light are two further Christ-icons used in this novel. Rema describes the prayer room of the nuns at Auschwitz in the following words. “.. the light of a candle, which burns, like a star showing the path in the darkness of human sacrifice. . . The gentle candle of love... gives salvation” (164-65). The star is a symbol designating the kingship of Jesus. The Gospel According to Matthew narrates the visit of the three wise men from the East to the place where Jesus was born on seeing His star in the East. (Matt 2. 2-10) Later in the novel the star of nativity (Matt. 2. 2, 9-10) is recreated as an icon “Now they saw the star that filled the sky. It’s shining head. The great star of revelation, then the tail which grew longer and longer and being absorbed in the darkness.” (289) Jesus is called the ‘light of the world’ (John 4, 9). Jesus announced Himself as the light of the world (John 8. 12). Adopting the Biblical icon, “And the word became flesh” (John 1. 14), Vijayan says, “The word is Incarnation” (279).

6.2.2.5. A character of this novel, Joseph is depicted as an icon of Jesus as the Redeemer who undertook the sins of the world. Sub-inspector Pisharaddy explains Narayanan’s Christ-like self-sacrifice in the following words “Searching out all the crimes, from murders to silly thefts happened here during the last ten years, he states firmly that all those are his faults. Then a last acknowledgement of crime that it was he who put the house on fire” (233). The fruit of knowledge, the icon of sin, is mentioned (165) along with other Christ-Icons, like ‘the king wearing the crown of thorns’
(165), and "the Gospel written in the pain of your son" (165). The Cross, a prominent icon of Jesus Christ, is included thus: "The Cross decomposes as an ornament" (276).

6.2.3.1. In iconotropy an iconographic motif is used in a new context with a new thematic stress. Vijayan's *The Prophet's Way* abounds in this technique. When the iconographic motif is placed in its original context, it projects one of the prophets whom Vijayan has reconstructed in the novel. As the focus of the current study is the reconstruction of the Jesus story, an analysis of the iconotropic handling of Jesus is undertaken. The best example for iconotropy is Sujan Singh's description of his dead wife and son equating them with the 'Pieta'. On the day of the riot against the Sikhs in Delhi, on seeing the burned dead body of his son falling on to the dead body of his wife Sujan Singh cries out, 'Look inside, Lord! Like the Virgin Mother, my Satvant tends Simren in her lap' (243). The fact that both the mother and the son were murdered brutally by the rioters adds intensity to the sorrow of the narration. In the devastating sorrow of this loss, Sujan Singh relates this local tragedy to the Crucifixion of Jesus and by this correlation Vijayan provides this singular event with a universal dimension. Simren, who was burnt alive in the aerodrome on his return home from London with a lot of money to look after his ageing parents, on behalf of his identity as a Sikhan, is made a representing-figure of all those sons who are brutally massacred as innocent victims of communal and political riots. Similarly by relating Satvant to the 'Mother of Sorrows', the Virgin Mary with the dead body of Jesus on her lap, Vijayan has given her a universal stature that makes her the symbol of all heartbroken mothers who lose their
beloved sons/daughters in undeserved tragedies initiated by blind human beings.

6.2.3.2. Rema Drimga, a major character of the novel is developed as an iconotrope for Jesus. Similar to the flight of Jesus and His parents into Egypt as refugees (Matt 2. 14), during the post-partition struggle, Rema's parents escape with her from Veeramdetta to Delhi as Hindu refugees (9). Later during the Delhi-riot against the Sikhs she dedicates her life to save two members of the hunted Sikh community: the eight year old Gurupreethan, whose parents were lost in the riot and the wounded young man Sukhveer Singh whose wife and children were burnt alive in his house. She becomes a Sikhani for their sake and even sacrifices her long dreamed married life with Narayanan (240-255). Thus Rema is constituted as an iconotrope for the self-emptying love of Jesus.

6.2.3.3. 'A man for others' is an iconographic motif often connected with Jesus Christ. In this novel many such characters are created through iconotropy. The first among them is Rema's grand father: Like Jesus who invited all people to Him stating "he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst (John 5 35), in Veeramduatta, a village, where generations of Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony, Rema's grandfather provided food and shelter to the merchants who were passing through the Khyber Pass without any consideration to their race or religion. During their journey, tying their valuable things on mule-backs merchants came to the house of the grandfather, with their wives and children, to sleep in the night. In its twenty-four bedrooms with mud walls,
Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs spent nights. If a child cried from any room grandmother would call grandmother "Sahaju, heat some milk and give it to that child." The next morning, the grandfather, who was a Hindu, would see off those strange parting guests, in the language of the Muslim, "Gudhahaffice", may God take care of you Then, sitting before the portraits of his myriad-God imagination, he chanted incantations and through those chants he immersed in the pleasant journey towards the One without form or shape.

