Chapter 5

Vijayan as Mythoclast

"Let us rewrite our epics, Narayaneetta"

O.V. Vijayan Pravaachakante Vazhi (276)

O.V. Vijayan has made use of myths in his fictional writing right from his first novel Khasaakkinte Ithihaasam to his last novel Thalamurakal. It can further be seen that his attitude to and use of myths have been constantly shifting. In Khasaakkinte Ithihasaam Vijayan makes use of Christian, Muslim and Hindu myths. While Vijayan uses Hindu myths in Gurusaagaram, he privileges South Indian dalit myths in Pravaachakante Vazhi and in Thalamurakal. It could be argued that Vijayan has evolved from a cosmopolitan mythographer in Khasak to a subverter of Aryan and Christian myths and to a privileger of regional dalit myths in his later fiction. Such a reading, however, would be two simplistic.

Helen Tiffin argues that in African countries, in Australia and in India which have well developed metaphysical systems, the writers use their indigenous resources to challenge European perspectives and invariably it is reflected in their conscious deployment of myths. Tiffin cites Raja Rao’s Kanthapura as an example (175).

It will be shown that Vijayan makes use of mythology not only to challenge European hegemony but also to challenge north Indian hegemony over the south, the Aryan hegemony over the Dravidian and the Brahmanic
hegemony over the dalit. Vijayan has made use of subversion to privilege the underdog, the downtrodden and the marginalised in his later fiction like Pravaachakante Vazhi, [The prophet’s path] and Thalamurakal [Generations]. It is not, however, the focus or main themes of these novels.

The theme of subversion and centralisation of marginalised characters has been the central motif of a few Malayalam novels. In M.T. Vasudevan Nair’s Randamoozham [The Second Turn] the Mahabharata epic is viewed from Bhima’s perspective. His wife Hidimbi and son Ghatolkacha are presented as dalits marginalised by the Aryan upper class Pandavas. In P.K. Balakrishnan’s Ini Njaan Urangatte [Now Let Me Sleep] the Mahabharata epic is presented from a feminist perspective with Panchali as the central character.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair has made use of the theme of subversion of central characters, the motif of two of his film scripts: Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha and Perunthchan. In both the films which were very popular, M.T. Vasudevan Nair subverts and privileges two highly misunderstood characters of Malayalam mythology: Chandu and Perunthchan. Kuttikrishna Marar’s Bharatha Pariyatanum is the most illustrious mythoclastic critical study in Malayalam. Marar demythologizes the Mahabharata story as well as central characters such as Sree Krishna, Dharmaputra and Arjuna while privileging some “misunderstood” characters like Duryodhana, Karna, Bhishma and Gandhari.

Vijayan has exploited demythologisation or mythoclastic techniques more extensively than García Márquez. Being a cartoonist, Vijayan is able to
view events from a comic point of view. The short story “Anachronism” is a caricature of some very famous historical figures and a subversion of history. The story is based on the assumption that some landmark events in history have not occurred. So, Lenin comments that the October revolution of 1917 failed and he narrates how he could have altered the course of history to Jesus Christ who comments that he did not die on the cross. Christ tells Lenin, “I used to be a carpenter in Jerusalem when they nailed me to a wooden cross but my father and mother bribed the centurions and took me down.... If they had killed me on the cross, I might have begun a religion.” (531) “Anachronisms” also presents Karl Marx as a London correspondent for The New York Tribune “Comfortable salary and perks” says Karl Marx. “Why should I drive myself to death writing four volumes of *Das Kapital*” (538). Karl Marx reminds Lenin that since *Das Kapital* has not been written, Lenin could not obviously have interpreted it and Lenin bursts out “Karl, you deceiver! You have destroyed me. You never wrote that book. Then where is my commentary, my revolution!” (538) and Lenin calls Marx “Saboteur! Counter-revolutionary!” (539) Through this story Vijayan parodies history to show how history could also be a made up story: Vijayan’s crossing into the territory of history in his fictional works is intended to close the division between the two.

Vijayan’s satirical novel *Ente Charithranweshana Pareekshakal* [My Experiments with History] is a parody of both history and the writing of history. Ostensibly, it is about the insights of a historian who writes under the pseudonym O.V. Vijayan. Vijayan parodies the title and style of Mahatma
Gandhi’s autobiography My Experiments with Truth. Through the “historian O.V. Vijayan,” Vijayan parodies the claims of historians that they possess exclusive knowledge of history and truth and through the parody of famous historical figures, he challenges the claims of history. So Ente Charithranweshana is a double-edged weapon that subverts both the historian and history.

The fictional “historian O.V. Vijayan” meets historical personalities from different ages and through open discussions with them he writes about the ‘untold’ chapters of history. Past history is viewed in the light of present national and international political milieu. Each historical figure gets converted into a caricature. Vijayan’s satire in Ente Charithranweshana is directed at the authoritarian stance of history. The ‘historian’ O.V. Vijayan meets many historical figures: Gautama of Kapilavastu, the emperor Asoka, Alexander the great, Christopher Columbus, The Mughal emperors Babar and Akbar, the mythical character Hanuman, the Afghan invaders Muhamed Ghazni and Mohammed Ghor; Shivaji, Adolf Hitler, Karl Marx and Engels.

Vijayan had written numerous articles in leading Malayalam magazines like Mathrubhumi and Kalakaumudi in the 1980s on the moral degeneration of politicians and about their exploitation of the masses. These articles were anthologised and brought out. The overriding sentiment in these

---

articles is a sense of tragic helplessness. However, Vijayan as a cartoonist made use of his uncanny ability in black humour and satire in drawing caricatures of these politicians and political events in leading English newspapers such as The Statesman and The Hindu. Vijayan achieves a strange and creative mixture of these two gifts of his in *Ente Charithranweshana*.

Throughout his life Vijayan has been swayed by the concepts of nationalism and communism. Many of his comments in *Ente Charithranweshana* are also on these. Another concern of his is the inferiority complex of South Indians in the presence of north Indians. Through the mythical character Hanuman, Vijayan ridicules the south Indians’ lack of sense of honour, self respect and their habit of abject servitude. Hanuman says: "We are not apes, we have ‘Konakavals’. A.K. Antony and Moopanar have real tails. When they see the princes from north India, they bend their knees and their tails" (51). This sentiment is repeated when Vijayan makes Alexander the great say:

> I’ll be fighting the Punjabis. I can’t guess how they will act. I know how the Tamilians and Malayalis would react. Tamilians won’t lose. Instead they would consume cyanide pills and commit suicide. Malayalis won’t pretend that they have lost. Instead they would mimic our dress and name their children with our names (27).
The best example of Vijayan's vitriolic satire and black humour is his advice to Hitler:

Brother, you should give up singing when your voice starts breaking. Look at Indira Gandhi. After 19 months she withdrew the emergency. She thus came to be idolized as the exponent of democracy and world peace in popular folklore. Numerous fellowships and awards are instituted in her name. You too can follow her path. Give up the war in the middle. You can rest and write your memories in peace. As for the genocide of the Jews, that will be conveniently forgotten (Ente Charithranweshana 73-74).

Vijayan has here achieved a rare combination of parody, satire and euhemerism and thereby brought out a superb piece of mythoclastic discourse. As P.K. Rajasekharan very aptly points out: "Ente Charithranweshana Pareekshakal raises fundamental questions about the writing of history. By parodying historical writing, by trivialising so called historical truth, Vijayan questions the basis of rational and progressive concepts of history."

