

## A CRITICAL STUDY OF LITERATURE REVIEW IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF O.V. VIJAYAN

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### Abstract

*Initially dominated by poetry, Malayalam literature diversified with forms like the Atta Katha, blending dance, drama, music, and poetry. However, the novels emerged as a significant form, paralleling its rise in other Indian regions. This emergence was not solely due to British influence via English education but also stemmed from India's socio-political context. O. V. Vijayan, a prominent figure, stands out for his novels' incisive commentary on politics and society. His works skillfully employ elements of the backdrop—political climate, economic disparities, and social injustices—to critique prevailing societal issues. The canvas of his narratives serves as a platform for dissecting the world around him. There are a few works of O.V. Vijayan which have been translated in English. The present study covers select novels of O.V. Vijayan viz. "The Legends of Khasak", "The Saga of Dharmapuri", "The Infinity of Grace", and "The Generations". The present paper analyses previous research studies attempted on these selected novels of O.V. Vijayan.*

**Key-words:** villages, society, myths, independence, ethics.

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Ottupulakkal Velukkuty Vijayan, born in 1930 in Palghat, Kerala, was an esteemed Indian writer known for his deep and multifaceted novels that address complex themes and societal concerns. In 2003, he was awarded the prestigious Padma Bhushan. Vijayan's narratives are particularly noted for their incorporation of myth and magical realism, blending the mundane with the fantastical to enrich the storytelling and deepen the meanings in his books. These elements also reflect and possibly influence the psychological evolution of his characters, highlighting their inner conflicts and dreams. Vijayan authored six novels, three novellas, eight short story collections, and multiple volumes of political essays in Malayalam.

His third novel, "Gurusagaram" (translated as "The Infinity of Grace"), received the National Sahitya Akademi Award, the Kerala State Akademi Award, and the Vayalar Award, marking it as a significant contribution to Indian literature. His works often portray an estranged society and tackle issues related to culture, language, social injustices, and belief systems. Vijayan's storytelling is marked by its originality and ingenuity in narrative style, using a language that resonates with the common speech yet often challenges the readers from various regions of Kerala to delve deeper into his texts. He frequently critiqued authoritarian regimes and the misuse of power by political figures, using myths and folklore to discuss current events and timeless existential questions. His innovative narrative techniques and creative use of language set his work apart, making him a unique figure in Indian literature.

"The Saga of Dharmapuri" originally penned in Malayalam during India's Emergency period and published after it ended, is a pointed critique of the political landscape of that time. This novel uses the decay of public manners and traditional values as a backdrop for its postmodern commentary, suggesting that even societal taboos have become fodder for highbrow discussions. Set in the fictional Dharmapuri, the narrative presents its inhabitants—ranging from corrupt officials and degenerate ministers to sycophants and various types of moral degenerates—as symbols of the depravity within the political system." (Ravindra, 2015: 130-136).

"O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak* explores multiple themes that resonate universally. The novel lacks a conventional storyline and instead delves into the spiritual and philosophical experiences of the village of Khasak. Through the narrative, Vijayan weaves together a tapestry of local myths, stories, and superstitions, setting them against the encroaching forces of scientific rationality represented by Ravi's new school. This clash between traditional and modern perspectives forms a core irony in

the novel. Additionally, by recounting historical encounters as remembered by the villagers, Vijayan offers a unique perspective on cultural interactions over different eras and locations.” **(Selvalakshmi& Jayan, 2016: 86-88).**

“In outlining the setting of Dharmapuri, we can now focus on Vijayan's intricate use of bodily imagery. The author focuses on three fundamental human impulses: eating, defecating, and fornicating. Throughout the novel, these elements are intentionally employed to evoke a sense of revulsion among readers. The character Siddhartha, embodying both leadership and compassion, acts as the moral guide within the story.” **(Maria, 2017:29:41).**

“The Legends of Khasak” O.V. Vijayan skillfully intertwines Persian, biblical, and Hindu myths to create a rich narrative tapestry. Vijayan's utilization of myth and mythical elements is intricate, making it difficult to discern where myth ends and the broader narrative begins. This analysis attempts to identify recurring patterns and prefigurative motifs in Vijayan's works, solidifying his reputation as a mythographer. These include themes such as the origin of things, journeys, paradises, falls from grace, and the quest for spiritual guidance. Additionally, the study delves into the examination of recurring images like winged serpents, dragonflies, and the deity Krishna.” **(Saran&Vasuhi, 2018:224-249).**

“The Saga of Dharmapuri” depicted in the novel symbolizes depths of darkness. The story revolves around the President who manipulates nationalistic sentiments to maintain power and accumulate wealth, including through morally reprehensible acts like exporting cadavers. The narrative is filled with disturbing scenes, including rapes committed by government officials under the pretense of patriotism, child molestation, necrophilia, revolting scatological content, crude eroticism, and gruesome cannibalism. Against this backdrop, the character Siddhartha, a nomadic ascetic, enters the scene promoting messages of non-violence, love, and peace.” **(Saraswathy, 2019: 492-498).**