6.2.3.4. In spite of the fact that it was he who had renovated the Mazjid at Veeramdutta, one day, in the courtyard of the twenty four bed roomed house, in front of the inexhaustible vessel of grandmother, Sahaju was shot dead by the young Muslim fanatics who came out of his Mazjid, shouting slogans. The prayer recited from the Book of the Guru by Guru Charan Singh, the merchant who came to pay last obeisance to him clearly expresses the universal brotherhood practised by him:

Me masîdh sidhak musalla-3
Hakh halal Khuran
Saram sunnath seel rosa
Ha oh musalman!

Thus Rema's grand father is depicted as an iconotrope for Jesus, the icon of Agape love, who embraces the whole universe without any consideration of race, religion or caste.

1 My Mazjid is the mercy of God, devotion is my prayer-mat Obedience to god is my circumcision, granting forgiveness is my fasting- in this manner I am a Muslim"(11-13)
6.2.3.5. The story of Gurumeet Singh, the Sikh captain who had died for Narayanan's father during the First World War, is another example of iconotropy. While Jesus sacrificed His life for humanity, Gurumeet Singh identified himself with the Jesus who taught, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13) through his sacrifice. Indian military life in the deserts of Mesopotamia during the First World War provided the context for his Christ-identification. He showed remarkable courage in protecting the life of the Small Pox-smitten soldier, Narayanan's father. While all his other companions demanded shooting him and throwing the body into the mid-day heat of the sands, Captain Gurumeet Singh carried him out of the trench to a far away tin-sheet shed and laid him inside it. Later he was shot dead while he was returning after leaving a jar full of water inside the tin-shed (32). Thus, Captain Gurumeet Singh, here, functions as an iconotrope representing Jesus, who sacrificed His life to save others.

6.2.3.6. The stories of Daniel Wiseman and Sujan Singh also are 'man for others' icons. Even in his dealings with his family members, Sujan Singh functions as a Christ-ideal. When Sujan Singh's father died, his uncles confiscated their farms. Instead of following the traditional way of killing them in a fight and retaining the farm, Sujan stepped aside and left the country like Jesus "who, though was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but emptied himself" (Phil 2:6). Later he sacrificed his time and energy for the rescue of the wounded-bleeding people of the post-partition racial strife in Calcutta. He has been
given a one to one similarity to Jesus when the author states, "Embracing the tube he cried, 'I thirst' [John 19.28] and fell unconscious" (110). Jesus cried out of thirst for the spiritual lives of people, Sujan Singh cried out of thirst for the physical lives of the dying people. Daniel Wiseman joined the World War to fight against the last enemy of his race, remembering, recollecting with devotion, the pain of the holy wounds of the king who was ignored by his race (71). Corporal Wiseman was put to death in the concentration camp at Sobibore. Thus he sacrificed his life for his people, the Jews and became 'the Good Shepherd' who sacrificed his life for his herd.

6.2.3.7. Sujan Singh's friend, Radheshyam is depicted as an iconotrope in the mode of the 'love that sacrifices one's life for the other.' While Sujan was caught among the rioters, he saved his life by cutting off his hair. Since he put Sujan's iron bangle on his wrist, he was murdered for the mistaken identity of a Sikh (226, 251-52).

6.2.3.8. The Biblical story in which Jesus denies permission to the disciples who wanted to burn the Samaritan village which refused to receive Jesus is reconstructed with a similar story of the Nabbi (Luke 9. 51-54 = 26) to highlight another iconic emotion of Jesus, 'love for the enemies'. Both Jesus and the Nabbi show compassion and tender love towards the villagers who reject them.

6.2.3.9. In the story of the forgiving widow of the police wireless officer whom Joseph and his comrade friends have assassinated during their
revolutionary rebellion, the love for the enemies' ideal is elaborately reconstructed in the novel. When Joseph went to seek forgiveness from the widow with a heart full of regret and guilty feeling, not only that she showed no anger or hatred but she expressed love towards him by offering him a formal drink and requesting him to wait till she finished her prayers and then by showing her willingness to share the *Theertham* [Holy Water] with him. Here she is equated with the Jesus who prayed from the Cross. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23. 34).

6.2.3.10. Nuns and their prayer, a living icon of Christ has been iconotropied against Auschwitz the city of the gas chambers, in which, thousands of Jews were burned alive. The depiction of Jesus crying aloud to the Father, "Oh, brothers! I ask my father to punish you for the blame of not knowing me? Why do my priests put the blame of this hatred upon me? Father, the cup of this accusation is more unbearable to me-", is used to bring home the love for the enemies identity of Jesus which was ignored by the Church. And the unbroken incantations of the nuns turn into a prayer for the Jews. "Merciful Mary, let this become a companion to the Gospel written in the pain of your son, the Gospel of nail marks"(164 - 65).

