

**John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and
Krishna Pillai's *Iratchanya Yathirikam***

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Abstract

This paper throws light on the art of characterization in the works of John Bunyan and Krishna Pillai. Characterization masters their work. They both established their art as roots from morality play and epic. The characters in the work of Bunyan are like puppets. Through the characters, he gives life to fiction. He beautifully depicts the characters as 'minor characters' and 'flat characters'. Both the writers give epic dimensions to their characters. Krishna Pillai has also introduced the same characters in *Iratchanya Yathirikam* as in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, but he gives Tamil translation to the names. Bunyan and Pillai portray both good and bad qualities in their characters. Through portrayal of the characters, they bring humor, satire and irony to their works to fertilize the minds of the readers. Both of them are good enough to show their individualistic work in exemplary art of characterization in their works *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Iratchanya Yathirikam*.

Keywords: John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Krishna Pillai, *Iratchanya Yathirikam*, God, Fiction, Individual, Journey, Companion, Irony.

John Bunyan

One of the great religious prose writers and preachers during 1628-88 was John Bunyan, who followed his father's trade as being the son of a tinker in Bedford. At the age of sixteen, he was a combatant in the Civil war; after his being discharged from the Army in 1649, he got married. In 1653 he became non-conformist preacher in Bedford by reading some of his wife's religious books which evoked in him an amazing emotional experience of sin, despair, and repentance. In 1656, his wife died and after that, he took care of their four children. Three years later, he re-married, as a non-conformist he refused to give up preaching and he was arrested because of this after the Restoration and was imprisoned in Bedford jail for twelve years from 1660 to 1672. While in prison, he wrote nine books. Freed in 1672, Bunyan was appointed Pastor to his old church in Bedford and preached there until he underwent a further term of imprisonment in 1675. During that time, he probably wrote the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Pilgrim's Progress

During seventeenth-century in English Puritanism, John Milton was the supreme spokesman in the field of poetry, but in prose, John Bunyan was found to be an excellent and supreme spokesman. In the prose fiction his work *The Pilgrim's Progress* occupies an important place. Although not novels in the true sense of the word, its romantic furniture of giants and dragons and of exciting adventures is reminiscent of the moments of chivalry; its humorously natural scenes forecast the realistic novel of manners that flourished in the eighteenth century. By using direct narrative method, Bunyan influenced his novel, by writing for the middle classes rather than for the landed gentry and by making his symbolical characters perfectly real and not frigidly artificial. The times in which Bunyan lived and preached were remarkable for conflict-political and religious conflict was wide-spread. Puritanism had brought vast learning to the door steps of the common people. Bunyan

was rich in popular culture. To live in that milieu was to acquire knowledge by breathing the air of the period. Bunyan absorbed the thoughts, dreams and feelings of the people and worked out their synthesis within him and he supplemented these with his own experiences. He had given us these masterpieces as he spent his life in turmoil and conflict. Solitude in prison makes him more creative and he utilized it for good purpose. He not only came to know himself but put the stamp of his individuality on everything he borrowed from his age. It was in this broad sense that Bunyan was cultured, and he turned this culture into a weapon in his fight against false religions and in the service of God. He, along with all Puritans, believed firmly that “God worked through their will”. “God is the author of our works” wrote Calvin. In all humility, Bunyan could proclaim himself “God’s instrument” he preached and wrote so as to spread the word of his Master.

As much as Bunyan, Milton imposed invented characters and invented incidents upon biblical material. Milton set out to justify the ways of God to men in a very long poem which an exacting mental and spiritual exercise. In *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, by using simple parable with homely characters and exciting events Bunyan’s aim was to lead men and women into God’s way, and the way of salvation. As Puritans, though not Puritans of the same complexion, both Milton and Bunyan distrusted fiction; both of them were considered as Masters of the art of fiction because of their imaginative creation and invented narratives. No doubt, Bunyan was an unwitting artist, but he was one all the same,” says Walter Allen (117). Though most of its readers accepted *The Pilgrim’s Progress* ostensibly for its moral allegory, their real enjoyment of it was for other reasons. For the plans and incidents in his books, Bunyan owes a heavy debt to reality and the dependence upon autobiography. Maurice Hussey observes:

“The author’s experience in the Civil War, in law courts, in prison and in the countryside, all appears; more important than these, however, are episodes which depict spiritual striving. This striving in dramatized and given a convincing and objective public form in what may be regarded as a crucial literary experiment. An innocent desire for diversion was admitted at the sometime, and all the sources of the author’s at enabled him to contribute largely to the growth of classical novel in this county” (Qtd. in Kanwar 117).