("Charathirathinte Amla Parishoodhanakal" 24) P.K. Rajasekharan further reminds us:

It is possible to write a comic sequence to the history of every great historical personality on account of the interference of imagination. It is one of the weapons of political cartoon. Vijayan not only undresses historical personalities of their mythical dimensions
through humour, he makes them realistic and human

("Charithrathinte Amla Parishoodhanakal" 24-25).

*Ente Charithranweshana* can be classified as what Linda Hutcheon
calls historiographic metafiction which is a peculiar concoction of history and
meta-fiction. The novel is generally differentiated from history through its
dealing with events that are probable but not true. Historiographic meta-fiction
violates this distinction by straying into traditional historical territory.

Vijayan uses the mythoclastic technique of parody to subvert the
primary premise of history that it represents truth. He proves that history is as
false as fiction. The so called Truth of history is presented as an objective
document of observed facts. He makes us aware of the biases that the selection
and interpretation of facts involve. It is highly subjective and facts may be
distorted to serve the interests of certain people. This is tantamount to stating
that the truth of history that is held sacrosanct is also a made up thing.

The "historian Vijayan’s" life is insignificant but he tries to make it
seem to be important and very interesting. He is not a known figure in history
or any other sphere. He is only a fictional autobiographer having no claim to
fame in "real life". So he tries to accomplish this fame in his narrative by
linking events of his own life with those of his country’s and world history and
sensationalising his own role in these events and in the lives of the people he
knows. Nancy E.Batty in her essay "Art of Suspense in *Midnight’s Children*
argues that, "Saleem’s dilemma is that of any autobiographer who has to
accomplish a circular journey from himself to himself." Vijayan faces a similar
dilemma in *Ente Charithranweshana*. More importantly as P.K. Rajasekharan points out: "Vijayan ridicules the misappropriation of history which mythifies historical events and historical personalities" ("Charithrathiente Amlaparishodanakal" 24).

Just as Mel Brooks has demonstrated through his series of films “History of the World,” it is possible to read a humorous version of every historical event. This is the stock-in-trade of the political cartoonist. Vijayan not only demythifies these mythical historical figures, he also humanises them by inflicting them with human frailties.

Every historian believes that his evidence is rational, based on scientific laws and so stands very close to truth. Most historians will not concede that their statements are mere opinions and can never be the fact. They hold on to their statements stating that they are based on scientific methods. Vijayan distinguishes between truth and remembered truth and looks into some of the currently raging debates in historiography. Since the nineteenth century, western science has placed an undue emphasis on verifiable truth in its attempt to make history writing closer to science. Other histories, however, have given as much importance to what is believed to be true or what is recorded as true. We have been led into thinking that historical documentation based on observation is the most unbiased method of presenting facts. This hides the fact that the selection and interpretation of facts is not objective. Vijayan’s method provides us with an inkling of how facts may be concealed to fit a certain theory and also how facts may be distorted to promote certain interests.
The "historian" Vijayan's "mistakes" unmask the design of written history to us. Certain facts favourable to certain groups are selected and passed off as the history of the entire community. Vijayan shows that while his novel clearly reveals how history is made, official histories hide the fact that they are also stories. The novels Pravaachakante Vazhi and Thalamurakal endorse this view. Vijayan in Ente Charithranweshana shows what Salman Rushdie calls the "Chutnification of history". He uses parody to produce counter - history to protest against the falsification of history. He parodies the method of writers who make up their stories to show how history could also be a made up story. Vijayan's crossing into the territory of history in his fictional works is intended to close the division between the two.

One feature of the politico-heroic myth is that during the course of time, it may be readopted or resurface, either in the same form or in a different one as dictated by the needs of politics. In some instances, new cases that are totally at variance with history are developed. Nicole Ferrier - Cavariviere opines: "Indeed, due to the distorting effect of variations on the myth, historical characters who were good often become wicked, while the wicked become good" (581).

Ferrier - Cavariviere cites the examples of Frederick II of Germany, a thirteenth century ruler who lived in Sicily with his monkeys, and chose to reach an understanding with the infidel rather then to hack them to pieces. He has gone down in mythology as the Antichrist. Conversely, St. Louis and Henry IV of France have acquired undeservedly good reputation through the
metamorphoses of myth. Christian propaganda has often been a crucial factor behind the use of myth to distort or even contradict history. The Roman emperors Nero and Herod persecuted Christian priests who were converting Romans to Christianity and so were depicted as cruel dictators by Christian mythmakers. Modern historians working on scientific lines have shown that the French Kings Louis XV and Louis XVI and the French queen Mary Antoinette were falsely represented as corrupt and debauched by the parliament of their days which succeeded in making a prejudiced and distorted image of these historical figures. So the historical figures who emerge from the scientific examinations of modern historians are in sharp contrast to their images in traditional history and popular imagination. As Fener-Cavariviere puts it: “Thus a myth is never innocent. The character around which it develops is immediately categorized, and can only really be discovered by looking at the history of mental attitudes” (582).

Even if we do succeed in getting back to reality, it is never possible to clear away all traces of the image created by the myth as the example of Louis XV proves. The hero derived from myth making and the historical hero exist side by side, like two distinct realities that are almost foreign to each other. They never destroy, exclude or impinge upon one another, for they belong to two different universes, those of art and history. Art leaves an indelible mark on the myth. Fener-Cavariviere has pointed out: “Collective psyche is often guided in a certain direction, in other words manipulated. This is why it is important to give special attention to propaganda as one of the catalysts
stimulating the myth's emergence" (580). Often the hero himself elaborates his own myth. Julius Caesar, Louis XVI, Napoleon Bonaparte and Simon Bolivar are cases in point. Vijayan in _Ente Charithranweshana_ endorses what Ferrier - Cavarieviere has said: “Neither history nor reality are mythical in themselves, but they become mythical, if, for example, they are imbued with an unfathomable mystery or cease to be comprehensible and to develop logically” (578).

Vijayan’s comic genius finds expression in his presentation of the oracle in _The Legends_. In the chapter titled “The Festival,” Kuttadan the shaman or oracle of the local deity, the Devi, is presented. At the annual feast of the Devi, Kuttadan and the dancers get intoxicated with locally brewed arrack. However, the arrack is highly contaminated with fertilisers and the sulphur in the fertilisers upsets their stomachs and they loose control over their guts. So instead of the prophesies of the oracle and the performance of the dancers, we have the ridiculous spectacle of Kuttadan and the dancers racing across the fields to take refuge behind the hedges to answer the call of nature. The ridiculous hilarity of the scene is brought out by Vijayan’s prose:

> Three crowned dancers were racing towards the fields chased by dogs. “O mighty goddess” Theinagan [the handyman of Kuttadan, the Oracles] lamented “Why have you undone us.” As though in reply, a noise from his innards, the conch call of the avenging goddess, he pressed his palms hard on his stomach but nothing could stop the cosmic deluge. Theinagan too followed the dancers,
running for the fields ... Behind the bushes crouched the dancers, he [Ravi] could see only the tinsel crowns as they glittered in the sun (The Legends 116).

Vijayan demythifies the ritual by reducing it to the level of a ridiculous farce. This is by far the most mythoclastic event in The Legends. Joseph campbell's observation throws light on this scene. He says:

An important distinction must be drawn in our studies of mythology between the attitudes toward divinities represented on the one hand by the priest and his flock, and on the other by the creative poet, artist or philosopher. The former tend to what I should like to call a positivistic reading of the imagery of their cult. Such readings are fostered by the attitude of prayer ... The poet, artist and philosopher, on the other hand, being themselves fashioners of images and coiners of ideas, realize that all representation – whether in the visible matter of stone or the mental matter of the word is necessarily conditioned by the fallibility of the human organs ("Historical Development of Mythology" 242).