“The central theme of The Legends of Khasak revolves around the concept of a journey, particularly the psychological journey undertaken by the protagonist, Ravi. Ravi grapples with intense guilt stemming from an incestuous relationship with his stepmother, seeking to escape this burden. His official trip to Khasak, while ostensibly for work purposes, serves as a means of distancing himself from his troubled reality. However, even in Khasak, he finds no respite from his inner turmoil. The village's belief in karma provides Ravi with a sense of resolution in confronting mortality. As the novel approaches its climax, Ravi, standing at the bus-stop preparing to depart Khasak, deliberately allows himself to be bitten by a snake, viewing death as a means of atonement for his sins and a pathway to redemption through rebirth.” **(Ashwathy, 2020: 198-202).**

“In The Legends of Khasak, the landscape plays a pivotal role, almost like a character in itself. Throughout the story, the environment exerts a powerful influence on the lives of the characters. It's as if entering the territory of 'khasak' determines one's destiny. O.V. Vijayan skillfully utilizes the setting—a rural village in the mid-twentieth century—to underscore this theme. This village, largely untouched by

modernity, serves as the backdrop for the protagonist, a science student. Through this portrayal, Vijayan suggests that humanity is inherently intertwined with nature and cannot escape its pull.” (Sruthi, 2021: 58-61)

“O.V. Vijayan's monumental work, "The Legends of Khasak," represents a significant shift in his literary career, moving away from mere protest to a more nuanced analysis of societal issues. It delves into the marginalization experienced by certain communities within the framework of a nation-state, suggesting that these issues can be addressed through constitutional means. Vijayan's remarkable creativity is evident in his ability to traverse different tones and themes. His debut novel, "Khasakkinte Ithihasam" (The Legends of Khasak), published in 1969, signaled this transformation. While his earlier work had a sense of existential futility, "The Legends of Khasak" stands out as a pioneering piece of fiction that reshaped Malayalam literature, drawing a clear line in its history.” (Jagdish, 2022: 646-649). “

O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak*, there's a deconstructive analysis that examines the protagonist Ravi's complex attitude toward Western education. Previous studies have focused on exploring Ravi's sexuality in relation to morality. However, a deeper understanding emerges when we consider the connection between Ravi's discriminatory behavior towards women and his stance on Western education, using Derrida's deconstructive approach influenced by Jan Patočka's philosophical essays on history. Ravi abandons his studies in astrophysics to embark on an internal journey, as Vijayan suggests in the Afterword, or perhaps as a form of atonement for his sins, as hinted at throughout the novel.” (Vadacke, 2023:2-11).

“Legends of Khasak, the clever manipulation of a myth by an individual named Nizam Ali. He seizes upon the instability inherent in a myth to elevate himself to the position of 'Khazi' in the novel. Nizam Ali, initially an ordinary man, suddenly gains power and dominance by appropriating the myth of Khasak. His motive is to escape imprisonment and attain authority. By modifying and adding a 'Second-Order Signification' to the myth passed down by Allah-Pitcha Mollakka regarding the descendants of Khasak, Nizam Ali transforms into the sorcerer of 'Saved Miyan Sheikh.' As 'Khazi,' he becomes an influential figure who exploits the people of Khasak. This instance illustrates how mythmaking and the adaptation of existing myths are continual processes across cultures. Through skillful manipulation, dominant discourses of a period can be transformed into the ideology of an entire society, utilizing myths as effective tools.” (Dalvin, 2023: 333-335).

### **Concluding Remarks**

O.V. Vijayan, one of India's most celebrated writers, intricately weaves themes of magical realism and postcolonialism throughout his novels, particularly evident in his seminal work, "The Legends of Khasak." Through a comparative study of Vijayan's novels, a deep exploration into the intersection of magical realism and postcolonialism emerges, shedding light on the complexities of identity, power dynamics, and cultural clashes in the context of postcolonial India.

“The Legends of Khasak” stands as a prime example of Vijayan's adeptness in blending the mystical with the mundane. Set in the fictional village of Khasak, the novel transports readers into a world where folklore and reality intertwine seamlessly. Through the protagonist Ravi's journey, Vijayan explores the impact of colonialism on indigenous communities, as well as the struggle to reconcile tradition with modernity. By employing magical realism, Vijayan invites readers to ponder the deeper layers of reality and the myriad ways in which history shapes individual and collective consciousness. Vijayan's portrayal of Ravi's odyssey as a self-made victim caught in the crosshairs of East-West confrontation is both compelling and thought-provoking. Ravi's quest for identity and belonging mirrors the broader existential dilemmas faced by postcolonial societies grappling with the legacies of colonialism and globalization. Through Ravi's experiences, Vijayan delves into the complexities of cultural assimilation, alienation, and resistance, offering a nuanced critique of power imbalances and cultural hegemony.

“The Saga of Dharmapuri” further underscores Vijayan's exploration of the infinite grace and resilience of the human spirit. Through the trials and tribulations of the characters in his novels, Vijayan celebrates the enduring power of human connection, spirituality, and cultural heritage in the face of adversity. By centering themes of grace and generation, Vijayan highlights the cyclical nature of life and the eternal quest for meaning and transcendence.

In conclusion, O.V. Vijayan's novels offer a profound meditation on the intersection of magical realism and postcolonialism, weaving together themes of identity, power, and resistance with remarkable depth and complexity. Through his evocative storytelling and vivid imagery, Vijayan invites readers to embark on a journey of self-discovery and collective introspection, challenging conventional notions of reality and inviting us to reimagine the world through a more inclusive and empathetic lens.

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