6.2.3.11. In the novel the Christian icon of Trans substantiation is linked to hard liquors.

At night a policeman gave the first book to Joseph. The story of European wines! The story of soured and un-soured grapes from their genesis to the present, to the fruit juice which became the medium, for the blood fallen from and spread on the cross to touch
and call the forthcoming generations, the doctrine of the mutual exchange between blood and wine, wine's generation (97).

6.2.3.12. Jesus who felt compassion for the prostitutes and sinners is iconotropied in Shevanti’s political leader who cries for the prostitutes and looks after the welfare of them (266= Luke 7. 36-50; John 8. 1-11). And the Gospel teaching “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none” (Luke 3. 11) is iconotropied in the following scene: “Ansari said, “There are two blankets in my hands—” Dharvice laughed aloud and told, “Oho! This is the word of the other simpleton, isn’t it? Don’t want. The second blanket is for the neighbour! Today there is none with only one blanket. We have only those with ten or hundred” (270).

6.2.3.13. Another icon related to Christ, the ascension is iconotropied as the fire-burned deaths of the Sikhs in the communal riots (286) The burnt house of Sujan Singh is compared to the ‘Shroud of Tourine’ which also is a traditional icon representing Jesus Christ. “Two black spots projected on the wall in the burnt house, four eyes from behind those marks, as in the shroud of Tourine, looked at Narayanan, four eyes told an unending story” (283-84). Locust, an icon of Jesus’ forerunner, John the Baptist is reconstituted as an iconotrope signifying the flight of the hunted races:

The locust told, God calls different individuals in different voices, the community as well as the lone. After listening to that call, it is exodus... Each race could go back. To return and restart from the beginning of the way it is enough to go two thousand years back. I
can hear the wild cry of John the Baptist, and be absorbed in his body as the food melted in honey (47). The covenant making words of Jesus is iconotropied into the mouth of Wiseman, a Jew "The wineglass of Wiseman became empty and again he ordered wine. When it came, he poured it into Sujan Singh's glass that was half-empty. "Drink this (this cup is the new agreement that is sealed with the blood of my death"). God, what did I say! The words of the carpenter of Nazareth who is forbidden to my race! How did it come to my tongue? Fathers come together, forgives historical sins... the soldiers of Panzer entered Poland breaking its boundaries. Israel's two thousand year long waiting ended (71).

6.2.4. Vijayan uses different synonyms of Jesus also in the novel as a means for reconstructing Jesus. One of the popular synonyms for Jesus Christ, 'Christ' is repeatedly used in this novel. Rema writes in her gold painted diary, “the love which has overflowed from Christ...”(26), Joseph says, “Martyrdom is possible only in a place where the fatherhood of God is accepted, like the crucifixion of Christ”(99). “The king wearing the crown of thorns cried from the cross”(165). Rema confesses, "This helplessness is the Christ whom I love" (112). Nuns are referred as “the fresh virgins of Christ”(164). The “Spirit of Christ” is mentioned (112). “Holy Spirit became a great explosion” (151) Another synonym used is ‘carpenter’. Rema says, “Nârâyâneretta, my first guru is a carpenter”(27); Corporal Wiseman says, “The words of the carpenter of Nazareth who is forbidden to my race”(71). Child Jesus of Prague is referred to (153). Yet another
synonym is "the king wearing the crown of thorns [who] cried from the cross" (165) Rema mentions, "the merciful Carpenter" (290).