Primitive societies believe that oracles communicate directly with God. The religious myth scholar Mircea Eliade assures us:

Viewed from its own angle, all the strange behaviour of the shaman reveals the highest form of spirituality; it is actually part of a coherent ideology, possessing great mobility. The myths which make up this ideology are among the richest and most
beautiful we possess, they are all the myths of paradise and the
‘fall’, the immortality of primordial man and his communion
with God, of the origin of death and of the discovery of the spirit
(In every sense of that word) ("The Yearning for Paradise" 266).

The oracle scene subverts the spiritual dimension of the oracle.

Vijayan’s handling of the oracle scene, inspite of the farce,
cannot be considered as totally critical or satirical. It could at best be described
as ambiguous:

“Ravi listened with rapt attention, [to the cry of the shaman] and the cry
sounded even more distant as he listened, as though the sword of the oracle
was calling him to an unknown wilderness for cleansing and baptism. Why
was he going to the shrine, Ravi asked himself” (The Legends 113).

This ambiguity which Ravi experiences toward religious idols and
sacred objects and the religious scepticism that he goes through get converted
to strong religious conviction in Kunjunni of Gurusaagaram. Ravi, too, cannot
resist the call of the supernatural. He goes and sees the shaman. Kuttadan gave
an oracle’s cry and began to smite his head:

Nallamma, queen of the viral hosts, had seeped out of the idol and
possessed the body of her oracle. Kuttadan works himself up to a
frenzy and bursts out ‘Parighatam, ‘Parighatam’. Kuttadan accuses
Ravi of mockery of the deity. ‘Parighatam the corrupt form of
parihasam, mockery. The oracle took a fistful of sacred ash from
the shrine and flung it on Ravi. Ravi broke into a cold sweat. The
frenzy ended, Kuttadan entered the shrine and bolted himself in
(The Legends 118).

Ravi is afflicted by smallpox. But whether Ravi gets smallpox because of the
curse of Nallamma, the terrible mother or whether he gets it by seducing
Kodachi, the hawker of illicit liquor, the novelist does not clarify.

"'Are you feverish, Kodachi?' May be not a fever, he thought but the
warmth of the body's arousal" (The Legends 120).

The pox could also be on account of the curse of Nallamma for
mocking her. The vision of God as a terrible destroyer is not strange to the
orient. Kali, a mother goddess, is conceived as a terrible incarnation of Shiva
or Shakti who has a protruding tongue and a necklace of skulls. But she is
believed to be a protector and saviour of the pious and the good and she is a
destroyer of the evil and the wicked only.

Vijayan's mythoclastic presentation of Nallamma is twofold. Nallamma
is a local deity. It is commonly believed that the spread of smallpox in on
account of the curse of Bhagavathy. But Vijayan presents the small pox
epidemic as the maternal grace of Nallamma. Nallamma nourishes and
succours her children with her breast milk and those she cherishes she takes
with her by killing them:

The village was one vast flower bed. Nallamma strung garlands of
pus and death, she raised towers of deadly chrysanthemums, the
men of Khasak saw her and lusted, the disease became a searing
pleasure in which they haemorrhaged and perished. Little children
died as she suckled them in monstrous motherhood (The Legends 124).

Nallamma, literally means 'good mother'. She is presented as a mother. At the same time she is also a lover of the devotee and the nemesis of her enemies. Nallamma combines within her the archetypal figure of both the Loving Mother who cares, nourishes and protects and the archetypal figure of the Terrible Mother who destroys and punishes. This is conveyed by the powerful oxymoron "monstrous motherhood". Ravi tries to seduce Maimoona when he is afflicted with smallpox. She warns him: “You shouldn’t. While this disease is on you Nallamma is your mistress. And she is a very jealous one” (The Legends 125).

The men and women of Khasak are not too scrupulous in honouring their conjugal vows. Fidelity to their spouses is not one of their virtues. They indulge in extramarital and adulterous relationship unscrupulously. Narayani, the wife of Sivaraman Nair has an adulterous relationship with Kuppu the palm-climber. Maimoona, the wife of Chukkru has on adulterous relation with Nizam Ali, the Kazhi. She is one of the numerous women seduced by Ravi. Kodachi is forced into prostitution by her father-in-law and while Madhavan Nair was away studying Vedanta, his mother played the harlot. Four years ago, Chand Umma’s husband had climbed the tamarind tree to collect his fortune but instead lost his life. The inhabitants of Khasak believe that Chand Umma’s husband had to pay with his life because of the infidelity of his wife and they ostracise her. Her father left her to become a fakir.
The immorality of the inhabitants of Khasak might have provoked the curse of Nallamma and the smallpox epidemic could be viewed as the nemesis brought upon Khasak by the misdeeds of its inhabitants. Ravi is afflicted but his life is spared. Kuttadan loses his sight. But the ones who paid with their lives are not the sinners but the children. The biggest loser is Chand Umma. Her two children Kunhu Nooru and Chandu Muthu lose their lives to the epidemic. When the school reopens after the summer vacation:

Ravi glanced through the register lying in front of him; he had underlined some names in green – the names of those who wouldn’t be coming to school anymore: Vavar, Noorjehan, Uniparathy, Kinnari, Koruvu. He had only underlined the names, he couldn’t bring himself to cross them out (The Legends 133).

Ravi feels that it is his presence in Khasak which brings the onslaught of the smallpox epidemic. Ravi experiences guilt for his adulterous relationship with his step-mother and he might have felt that his predicament is not much different from that of Oedipus of Thebes. So Ravi decides to leave Khasak but at the same time he realises that he cannot run away from his sin or the fruits thereof. So Ravi invites death by planting his foot near a cobra to be bitten and killed.

In The Legends, other than narrating the havoc caused by the epidemic, Vijayan does not suggest the cause. All these options and readings are left open to the reader. Leaving many options open is a post-modern technique and
by suggesting but not privileging the myth of nemesis, Vijayan is in fact
demythifying the myth.

In the second chapter of The Legends titled “The Second Coming”
which has an apocalyptic ring, the novelist says that, “Mariyamma was the
goddess of smallpox, worshipped by the Hindu lower castes who appeased her
with toddy and obscene song” (The Legends 1.7). Mariyamma resembles the
Bhagavathy of Kodungallur who is worshipped by the lower caste Hindus with
obscene songs to appease her and win her favour. This vision of a goddess as a
terrible destroyer of her enemies, an avenging goddess, who has animal
sacrifice done to appease her and who enjoys the obscene and the vulgar is a
radical and mythocalstic view of the divine.

Dharmapuraanam, when it appeared in Malayalam broke new grounds
in numerous ways. A truly border crossing work, its challenge to fiction,
literature, history and reality called for new classifications. Its blend of fact and
fiction, myth and history, story telling and novelistic conventions defied all
rules for writing fiction and with it started a new genre. By commingling
spiritualism and scatology, Vijayan brings together the sublime and the
nauseatingly ridiculous. If in Khasak, Vijayan had achieved the greatest poetic
dimensions that Malayalam prose was capable of, in Dharmapuraanam,
Vijayan stretched the Malayalam vocabulary to hitherto unexperimented
frontiers of scatology, satire and parody. Dharmapuraanam was begun in 1972
and the magazine Malayalanadu planned to serialize it from July 1975. In June
1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi clamped down a state of Emergency, and
the serialization had to be postponed till 1977, when the Emergency was lifted. In the foreword to the fourth edition of Dharmapuraanam, Vijayan states that he is concerned, in the novel, with three fundamental aspects: “One, the garbage of history symbolized by the President’s shit. Two, the presence of the Guru which reaches Dharmapuri through Siddhaarata. Three, the promise of Divine intervention fulfilled repeatedly through the essence of revolution” (7).