Stream of Consciousness

In the twentieth century novel, the Stream of Consciousness has become so popular, which owes its debt to Bunyan for externalizing his inner conflicts. Bunyan, in a metrical introduction, tells his readers the circumstances under which *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was written:

“When the author had first taken up his pen, he had had no intension of writing an allegory; in fact, he has had quite another purpose in mind. But so many ideas about the “way to glory” crowded into Bunyan’s head that he resolved to set them down; this he did, mainly for his own entertainment and without the thought of what the world would say about it. When he had finished writing down these many novel ideas, he showed the completed work to others to hear their opinion about publication. Here Bunyan was confronted with a dilemma, since some advised him to print the work, while others opposed publication. Finally, although he did not wish to offend anyone, he resolved to put his work into print and thereby allow the reading public to form their own judgment” (Methuen 3).

He points out that nothing in life is complete or perfect; for rain to fall there must be dark clouds; a fisherman can never catch every fish; and a fowler must allow some birds to escape. So, it is with his book: although it does not pander to every taste, it is “not without those things that do

excel” (P3). *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is supposed to be a dream, and to allegorize the life of a Christian from his conversion to his death. His doubts are giants; his sins a bundle or pack; his Bible a chart; his minister Evangelist; his conversion a flight from the city of Destruction; his fight with besetting sins a struggle with Apollyon; his death a toilsome passage over a deep stream; and so on. The second part tells of the adventures of the Heart along the same road to join Christian, who had gone before.

The Pilgrim’s Progress, hailed as the first English novel, has all the requisites of a good novel. A.C. Ward writes:

“The Pilgrim’s Progress has all the basic requirements of the traditional type of English novel: a good story, interesting (even though readymade) characters, arresting conversation, vivid description... Almost the only quality of a novel proper that is absent from *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is imaginative development of character” (p. 277).

The characterization masters the work, though the characters have no development. The characters belong to the long-established morality plays. They are puppets with label names like Talkative, By-End, Obstinate, Hypocrisy, Mr. Loyalty, etc. The characters may bear the names of certain abstractions, but blood flows through their veins; they are Bunyan’s compatriots, moving through the English towns and country side he knew so well. Each character has an extraordinary freshness and individual interest such as no earlier characters of the morality type possessed. They also possess the initial third dimension having depth and step away from the background. Christian is the principal character, by using his moral stature it dominates all the others. He is a man of action displaying a remarkable insight into the nature of men including his own. As a courageous person, whatever may be the hurdles on the way, he is determined to reach the Celestial City. He is also learned, with keen intelligence and quick grasp and comprehension.

John Bunyan gives life to the fiction with interior truth and coherence. In his character, one can see a blend of the universal and the individual. Christian is for the most part of the pilgrimage the subject of universal experience—the way-facing pilgrim of tradition. When he retains individual quality, they are those which Bunyan was interested in or which correspond closely to his own experience. When he set out for his journey, he was steadfast in purpose and motive, his motive was two-fold: to escape from the city of Destruction; and in the Celestial City to seek peace for his soul. From the very start, these are no turning back. With full of energy and conviction, he moves towards his goal. His will and courage grow stronger when he comes across greater solitude, the harder the road he passed and when faced with the lions, giants and monsters. He wavers only when his intelligence is taken unawares, and thus it is that worldly-wiseman’s arguments tempt him to stray from the path.

No doubt, he is a man of action finding peace of soul in the tumult of battle, forgetting danger in the moment of facing it. Struggle intoxicates him and his resistance to temptation and weakness grows harder every day. Critics have accused Christian of having no heart for he deserts his family to seek his own salvation but if he had given way to remorse or grief or self-pity, he would have yielded to pride or despair. Reserve is an English virtue which Bunyan admired, and he endowed Christian with it. His English reserve never allows him to show anyone a warm and over-indulgent affection, but he has a friendly and reverent curiosity about others. Christian is the author detached from him and because of Christian; *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is a work of art in which the author has effaced himself behind the immortal creature he has brought to life.

