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## O.V. Vijayan's Style and Techniques as a Novelist: A Critical Assessment

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### Abstract

O.V. Vijayan, a key figure in Malayalam literature, transformed regional writing with his unique style and innovative narrative techniques. His novels, "The Legends of Khasak" and "The Saga of Dharmapuri", introduced a blend of magical realism, existentialism, and deep philosophical reflections that deviated from the traditional focus on social realism and cultural identity in Malayalam literature. Vijayan's novels often explore the metaphysical and spiritual, set against the backdrop of Kerala's rural landscapes, which are rich in folklore, superstitions, and spiritual beliefs. His descriptive prose, filled with symbolism, creates a dream-like quality in his narratives. By combining myth, allegory, and language, Vijayan redefined the boundaries of regional literature. His novels deftly intertwine the political and personal, portraying the complexities of post-colonial Indian life. With a deep sensitivity to human suffering, spiritual quests, and the absurdities of existence, Vijayan's works stand out in Malayalam literature. He played a vital role in expanding the scope of regional writing, making a significant contribution to Indian literature as a whole. In the Background of this, the present paper aims to critically examine style and techniques of O.V. Vijayan.

**Keywords:** Style, Technique, Language, Regional, and Locales.

### Introduction

O.V. Vijayan's contribution to Malayalam literature marked a pivotal shift in narrative style and thematic exploration. While Malayalam literature had traditionally been grounded in social realism and cultural identity,

Vijayan introduced an intellectual depth that intertwined myth, mysticism, and existentialism. His works stand out for their philosophical undertones, blending the political with the personal, and the spiritual with the mundane. In "The Legends of Khasak". Vijayan

presents a magical realist portrayal of rural Kerala, where folklore, superstitions, and human emotions coalesce in an introspective exploration of life's meaning. His literary language, imbued with symbolism and imagery, significantly broadened the horizons of regional writing in Malayalam, pushing it beyond the confines of conventional storytelling.

Through novels such as "The Legends of Khasak" and "The Saga of Dharmapuri" Vijayan continued to question socio-political structures, challenge power, and reflect on the absurdities of existence. His experimental use of language, combined with his penchant for allegory, gave his novels a distinctive voice within Malayalam literature. Vijayan's philosophical narratives invited readers to contemplate deeper existential questions, while his portrayal of Kerala's small towns and villages gave his works an unmistakable regional essence, connecting local life to universal themes.

As a novelist, O.V. Vijayan is celebrated for his ability to merge the local and the universal, offering readers a lens through which they can explore both the specific cultural landscape of Kerala and the broader human experience. His novels often reflect his deep philosophical and spiritual quest, with characters who grapple with existential dilemmas. Vijayan's writing is noted for its rich symbolism, intricate narrative structure, and its ability to oscillate between the mystical and the real. He was a master at blending multiple genres—magical realism, satire, and allegory—creating a body of work that defied conventional literary categorizations. His distinctive voice and thematic concerns placed him in the forefront of Indian literature, even as he remained deeply rooted in the Malayalam tradition.

Vijayan's unique ability to infuse his works with political commentary, particularly through satire, also defined his legacy. In

Dharmapuri, for instance, he sharply critiques authoritarianism, employing allegory to dissect the nature of power and its moral implications. Yet, despite these broader socio-political themes, Vijayan's novels often return to the individual's inner world their personal conflicts, spiritual yearnings, and ultimate search for meaning. His works are not only significant within the realm of Malayalam literature but also contribute to the larger canon of Indian and world literature, where themes of existentialism, human suffering, and the quest for truth remain timeless and universal.

### Literature Review

**Singh, Ravindra (2015)** disclosed that 'The Saga of Dharmapuri' the inhabitants are primarily characterized as pimps, prostitutes, corrupt ministers, and unscrupulous officials. The story is rich in political symbolism and themes, revealing a clear picture of social and political decline. Right from the beginning, the novel depicts a noticeable breakdown of manners and decency in public conduct, emphasizing the disintegration of traditional values.

**Jayan, K. Nimisha (2016)** stated that 'The Legends of Khasak' stands as a distinctive and unmatched work in Malayalam literature. No examination of this literature would be complete without acknowledging O.V. Vijayan and his landmark novel. With a postmodern style, it signifies the dawn of a new chapter in Malayalam literary history.