Vijayan uses the myth of apocalypse more explicitly than García Márquez. The Saga of Dharmapuri, and the short stories “The Fœtus” “Oil”, “The Wart”, and “Anachronisms” are based heavily on Biblical themes. In The Saga of Dharmapuri Vijayan uses biblical apocalyptic phrases such as “The Beast” “The Whore” and “The Bride”. A chapter is titled significantly “The Revelation”. In The Bible, says Zamora,

The apocalyptic description of the punishments to be wreaked on the faithless is balanced by the description of the rewards that await the faithful. The moral dualism of apocalypse is embodied in the metaphoric contraries of Christ and Antichrist, Whore and Bride, Babylon and New Jerusalem, this world and the next (12).

Siddhaartha is represented as the Christ figure and the President, the Anti-Christ. Shantigrama is Babylon, while New Jerusalem is not represented. The wives of the ministers of the President and his concubines represent the whore, while Laavannya though repeatedly raped, represents the Bride. Like Biblical apocalyptic narrative, The Saga also moves toward an ending in a linear time frame. But all Vijayan’s apocalyptic stories do not end in the
triumph of good over evil or the destruction of the Beast and Antichrist. At the end of The Saga, the army led by Paraashara who represents the faithful is defeated. The story “Oil” too ends in the victory of Chalachi Chettichiyar and her Chettiyar who represent evil. While the children of the Village are doomed to eternal paralyses because they have consumed the contaminated oil sold by the Chettiyar and the Chettichi. In the short story “The Wart”, the protagonist is transformed into a worm while the wart on his chin grows, controls the protagonist and finally separates from him. It assumes the form of the Beast: an elephant which is led to a temple to carry the idol of God. In the short story “The Foetus,” however, the Beast is vanquished in the end and peace and harmony restored.

Apocalypse integrates memory and anticipation and so it leads Vijayan not just to the philosophical conceptions of history but to the actual historical circumstance prevailing in India. The provocation that supplied the impetus for Vijayan to write his apocalyptic fiction was the highly charged political situation prevailing in India in the 1970s. The independence of the country, which had been gained from the British after decades of struggle was suspended by the Prime Minister Indira Gandhi when she declared a state of Emergency in June 1975. The nineteen months that followed was notorious for human rights abuse and political witch hunt.

In the introduction to Tariq Ali’s *An Indian Dynasty: The Study of the Nehru Gandhi Family* (1985) Salman Rushdie describes how in a planned way the first family of India had set about “Self mythification”. This attempt at self-
mythification reached its height in 1975 during the Emergency. Vijayan clearly exposes Indira Gandhi's political manoeuvres as part of a major strategy to aggrandise herself and her family as the family of India's greatest leaders. Vijayan anticipates both Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor in exposing Indira Gandhi and her attempt at self mythification. Vijayan's short fiction "Oil" "The Foetus" and "Oru Yuddathinte Arambham" [The Beginning of a War] portray autocratic patriarchal females who could be interpreted as parodies of Indira Gandhi.

It is true that the charged political atmosphere sets the background for The Saga. But to read it as a mere parody of Indira Gandhi and the Emergency would be a gross misreading of the text. The President and his deeds hardly bear any resemblance to Indira Gandhi and her deeds. The President in The Saga is a development of the concept of power and the corruption that goes with it. It would be safer to state that Vijayan is protesting against the corruption and degradation of values that is rampant in Indian politics. The Saga is therefore, not merely a satire of the Emergency but a political satire of corrupt society. Though the author bases his novel on the specific historical and cultural condition prevailing in India, events of the actual past repeatedly adhere to the mythic shape of apocalyptic history. Vijayan's contemporary vision of apocalypse results in fiction that is formally and thematically critical and subversive than passively tolerant or escapist in its attitude toward historical reality.
Vijayan’s treatment of the theme of apocalypse in fiction has not been static but rather has undergone change. The Legends presents the apocalypse of an individual. It has a biblical structure with a genesis, an Edenic period and an apocalyptic end. The short story “The Wart” also has a paradise like beginning, and after going through a Kafkesque middle has an apocalyptic end for the individual, the protagonist. The stories “Oil” and “The Foetus” and the novel The Saga are about the apocalypse of a community.

The Saga begins with the chapter “The President”. The very first sentence of the novel presents the shocking scene of the defecation of the President. The apocalyptic subversive intentions of Vijayan are manifest in the first sentence itself. The sovereign’s excrement is presented as a sacrament for which his sycophants and underlings crave: “Only a fortunate few gained actual access to it, and it was those who held power in government, in trade, and in the seats of learning. Even those privileged ones had to obtain the excrement through elaborate strategies; and they secured mere smatterings” (The Saga 182).

This is a parody of the sacrament of God. In religious ritual, food is usually offered to the deity. It is then partaken by the devotee with great veneration believing it to be blessed by God’s grace. Here it is the excrement of the President which is accepted by his subjects as his sacrament. The ritual is also a parody of Christ’s offering of bread and wine as his body and blood. The parody is heightened by the description of the defecation which is carried out like a religious ceremony: “Six bare breasted young women washed the
posteriors and freshened them with frankincense and myrrh" (The Saga 183). Frankincense and myrrh are the gifts that the Magi presented to infant Jesus. Religious rituals and sacred objects are parodied. Parody is used by Vijayan as a subversive device.

If in The Autumn, the general makes his ministers eat the body of General Rodrigo de Aguilar who tried to assassinate him, the President in The Saga, makes his ministers literally cat his shit. Both these incidents parody Christ serving bread and wine as his body and blood. In The Saga, Vijayan depicts the President, his consorts and their frolics in highly nauseating fashion. Vijayan's scatological imagination parallels Jonathan Swift's. Northrop Frye's comment on Swift's Gulliver's Travels is relevant in the case of Vijayan's The Saga too:

Gulliver's Travels shows us man as a venomous rodent, man as a noisome and clumsy pachyderm, the mind of man as a bear pit and the body of man as compound of filth and ferocity... But Swift is simply following where his satiric genius leads him, and genius seems to have led practically every great satirist to become what the world calls obscene (Anatomy 235).

Dharmapuri, the mythical land in which Vijayan's The Saga is located, is reeling under the domination of an aging dictator, an Antichrist, the President. The wasteland that he creates with his cruelty and misrule corresponds to the period just before the end of the world as described in Biblical Apocalypse. The mood of the transitional period is that of a
nightmare. The dislocation of personal and public relationship, the confusion of reality and appearance, and fear of the future are its features. The situation in Dharmapuri is no different. In apocalyptic narration the physical realm prefigures moral realities. In "Revelation", John describes the poisoning of the waters, the drying up of the sea during the period of transition.

Even young children and corpses are sold to foreign countries to replenish the treasury so that the President and his hoard of children may indulge in debauchery. So complete is the moral and political corruption of the President's world that it subverts and destroys the very concept of order. The President holds absolute control over the lives of his subjects. The general in García Márquez's The Autumn rapes a woman and then has her husband cut into small pieces because he would be an enemy if allowed to live. In The Saga the prime minister of Samarkhand, a neighbouring country of Dharmapuri, sleeps with the wives of his ministers and he sees to it that their husbands come to know about it, so that they may undergo humiliation with the frustration that they have to suffer the disgrace, unable to protest. The prime minister boasts to a concubine:

I am pleased that you realize our laws are God Given and administered to justify God's ways. Now, coming back to your husband, on second thoughts, I decided against liquidation, because, were your husband to be removed, you would become mine and mine alone. Where then, O delectable whore, would be the pleasure of prevailing over the adversary? Diverted of such
triumph, of what use would be my power and sovereignty? (The Saga 236).

