Chapter 3
Vijayan as a Mythographer

Myth making is a permanent activity of all men, all men can do is to abandon one myth for the sake of another.

Eliseo Vivas
"Myth: Some Philosophical Problems" 92.

Gabriel García Márquez’s maternal grandfather was a colonel while Vijayan’s father was a police officer: a Subaidar Major in charge of the Malabar Special Police branch at Arikode. When his father was transferred, the child Vijayan was taken to his grandfather’s house. The future writer’s genesis as a mythologist must have happened then: Vijayan reminisces in his autobiographical novel Thalamurakal:

The parents entrusted the child with the grandfather and proceeded to the workplace. For them another honeymoon. For the child the much more desired freedom. . . . In the Nalukettu the grandmother entertained the children with tales from the Puranas and the grandfather with his stories of revolutions (11).

In 1953, Vijayan was studying for his M.A. in Madras, when he wrote his first short story in English titled: “Father Gonzalez.” He had written a few paragraphs when he was stricken by an odd uneasiness. In spite of the uneasiness, though, he continued writing, and finished the story. It was after completing the story that he had the revelation: “a foreigner’s language, a foreigner’s experience, a foreigner’s history. I was struggling through that like
a blindfolded clown. That night I took a decision. Though not well-versed in Malayalam, I'll write only in Malayalam” (Ithihaasathinte Ithihaasam, 117).

He translated the story into Malayalam and got it published in the 1953 January issue of the Malayalam journal Jayakerala entitled “Parayu Father Gonzalez.”

Vijayan began the career of a writer as a communist sympathizer. His short fiction “Valnakshathram” [Comet], “Parayu Father Gonzalez”, “Njerukunna Manushyan” [Struggling Man] are examples. In the foreword to the anthology titled Moonnu Yuddhangal [Three Wars] which appeared in the early sixties, Vijayan had written: “I dedicate this book to the blood of the blood, flesh of the flesh, bone of the bones of toddy-tapers, labourers and the working-class” (6). About this period, Vijayan says, “Being a communist, I wrote these stories with the intention of expressing my solidarity to my party. However, when the story came to be written, the plot, nature and romance strayed beyond my control” (Ithihaasathinte 41).


Like García Márquez, Vijayan was initiated into mythology at a young age. He says:

At that time Blackie and Sons published stories for children.

Stories of witches and stories from Greek and Roman mythologies.
I created a fantasy world which consisted of nature and magical symbols from these stories. Nature and fantasy of these stories alone became my education (Ithihasathinte 17).

Vijayan’s Magnum opus, Khasaakkinte Ithihasam began as early as 1956 but published only in 1969 has an epic design: there is a paradise, a fall, a pox-epidemic, a journey, a suffering and penance. The visual image that inspired García Márquez to write One Hundred Years was that of the young Aureliano Buendia going to see ice for the first time in his life with his father. For Vijayan, the visual image that inspired him to write Khasaakkinte Ithihasam was the village Thasarak.

There must be a motive to begin a story: A tangible and visible collection of experiences. Khasak’s motive is a similar sounding Palakkad village. [Thasarak] . . . . The village had me in its tantalising grip. The village extended its rhythm on to my legend Khasak (Ithihasathinte 29).

O.V. Vijayan’s mythographical genius is most pronounced in his Magnum opus The Legends of Khasak. Here he has effectively combined Persian, biblical and Hindu myths to telling effect. Vijayan’s use of myth and mythical images and symbols is very complex and it is hard to say where the myth can be isolated from the whole design. In this study, an attempt is made to identify a few patterns, and prefigurative motives from Vijayan’s oeuvre, which justify his being labelled a mythographer. They are the themes of aetiology, journey, paradise, the ‘fall,’ incest and the search for a guru. A few
recurring images such as winged serpents, dragonflies and Krishna, are also analysed.

The Legends of Khasak presents an idyllic world of Ravi’s childhood, which is like paradise:

His most cherished memory was of the sky-watch, a pastime in which his mother joined him, though not often as she was big with child. She told him stories of the Devas. These dwellers of the sky drank the milk of the Kalpaka fruit, their elixir of immortality, and flung the empty husks down to the earth. If you gazed on the sky long enough, you saw the husks as transparent apparitions. The sky at noon was full of them (7).

In The Legends, it is Ravi’s mother who creates a myth out of the visual defect, but Vijayan claims it was his grand mother who told him the story of the “Devas and the kalpakas”:

I do not know whether the story that my grandmother told me is based on oriental mythology. This metaphor could not have been borrowed from some books on the affairs of gods. My grandmother could have been told this story by her grandmother. So a mythical plot gained currency because of a visionary defect in innumerable grandmothers (Ithihaasathinte 23).

Mircea Eliade has said that “in describing the primordial situation the myths reveal its (Sic) primordial quality by the fact that in illo tempore Heaven is said to have been very near earth.” Eliade adds further that “it may be possible to show that the myths about the extreme nearness of Heaven and
Earth are found primarily in Oceania and in South East Asia and are in some way connected with matriarchal ideology" ("The yearning for paradise" . . . 255-56).

Ravi’s fall from grace and his initiation into the sins of incest is narrated in a style that resonates with mythical metaphor and symbols:

The covenant ended when his stepmother, his chittamma arrived. At noon she had her siesta inside, and Ravi sat alone on the verandah not wanting to watch the sky, uninterested in his toys. Those were his Cinderella days, a period of orphanhood; one day turning away from the hollows of the sky, he looked towards the miraculous horizon. It was then that they came riding the golden surf of the mirage—the winged and diademed serpents, calling him to play (The Legends 8).

Vijayan uses the image of the serpent as a biblical symbol of sex and sin. In the passage quoted above, winged serpents symbolise Satan. The sexual impulse of Ravi is expressed through the image of the serpent. He reads a letter from his childhood girlfriend Padma. “The winged serpents rose in the mirage and beckoned to Ravi with anxious passion” (The Legends 159). “Creepers entwined like mating serpents” (The Legends 163). But Vijayan’s use of ‘winged serpent’ as a symbol is ambiguous. It sometimes can be a ‘gentle being’: “A Winged Serpent? The sunlight flooded Ravi’s memory. A winged serpent with a diademed head, riding the mirage for a lonely child? ‘Well, my children,’ Ravi said, ‘don’t throw stones at the water demon. It is a gentle being’” (The Legends 157).
With clarity of expression that is widely acclaimed as the best in Malayalam creative writing, Vijayan combines the theory of evolution and the story of the Genesis.

That day Ravi told the children the story of the lizards. In times before man usurped the earth, the lizard held sway. A miraculous book opened, the children saw its pages rise and turn and flap. Out of it came mighty saurians moving slowly in deep canyons after the dull scent of prey, and pterodactyls rose screaming over their nesting precipices. The story was reluctantly interrupted for lunch; after hurried morsels the children raced back to school and huddled around their teacher. The pages rose and fell again . . . Long before the lizards, before the dinosaurs, two spores set out on an incredible journey. They came to a village bathed in the placid glow of sunset.

‘My elder sister’ (said the little spore to the bigger spore, ‘let us see what lies beyond’. ‘This valley is green,’) replied the bigger spore, ‘I shall journey no further’ ‘I want to journey,’ said the little spore ‘I want to discover.’ She gazed in wonder at the path before her. ‘Will you forget your sister?’ asked the bigger spore. ‘Never’. Said the little spore. ‘You will, little one, for this is the loveless tale of karma; in it there is only parting and sorrow’” (The Legends 52-53).