6.2.5. The Father and the son from the Bible are recreated in the novel. The Holy Bible is centred on God, the Father and His begotten Son Jesus Christ. Vijayan mentions their relationship in the novel against the identity of the prophets as the Sons of God (43). John the Baptist is mentioned as the person who invites people to hear the call of God (47) Later he is described as the man in a camel-skin garment who informs 'His' arrival (120 = Matt 3; Mark 1; Luke 3). Again he is implied by the description of the bodiless head (270 = Matt 14. 10-11; Mark 6 27-28). Holy Spirit is described as the power-source behind creation (151). Child Jesus is equated with the child-incarnations of Hindu mythology. (153). Barabbas, the murderer who was released on behalf of Jesus is implied in the culprit of 'the Paruthippully murder case' whose crime is undertaken by Joseph (233 = Matt 27 15-22; Mark 15. 7-15; Luke 23. 18-19) Mother Mary is referred as 'The mother in the Catholic Church' (182) and as the mother of sorrows with the dead body of Jesus on her lap (243). Saul who was transformed into St. Paul is mentioned along with a description of his conversion experience (112 = Act 1. 1-9). The second Christ, St. Francis of Assisi is mentioned with emphasis on the stigmata (90). The 'voice from the cloud' is mentioned (277 = Matt 17. 5, Luke 9. 35). Mary Magdeline, the prostitute converted into saint by Jesus is symbolically recreated in Shevanthy, the prostitute married and made respectable wife by Sundar (287-88).
6.2.6. Following verses from the Holy Gospel are being quoted in this novel: “give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to give to God the things that are God's" (43 = Luke 20. 25). "Father, if you are willing, take away this cup (43 = Luke 22. 42; Mark 13. 17). "I am the way" (55, 226 = John 14. 16). "Drink this-this cup is the new agreement that is sealed with the blood of my death"(71 = Mtt.26. 27; Mark14. 24; Luke 22. 17; 1Cor.11. 25). “Let me clear my doubt, shall I touch you! [John 20. 25] "Yes. It is I" (96 = John 6. 20) "I thirst" (110 = John 19. 28) "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (112 = Acts 9. 4; 22 7; 26. 14). He is risen (Matt. 28. 6; Mark 16. 6; Luke 24. 6, 34) He will come again (119 = John 14. 19, John 21. 22; Acts 1. 11). “You shall not murder!” (166 = Mtt.21; Exod. 20. 13). “ The Father and the Son were one . ” (43 = John 14. 10). "Why do you become doubtful? Touch my wounds and see!" (235 = John 20. 27) “He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none” (270 = Luke 3. 11). “I will come again”(290 = John 14. 3). The whole Gospel story is summarised in a small paragraph:

The sons of man who ate the fruit of cunningness, built up empires, they created unabashed forts of technology, play houses of sex and huge arsenals and competed each other to get copious shares in them. The footprints of the prophet, who moved aside without touching their lust, were ploughed down (165=Mark 12. 1-8).

6.2.7. The Jesus figure that is projected from a consolidated reading of these narratives is identical with the Biblical Jesus: He is a man who has wounds on his palms, legs and side. He is a helpless man of sorrows. He introduces God as the Father. He is a forgiving God He is one who divides
his flesh and blood for the humanity. He is the Star, which guides humanity to salvation. He is the light of the world. He is the Bridegroom of Nuns. He is a Guru who had been betrayed by his own disciple. He is the word who became flesh. He is the innocent victim who sacrifices his life for the sin of others. He is the King who wears the crown of thorns. He is the one in whose pain the Gospel is written. He is the gentle candle of love, which gives salvation. He is the one who died on the cross. He is the son who was laid in the lap of the sorrowing mother as a dead pathetic body. He is a man for others. He is the Carpenter of Nazareth. He is the one who cried ‘I thirst’. He is the one who taught to love the enemies. He is the one for whose sake the Jews were persecuted in Auschwitz and Sobibore. He is the one who showed compassion to the prostitutes and sinners. He is the one whose forerunner asked those who have two blankets to give one to those who have none. He is the one who has ascended to heaven; He is the one who is connected to the ‘Shroud of Turin’; He is the great star of revelation; He is the Christ; He is the carpenter of Nazareth, He is the king who was ignored by his race. He taught “give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to give to God the things that are God's”. He cried shouting “Father, if you are willing, take away this cup”. He declared “I am the way”. He asked his disciples to “Drink this cup, which is the new agreement that is sealed with the blood of my death”. He cried, “I thirst” He taught “You shall not murder”. He said: “I am the way!” To him the Father and the Son are one. He is the risen one. When he came back from death he asked his disciples “Why do you become doubtful? Touch my wounds and see!” He has ascended into heaven. He is believed to come again. He asked “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” His life story is
condensed in the parable of the son of the vineyard owner. When the owner sent his son to the tenets to collect his share of the fruits, they killed him and cast him out of the vineyard (Mark 12. 1-8).

In short, Vijayan's Jesus Christ is a prophet who constricted Himself into the manger, into Egypt, into the carpenter's house in Nazareth, on the cross and at present in the Tabernacle. This analysis confirms this novel as a biographical reconstruction of the Biblical Jesus story.