But the prime minister himself is not immune to the vagaries of power.

“But where is the Begum?” the concubine persisted. The prime minister grew dispirited,

“So today she goes to bed with a Confederate credit agency.”

“A whole agency, sire?”

“Yes, a whole agency”.

The vision of her nation as a pimp, its armed legions and its flying machines and flotillas, its spies and prosecutors and judges, its convocations, protocols, and glittering ceremony, all the many arms of a pimp god, made the concubine sad (The Saga 238).

Dharmapuri and Samarkhand are so corrupt that even the prime minister and other ministers are not immune from the malign influence of power. People in high places, including ministers and high officials, abuse their office. Vijayan depicts the political disorder using apocalyptic imagery. In Dharmapuri, Rumannuaan, the minister for sorrowing disrobes Laavannya, the kitchen maid and tries to molest her. She tries to escape from his clutches and dissuade him from his intentions and she reminds him of his wife. Rumannuaan says:

“Have no fear. She will not come upon us, because today the President has her” he reminds her . . .
"Merciful God!" she said. "Do you ministers have to do this as well? I had supposed it was enough to partake of the sacrament."

"One wishes one could stop with the sacrament," Rumannuaan said cheerlessly. "But it does not suffice, O my kitchen maid! One has to part with one's woman too. Such is the awesome process of history" (The Saga 203).

The general in The Autumn and the President in The Saga shuffle their ministers and their generals merely on the basis of their momentary whims. Priyamvada, the wife of Hayavadana, the vice - Minister of Aircraft, after granting sexual gratification to the President requests that her husband be elevated to the post of Minister for Sorrowing and her request is immediately granted. The displaced minister, Rumannuaan has no sense of honour and self respect and he comes crawling to the President, who out of pity makes him minister without portfolio, and gives him "the use of his mansion and his kitchen maids. In gratitude Rumannuaan held out his hands and begged, 'Sacrament My Lord,'" (The Saga 248).

Corruption and persecution have reached a deplorable state. For the President and his greedy ministers, there was gold to be had "in war, in famine, in floods and in the great plague." The government bartered corpses to the Western confederacy and in return they got candy. The citizens of Dharmapuri are reduced to a state of abject poverty. They are compelled to sell even their parents and their children. The aged are converted to corpses, which are shipped off to medical colleges abroad and the children are canned and sold as
delicacies in the west. People like Shubhraka in fact demand it: “Have pity on me, sir, and ship my parents and my children away, clearing for me the space of my hut” (The Saga 270).

Things have come to such a pass that people are compelled to sell off their own parents and children, to survive. Children are abused and misled by a false sense of patriotism. They are taught that their being killed, canned and sold off for foreign exchange is a great act of self-sacrifice and patriotism. A diseased child who was denied the privilege of sacrificing himself for his country because the law does not permit the export of contaminated flesh bemoans his lot. The boy’s sorrow is that he has failed his country but he consoles himself with the hope: “I shall take medicine and make myself whole again and go to the workhouse. I do not want to fail my country” (The Saga 315). Through this boy Vijayan parodies the concepts of patriotism and self-sacrifice. Vijayan says:

By enquiring from any single thread of truth, it would be apparent that the whole of social experiments of humanity till date are laid on the foundation of half-truths and falsehoods. This knowledge could destroy the peace of mind of any person. There are many ways one can escape from this: patriotism, class consciousness, political ideologies, production, wealth, and war. Ignorance of this knowledge is indeed bliss (“Foreword” Dharmapuraanam 7).

The President starts partaking human flesh because men of science have assured him that it would help him to regain his vitality. The personal envoy of
the President, Shakuni's comment is an ironic statement on the President and his rule. "After all, what is all this war and massacre for, but to facilitate your fornication? ... However, in the minds of the people you are still an eater of cabbage and lettuce. That being so, the man-flesh must be kept a secret" (The Saga 300).

The President and his ministers may indulge in all sorts of fornication and debauchery but their public image has to be maintained without blemish. But it is not easy, as Shakuni points out: "Every day, on a rough reckoning, three or four maids and concubines and an equal number of Minister's wives come to you. They have husbands and lovers, who in turn have concubines and women of casual amusement, who have lovers" (The Saga 300-01).

In spite of, or may be because of, his repeated fornication the President has become impotent and his occasional erections are celebrated as events of national significance. He is also a coward who is afraid of his subjects. His only concern is to remain in power so that he and his prodigious family may continue to indulge in unrestrained pleasures. He feared the people and their verdict. The President asks:

"What will happen if we are forced to go to the polls and the convention of the Holy Spirit is beaten?" The ministers made elaborate pretence of consulting learned tomes, and answered variously. "The ideology of the celestial birds will be endangered, Dharmapuri will no longer be able to lead the struggle for peace; mankind will become spiritually leaderless,
there will be no one to prevent a nuclear holocaust” (The Saga 192-193).

A state of Emergency is declared. Though the real reason is that the President is afraid that he may lose the election, lofty ideals are given for its imposition. Religious apocalyptic writers provide the hope that suffering under the Beast is temporary and that time is against the Beast. In The Saga, Siddhaartha and the army of Paraashara provide the hope that the evil rule of the President may yet come to an end. “More and more people listened to these voices in Dharmapuri’s reaches” (The Saga 278).

The evil forces continue their malignant ways in blissful ignorance of what is in store for them: “Princes and Presidents played in erotic ritual for their concubines, they played thus while they reigned in the little time they had, which they mistook for permanence” (The Saga 279). Vijayan uses Biblical apocalyptic imagery to describe the beast:

Then Siddhaartha saw. He gazed in disbelief at the diminutive and decrepit thing that clung to the arches of the cupola, and with gnarled digits shredded the ageing chronicles of the earth. Its fangs flashed white in simian chatter and its eyes looked down in imbecile evil . . . Darkness thickened in the bowl of the cupola and hid the beast (The Saga 319).

In the final Armageddon, “both the Red Tartar Republic and the white confederacy backed the President with guns and aphrodisiacs” (The Saga 299).
At times, Siddhaartha assumes the role of an apocalyptic prophet promising a prosperous and peaceful future to the just and the good. He then speaks in the tone of the apocalyptist John:

"yet rejoice and be exceedingly glad," the mendicant said,

"because there comes another war in which the victory will be yours; for in that war everyone wins . . . The voice of God tells me that some day the people of Dharmapuri will have huts to live in, and that great forests will be in flower. My beloved people, be ready for them" . . . "He that comes after we will teach you," the mendicant said. "He will rouse the serpent that sleeps in the stems of your spines" (The Saga 213).

In the Bible, in 'Revelations' John often prophesies that he was only a messenger preparing the path for the prophet who will come after him. Siddhaartha refers to the Armageddon in which the Antichrist will finally be defeated. Vijayan’s Siddhaartha speaks in an apocalyptic tone not unlike John. Vijayan’s radical treatment of Siddhaartha is mythoclastic because he makes Siddhaartha speak both like the Apocalyptist John and the revolutionary Mao Tse Tung: "In times far away, I see man reborn a resplendent animal, I see the plant overcoming the edifices of the city" (The Saga 249).