The last line sums up the philosophy that Vijayan was trying to elaborate in The Legends. Vijayan has succeeded in combining the theory of evolution with the story of the Genesis and the ‘Fall’ from the Bible in this
brief myth. Vijayan develops the myth to express his concern of the destruction of nature by man:

A girl with silver anklets and eyes prettied with suruma came to Chetali’s valley to gather flowers. The Chempaka tree stood alone—efflorescent, serene. The flower—gatherer reached out and held down a soft twig to pluck the flowers. As the twig broke the Chempaka said, ‘my little sister, you have forgotten me! (The Legends 53).

With remarkable skill, Vijayan connects the myth that he has created with the myth of the ten avatars of Vishnu. Thus the seed of the spiritualisation of myth—a seed that would grow into a tree and branch out in The Saga of Dharmapuri, Madhuram Gayathri, The Infinity of Grace, and in Pravachakante Vazhi—takes root in The Legends: “Vedan Uddharate Jagannivahate -- the sloka celebrating the avatars of the lord, evolute incarnation from fish to boar to man and deity resounded over everything” (The Legends 53). The cycle of birth and death is suggested: “Her roots pierced the damp earth and sought the nutrients of death and memory” (The Legends 53).

The theme of Journey or pilgrimage is a common motif in mythology. Joseph Campbell and Northrop Frye have made extensive study of the theme of quest or journey. In fact, Frye considers the quest myth as the single, all pervasive myth. Journey or pilgrimage is a means of doing penance, gaining self-realisation and forgetting. The Odyssey, The Aenid, The Divine Comedy and The Ramayana focus on the theme of wandering. In The Bible, the wandering of the Jews in the desert is narrated in the Exodus.
In *The Legends*, the journey undertaken by Ravi is a pilgrimage, a forgetting, an expiation for sins committed, a penance. A journey that prolonged over numerous births, “No, Not on this journey of many lives, this journey of incredible burdens. Let me reach my inn, the village called Khasak (*The Legends* 9). The image of journey is repeated several times in the novel like a refrain: “Ravi heard the whistle of trains, the dull clatter of rails, it was the journey again” (*The Legends* 120). Pilgrimage is a journey undertaken by a devotee for expiation of his/her sins. For the devotee the journey is as sacred as the destination. For Ravi, however, who has no destination in life, the journey is as absurd as life. Ravi’s pilgrimage begins from a railway platform:

The journey into the vast unquiet universe, watched by faces in railway compartments, tolerant and incurious... The names of the railway stations changed, their script changed... The roadway dust changed colour, sunrise and sunset changed places, directions were lost in an assailing infinity. The journey took him through cheerless suburbs, through streets of sordid trades, past cacti villages and lost townships of lepers and ashramas where, in saffron beds, voluptuous swaminis lay in wait for nirvana. And at last, this respite, this sarai in Khasak (*The Legends* 79).

The image of the journey is repeated and recurs in the novel. The train journey becomes a symbol for Ravi’s absurd life: A life which is meaningless, trackless and without destination:

Soon it was dark, and the fantasy returned, the fantasy of the journey. The seedling house became a compartment in a train,
and he the lone and imprisoned traveller. Dark wastes lay on either side; from them fleeting signs spoke to Ravi—a solitary firefly, a plodding lantern. The wheels moved along the track with soft deceptive thuds then he heard the far rush of another track running towards his own, the sorrow of another, futilely seeking comfort. The rails met for one moment, tumultuously, to part again. To race away into the many-mysteried night (The Legends 42).

Ravi undergoes existential angst and comes to the realisation that life is totally meaningless. His journey without destination is as purposeless and meaningless as his life. Yet, there are moments when he feels that life is a pilgrimage:

When Ravi entered the seedling house, he felt he had strayed through many births to reach his heaven once again. A subtle scent pervaded the room, the gentle incense of the traveller. It was the journey of things unmoving and inert, a journey through time. As he wiped the dust and aired the room, he was sad that he had disrupted an incredible pilgrimage (The Legends 132).

Ravi’s journey is backwards in time. With each fall, Ravi loses his divine spark. Ravi’s journey into remote Khasak is not unlike Marlowe’s journey into the heart of Africa in The Heart of Darkness. And like Marlowe, Ravi too confronts the horror of the darkness of his own heart. “He was retrogressing into primitive man” says V. Rajakrishnan (“Rogathinte Pookkal” 54).
Gypsies are the outsiders who connect Macondo in *One Hundred Years* with the outside world by bringing them new inventions and news. In *The Legends*, it is the pandarams. The natives of Khasak are not fond of travel, but the pandarams are a visible exception. An immigrant community, which had come in through the Palghat pass centuries ago, they are sworn to mendicancy and ascetic nomadism. Time has diluted those observances; the Pandarams go back through the pass on their annual ritual pilgrimage. Clad in saffron, they were received with hospitality and reverence and given generous alms.

When on these pilgrimages, like the saffron they don, they assume new names as well -- names taken from myth and legend—and act like gods out of a long lost pantheon. The God-walk took half the year at the end of which the Pandarams come home to Khasak with their considerable earnings. The Pandarams are the great fabulists, because they had nomadic minds. They too add their contribution to the rich mythological tradition of Khasak:

They spun endless tales about the Tamil country while they waited in the liquor den for the quail to fry crisp on fire. In these tales the pilgrims progressed over unrelieved chalk-stone landscapes under a relentless sea, but at the end of a journey, there was always a village, a woman, a god (*The Legends* 101).

Vijayan is non-committal in his use of various mythical themes and devices. For Ravi, journey is absurd, but at the same time a pilgrimage. For the pandarams, the journey is their way of life; their livelihood. But Vijayan presents their journey as a pilgrimage.
The theme of incest has been studied exhaustively by psychologists, sociologists, historians, and writers. Incest is a common theme in all the major mythologies of the world. Clyde Kluckhohn undertook a survey of the recurring themes in mythology by analysing samples from different parts of the world. He found the theme of incest overtly depicted in twenty-nine mythologies. In three cases (Celtic, Greek and Hindu) mother-son, father-daughter and brother-sister incest are alluded to; eleven cases mention two forms of incest; the remaining twenty-five mythologies apparently deal with only a single type. Brother-sister incest was easily the most popular theme in the sample (28 cases). There are twelve cases of father-daughter incest ("Recurrent themes . . . 272). Among the various kinds of incest, brother-sister incest appears to be the most common, followed by father-daughter. There are numerous references to the seduction of a mother-in-law by her son-in-law (or vice-versa). Mother-son incest seems to be the least common. Clyde Kluckhohn states, "there are no instance of mother-son incest in African mythology and only one in Eurasia" (272).

Throughout history, mankind has denounced incest as something abominable. None the less, myth extensively alludes to incest and treats the subject as snickering humour or even acceptable practice under certain circumstances. Modern psychology suggests that the vehemence usually expressed against incest arises because of an innate desire that man wishes to curb. Nature mythologists state that incest is entirely metaphoric. The sun is interpreted as father, brother and son, while the moon is mother, sister and
daughter. Interrelationships between the sun and the moon are then alleged to generate all myths of incest.