6.3.1 In a reconstruction process in the mode of creative understanding the reader recreates a work or a character through a positive fusion of both the world of the author and the reader. In this novel, Vijayan merges the characteristics of the First century A.D Judaeo-Christian Palestinian cultural context and that of the twentieth century Indian cultural context. He has placed the Biblical Christ as an appropriate prophet who could create harmony and peace in the racially divided India. Standing firmly in a Hindu-majority, multi-religious, multi-cultural modern Indian context Vijayan reinvents the Jesus Christ of the Biblical setting in it. His Jesus is acceptable both to the Hindu Indian mind and to the traditional Christian mind. As Rajashekaran states, "In Vijayan's art the search for God is an indispensable part of the philosophical doubt of existence. Hindu philosophy based on the Upanishad is the influence behind this search" (82). To Vijayan human life itself is a journey in search of God the Father and Jesus as the son leads the way (Ibid). In his Indianized philosophy, all prophets: Sree Rama, Christ, Mohammed, Guru Nanak, Buddha, were the media of God to communicate
with human beings. Child Jesus of Prague and Vettakkaren⁴ are equal Gods in his view. For him God is a father who loves mercifully. Vijayan sees the repetition of Christ’s Crucifixion in all martyrdom: in the persecution of Dravidians by the Aryans; in the martyrs of the Indian freedom struggle; in the suffocated death of the Jews in the gas chambers of Nazi concentration camps; in the massacre of Reichstag fire; in the destruction of Thavang [Kashmir]; in the Jalian Wallah Bhag massacre; in the Indo-Chinese war; in the Burma war; in the collective murder of Hindus and Moslems during the partition, in the Golden temple violence; in the persecutions of the ‘emergency’ period and in the burning alive of Sikhs after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister Vijayan feels

6.3.2. He finds the solution for the present dilemma of mutual existence in the teachings of Jesus Christ. It should be Jesus in the Indian garb and Indian temperament. “In his outlook the prophet is the mediator found out by each race in their journey to meet God. It was asking the question what is there beyond this life that each prophet passed over. It was into the confused world that the crisis of race and individuality has thrown human beings. In this society which faces the absence of the father, Vijayan’s Jesus is born as Rema’s grand father in the Hindu-Muslim war field of Veeramdetta. He is born in the deserts of Mesopotamia in the form of Captain Gurumeeth Singh who sacrificed his life for the small pox

⁴ Vettakkaren is a child appearance of Lord Shiva. He is worshipped by Hindus of Kerala, especially by those who live around the river Nila (Bharathapuzha). He is regarded as the naughty boy who hides behind the fences and peeps through the foliages. Devotees play with him by placing coconut oil near the fence and shouting to him that it is ghee for him to eat (153)
affected soldier, Narayanan's father. Ganga Prasad, Rema's brother, who is a mental patient, reflects Jesus with His five wounds of nails, in the same manner as St. Francis of Assisi reflected Him (90). Jesus lives in the Buddhist monk of Thavang. Vijayan's attitude to religion is consolidated in this short passage:

To ease the sorrow of God, his sons walked in the way of self-infliction. To cool his mind they created lofty music, the rhythm of the drum, filled the epics with god's images with numberless hands and heads, in these festivals people wandered around with horn, flute and shouting. The goddesses who got life through such adoration became man's Gods through blessings and destruction. But above them, god and the prophet communicated in endless planes of sorrow (43)

6.3.3. Indian theology views all prophets and all Gods as equals. Adopting this view Vijayan states that "Each race walked without knowing the perpetuity of prophecy (55). In the pungency of God experience each Guru told "I am the way" (John 14. 16)... the only way...." When an experience which was beyond words was translated into human words by the prophet who was a limited human being, prophecy was acquiring the limitations of historical time. According to Vijayan, the Gurus who told 'through me, and only me' were repeating the oneness of the Word of God, which was conveyed through them. Without knowing this reality that all prophets are messengers of God, races ended fighting each other. When the doubts of the Sikhan or the Muslim increased, the anxiety of the Hindu also increased (55). Vijayan describes how religions and worship houses
initiated by the prophets lose their spiritual value in the course of time due to the ignorance of humanity:

On Chevidi hill, in Kalli forest and on the river bank, the bloodstain of the martyr stayed without getting dim. The word fell into these with the simplicity of the drizzling rain. Around the word there arose the houses of worship, gold plated towers, epic stories copied by painters on the windowsills, arches and decoration—the raindrops of the prophecy dried in the extravaganza of workmanship, then cities developed around the worship houses. Then the prophet left for some place somewhere in search of a way... Pranavam told him, ‘Son, for you I speak again’ (54).