In One Hundred Years, when the people of Macondo are afflicted by the epidemic of forgetfulness, José Arcadio discovers the power of the written word in retaining the memory of his people. Macondo is once again saved from complete oblivion by Melquíades’
record. In *The Saga*, Siddhaartha realizes that only words have the power to sustain the rationality of a people engulfed by the lunacy of rampant corruption and exploitation. Siddhaartha is introduced to Kaanchanamala, the daughter of Kanakalatha. Kaanchanamala with her doggerel symbolises the saving grace of culture and civilisation. She, however, confesses that she is blind, signifying that learning has been rendered blind and powerless.

“Look at my eyes, my king,” said Kaanchanamaala.

“Merciful Lord!” Said Siddhaartha. “I see dead orbs white and sightless like sparrow’s eggs!”

“While I slept in my mother’s womb, said Kaanchanamaala, no one fed my eyes. They fed their wars instead and I came sightless into the world . . .”

“Look at my palm leaves, my king,” said Kaanchanamaala.

“I never wrote on them.” (*The Saga* 197).

It is not Siddhaartha alone who speaks in a prophetic and apocalyptic tone. Kaanchanamaala too assumes a prophetic tone when she announces.

“Go, sir,” said Kaanchanamaala “Strange stars have risen tonight. This is the night of the bondsman. All the prisons lie open tonight. Go before they close again. A great benediction has come upon Dharmapuri . . . The grace of Siddhaartha.” Kaanchanamaala tells Vaatasena, the husband of Laavannya (*The Saga* 260-61).

Siddhaartha confronts the evil and despicable beast:
"I have come", Siddhartha said again, "I Siddhartha, the
Bodhisattva"

"Aaaaah" came the reply

"Who are you, O king of Darkness?"

"Aaaah"

"Speak to me, for every artifact of my civilisation pollutes the air I
breathe, the armories bristle, the creatures of the earth move toward
Armageddon, unaware. O master who hides, you have the answer.
Tell me: who desires war, who profit from it?" (The Saga 318).

Siddhartha’s words are replete with apocalyptic images, "King of Darkness,"
"Armageddon".

The Saga cannot strictly be considered a novel. It would be more
accurate to term it a fantasy because improbable events and occurrences are
narrated. Siddhartha is able to will himself away from places. Even the
Shakuntas, the birds of Shakuntala speak. And they speak in a prophetic tone:

"Let us not touch down. This is a City of sin."

"Look, down below! The city’s cruel sacrifice?" (The Saga 256).

The Shakuntas’s reference to the city of sin echo the city of Sodom and
Babylon in the Bible.

While García Márquez makes use of magical realism, Vijayan makes
use of fantasy to depict the unreal world of the Beast and the apocalypse. For
Vijayan, fiction has been a medium to air his views on communism. In The
Vijayan’s satire of the communists, both in India and in Russia, is harsh. He ridicules them for sacrificing their ideals for enjoying the spoils of power. According to him, communism and capitalism are the different faces of the phenomenon called power. He parodies their jargon:

They (The communards) practiced the ancient regimen of historical and dialectical sorcery and its arcane texts gave them glimpses of what went on beneath the surface of things. They pitied the people who, with no such aid, plodded through history, reading its surface graffiti and perishing in tragic summations; these were the people the communards were eventually destined to liberate.

Or so the Tartar republic assured them. This was again a matter in which the communards pited, the rest of the people: no one save they had access to so infallible a sorcery, or had a global teacher to interpret it constantly (The Saga 222).

Vijayan’s criticism of communism is best brought out by his portrayal of a young communist revolutionary- a scholar from the university of Nalanda. He molest the dead body of a rich woman shouting. “Merchants daughter! Exploiter of the toiling people! This is class struggle, the retribution!” (The Saga 232).

The country had gained independence from the imperialist power only after prolonged struggle by the freedom fighters in which many people sacrificed their lives. But once the country gained independence, the power hungry and the corrupt seized power and they utilised the government
machinery to advance their selfish interests. Vijayan states ironically that the President and his family wreak revenge on the erstwhile masters by enjoying the privileges and spoils of their trading houses. After independence, the President joins hands with the Imperialists to exploit the people.

Imperialism had its presence in Shantigraa in the form of confederate trading houses; these fortress like structures caused the citizens, as they passed them, to rage and smoulder. However, the imperialists had their uses; as many as fourteen members of the President’s family: sons and sons-in-law, held ceremonial vice-presidencies in these establishments. The common citizens saw this as their country’s hegemony over Imperialism (The Saga 191).

Vijayan uses satire and irony to portray how the imperialists continue exploiting the erstwhile colonies. Earlier, their tone as masters had been one of threat and condescension, now the tone was submissive and fawning:

The great white father was used to such brag from the tiny Presidents and midget emperors who ate at his table and would never dispute their claims even while choosing one of their countries for carpet bombing. He would tell his prospective victim, with much bowing and clinking of glasses, it is true, your Tiny Excellency, the New World has a good deal to learn from your ancient civilization.

... Satisfied, Dharmapuri’s President and his entourage now gorged on the desserts, and in an attempt to undo the past wrong of
plundering Imperialism hunted among the gold and silver ware for souvenirs (The Saga 192).

Northrop Frye’s comment on the use of apocalypse imagery and demonic imagery is true in the case of Vijayan. “Apocalypse imagery is appropriate to the mythical mode, and demonic imagery to the ironic mode of the late phase in which it returns to myth” (Anatomy 157).

In the essay “The Dialectic of Solitude” from his book The Labyrinth of Solitude, Octavio Paz says:

myth, biography, history and poetry describe a period of withdrawal and solitude-almost always during early youth – preceding a return to the world and to action. These are years of preparation and study, but above all they are years of sacrifice and persistence, of self-examination, of expiation and purification (204-05).

He cites Arnold Toynbee who gives the myth of Plato’s cave, the lives of St. Paul, Buddha, Mahomet, Machiavelli and Dante as illustration. Octavio Paz says: “All of us have lived in solitude and retirement, in order to purify ourselves and then return to the world” (205).

Vijayan subverts this belief to show how the beast; the Antichrist, too, withdraws to solitude to gain strength and to return to the world but not to save or serve the people but to harass and persecute them with added vigour and strength. In The Saga, Siddhaartha confronts the ugly beast withdrawn in solitude in its fortress. In the short story “The Foetus” the foetus gains physical
and demonical power in the solitude of the fortress and turns up now and again to rape women and molest innocent people.

In the short story “The Wart”, the Wart detaches itself from its human source and gradually gains diabolic strength within the solitude of his house. It finally emerges as a diabolic beast in the guise of an elephant. But ironically it is led off to a temple to carry the deity there.

The concept of an evil force withdrawing to the silence of solitude to return with redoubled energy and strength is not entirely original. Indian mythology abounds in numerous instances of diabolic rakshasas and asuras (demons) withdrawing into the forest and performing austere ‘tapas’ to gain a boon, which is invariably some supernatural or invincible power, from some God. And all these demons use these powers, that they have gained through tapas, to persecute and harass the Gods and innocent people till they are finally vanquished and destroyed by some incarnation of God.

Writers of the pre-independence era and writers of the period just following independence used traditional Indian myths to protest against British hegemony. Vinay Kirpal has pointed out that Raja Rao has structured Kanthapura around the Ramayana myth with Sita (India) being rescued from Ravana (The British) by Rama (Gandhi). Raja Rao could do so because the Rama- Sita- Ravana myth was a living presence in Indian society. It helped Rao to explain the freedom movement in the light of the ancient past which has great meaning for the people in India. Helen Tiffin has demonstrated how the post-colonial writer makes uses of indigenous myths to subvert Euro-centric
history. She cites the examples of Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe. Rao has used the myth of Ramayana to narrate India’s freedom movement.