It is far easier to condemn incest than to defend it. According to Martin, S. Day, "incest may be defined as violation of the social taboo against copulation with members of the opposite sex in specified kinship categories" (222). Since the mythic mind equates sexuality with fertility, myth ignores incestuous inclinations and conduct with close relatives that psychology deems incestuous. For example, Noah's naked exposure to his children (Genesis 9: 21-24) could be considered incestuous, but the Biblical treatment suggests no more than gross indignity.

Different races have varied and even contradictory concepts of forbidden kinship relations. Westerners disapprove of first cousins marrying, but cross cousin marriage with the daughter of man's maternal uncle is common even today not only in south India but also among Australian aborigines, Melanesia and Indonesia. Isaac commanded Jacob to marry the daughters of Laban (his mother's brother) in Genesis (28:2). Gautama Buddha married the daughter of his mother's brother. This cross cousin marriage stems from a matrilineal society, the parallel pattern would be a man marrying the daughter of his father's sister. Possibly this cross-cousin marriage is a modification of or substitution for brother-sister marriage. Whatever be the genetic compulsion, incest for most human communities is fundamentally a social practice.

The Penare of Venezuela condemned incest as "to have sex like monkeys." Such a view regards incest as natural, while men must live by
culture. Here may be the crux of the incest problem. Incest is all too natural, and in order to strongly assert man's humanity and difference from the brute, it is imperative to avoid incest. Levi-Strauss, too, argued that incest is natural, 'the raw,' while the taboo against incest is cultural 'the cooked.' However, there is a fundamental flaw in this argument because incest is the exception and not the rule in nature:

Cross-pollination of plants suggests that living matter basically repudiates incest. Claire Russell states, "certain mammals scrupulously avoid mating with blood relatives. For example, prairie dogs, lions, and macaque monkeys" (59). The revulsion against incest may be genetic, for, early man could not have reasoned inbreeding would produce deterioration and eventual extinction. Malinowsky says that, "organised family life is impossible unless incest is suppressed. Incest would destroy the human family. Hence man's social detestation of incest" (182). Levi-Strauss goes further and suggests that the essence of culture is exchange and for all societies the basic irreducible exchange is the exchange of women. A primitive social group retaining all females for inbreeding has absolutely no means of exchange. Martin, S. Day corroborates the view: "Priestesses in early societies would be excluded from exogamy to prevent their group losing their knowledge and sacerdotal functions. To avoid incest, therefore, such priestesses would be enjoined to remain virgins" (489).

Incest among deities, though, is accepted because they are not bound by the laws and customs of men. Myth records multitudes of divine incest. Zeus though married to his sister Hera had a daughter Persephone by his sister
Demeter and by his daughter Persephone, Zeus had a son Zagreus. A great deal of divine incest seems to be metaphoric, as the daughter of Zeus and Hera, Hebra (Juventus, in Latin) is the personification of eternal youth. Incest was common not only among deities but also among divine kings. Hence the brother-sister marriages of the Incas or the Egyptian Pharaohs.

Perhaps the most appalling incest pattern to westerners is the mother-son, the Oedipal theme, so abhorrent to the Greek mind that all participants in the Oedipus Jocasta account are presented as ignorant of the true situations as they occur. Though the mother-son incest theme is strongly condemned in Europe, it seems to be accepted in South East Asia in a great arc, which runs through Indonesia, the Philippines and up through Taiwan. Typical is the version of Li tribe of Haiman Island where catastrophe kills off everyone except a mother and her son. She leaves him, advising him to marry any strange woman he finds. In the bush she changes her tattoo marks (seen as the true means of identification) and returns to marry her son and replenish the world. The excuse for the many versions of this myth is stark compulsion upon the only surviving couple, incestuous as they are.

The Zuni Amerindians tell of a grandmother sleeping with her grandson to give him sexual instruction. The Shawnee Amerindians say that in former times such was their regular practice. According to Day, “Probably most mother-son incest myths arise from the Oedipal complex in males rather than overt action”(27).

Similarly, the myths of father-daughter incest may essentially spring from the Electra complex in women. To enforce the stability of society and
law, myth throws up shocking pictures of anarchy triggered by violation of the sacred taboo of incest to force the “uncivilised” into the “civilised”. Psychoanalysts, will none the less, insist that father-daughter incest is concealed in some myths. They claim that incest is suggested when Zeus assumes the form of a bull to molest his daughters Europa and Io.

Some myths are euphemistic but transparent. A south Slav myth tells of a king with a beautiful daughter whom he treats as his wife. Through a charm he renders her pregnant (and not a very subtle cover for incest). Hindu legend assigns five heads originally to Brahma. Because he lusted for his daughter, one of his heads was lopped off by Shiva. The Rig Veda account of Brahma’s incest with his daughter may be allegorising of heaven and dawn. The Hindus even have a special hell, Mahajwala, reserved for a man committing incest with a daughter or daughter-in-law. Father-daughter incest is universally condemned, though in Amer-Indian trickster cycles Cayote, is thought a clever scoundrel in his disguising of himself to seduce his own daughters.

Brother -- sister incest is the most common in myths and the least excoriated. Much of the problem lies in defining sibling relationship. In a totemic society, all young men of a young woman’s totem are her ‘brothers.’ In many societies parallel cousins on father’s side, mother’s side, or both sides are ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters.’ So-called brother-sister incest may be endogamy but not pairing of blood kin. In The Old Testament, Leviticus mentions the marriage of Abraham with his half-sister Sarah.

In a polygamous patrilineal society, such as that of early Hebrews, children of the same father but different mother (and separately brought up)
were perfectly proper marriage partners, as were Abraham and his half-sister Sarah (Leviticus 20: 17).

The custom was later prohibited but it apparently was acceptable in the days of David, whose son Ammon sought to ravish his half-sister Tamar (II Samuel 13: 13). His half-sister urges Ammon to get David to betroth her to Ammon. She resents rape but accepts marriage with her half-brother.

These occasions, however, occur very early in the biblical history of man and were defended on the grounds that they were necessary to the survival of the race. Constance Hill Hall says that it is only after the promulgation of the laws of Moses that incest came to be censured in The Bible. According to Hall:

With the promulgation of the laws of Moses, incest for Jews and Christians was unequivocally and forever condemned. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, it was explicitly defined and forbidden, and in both the Old and New Testaments instances of incest were noted and censured (Hall 6).

Incest is condemned not only in mythology but is religiously avoided by all races of men, even savages. Analysing the works of James Frazer and Andrew Lang, Sigmund Freud draws deep insights and arrives at certain theories regarding incest. In his article titled "Totem and Taboo," (1913) Freud analyses the customs and practices of one of the most primitive savages of his days: the aborigines of Australia. Freud developed his own mythology in which he claims that the founding event, decisive and irrevocable, was the Oedipal crime of the killing of the father. According to him, the neuroses of
the modern individual are a re-enactment of the collective guilt of the ‘primal horde.’

Freud believed that the people of the Old Stone Age were patriarchal. The tribal patriarch appropriated all the women for himself. As Freud puts it:

One day the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde...of course these cannibalistic savages ate their victim. This violent primal father had surely been the envied and feared model for each of the brothers. Now they accomplished their identification with him by devouring him and each acquired a part of his strength. The totem feast, which is perhaps mankind’s first collection, would be the repetition and commemoration of this memorable criminal act with which so many things began: social organisation, moral restrictions and religion (183).