**Rajan, Maria (2017)** unfolded that 'The Saga of Dharmapuri' by O.V. Vijayan is a Set in the imagined country of Dharmapuri, which could symbolize India or another newly independent nation in the post-colonial era, O.V. Vijayan's novel presents a dystopian fantasy. Through Grotesque Realism, he portrays the political, social, and economic landscape of India in the 1970s, especially during the emergency period. Like other dystopian tales, "The Saga of Dharmapuri" is prophetic in foreseeing some of the social issues that persist today.

**Selvalakshmi, S and Jayant (2018)** remarked that O.V. Vijayan's characters are intricately connected to nature and reality, particularly evident in the depiction of sexual instincts. The narrative's tone and structure enrich the reading experience, leading to a transformation in the language employed. Vijayan has undeniably crafted a magical world, allowing readers to gain a deeper understanding of human existence and the mysterious forces that make life possible on this planet.

**Saraswathy, B.V. (2019)** unfolded that 'The Saga of Dharmapuri' serves as an allegorical depiction of India, immersed in different shades of darkness. The narrative explores the President's manipulations, using the people's patriotism to maintain power and accumulate wealth, even resorting to the export of cadavers. Amidst this grim setting, Siddhartha, wandering mendicant, appears to discourage war and violence while promoting love and peace.

### Research Methodology

This research work relies on Primary and Secondary data. Primary information has been taken from the original writings. The secondary data had been collected from research journals, magazines, newspapers, and Internet. This research study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

### Linguistic Components in O.V. Vijayan Novels

In "The Legends of Khasak", O.V. Vijayan creates a rich linguistic tapestry that reflects the cultural and spiritual essence of rural Kerala. The novel's vocabulary is a mix of colloquial expressions and poetic language, effectively capturing the authentic speech of the villagers while also imbuing the narrative with a mystical undertone. Vijayan uses everyday Malayalam, along with local slang and folk idioms, to give a genuine portrayal of Khasak's rural life. His syntax is flowing and reflective, mirroring both the introspective journey of the protagonist, Ravi, and the dream-like rhythm of

the story. The long, flowing sentences interspersed with short, impactful phrases create a contemplative atmosphere, aligning with the novel's spiritual themes (Chapter 2, p. 45). Semantically, the text is rich with metaphors and symbols—such as snakes, rivers, and trees—that carry deeper spiritual and existential meanings. Vijayan's use of allegory in these interactions between humans and nature adds philosophical layers to the narrative. Furthermore, the novel's frequent shifts between philosophical reflections and everyday conversations add complexity to the language, allowing the story to operate on multiple levels of meaning (Chapter 6, p. 101). In *The Legends of Khasak*, language becomes a vehicle for exploring the tension between reality and spirituality, making it central to the novel's thematic depth.

"The Saga of Dharmapuri" takes a very different linguistic approach, using more direct and politically charged language to criticize authoritarian regimes. The vocabulary is deliberately stark and satirical, with frequent use of political and bureaucratic terms that evoke the oppressive atmosphere of the fictional state of Dharmapuri. Unlike the flowing syntax of *The Legends of Khasak*, the sentence structure in this novel is sharp and concise, reflecting the rigid nature of the regime being critiqued. The short, impactful sentences contribute to the sense of control and repression present throughout the narrative (Chapter 3, p. 56). Semantically, the language is infused with irony and dark humor, with Vijayan using satire to reveal the absurdity of the political system. Through absurd dialogues, he exposes the moral corruption within the regime. Ordinary words take on darker meanings in the context of authoritarian control, with Vijayan using metaphor to add depth to the critique (Chapter 7, p. 120). Additionally, terms like "order" and "duty" are repeatedly used to symbolize the oppressive power of the state, turning everyday language into a tool of control. Through his linguistic choices, Vijayan crafts a sharp political

allegory that explores the destructive effects of power and repression.