However, by the 1980’s, writers used myth, if at all, to parody the pathetic plight of post-independent India. Salman Rushdie and Shashi Tharoor are the most illustrious examples of this trend but it can be proved that Vijayan anticipates them by almost a decade. Vijayan’s works were written and published in Malayalam and his own English translations were however published only after Rushdie and Tharoor had established their reputations. So while Raja Rao and other myth writers of the pre-independence era mythify the freedom fighters and the freedom movement, Vijayan and writers of the eighties and after demythify the glorified political leaders by showing that they have feet of clay.

Vijayan juxtaposes the sublime with the ridiculous and the religious with the irreverent as a mythoclastic technique. In *The Legends*, for instance, Ravi makes preparation to set up a school at Khasak. As the school was his property, he had paid for a blackboard, table and chair, and a couple of benches. “To these he had added a personal touch -- framed and colourful pictures of Gandhi, Hitler and the monkey God, Hanuman” (10). The contrast between the pictures reflects the discordant elements, which are dwelt upon in the novel. Vijayan often employs juxtaposition in *The Legends* for shock effect. A very intimate scene between the infant Ravi and his mother is juxtaposed with the adolescent Ravi seducing his step-mother:
Mother scoops him up in a rejoining embrace. As she sets out on her last grand journey into the noontide mirage, she gives him this message - *all this is your precious inheritance*.

Then the redemption of death, and the curse of rebirth.

“Chittamma,” he says, “are you crying?”

“I cannot face it” she says.

“The sin?”

“It is like dying” (*The Legends* 123).

In a sense, Ravi is the diametrical opposite of the mythical characters Bhishma and Yayati. Bhishma gave up a kingdom and vowed that he would never marry but would lead the life of a celibate so that his old father may take a young bride. Yayathi, on the other hand, exchanged his youth and vigour with the wrinkles and decay of his aged father so that his aged father could marry again. In contrast to these mythical figures, Ravi seduces his father’s wife and does not look after him in his decrepit old age as a dutiful son ought to have done.

Vijayan narrates that after Ravi seduces Maimoona, peace descended on him. “He was now the helpless infant god, afloat on the deluge, lying on a pipal leaf, the creator forever beginning his sorrows anew” (*The Legends* 127). Hindu philosophy accepts one’s identification with the divinity. “Tat Twam Asi” [you are that]. But identifying oneself with God because one has sinned is truly a radical and mythoclastic spiritual view.
It has been pointed out that in García Márquez’s Macondo, the strange and bizarre are accepted as everyday realities whereas even the simplest and most mundane discoveries of science are viewed with awe and scepticism. Vijayan does not take the marvelous for granted. However, Vijayan’s use of fantasy and myth, subvert reality in art. Vijayan’s strange commingling of the improbable and the mundane in The Saga and in the short fiction “The Wart” can be seen as his attempt to glimpse into an aesthetic of art which does not need to imitate life. Oriental narratives grow out of a semi-mythical world. Here the strange and improbable is not only the natural subject matter of fiction but the bizarre and uncanny is also accepted as the ‘real’. Miracles and improbabilities, of the kind The Saga and “the Wart” abound in are accepted in the fictional milieu of these works, without scepticism. In The Saga, Siddhartha, Laavannya, her husband Vaatasena, their son Sunanda and the general Paraashara and in fact all the ‘good’ characters are able to will themselves out of a difficult situation by simply disappearing. In the story “The Wart” the protagonist Koppunni is metamorphosed into a worm while the wart on his chin assumes the form of an elephant. In fact, fantasy is used as a subversive device in all the apocalyptic fiction of Vijayan. It is used to emphasize that in the apocalyptic world, everyday reality fails to make sense and the bizarre and uncanny world of the Antichrist can be understood only in terms of fantasy.

In his later fiction, (Pravaachakante Vazhi and Thalamurakal) Vijayan has privileged dalit myths over Aryan, Christian and European myths. The just
asura (demonic) king Maveli is presented as a victim of Aryan hegemony in Thalamurakal. Chandran tells his beloved Rose Mary: “The Aryan God MahaVishnu pushes down to the underworld, the just king Maveli because he was unfortunate to be an asura” (Thalamurakal 27). Chandran tells her that according to the priestly Brahmins, Vishnu appeared in the incarnation of Vamana not to bless but to kill Maveli: the Asura King, loving giant, the just king and embodiment of all virtues. Poor slaves and farmers create the form of Maveli in mud and worship him. After a little reflection, Chandran continues: “The Aryan concept of God converges with the Dravidian, this is marked by the return of Maveli” (Thalamurakal 27).

Chandran’s questioning of the myth wherein a Dravidian King is toppled by an Aryan God is an act of subversion. The view that a Dravidian King is reborn every year like a drowned God and the view that the Aryan and the Dravidian concept of God converge are radical and mythoclastic.

García Márquez privileges native Latin American myths to European myths. Similarly, Vijayan privileges South Indian, Dravidian and dalit myths. Narayanan in Pravaavchakante Vazhi tells Rema that the cow eating Aryan, Rama’s primitive ancestor, crossing the passes and witnessing the urban civilization on the banks of the Sind was wonder struck. Unable to understand the Dravidian’s sophisticated houses, birth places, bathrooms and drainage system, the Aryan destroyed them. The womaniser God of the Aryans, Indra, became the destroyer of cities. The cities on the banks of Sindhu and Ganga were unprotected, for in Dravidian culture war had become obsolete long ago.
Narayanan tells Rema: "Not troubling to resist, my race moved south."

Narayanan finished the story "It is true in my river, blood has not mixed but it is full of tears" (Pravaachakante Vazhi 18).

Narayanan becomes the mouth piece of Vijayan and he becomes vociferous in enumerating the crimes enacted by the Aryans on the Dravidians. "The Dravidians who came to help Rama, he called heathens considering them as apes. He killed Bali and Shambuka. Still see, the love that was showered on this Aryan God by a Dravidian" (Pravaachakante Vazhi 19). Narayanan is referring to the Dravidian Hanuman's love and adoration of the Aryan Rama.

Narayanan is also able to grasp Rama's sorrow: "Rama's history from the baptism with fire to death by drowning is one of sorrow, dear Rema. Bearing that sorrow, even today, Surayu flows" (Pravaachakante Vazhi 19).

Vijayan's concept of God borders on sacrilege, at times. The Christian concept of God is that he is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. He is beyond all grief and happiness. A concept of God in Hinduism is that He is Paramananda: Divine Bliss. But Vijayan presents God as sorrowing. Not only Rama but also Christ sorrowed. Had he not cried out on the cross "Why have you forsaken me?".

Narayanan, in Pravaachankante Vazhi elaborates: "It is when we realize that the father and the son are one that the shocking realization dawns that the sorrow is God's as well" (43). In Narayanan's radical view, it is not Gods who remove the sorrow of mortals but on the contrary it is the business of mortals to remove God's sorrows. He adds:
To remove the sorrow of God, to pacify him, his son’s followed the path of self-abnegation. To calm His mind they composed devotional music and filled epics with God’s having numerous heads and hands... In this foolish worship, the Gods who blessed and punished according to their whims, became the Gods of men. But above them, in unending sorrow, God and the prophet met (Pravaachakante Vazhi 43).