Characters in *The Pilgrim's Progress*

In the part of the pilgrim's journey along with Christian, Faithful becomes the fellow – pilgrim, who has been introduced as a foil to Christian. He possesses courage and will, but he lacks intelligence, imagination, and sensibility. No burden rests on his shoulders, he does not have cross slough and for him the lions do not even design to roar. His conversion is sudden, and his spirit is steadfast. “His martyrdom is Vanity Fair awakens many inhabitants to religion life, while the arduous journey is reserved for Christian” (Talon 63). Hopeful is another vital character, but much more colourless and insubstantial. To personify a Christian virtue, he is introduced to use allegory. He often counsels the Christian not to despair by playing the role of comforter. He also saves Christian when the latter is in Deep waters.

“These troubles and distresses that you go through in these waters are no sign that God hath forsaken you but are sent to try you, whether you will call to mind that which here to fore you have received of his goodness and live upon him in your distresses” (65).

Hopeful is another character who is not a well-blended character. He is made up of bits and pieces badly joined together. Large pieces from *Grace Abounding* find their way into the making of Hopeful unchanged. Bunyan systematically reproduces his own spiritual experiences instead of developing a psychology suitable to this character. Christiana is another character who is a very sensitive woman, for she suffered from being obliged to wait, and the memory of her absent husband often made her cry. Her conversion was a movement of human love and of the intelligence upheld by divine grace. For Christiana has a lively and intuitive intelligence – ‘a woman of quick apprehension’. N.C. Kanwar quotes: “This good wife is also an excellent mother. Her love spreads over her children. The obedience she gets from them in the fruit of persuasion and love. Bunyan forgets both himself and his allegory a little when he describes Christiana as the beside of her ill son” (P 66). In the words of Henri Talon,

“The picture we get of her is of a loving and worthy woman with a suggestion of vivacity in her disposition and a great deal of courage. When circumstances demand it she can defend herself and strike at the adversary. Was Christiana suggested to Bunyan by his second wife, Elizabeth? It is very possible” (P 66).

Another character is Mercy who seems to be more fragile and more charming than Christiana, with her youth and her pretty face-often blushes with humility. Mercy has no dreams, nor-visions, nor sense of crushing guilt; her conversion is a movement of the whole soul. She is charitable and hard-working, but she is not without a touch of mischief; for instance, she shows her mischief when she teases her sweet heart, Mr. Brisk. Even through the delineation of minor characters, Bunyan's artistic skill has been seen. Literary art is displayed in full subtlety; it is the art of the traditional popular sermon judiciously fusing moral doctrine and dramatic reality into economical vignettes. Though these characters are ‘minor characters’ or ‘flat characters’, they are all capable of ‘turning-round’, by giving an impression of human depth. Their appearances and conversations are highly suggestive, for they awaken the imagination of the readers. These minor characters like Talkative, By-Ends, are types and individuals. In Talkative, an inhabitant of Prating Row, one recognizes a Puritan in words. In an eloquent oratorical flow, he says:

“I will talk of things heavenly or things earthly, things moral, or things evangelical, things sacred or things profane; things past or things to come, things foreign or things at home, things more essential or things circumstantial, provided that all be done to our profit” (*The Pilgrim's Progress* 277).

Here Bunyan is seen mildly satirizing the hypocritical Puritans, who only prattle about religion, without practising it. Another minor character on whom Bunyan has lavished his literary skill and ironically hinted at Latitudinarians is By-Ends. In portraying this character, Bunyan shows hatred for wealthy men. He is a comic figure, for every word he utters provides humour and Bunyan delights in portraying him. His easy-going Christianity is clearly revealed when he says,

“Why, they after their headstrong manner conclude that it is duty to rush on their journey in all weathers, and I am waiting for wind and tide... they are for religion, when in rags and contempt but I am for him when he walks in his golden slippers in the sunshine and with applause” (TPP 139).