### **Narrative Techniques/Expressions in O.V Vijayan Novels**

In *The Legends of Khasak*, O.V. Vijayan employs a unique narrative technique that blends magical realism with a deeply philosophical exploration of human existence. The novel's language is a combination of the lyrical and the mundane, reflecting the fusion of the mystical and the ordinary in the lives of the villagers. Vijayan uses a rich, poetic vocabulary to describe the natural surroundings, while the dialogues remain rooted in the everyday speech of rural Kerala, creating a dynamic contrast between the internal and external worlds of the characters. The syntax in the novel is fluid, with long, flowing sentences that mimic the protagonist Ravi's reflective journey and the slow, meditative pace of village life (Chapter 3, p. 50). The use of stream-of-consciousness techniques allows readers to experience Ravi's internal monologue, his doubts, and his spiritual questioning in real-time, often blurring the line between thought and reality. Semantically, the narrative is layered with symbols and metaphors, particularly in its depiction of nature—snakes, in particular, are recurring symbols of both fear and enlightenment, embodying the village's superstitions and Ravi's personal transformation (Chapter 5, p. 85). This blending of reality and the metaphysical, along with Vijayan's evocative use of allegory, creates a narrative that is not only a journey through Khasak but also an introspective exploration of life's deeper meanings.

In *The Saga of Dharmapuri*, O.V. Vijayan adopts a satirical and allegorical narrative technique to critique authoritarian regimes and explore the corrupting nature of power. The novel's vocabulary is sharp and precise, filled with political jargon, military terms, and bureaucratic language, reflecting the rigid, hierarchical structure of the regime in

Dharmapuri. Vijayan contrasts this harsh, formal language with absurd, often humorous dialogue that highlights the grotesque and ridiculous aspects of authoritarian control. The syntax in Dharmapuri is much more direct and clipped compared to Khasak, with short, sharp sentences that reflect the oppressive atmosphere and the controlled, stifling environment of the state (Chapter 4, p. 63). Semantically, the novel relies heavily on irony and symbolism. Vijayan uses allegorical representations of political figures and systems to critique real-world authoritarianism, with Dharmapuri serving as a stand-in for any oppressive regime (Chapter 7, p. 118). The absurdity of the characters' dialogues and actions is a narrative technique that exposes the hollowness and moral decay of power structures. Vijayan's manipulation of language—where ordinary words like "order" and "duty" take on sinister meanings within the context of repression—adds another layer to the narrative. By combining satire, allegory, and political critique, Vijayan's narrative technique in *The Saga of Dharmapuri* effectively dismantles the facade of authority, revealing the inherent chaos and absurdity beneath its surface.

### **Concluding Remarks**

O.V. Vijayan's literary style and techniques showcase a unique fusion of magical realism, existentialism, and political satire, making his works both groundbreaking and complex. One of the significant merits of his style is his ability to blend the mystical with the mundane, creating narratives that delve deep into philosophical and spiritual realms while remaining grounded in the everyday lives of his characters. In *The Legends of Khasak*, this technique shines through in his use of language, where folklore and nature metaphors are intertwined with the inner journeys of the characters, creating a lyrical and meditative narrative. His use of symbolism and allegory, especially through recurring motifs such as snakes, elevates the storytelling, giving readers multiple layers of meaning to explore.



Additionally, Vijayan's use of stream-of-consciousness techniques and nonlinear narratives adds to the richness of his works, allowing readers to engage with the psychological and metaphysical dimensions of his characters' experiences.

However, the complexity of Vijayan's style can also be seen as a demerit for some readers. His penchant for long, meandering sentences, combined with dense and metaphorical language, can make his narratives feel opaque or inaccessible to those unfamiliar with his philosophical undertones. In *The Saga of Dharmapuri*, for instance, while his political satire is sharp and effective, the narrative's allegorical nature may obscure the political critique's immediacy, making it harder for readers to connect with the storyline on a straightforward level. Moreover, his narratives often blur the boundaries between reality and the surreal, which, while innovative, can leave certain readers disoriented or confused by the plot's lack of clear resolution or linearity. Another critique of Vijayan's technique is that his philosophical musings sometimes overshadow character development, making the protagonists more symbolic than fully fleshed-out individuals. Despite these potential drawbacks, Vijayan's style remains deeply influential, challenging readers to engage with complex existential and political questions, ultimately marking him as a visionary in Malayalam and Indian literature.

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