6.3.4. He believes that “Each race could go back. To return and to restart the journey from the starting point of the path it is enough to go back two thousand years” (47) There, Jesus’ teachings on love would show the way for a harmonious living together To him God is a friend who enjoys seeing and listening to human idiocy (57) His Jesus is an inspiration and model for imitation even to the Jews “Daniel Wiseman went into the battlefield to face the last enemy of his race, remembering, recollecting with devotion, the pain of the holy wounds of the king who was ignored by his race” (71). Vijayan considers the touch of human goodness/virtue more abundant than the grace of God (74). In his universal brotherhood each and every God, Prophet and Guru is a common property of the whole universe: “Not only the North and South Indians but also the people of the whole world should have a right in the Kasi of Vishvanāthan” [the Lord of the universe] (92). He describes the cry of the guru at Lal Quila, who is
oppressed in the burning Uruli (vessel) and equates it with the cry of Christ before Saul, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" According to Vijayan's theology, to ease the burden of those who can not visualise a God who fills the whole world as spirit, the Holy Spirit became a great explosion and the live particles that scattered from that explosion became incarnations. Thus, Child Jesus of Prague, Little Krishna on the banian leaf and Vettakkaren become the different incarnations of the one and only God. Seeing the Jews who were being persecuted in the Nazi concentration camp, his Jesus cries from the cross "Oh, brothers! I ask my father to punish you for the blame of not knowing me? Why do my priests put the blame of this hatred upon me? Father, the cup of this accusation is more unbearable to Me" -(165). The forbidden fruits of knowledge are recreated as fruits that will provide the necessary cunningness/tricks for weapons and toys (165). The Sermon on the Mount is considered as a means for cutting the roots of karma (177-78).

6.3.5.1. In his ecumenical view, the Ka Abba⁵ and Durga are only the fences that one should pass in the journey of the spirit (181). His God says "Whatever things in whatever ways be worshiped, that worship enjoins in me"(150). For one who understands the blissful journey from the one with form to the formless do not have the conflict of the ways of worship (181). Sujan Singh's life is depicted as an example of this theory. Being a Sikh he visits both the Christian church and the Jewish Synagogue. Pointing to the Church he says, "the mother there, she knows, when I weep silently contemplating her, She would say 'I know everything without your saying,

⁵ It is the Holy place of the Muslims in Mecca
Sujan. I undertake your sins’. Similarly when I am reminded of Corporal Wiseman, I will go for the prayer in the Synagogue of the Jews in Humayoon Road.” The Holy Communion which is totally restricted to Christians is expanded to include even the Sikh: Narayanan sees the priests arguing with Sujan Singh who stands waiting for his turn to receive the Holy Communion and take him out. Afterwards in the Dhaba, breaking the kulcha into two by his mud-stained hand and putting his palm over it, Sujan Singh sat there for a while. Then poured red rum a little into two glasses. Narayanan realised the meaning of those great symbols. Then they ate the piece of mud-stained bread before prayer and drank a gulp of red liquor (186). When Sujan Singh begged Narayanan to console him regarding the downfall of the golden temple, he fought with himself for sometime without being able to decide what to say. Then he said,

Almost all the experiences that we got today are valuable messages, Sujan Singh. The mud particles that stuck on our hands from the land of a prophet angered the priest of another prophet. He was also calling up a Holy Soul into the physical actuality. That also is Karseva. Do you understand the meaning Sujan Singh? (188).

6.3.5.2. In his view, the Prophet is a man who will have all the limitations of incarnation. It is a man with limitation itself who writes down the wisdom that came through the Prophet. When a Prophet says, that he is repeating the Word of Him and that he is the only way, he is speaking as a representative of numberless generations of Prophets’ (188). According to him, the word of God who came in the chariot of Pranavam, was heard by the Prophet who was a man, it was through the symbols of experience of
his race and history that he understood the meaning of it. The chain links of prophecy that were lost to humanity became small gaps and then produced blindness, hatred and war (182). "Beyond the contrast in the forms of name there is the fullness of love" (190). In a later scene Narayanan says to Sujan Singh, "All prophets are one" (222). Vijayan's view of incarnation is summed up in the following statement:

There are little men who detest riches and pride and renounce them, who cry with unmixed feeling in the sorrow of others, who pray, who love, who steal, still longing to become the foetus of prayer in the womb of the Devi, those who die to become the fish-seeds in the life-flood of the father. For them, he, she, it, throws prophets into this termite soil rolling around space-zodiac. Carpenters camel-grazers, cowherds, and truth telling merchants Gods in blue colour, Goddesses, the great-male person's younger sisters" (199).

Later Narayan's father strengthens this view by stating: "We are all partaking in a good thing, searching the hidden paths for incarnating Bhagavan" (203).

In Vijayan's fictional world the Last Holy Communion is prepared by bacterium (217). Like the Christian being united in Christ through the Holy Communion, the germs of diseases converts earthly life into heavenly life through death. This process of transition is equated to the conversion process that changes milk into curd. Repeated reference to the 'last dinosaur' brings out Vijayan's over consciousness about the impending termination of the human species. Jesus and his teaching of love are pointed
out as the remedy for it. By showing Joseph, who had walked through the ways of Marxism and Capitalism, becoming a Christ icon, Vijayan proves that anyone can become a second Christ, like the good thief. Rema states, “We are all Guru and disciple at the same time” (237). Vijayan keeps reservations regarding modern Christianity where the Cross has become an ornamentation (276). He equates the burned house of Sujan Singh containing bloodstain with the shroud of Tourine, which is believed to have the image of the Crucified Christ (283). Similarly the burning of Gurupreethan, a Sikh boy, is equated to adorning the merciful Carpenter with the crown of thorns (290).