Bunyan, aware of the path of a Christian that is narrow and straight, only laughs at By-End while depicting him and makes us laugh with him. The didactic damsels of ‘House Beautiful’- Piety, Prudence, Discretion and Charity, apart from being allegorical characters, remind us of middle class Puritan families of Bunyan’s time; and the House Beautiful is a typical English Puritan household. All the important characters met along the road can be recognized as universal as well as typical. In the portraits of heretics and back-sliders, we slip away from allegory to genre studies. Such generic names like Love-wit and Wishfort are later seen in the satiric types of Restoration comedy. To create an immediate effect on the structure of the work, Bunyan uses his profound skill in choosing names like Mr. Blindman, Mr.No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-Lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-mind, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cmelty, Mr. Hate-Light, Mr. Implacable. By creating such characters, Bunyan is said to have paved the way for the great novelists to introduce characters of flesh and blood often to represent a species- as their names sometimes declare. Mr. Honour, Heartfree and Alworthy in Fielding’s novels recall Bunyan’s representative names for personages like Madam Wanton, Valiant - for Truth and Ignorance. Bunyan has been gifted with an excellent discerning of persons and it is this keen power of insight which gives permanent value to his work. Thus, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is remarkable for the reality of its impersonations and for the rapidity and power with which its characters are drawn. They are no mere shadowy abstractions moving about in a mystical region far away from us, but real men and women living in our own everyday world. In a word, it may be said that Bunyan’s great gift as a writer was his power to give life to the figures of his allegory.

Iratchanya Yathrikam

Krishna Pillai’s monumental work namely *Iratchanya Yathrikam* is epic form which retains almost all the characters of Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* with a few exceptions. All the main characters of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* have their role to play in *Iratchanya Yathrikam* also, but these characters attain epic dimensions in the hands of Krishna Pillai.

Aristotle wrote:

“In respect of character, there are four things to be aimed at. First and most important, it must be good.... The second thing to aim at is propriety... Thirdly character must be true to life... The fourth point is consistency” (PP 54-55).

The deformation of characters in epic neatly fits Krishna Pillai’s characters in *Iratchanya Yathrikam*. Characters in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* are introduced in *Iratchanya Yathrikam* with much more literary finesse and given epic dimensions. One cannot but admire the courage and valour of the main characters - Christian, Faithful and Hopeful, their steadfastness till the end. Their

weaknesses that leads them away from the King's way shows them as mortal beings, who, with all their trust in the lord, slip again to the path that is narrow and straight. Christian is referred to by the same name throughout *The Pilgrim's Progress*. But Krishna Pillai gives him various names like Athima, Visari, Vethyan, Nivarthan, Vithakan, Panavan, Maraikkizhavan, Aryan, Meivisari, etc. which all reveal many facets of his exemplary character and help the poet to maintain the spontaneous flow of poetic language.

It is strange to note how Krishna Pillai has chosen the name Nithani for Faithful, the companion of Christian who dies as a martyr in the city of vanity. In the Tamil translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* Faithful is translated as Truthful (Unmai). The poet must have been so taken up by the steady and undaunted faith of Faithful. Recognizing his calm and unperturbed manner during the trial while placing his point of view before the jury, he fittingly gives him the name Nithani. While Krishna Pillai gives his characters names not exactly the ones found in Rev. Samuel Paul's translation, his rendering into Tamil reveals his imagination, poetic nicety and appropriateness. Obstinate and Pliable are poetically and aptly referred to as hard-hearted, i.e., Vannenjan, and Soft-hearted i.e., Mennenjan instead of the literal translations in Rev. Samuel Paul's *Motchap Pirayanam*, Pdivatham and Inangan Nenjan. Apollyan is Azhiamban, one who destroys a fitting title for him indeed and no doubt, Alappan for Talkative is a better translation than Vayadi used in *Motchap Pirayanam*. In one place, Krishna Pillai is seen introducing three characters whom we do not come across in *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Pliable who accompanies Christian for a short distance falls into the slough of Depond and goes back to the city of Destruction.

According to Bunyan,

“He gave a desperate struggle or two and got out of the mire on that side of the slough which was next to his own house. So, away he went, and Christian saw him no more” (*The Pilgrim's Progress* 45).