Now they had access to the females of the horde. At the same time with the killing and removal of the patriarchal figure, their tender impulses were also invoked, resulting in a collective guilt of patricide. They undid their deed by declaring that the killing of the father substitute, the totem, was not allowed, and renounced the fruits of their deed by denying themselves the liberated women. Thus they created two fundamental taboos.

Many critics argue that in The Legends, Ravi’s existential angst is inexplicable. They feel that Vijayan was blindly mimicking a popular western fad. However, on close scrutiny, it will be apparent that Ravi’s sense of guilt and existential despair is on account of his incestuous relationship with his
stepmother. Ravi’s childhood memories are of, an Edenic world of bliss. The house at Ooty; the intimate childish games with his mother, counting ‘kalpakas’: “Mother scoops him up in a rejoicing embrace. As she sets out on her last journey into the noontide mirage, she gives him this message—all this is your precious inheritance.” Ravi’s fall from the grace of his mother’s love to the sin of incestuous love is sudden and narrated by Vijayan in succession without a pause. The next sentence in the novel is:

“I cannot face it,” she says

“The sin”

“It is like dying” (The Legends 23).

Ravi’s incestuous affair with his step-mother is only hinted at:

“Chittamma,” he says, “let me go to my room.”

She bars his way. Ravi tells her sternly:

“Put on your clothes.” Then the farewell (The Legends 123).

Ravi searches for his mother or rather his mother substitute in numerous affairs beginning with his stepmother. The inevitability of his fate is spiral in nature. The more Ravi tries to escape from the inevitability of his guilt, the more engrossed he becomes in his sin. He proceeds to take to bed almost any woman he comes across. They include Maimoona, Chand Umma, the prostitute Kodachi, his childhood friend Padma and a sanyasini. He tries to escape from his sins by going on a pilgrimage which takes him to Khasak but that does not end there. He tries to drown his grief in drink. Finally realising that he cannot escape either from his remorse or from his sins, he succumbs to his ‘karma’ and welcomes death.
What Ravi yearns for is angelic love—pure, unbounded, unimpeded—a love, which he believes he got from his mother. And he desires and searches for that love in his stepmother, and numerous casual love affairs that he has; but such a love is not permitted to man. Ravi can find it only in death—the perfect consummation of love. Ravi is simply demonstrating the longing of mankind for a oneness with something somewhere: the irony is that he should pursue it in incest and death, themselves the symbols of man’s fall from wholeness.

The Malayalam novelist Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai published the novel *Chemeen* in 1956 in which he created the myth of the chaste wife. In this novel Thakazhi describes how in the mythic past, the first fisherman fought the waves and the currents on a piece of wood and sailed beyond the horizon. All the while, his wife performed penance on the seashore in austerity. In Thakazhi’s words:

The sea turned rough, the whales opened their mouths. The sharks beat against the boat with their tails. The current dragged the boat to a whirlpool. But the boatman not only miraculously escaped from all the dangers, he even returned with a big fish. How did the fisherman escape from the big storm? Why did not the whale swallow him? The boat was not damaged by the attack of the sharks. The boat escaped from the whirlpool. How did all this happen? The virgin was performing tapasya on the beach! The womenfolk of the seashore learned that myth of the chaste wife (*Chemeen* 14-15).
This myth of chastity created by Thakazhi could well be termed as ‘The Chemeen Myth.’ Vijayan has exploited this myth in The Legends: the myth of the cuckold, paying with his life, for the sin of his straying wife.

Chukkru is a diver who makes his living by retrieving lost objects from wells. His wife, Maimoona cheats him by having an affair with Khazi, the Muslim mendicant and magician. Chukkru, pays dearly for his wife's infidelity with the Khazi with his life:

He dived into the well, and deeper, into the well within the well. The water was like many crystal doors and silken curtains. Chukkru made his way past crystal and silk. And moved towards the mystery that had lured him all his life. As Chukkru journeyed on, the last of the crystal doors closed behind him

(The Legends 60).

Chukkru, must have confronted his past as well, in his last plunge. "Very deep" wrote Thomas Mann at the opening of his mythological tetralogy, Joseph and His Brothers, "Very deep is the well of the past. Should we not call it bottomless." If Remedios the beautiful flew towards heaven in One Hundred Years, Chukkru’s journey was downwards like that of Odysseus, Aeneas, Mahabali and Orpheus. But unlike them, he was unable to return to earth.

'The Chemeen Myth' is repeated in the story of the tamarind tree. It had happened in the lost time of Khasak, but it lived on, a brooding avenging sorrow. The great tamarind tree, which stood on the edge of the buried marsh was witness to that sorrow. Old beyond reckoning, Khasak believed the tree wouldn't die until it was redeemed in some way. It was beneath this tree, in
that lost time, that an old widower astrologer and his daughter had built their
hut. A company of white cavalry came there in search of water for their
camels. They killed the old star-watcher and raped his daughter. They left her
to die on the marsh and went towards the mountains, but as they reached the
foothills, scorpions crawled into their battle fatigues and black cobras bit the
camels and riders perished in the wild, and the loom of the mountain settled
over their bones. The dead girl rose from the marsh and made the tamarind tree
her abode. Worshipped as a Devi, she was the guardian of the chaste. The
tamarind tree grew to enormity and, despite its great age; bore fruit in
abundance. There were wandering tamarind merchants and their climbers and
settlers, who came from Koomankavu and elsewhere, and the harvest overhead
was rich, yet few dared to climb up. For the trunk was covered with slippery
lichen and the canopy infested with venomous ants. But if the climber had a
chaste wife, the Devi would turn the lichen into firm footholds, and the ants
would make way (The Legends 87).

Chand Umma’s husband had climbed the tamarind tree to pluck the
fortune there was for his taking. “The villagers found him the next day
sprawled over the edge of the marsh, blood still oozing from the splintered
skull and hordes of ants, glimmering violet and magenta, marauding over the
eyes and the genitals” (The Legends 87). This punitive widowhood brought on
exclusion, and unbearable loneliness for Chand Umma. After Ravi made
Chand Umma tell the story of the tamarind tree he asks her: “‘Umma, do you
believe the Devi was punishing you?’ She met his gaze with stern and accusing
eyes. Then courage gave way to shame, and Chand Umma was seized with a
spasm of crying” (The Legends 88). Ravi tries to console her. But Chand Umma’s sufferings are unbearable. When Chand Umma’s husband died, her father left Khasak to become a wandering fakir. Her villagers ostracised her and didn’t come to help her to mend the thatch of her roof. Chand Umma’s life is spared. But she loses her husband. Her two children Chandu Muttu and Kunju Nooru are snatched away from her by the small pox epidemic. She is denied the grace of death and has to endure the consequence of her sin all alone.

A myth believed by the toddy tapers of Khasak, resembled the myth of the tamarind tree. Both myths deal with the fidelity of the spouse and resemble the myth of the fisher folk community in Chemeen.