6.4.1. The most important formative force behind Vijayan’s Jesus reconstruction is the socio-religious context in which he was born, brought up and is living. Vijayan is described as a devotee of the Thrisúlam,⁶ who knows and believes in its power (Nirmalkumar 40) But he identifies religion as a matter of the individual and respects religious freedom. K P Nirmalkumar quotes Vijayan’s reply to an old friend who described him as a religious fanatic, “Grand father was partially a Christian believer. And the son is a fully baptised” (40). His wife, Theresa is a fully dedicated Christian (Chittettukulam 2) This ecumenical home atmosphere might have inspired him to shape this typical Jesus reconstruction. Vijayan sates in an interview with Manarkad Mathew

It was from the Crucified Christ that I got the inner call to glorify defeat. Crucified Jesus is the face of intense sorrow. The

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⁶ It is the three pronged spear a weapon of Lord Shiva
insensibility of sin is overcome by severe pain. I see the intensity of mental and physical pain in the crucifixion of Christ. The Cross is the strongest image of death pain. In Christian view the Cross is not an image of the defeated, but that of redemption (10).

In the same interview he speaks of a miraculous experience that he had in Hyderabad. Standing on a street in Hyderabad he was watching a procession carrying a cross. When the vehicle bearing the Cross reached the place where he was standing, the vehicle inclined to one side and he saw the cross bending forward and coming towards him. He describes it as a spiritual experience that made his whole body tremble. In the interview he narrates that mystical experience in the following manner: “The image of the Crucified Christ stands in the inner wall of my mind as the blood stains of pain and as the open tongues of severe wounds. An experience that unifies physical and mental pains” (Ibid) He admits that in Delhi, he had participated in the Holy Gathering with neither legal right nor admitting intellectual or psychological aspects of it into his soul but due to the mere longing for some transcendent experience (Ibid).

6.4.2. In Vijayan’s philosophy God does not communicate directly with man. His way is Prophecy. Prophet, the mediator, accepts the message from God and shares it with the human beings. Each Prophet who speaks about the limits of man and gives him God experience by liberating him from sinful and immoral deeds continuously reminds us of the tragic nature of human life. The Prophets in Christianity and Islam, the Bódhisatvan [enlightened monk] in Buddhism, the Tharthamkaras of the Jains, the Gurus of the Sikh and the incarnations of Hinduism are all mediators between
human beings and the wisdom of God (Rajasekharan 78). The Prophet is the son who has accepted the fatherhood of God.

6.4.3. For Vijayan God is only a philosophical image. He collects God images from the power sources of culture and places them in his art. The presences of religion and worship appear in art as cultural experiences (Ibid 81). The basic problem of Vijayan's art is the disturbing question, 'what is the way to attain freedom from the paradoxical tragedy of life?' (Ibid 82) This question leads him from man to God. This disrupted world is fatherless and the people in it are in search of the father. The philosophical foundation of Vijayan is the ethos of Upanishad based on the discourse between father-son, guru-disciple.

6.4.4.1. The culture of India has played an important role in the shaping of Vijayan's Jesus figure. The basic theme of The Prophet's Way is the sad search for the fate of the hunted races. The novelist attempts to find out the role of God and fate of man in the background of the three levels of reality - physical reality, cosmological reality and human reality. He considers the problem of race and man as one. He forefronts an anarchical view of the current history of India. Through the ages various races and religions have taken root in India. Different racial groups ruled her at different moments in the past. In modern times individuality-oriented ideologies propagated each race to fight for dominance and in India it led to the initiation of communal fights and racial strife. The partition and the trauma accompanied it increased communal feelings among the Indians. This twentieth century socio-cultural situation in India propelled Vijayan to
focus on the Jesus figure as an answer to the problems produced by the clash between different racial, religious and political groups. A glance through Vijayan’s essay collection *Haindavanum Ath$haindavanum* [*The Hindu and the Extreme Hindu*] brings out his supra-consciousness of the current Indian atmosphere of disharmony, communal hatred and violence. He says, “In order to get liberation from the violence and preposterousness that encircle us, we should find out the footpaths to go back to the chants of peace” (11) The most important problem of India today is the collapse of the vision, Bharath, the secular country where people of different religions live as one family. Today each race searches for its own identity.