But Krishna Pillai introduces three characters Kama Mohithan (Love Lust), Pirabanjan (Wordly) and Thoorthan (Destruction) “who eagerly ran out to take pliable out of the slough” (Iratchanya Yathrikam 91). He vividly brings out the despicable nature, when he describes about the three characters. In a few places, Krishna Pillai gives names to certain characters that Bunyan has just mentioned but left nameless. After Christian's burden rolled away and he received gifts from the shining ones, he was on his way to Palace Beautiful. On the way, in the pleasant Arbour he fell asleep:

“Now as he was sleeping, there came one to him and awaked him, saying ‘Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise,’ and with that Christian suddenly started up and sped him on his way and went apace till he came to the tops of the Hill” (*The Pilgrim's Progress* 75).

To this person who helped Christian to wake up from his sleep Krishna Pillai gives a name, Punnian. We come across a flatterer in *The Pilgrim's Progress* who is described as “a man black of flesh but covered with a very slight robe” (P172) and misled the Pilgrims that they fell into a net and got entangled. This description of a man without a name reminded Krishna Pillai of Kar Vannan in Tamil literature, dark of complexion. So, he gives this typical Tamil name to this person who wantonly misled the Pilgrims. The graphic description that Krishna Pillai gives of Kar Vannan is one that is familiar to students of Tamil literature. There is no harm in giving names to characters that remain nameless in the original. In fact, these names give an emphasis to specific feature and evoke our imagination to a better understanding of the same. The nobility of Krishna Pillai is one of the

reasons for his changing the names found in his original. John Bunyan, being a staunch Puritan, had such great hatred for the Roman Catholics that he even described the Pope as a demon:

“I espied a little before me a cave, where two giants, Pope and Pagan, dwelt in old times by whose power and tyranny the men whose bones, blood, ashes etc., lay there, were cruelly put to death” (p. 100).

But Krishna Pillai, in all his magnanimity, does not want to condemn other regions. So, when he gives Tamil names to these characters, he does not indicate them as represented in the original. His cultured mind makes him describe one of them as ‘an evil one, day blind’ i.e. Pahar Kurudaya Theeyan and the other as ‘another wicked one who destroyed the good’ i.e. Koviyaal Ozhitta Mattore Kodiyavan.

In Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian and Hopeful meet Atheist after they are released by a shining one from the net into which they were snared. He laughs at these pilgrims and tries to dissuade them from going on, saying that there is no such place as Celestial City. But Christian and Hopeful are not carried away by his words. In Krishna Pillai’s *Iratchanya Yathrikam*, we do not come across this character. But Pillai makes Christian fight with Atheism as well, when Christian had to confront Apollyan (Azhimban). Of the many armies sent by Satan to attack Christian, there were Atheism and Materialism also which were triumphantly destroyed by victorious Christian. *Iratchanya Yathrikam* is an adaptation of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and the characters are not of creation. It is followed as if in *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Though the characters are portrayed as if in *The Pilgrim’s Progress* they possess individuality and bear the stamp of Tamil literature, whereas in Bunyan’s characters *The Pilgrim’s Progress* the characters very much resemble the common men and women of contemporary English society.

These confirm opinion that Christ is the hero of this epic *Iratchanya Yathrikam*. But this cannot be accepted. Dennis Hudson holds that both Christ and Christian share the title hero. This epic emphasizes the journey of Christian, bringing out the hardships on his way; and so it is only Christian who is the hero of this epic. It is not the journey of Christ, but only that of Christian walking in the footsteps of Christ. The poet shows how the Pilgrim Progresses gradually from being a sinner till he becomes qualified to be a citizen of the Celestial City. Learning from the word of God, from his experiences of ups and downs on his path and from others, this progress is a slow and steady one; and with God’s grace he reaches the gates of Heaven to be in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot call this character development as in any other literary piece. This is only the progress that every Christian who becomes a pilgrim on God’s highway aspires for. In this task, the hero Christian shows his exemplary character and steadfastness.

Both Bunyan and Krishna Pillai excel in depicting the characters, good as well as bad and also the ones who can be classified as neither good nor bad. These characters portrayed by both, no doubt, add colour to their works with their variety, grandeur, irony, humour, satire, subtle wit or seriousness. To conclude, it may be said that in character delineation, both John Bunyan and Krishna Pillai have excelled in their own individualistic way.

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John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and Krishna Pillai’s *Iratchanya Yathirikam*

103

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