And so ended the epic of the toddy taper, an epic from other times when flying serpents rested on palm tops during their mysterious journeys. The taper made an offering of sweet toddy to please these visitants. He left flowers at the foot of the palm for the clan’s well being. In those times the taper did not have to climb, the palm bent down for him. It was when a taper’s woman lost her innocence that the palm ceased to bend (The Legends 91).

The artistic purpose served by these myths is to reiterate Ravi’s guilt of having fallen from grace. V. Rajakrishnan points out that in Khasaakkinte Ithihaasam, Vijayan uses the exact Biblical word to describe the sin of adultery. It was there that he knew his stepmother (“Roogathinte” 52). Ravi gets involved with adultery dispassionately. Ravi has adulterous relationships, along with others, a sanyasini at an ashramam and a forty year old prostitute.
Kodachi in Khasak. Rajakrishan labels Ravi a ‘holy sinner’ for he is a dispassionate lover. Every adulterous deed of Ravi is an act of escapism from his original sin (“Roogathinte” 52).

Ravi goes to have a darshan of the Devi at the shrine with enthusiasm:

He thought to himself he was her kin, and would discover their twinhood in this intimate sanctuary. Then would he share his with her, the placental sorrow, generation after generation; as he thought this, the sorrow spilled over to become the sorrow of karma, it was the scar of the sinner, the orphan’s pining, the despair of the one who thirsted for knowledge (The Legends 113).

Within a single sentence, Vijayan combines the Hindu concept of ‘Karma’ with the Christian concept of “knowledge”- suggesting the fruit of Knowledge. Ravi’s grief is on account of his sin of desiring the fruit of knowledge. Thumbamon Thomas’s article “Papathinte Thinarppukal” examines the Biblical concept of sin in Khasaakkinte Ithihaasam. Thomas also attempts to study the Biblical metaphors, images and symbols in this article. Thomas compares the snake symbol used in the novel to the serpent in the Bible. He also draws attention to the symbols of garden, the forbidden fruit and to the Eve like stepmother. In the garden of Ooty [Eden] Ravi’s stepmother tempts him to eat the forbidden fruit. In Thomas’s opinion: “The tree, the forbidden fruit and stepmother are one” (152). Ravi, and not his step-mother, accepts the consequences of his sin and he leaves his Eden. He does not blind himself like Oedipus but he cannot face his father. So he undertakes an absurd pilgrimage to nowhere.
"God" said Ravi, "You gave me your love, gave it with fond indulgence, yet it dies in the deserts within me. I am in flight, Merciful God: let me savour my weariness . . . Father, do not pine for me said Ravi. I am going away to free us both from memory. I walk, an avadhuta, a renunciate along the shores of the infinite ocean. Journeying, I let my sloughs of memory moult away. When I reach the last shore, when I wait for the last redeeming wave (The Legends 151).

Ravi takes leave of his father, while his father is asleep. He pressed his forehead against his father's feet, softly, without waking him. Ravi utters a silent prayer: Father who gave me these eyebrows and these eyes, I give up this nest of sewn leaves, I journey again. Bless my path (The Legends 123). Richard M. Dorson draws attention to the psycho-analyst Ferenezi's interpretation of Oedipus blinding himself. "The eyes as paired organs symbolise the testicles. Oedipus mutilated himself to express horror at his mother-incest, and also to avoid looking his father in the eye" ("Theories of Myth . . ." 285). Ravi does not pluck out his eyes but he avoids his father unable to face him.

By grace of the goodwill of the residents of Khasak, Ravi is able to glean a glimpse into the myths of Khasak. Alla Pitcha Mollaka initiates him to the myth of Sayed Mian Sheikh, while his students tell Ravi the Legends of Khasak:

Of those who had come back from the far empty spaces, of the goddess on the tamarind tree, of Khasak's ancestors who, their
birth cycles ended, rose again to receive the offerings of their progeny; then like the figurines on the throne of Vikrama who narrated the idylls of the king, each child told Ravi a story (The Legends 135).

In the chapter titled "The Second Coming" which has a Biblical ring, Vijayan is at his mythographical best. The myth that he creates in this chapter has an Arabian origin. Vijayan has succeeded in combining the charm, magic and mystery of The Arabian Nights in presenting the myth of Sayed Mian Sheikh. Seated in the madrassa, Alla Pitcha, the mullah teaches the children of the Muslims the saga of Khasak:

Long, long ago, in times now unknown to man, there came riding into their palm grove a cavalcade of a thousand and one horses. The riders were the Badrins, warriors blessed by the prophet, and at the head of the column rode the holiest of them all—Sayed Mian Sheikh. The full moon shone on the thousand steeds of spotless white. But the horse the sheikh rode was old and ill . . .

When the horse could go no further, the sheikh signalled his warriors to stop. In the last watch of the night, as the moon set, the faithful animal died and was buried in a palm grove. It is said that he rises from his unmarked grave, rises with the wind, and those who listen in grace can still hear his unsteady footfalls as he canters to the rescue of the lost, often helping them across the wooded mountain pass . . . The thousand riders dismounted and pitched their camp in the palm grove. The people of Khasak trace their
descent from those one thousand horsemen. Today, the sheikh sleeps in a stone crypt on the top of Chetali. Mortal eyes are yet to discover its exact location. Both the Muslims and the Hindus of Khasak look upon the sheik as their protecting deity (The Legends 12).

Vijayan makes use of the Indian tradition of deifying stones, and creating local myths, and this sets him apart from García Márquez. In the foreword to Kanthapura, Raja Rao has written about the Indian practise of creating local myths around local objects. He calls them, ‘Sthalapurana’. Similarly, Vijayan creates numerous myths around Khasak. Ravi’s friend Madhavan Nair introduces him to the myth of the Devi, the local deity of Khasak. Ravi’s students introduce him to the myth of the dragonflies. No child of Khasak made friendship with the hedge lizard because it sucked the blood of children -- sucked it through the air from afar. One realises it only when one watched the lizard’s head suddenly turn crimson -- the sign of the vampire.

There was more about the hedge lizard - the evil spirits exorcised by the astrologers went into exile riding the hedge lizard. “They [the children] wouldn’t say anything more as it was Khasak’s secret” (The Legends 52). Eric Dardel suggests: “When the primitive recognises an ancestor looking at him out of the shark’s or the lizard’s eye, he is certainly making a reference to reality, but he interprets it mythically” (229). Another local myth developed in the novel is the myth of dragonflies. The dragonflies are a recurring image in The Legends. Ravi’s students inform him that the souls of the dead people of Khasak are reborn as dragon-flies.
Ravi walked over the ridge; overhead a million dragon-flies sallied forth into the blind sun. Memories of the dead, the dead praying for miraculous reprieves. Ravi walked beneath the canopy of little wings. Khasak lay dreaming all around him. In that experience he prayed for an end to Chand Umma's curse. The ridge stretched before him becoming infinite, spanning recurrence and incarnation (The Legends 89).