6.4.4.2. To Vijayan the only solution to the problem in India is a religious symbiosis (Ibid 14). He suggests the way of co-operation and humility as the fruitful way (Ibid 36). He considers the union of the races and sub races as the strength of the nation. He mentions Kashmir, Punjab, Manipur, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. He speaks about the Golden Temple, the Emergency, Ramajanmabhoomy- Babari Mazjid affair and even of a local school in Kerala, St. Joseph’s School Pavaratty. The police wireless officer murder incident described in *The Prophet’s Way* has its parallel in the Morazha event of 1940 (Eppan 338). He warns that it is too late to construct a strong Bharath through open symbiosis among the various cultures in this sub-continent (Ibid 61). He reminds the readers of Gandhiji’s advice that the president and the ministers should stay in small houses instead of palaces (Ibid 127) by quoting Gandhiji’s dream: “The President of free Bharath should be a Dalit and he should stay in a hut” (Ibid 140). He prophecies that if Gandhiji had lived ten
or fifteen years more he would have been arrested and his organisation would have been banned (Ibid 129). Vijayan dreams of an India where Hindus who are the devotees of Rama do *karseva* to rebuild the Babari Mazjid and the Muslim brothers do *karseva* to remove the fissures in the Ram Temple (Ibid 162). He highlights Jesus Christ and His Sermon on the Mount as fruitful means to realise this dream. To him Jesus is not the private property of Christianity

In his novel *Thalamurakal* [*Generations*] Chandran changes the name of a low caste Hindu, ‘Chelli’ to ‘Jesus Christ’ as Chelli disagreed to accept the name ‘Raman’ (9). Another Character Ignatius says to Chamiarappan, “They don’t know the grandeur of idol worship. To these slight-intellects who repeatedly ask how does a stone become God I would say; not only one stone, but also all the stones in this universe are gods You, Hindus could have accepted the Christ who comes down to the wine and bread without any obstacle”(Ibid 106) Vijayan’s religion is an ecumenical religion where “Guru emerges in Guru, thus the continued succession of Gurus become one Guru . . .”(186).

6.4.5. Peculiar socio-cultural background of Kerala also might have played a prominent role in shaping Vijayan’s Jesus reconstruction. The positive effects of Renaissance started to appear in Kerala in the nineteenth century with the arrival of the European Christian missionaries. But the actual inauguration of Kerala renaissance occurred with the dedication of a stone representing Shiva on the bank of a river in Aruvippuram by a lower cast Guru, Sree Narayana Guru in 1988 (Gopalakishnan 511) The main
messages of Sree Narayana Guru echoes in *The Prophet's way* in the following words

“One cast, one religion, one God for man.

Whichever be his religion, it is enough that the man is good

Mixed marriage and table fellowship is not bad, as whatever be their religion, dress and language human beings are of one cast” (Ibid 522). Sree Narayana Guru also taught that the social structure of India should be one that could unite all citizens (Ibid 535) Usha certifies that at his youth Vijayan was familiar with the ideology of Sree Narayana Guru (4)

6.5.1. This study shows O V Vijayan’s *Prophet’s Way*, as an example for the creative understanding of Jesus Christ by a modern fiction writer He reinvents Jesus in the twentieth century Indian atmosphere with the help of varied icons, images and symbols. His Jesus preaches the love song of the Sermon on the Mount to the mutually annihilating racial/religious/political groups He is the modern Krishna who advises the modern Arjuna who arises to destroy his own brothers on the other side of the war field, “Don’t kill!” He is the symbol of the incarnated God who pleads with His priests not to punish people for the crime of not knowing him In short Vijayan’s Jesus is a prophet born for all ages and all people. He is an all-pervading presence.

6.5.2. The race, milieu and moment of Vijayan’s life have played a prominent role in inspiring him to produce such an interpretation of Jesus Christ. He was born in 1931. The 1940s saw the religious and social strife
attaining its worst form in India. In 1947 the partition and its offspring Hindu-Muslem exodus and mutual destruction took place. In 1948 Gandhiji, the prophet of non-violence was murdered. In 1986 Indira Gandhi and large number of Sikh people were assassinated. All these wounds on the body of India might have prompted Vijayan to search for a remedy. And the search led him to the Sermon on the Mount and ultimately to the Crucifix. Primarily the Crucifixion is the result of Jewish fear of the annihilation of their religion at the growth of Jesus' fame and name. But history proved crucifixion and failure as means to glory and success. So through this novel Vijayan invites the readers to assimilate this reality and to turn to the way of love, harmony and peace. The atmosphere of religious freedom prevailing in his family might have shaped his ecumenical attitude to religion and individual faith. His professional experiences as a cartoonist, journalist and his life in Delhi all turned out to be productive influences in the creation of this unusual and highly admirable Jesus figure. It is a pleasure to read a novel that deals with the real social and religious problems of the day.