Vijayan has even made use of figures of speech like irony, paradox and oxymoron for the purpose of subversion. In The Saga, for example, Siddhaartha finds himself in a tunnel where he sees a young revolutionary copulating with a corpse. On reaching the end of the tunnel, Siddhaartha says: “I see light” (232) ironically implying the spiritual dimension of the statement. Phrases like “the love of one’s country demands the killing of Children” (The saga (277). rely on irony for subversive effect. Similarly the concubine of the prime minister of Samarkhand is ironic when she claims: “Have I not reached places where few women have reached, and beyond which there is no reaching” (The Saga 237).

Vijayan exploits the apocalyptic impact of oxymoron in The Saga. Phrases, such as “the curse of the saviour,” (215) “The unspoken Voice” (265) “Virgin Sinning” (305) are effective in evoking an apocalyptic atmosphere. So too is the literal use of metaphor. Phrases such as “The President shat” (301). “The dynasty was now wallowing in dung” are used literally.
Even prostitution is depicted by Vijayan not as a sin, but as a spiritual experience. In Indian Devadasi tradition, prostitutes are viewed not as sinners but as the servants of God. “Sevanti is a Devadasi and also Sati. Suffering a widowhood everyday” (Prayaachakante Vazhi 145). A Devadasi is a prostitute and Sati was the wife of Shiva who resorted to self-immolation and is the archetypal symbol of purity and Virginity. Vijayan presents Sevanti as a saintly sinner by using a paradox: the image of Sati and Devadasi.

In a chapter titled “Mother’s Children: my Co-Born” from his autobiographical work Ithihaasathinte, Vijayan confesses that he suffers from a morbid fear of spiders. But he tries to come to terms with this fear. In Khasak, Ravi’s students tell him that spiders are the reincarnations of their ancestors. Narayanan in Prayaachakante Vazhi, shares Vijayan’s fear of spiders. But he comes to terms with his fear by accepting as his spiritual Guru, the very object which invokes revulsion in him. He says: I often think of the web. The shrunken spider, having lost its sense of taste in decrepitude and old age, fasts without catching any mosquitoes and flies” (149). Even the spider, Vijayan suggests, resorts to sanyasa in its old age:

“This spider, is he your friend?” asked Rema. “No, Guru.” What else could you call a fellow creature who has revealed to you the secrets of the universe? Seated on his exalted and dangling seat of learning on the upper corner of the walls, the spider looked down upon his disciple. Below, Narayanan, the man, youth, cartoonist, the aborigine who has returned to the banks of the Sindhu and the
Ganga, which he had vacated three thousand years ago

(Pravaachakante Vazhi 149).

Narayanan has come to terms with his fear of spiders. But depicting a spider as a spiritual Guru who talks down to his human disciple is undoubtedly a radical and mythoclastic view. Narayanan also presents a very radical view of the creation and destruction of the universe:

After the big bang, galaxies wash their face and brush their teeth. Galaxies change their dress and go out... As if grasping the essence of the words the spider continued. “The concept that infinity is an arch is wrong. Infinity is a room that has windows and doors. But it is not possible to go out through them because outside there is neither space nor time (Pravaachakante Vazhi 149).

In The Legends, Vijayan’s evolution myth beginning “Long before the lizards, before the dinosaurs, two spores set out on an incredible journey” (52) is based on the biblical story of “The Genesis” and so has been cited as an example of his mythography. While in Pravaachakante Vazhi, the myth Vijayan evokes is based on the Malayalam myth of Vilwamangalam and Vijayan’s highly innovative use of myth prompts one to label it as an example of demythification. Vijayan judiciously blends the Christian myth of the genesis, the Malayalam myth of the origin of Ananta Padmanabhan and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and creates a new myth:

To mitigate the suffering of passage, the holy spirit became a great explosion. The living organisms which scattered from the
great explosion became incarnations. They became micro
organisms, dinosaurs and human beings, drowning their sorrow
in bliss. He [God] assumed the form of a mischievous boy and
stood behind Vilwamangalam who was in meditation. Losing his
patience the mendicant (Vilwamangalam) scolded the invisible
child. ‘Don’t be mischievous’ and beat him. Then
Vilwamangalam realized that the continuous leela [cosmic play]
had come to a stand still behind him. He looked about him with
tears filled eyes. A voice told him. “Come and see me at
Anantankadu” (Praveachakante Vazhi 151-52).

Narayanan’s concept of God is radical and rather strange. When Rema
expresses a strange desire to become the mother of God, Narayanan suggests
the names of some infant Gods. The infant Jesus of Prague and infant Krishna.
Rema wasn’t interested. She wanted “a dark child, a mischievous one and a
first born moron.” Suddenly Narayanan laughed and said:

“It seems as if for you alone, the Paramatma has preserved a comic
picture of the divine: Vettakkoru Makan.” The terrible Atmalinga
Shiva who danced the dance of death in the frontiers of creation
came to the shores of Nila along Mankara Kavu and became an
idiotic child God. It became an entertainment and prayer of the
devotees of Shiva to fool Vettakaran. After receiving the morning
prayer, this idiot child would hide behind fences and hedges and
look. The devotees would shout and ask ‘Vettakara, Vettakara, don’t you want ghee?’

They would then fill earthen pots with coconut oil which had been used for frying papads and they would shout: ‘Here is ghee, come and eat.’


By privileging a Dravidian, dalit and an idiotic deity over infant Jesus and Krishna, Vijayan has undoubtedly performed a radical and mythoclastic act.

Vijayan often parodies and ridicules Marxist literature for its cliches-ridden style. His critics accuse him of compromising his artistic commitments in his later fiction. In The Legends, Vijayan like a true post-modernist makes no religious or political commitment. He challenges and subverts them, in fact. But in Pravaachakante Vazhi and in Thalamurakal, he wears his spiritualism on his sleeve, as it were. In the article “A hundred Visions and Revisions” N. S. Madhavan critiques Vijayan for permitting his religious predilection to get the better of his artistic judgement. He cites the example of the scene in The Infinity, where Kunjunni while travelling to Delhi with his friend Olga, unwittingly chooses the road to Mathura. “Kunjunni stopped the car, he wrapped his arms around the steering-wheel and bowed his head in veneration. Beloved Gopala, he said, I feel you calling me to your pastures” (353). In the Malayalam version Gurusaagaram, Vijayan had written, “he
wrapped his arms around the steering wheel like a swastika”. As Madhavan rightly points out, Vijayan exhibits better artistic judgement and restraint in the English version. The Malayalam writer Paul Zacharia has been the most vehement critic of Vijayan accusing him of Hindu fundamentalism. But Vijayan has always striven for religious harmony: both in life and in fiction. Vijayan has made use of the universality of myth in establishing the unity of religions. His message is stated in unequivocal terms in Pravaachakante Vazhi:

Nanak Said: “Look at Kaaba. Is there a mightier place of worship? In the evolution of the soul, the Kaaba and Durga are thresholds to be crossed. This in my elder brother’s prophetic land. The desert of the crescent moon. This all his divine molds. “Whatever you worship in whichever form, those prayers come to me.” For him who understands the blissful transition from the worship of form to worship of the formless, there is no diversity in the form of worship. Listen brother.

From behind the Kaaba rose the music of the flute. Hearing the note, clusters of camels were transformed into cows (Pravaachakante Vazhi 181).

It is true that Vijayan has been carried away by his religious enthusiasm in his later works. But at the same time, he never advocates or propagates religious fundamentalism, either in his fiction or journalist writing. Vijayan’s over riding message, as the passage quoted above, is for religious harmony.