The Hindus and the Muslims of Khasak live in harmony and they respect each other's beliefs and religious practises. This harmony is disturbed when Kuttappu, a migrant and married to kali moved into khasak. He walked with a slouch, the gait of the striped king and so was called Kuttappu-Nari: Kuttappu, the tiger. Kuttappu is infuriated when the Muslim Khazi made a call to exorcise his sister-in-law, Neeli. In an intoxicated state, kuttappu abuses the Khazi and challenges him to let loose the djinns of the Sheikh. But on regaining sobriety, Kuttappu becomes frightened and he approaches Kuttadan, the oracle of Devi, who is worshipped by the lower castes, to save him. However, Kuttadan refuses to participate in the feud. The Hindu and Muslim deities of Khasak too, like the people who worshipped them, live in harmony:

Kuttadan sat before the idol of his goddess and went into a brief trance. Opening his eyes again he said, "O Tiger, we cannot" . . .

His goddess strictly forbade any quarrel between Hindu and Muslim gods; these gods were the natives of Khasak. "We cannot set up the gods against themselves," Kuttadan said, "we cannot let them brawl" (The Legends 63).
Finally, Kuttadan is killed when he imagines that he is chased by the djinns of the sheikh. “The power of the illicit elixir wore away. Now the clip-clop of the chasing cavalry was loud and clear! The tiger sweated. The djinns of the sheikh were right behind him. The tiger tried to cry for help, but his voice sank. The djinns were coming” (The Legends 65).

Was Kuttappu really killed by the djinns of the Sheikh or did he simply imagine them when under the hallucination of illicit liquor? The novelist does not clarify. In One Hundred Years, García Márquez offers matter of fact alternatives to the supernatural events narrated in the novel, usually as what is believed by the inhabitants of Macondo. Thus Remedios disappearance is interpreted by the local inhabitants as her elopement with a lover. But it is the family’s version that she had flown to heaven on a spread of bed sheet that is privileged by the author. In The Legends, mythical events and supernatural figures are described and believed by the inhabitants of Khasak but Ravi, though he lends a sympathetic ear and enjoys them, being a rationalist, does not seem to believe the stories. So, Vijayan, the novelist, maintains an artistic distance from the mythical stories that he creates without either privileging or censoring them.

Clyde Kluckhohn, a social scientist travelled extensively all over the world collecting samples of myths from different cultural areas. He found that catastrophe which includes floods, earthquakes, famines, plagues, etc can be considered universal or near universal themes in mythology. And in the majority of the myths that he examined he found catastrophe myths treated as punishment (“Recurrent Themes . . .” 271-72).
In the Oedipus tale, Thebes is afflicted by plague as punishment for the sin of patricide and incest of Oedipus. In The Legends, the people of Khasak are stricken with small pox. It is the terrible mother in her celestial play:

The village was one vast flower bed. Nallamma strung garlands of pus and death, she raised bowers 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).

Ravi was stricken by the disease, because he had not got himself vaccinated. Maimoona asks him why? “I wanted to experience death” he replies. Ravi seduces Maimoona. 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 epidemic is the nemesis for the sins—the sin of adultery of the villagers of Khasak. Many women of Khasak indulge in adultery. Narayani, the wife of Shivaraman Nair has an adulterous relationship with Kuppu the palm-climber. Maimoona the wife of Chukkru commits adultery with Nizam Ali. Chand Umma and Kodachi, the middle-aged prostitute brings on Nallamma’s curse: the small pox epidemic. The malignant presence of Ravi in the village brings about not the plague but the epidemic of small pox. The victims are the innocent—most of them children. When the school reopened after the summer vacation, Ravi underlined in green the names of the children
who were lost in the epidemic—Vavar, Noorjehan, Uniparathy, Kinnari, Karavu.

Ravi is stricken by the disease when he commits adultery with Kodachi. He refused to be vaccinated because he wanted to die and to escape from the bond of karma. However his life is spared. As Thomas Mathew suggests “the vision of life projected by Khasak is that life is a meaningful absurdity. If viewed theologically Khasak harmonises Christian concept of sin and the Hindu concept of karma.” Appukili and Remedios are emblematic of the stagnation and regression, the failure to grow, which characterises the incestuous family. Technically, Appukili was not the product of an incestuous but of an adulterous relationship. His unmarried mother Neeli’s adultery with her sister Kali’s husband, Kuttappu. Appukili is physically deformed and mentally retarded and he bears resemblance to Benjamin Compson of The Sound and the Fury. Appukili’s shattered mind recalls the age-old biological argument against incest: the belief that the offspring of an incestuous union would be defective. The association of these two themes—incest and idiocy—has been widespread and of long duration.

In The Legends, Ravi passes from the innocence of childhood to the experience of sin in adulthood but unable to come to terms with his guilt commits suicide. Kunjunni, in The Infinity of Grace, passes through greater turmoil in life but what guides him through all his travails and suffering is the grace of the Guru. The title of the novel itself suggests the infinity of the grace. The novel is dedicated to Vijayan’s guru—Karunakara Guru. The prologue of the novel ends with a Sanskrit verse dedicated to the guru: “All things grow
lucid and lustrous in the grace of the guru which wells everywhere” (The Infinity 328).

Ravi’s guilt and sorrow made him wander aimlessly, but since his search was not graced by his finding a guru, he could not resolve his crisis. Realising that he could not escape from himself, he resorted to suicide not realising that death is not an end, and does not solve one’s problems.

Kunjunni’s problems in The Infinity of Grace—mental anguish and turmoil—are no less than Ravi’s. He is driven by remorse that he has abandoned his parents and elder brother. He has turned down a rustic girl chosen by his mother, to marry a Bengali doctor, who he knows is having an affair with another doctor. What sustains him is his love for his daughter Kalyani.

Kunjunni’s sorrow and trauma are more tangible and profound than Ravi’s. He is buffeted by a series of personal tragedies. Sent as a war correspondent to Dacca to cover the Bangladesh war, the horrors and brutality of war exhaust him. Kunjunni is wounded badly but his life is saved. As he recovers, he receives yet another shock when he learns that his daughter Kalyani, who is more attached to her father than to her mother, is dying of cancer. Kalyani dies. More harrowing than the shock of Kalyani’s death are the words of consolation of her mother that Kalyani is not Kunjunni’s child.

What sustains Kunjunni through all these trials is the grace of his guru Nirmalanda and his surrender to Lord Krishna. Kunjunni’s guru Nirmalananda was a colonel named Balakrishnan in his pre-renunciation (poorvashramam) days. Balakrishnan married a wealthy Punjabi farmer’s daughter named Prabha who inherited a large estate from her father. Balakrishnan’s wife, her father
and his only daughter die, burdening him with the responsibility of looking after their huge estate. When colonel Balakrishnan visits his wife's village, the whole village turn up to welcome him. He realises that they have elevated him to the status of a semi-divine:

All Beliram's village turned out to welcome colonel Balakrishnan. It was well known in that Dogra village that Beliram had died in Balakrishnan's arms. The simple minded Dogras had created their own legends of heroism and compassion about their south Indian colonel Sahib and they believed in those legends as well. They imagined his birthplace on the banks of a sacred river in the south, and he became the blessed and favourite son of the goddess Jwalamukhi (The Infinity 338).

The process by which colonel Balakrishnan is elevated to the status of a guru could well be termed euhemerism. So Balakrishnan, alias Nirmalananda, chooses to convert his wife's land, which had been unwittingly thrust upon him, as his ashramam. Nirmalananda suggests that the process of the sishya meeting his guru is similar to Nachiketas's encounter with Yama or Death. The story of Nachiketas is narrated by Vijayan to clarify the point:

Nirmalananda had wondered how the god of death had set at rest Nachiketas' anxiety about the mystery of dying. Was it with a discourse? Nirmalananda felt it could not have been. That anxiety must have been quietened first with sight and touch, and then with the deepest silence. If Nachiketas had not gone in search of Yama, in good time the god of death would have come seeking
Nachiketas. The quest and the arrival are both delusions of the pilgrim's journey; between them, the union of guru and sishya was the perennial truth (The Infinity 354).

A significant change that Vijayan has effected in The Infinity is the direct invocation of myths. While in The Legends, the mythical pattern and structure lies hidden and is woven into the plot, in The Infinity, myths, especially Hindu myths are directly invoked. The story of Nachiketas, a mythical character believed to have lived in the Rig Veda period appears in the Thaithareeya Brahmana. The story of Nachiketas appears with alteration in the Varaha Purana and in the Mahabharata. The myth of Nachiketas as it appears in the Thaithariya Brahmana Upanishad, can be summarised thus: Nachiketas' father Uddhalukkan had started the 'Viswajit' yaga.' Though young, Nachiketas had got involved completely in the yaga. The practice in 'Viswajit' yaga is that as the yaga ends, the performer has to sacrifice all his possessions to the priest. Fearing that he (Nachiketas) too may be sacrificed, he approached his father. Uddhalukkan was sacrificing his possessions. Among them were skinny, old, milkless cows. Seeing the cruel act, the pondering Nachiketas asked his father "To whom will you donate me?" And the answer was: "I will give you to death." At this juncture a voice from the sky announced:

Your father intends that you should visit the house of Yama. So pay a visit to his house when he is not there. Yama's wife and son will invite you to eat in their house. You should refuse. On his return, Yama will question you closely. You should lie that you had been there for three nights. To his query what you had fed on those three days you should
reply that you had eaten Yama’s subjects on the first day, Yama’s
cows and good deeds on the second and third days respectively. The
belief is that if a guest goes hungry in a house, the host would lose his
subjects, wealth and the fruit of his good deeds. Following the
instruction from heaven, Nachiketas went to Yama’s residence and
replied to his questions as stated above. Pleased by the brilliance of the
boy’s answers to his questions, Yama asked Nachiketas what blessing
he desired. Accordingly, Nachiketas asked for three boons: 1. Send me
back alive to my father 2. Through me retain Shratha smartha karma
3. Enable me to overcome death. All the boons were granted and thus
gaining both Brahma Vidya and Yoga Vidya, Nachiketas returned
home Victorious. (Puranic Encyclopaedia 650).

Balakrishnan’s personal tragedy compels him to renounce worldly life
and accept a spiritual path. He finds his Guru Tadrupananda who initiates him
into the spiritual path. After undergoing baptism by fire and spiritual re-growth
by water, Balakrishnan renounces all his worldly possessions including even
his name. He comes out of the water, a renewed spiritual person.
Tadrupananda and his new disciple sit together in dhyana[meditation]. They
observe fast and dhyana for three days. On the third day, at dawn,
Tadrupananda walks out of the ashrama, with Balakrishnan behind him. They
descend the mountain and reach the Alakananda.
Tadrupananda and Balakrishna stand waist deep in the icy waters.
Tadrupananda bathes Balakrishna with the biting waters and baptises him:
Om Shanavarathu. Above the flow of the mountain river, subtle congregations of gurus stood witness to that baptism, and the river wind was full of hymnal voices from invisible monasteries.

Balakrishnan stood naked in the water, naked he was reborn. The river bore the cloth he had worn round his waist like an umbilicus out of sight (The Infinity 357).

Tadrupananda clothes Balakrishnan in the saffron cloth of the ascetic signifying the disciples complete surrender of worldly life. Balakrishnan's eyes are dazzled by its hue. Balakrishnan folds his hands. He shut his eyes and bows before Tadrupananda. Then he kneels and touches the guru's feet. Still the mystic fire raged. Balakrishnan was aware of the gross universe being burned into ashes in those flames. When the fire abated, he heard Tadrupananda's voice “Nirmalananda, arise!” (The Infinity 358).

The ritual represents Balakrishnan’s baptism by water and evolution as a sanyasi. The spiritual discourse of The Infinity of Grace, like The Gita is conveyed in the background of a war. The Bangladesh war like the Mahabharata war serves as a good foil to the spiritual discourse of the novel. The central mythical pattern followed in The Infinity is the quest myth. The disciples search for the Guru and paradoxically, the Guru's search for his disciple: Nirmalanda’s search for his Guru Tadrupananda and consequently, Kunjunni’s search for his Guru, Nirmalanda.

If Freud with his scientific priorities privileged Greek mythology, Jung with his religious preoccupation gave priority to the quest myth, in which the hero reaches maturity or re-generation after undergoing a series of trials. Jung
advocated a mythical descent into the underworld or a voluntary self-sacrifice or death of consciousness in order to secure rebirth with the source of wholeness. Northrop Frye has identified the quest myth as the single overriding myth. About the spiritual dimensions of the quest myth Frye has stated:

The quest of the hero also tends to assimilate the oracular and random vertical structures. . . . In most of the higher religions this in turn has become the same central quest myth that emerges from ritual, as the messiah myth became the narrative structure of the oracles of Judaism (“Myth and Literature” 94).

Like Frye, Joseph Campbell has popularised Jung’s privileging of the quest myth as a universal structure of the human mind in his justly famous book The Hero With a Thousand Faces (1949). Using Jungian concepts, Campbell interprets the hero’s descent into the underworld as a return to the womb of the unconscious in search of a wholeness. Campbell reduces all myth to what he blatantly calls the “monomyth”. Campbell insists on the therapeutic value of myth and myth criticism, stating that it put the contemporary alienated individual back in touch with “the total image of man” of which the “individual is necessarily only a fraction and a distortion”.

Cross roads are a significant image in Vijayan’s art. In The Legends, the image of the cross road had been used by Vijayan with telling effect. In The Infinity, the cross road represents a critical moment of choice. Kunjunni and his Czech friend Olga are on the road. “They arrived at the crossing where
the Mathura road forked into Maharani Bagh. Kunjunni stopped the car once more:

"Here, if I gaze along this road,' he said.

'I can see the city of Mathura." (The Infinity 350),

Both the literal and metaphorical implications of Kunjunni's statements are significant. Kunjunni could see Mathura, the birthplace of Sree Krishna and metaphorically he was implying that the path to Sree Krishna- the spiritual path was also open before him. Kunjunni is drawn by spiritual aspirations. At the same time he is unwilling to surrender his love for his near ones—especially his love for his daughter, Kalyani. The dilemma is resolved when Kunjunni realises that he had unwittingly chosen the road to Mathura. He realised that, instead of turning towards Delhi, he had turned towards Mathura.

Soft sounds in an inner ear, of bells around the necks of tender calves, the flute of the cowherd. 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. It is not time yet for me to come to you. I carry my wars and follies within me still, like the mesh of karma. But in this sorrowing interlude, help me find an answer to the questions of an orphan of the mountains. What is that you said in your chariot between the embattled armies? Kunjunni felt the god of Mathura fall silent. The sorrow of the Gita which flowed along that ancient road enveloped him (The Infinity 353).
In *The Legends* and in *The Saga of Dharmapuri*, Vijayan makes use of the structure of myths for the delineation of his past. But in *The Infinity*, he resorts to direct references to Aryan myths. Kunjunni compares Tapaschandra to the innocent rishi Rishyasringa. In the footnotes Vijayan briefly sums up Rishyasringa’s story.

Rishyasringa was the son of a saint who brought up his son as a strict celibate. He was not allowed the sight of women, and did not even know that they existed, until one day, the king sent a number of beautiful women to break his celibacy. The pure Rishyasringa wondered at the sight of the women’s breasts and concluded that they must be callouses from too much prayer (*The Infinity* 375-76).

The myth is an indication of the shift in focus from the overindulgence and debauchery of the characters in *The Legends* and *The Saga* to the myth of the celibate in *The Infinity*. If myths of incest and infidelity dominate *The Legends*, myths of overindulgence and debauchery dominate *The Saga of Dharmapuri*. *The Infinity* deals with myths of guru-sishya, Sreekrishna and chastity.

In *The Mahabharata*, king Parikshit tried in vain to escape from the inevitable fate of death by snakebite. The story of Parikshit describes the quintessence of life: to attain moksha (salvation). The myth is only suggested in *The legends*, but narrated in *The Infinity*, in the footnotes. King Parikshit once inadvertently showed disrespect to a sage. Angered by the sage’s refusal to come out of his trance and greet him, the king hung a dead snake around his neck. When the sons of the sage returned to the _ashrama_, they were horrified
at this dishonour to their father and cursed that whoever had done this, would be killed by the serpent god Takshaka. The sage, on coming out of his trance, was grieved to hear this and warned King Parikshit that he had only a few days to live. The existential question confronting Parikshit was, what should he do in these few days?

Realising the futility of his attempts, he finally yielded to his fate and tried to gain salvation for his soul by listening to The Bhagavatham, read out to him by the renowned Guru Suka. Ravi, on the other hand, invites the snake to bite him. Ravi realises that he cannot escape the inevitability of fate. He realises that he may run but he cannot escape from himself -- his haunting memories of sin, guilt and remorse. Ravi is quite well aware of the cycle of death and rebirth and knows that death is not the end. Nevertheless, he invites death. He sees the young snake as the infant Krishna and could not escape the final temptation of death:

Ravi looked with fond curiosity at the little blue and black apparition that slithered out of the clods. The blue-black one looked at Ravi, conversing with its flickered tongue. Ravi saw the tiny hood, outspread now. Infant fangs pierced Ravi's foot. 'Teething, my little one?' With a last playful flick of its forked tongue, the snake slid back into the valley of wet earth (The Legends 172).

The birth and rebirth cycle of 'karma' believed by Ravi is similar to the concept of the journey of the hero of Joseph Campbell, who holds that: "The standard path of mythological adventure of the hero is magnification of the
formula represented in the rites of passage: separation - initiation-return” (The Hero with a Thousand Faces 30).

Kalyani had written in her note-book that the cat Parikshit was killed in a car accident in tragic circumstances. Kunjunni stood overwhelmed, as if he had opened a holy book and been struck by a prophecy in it, Kunjunni slips into a trance wherein the dead cat I'arikshit speaks to him:

“I am Parikshit, don’t you know?”

“How different you look, Parikshit”.

“That’s because I am dead, isn’t it?”

“I forgot. Kalyani wrote that you died in a car accident”.

“Child’s ignorance. I died in battle with the serpent king Takshaka”. (The Infinity 379).

Kunjunni’s naming of his childhood pet as Parikshit, then, is prophetic. The myth of Parikshit represents the dilemma of a person who knows that his/her days are numbered. Vijayan uses this myth as the central overriding myth in The Infinity. In retrospect, Kunjunni’s ‘daughter’ Kalyani’s days were numbered. The existential dilemma Parikshit and, in fact, everyone faces is, how best to spend the remaining days. Vijayan seems to suggest the answer too, in The Infinity. Kunjunni, like Parikshit when confronted with death, realises the meaninglessness, and the transience of worldly possessions and glory. Kunjunni tells his Guru that he has given up all his personal possessions.

“When I had given them all away, it was like a sraddha, and I felt so light. But there is one book I have kept.”

“Which is that?”
"The Bhagavatham." (The Infinity 451).

In the footnotes Vijayan explains: "The Bhagavatam is the story of Lord Krishna, which king Parikshit listens to, as waits for the serpent god Takshaka and death" (The Infinity 451). The Parikshit story is the central mythical pattern, which runs through Vijayan's major novels—The Legends, The Saga, The Infinity, and Pravaachakante Vazhi. The ultimate aim of every mortal is to attain moksha. In Pravaachakante Vazhi, Chandran says that in Kaliyuga, it is easy to attain moksha. One has only to chant the lord's name.

The snake is an ambiguous image in The Infinity. As Thakshaka, it is simultaneously the agent of death and so is the path to salvation. The spiritual discourse between Nirmalananda and Kunjunni take place in the background of the 1971 Bangladesh war between India and Pakistan, just as the spiritual discourse of the "Bhagvat Gita" took place in the background of the Mahabharata war. Kunjunni is aware of this incongruity:

Kunjunni sat on the earth to receive the Upanishad of the grass. Then he saw that the insects were not journeying, but flying for life, one hunted the other. The disquiet of mukthidham! The battle of the grasses became an enormous spectacle before Kunjunni. "O, Sanjaya, he whispered 'the battle you revealed to your blind king pales before this (The Infinity 423).

In his next major novel Pravaachakante Vazhi, Vijayan makes use of myth ironically. In this novel, he uses images, metaphors, and plots from ancient Hindu myths to describe the Naxalbari revolution in West Bengal. Though the paths and methods of the ascetic and the revolutionary may be
different, Vijayan seems to imply that, their dedication to the cause, their stoicism and their guru-bhakti seems to be the same. Both the ascetic and the revolutionary are unmindful of physical discomforts and willingly and whole-heatedly make the supreme sacrifice of their lives.

It is thus that Vijayan makes use of Hindu myths. His mythology in this sense is unique and original. The young aristocratic youth from the cities are thus called Rishyasringas for their purity. The obedient Raicharan is Upamanyu, the ideal sishya of mythology. The revolutionary Jugul Dada's daughter becomes Durga. The comrades do not chant revolutionary songs but mantras of Vishnu and Durga.

Not only in the narration but also in naming the revolutionaries, Vijayan has made use of irony. The revolutionaries are given the names of ascetics—Tapasa Chandra, Devavdrada, Gangopadhyaya, Dharmendra Ghosal. Their political guru, Mao Tse Tung is compared to the spiritual guru Upamanyu, who attained the acme a guru could achieve. However, the revolutionaries from the cities of India were denied the grace of the guru Mao, because they learned of revolution only through books. That is why they forgot the lessons of ahimsa in the intoxication of violent revolution. Whereas the rustic peasants who came from the villages of West Bengal, men like Raicharan, were moved by the sight of milk at the mouth of the calf and they turned their backs to bloody revolution. They were the descendants of Upamanyu and the virtuous tradition of the Indian revolution.

*Guru Saagaram* marks a distinct shift in the evolution of the artistic career of Vijayan. There is a dominance of Hindu myths in this novel and it is
reflected in the central character, Kunjunni discarding all books to take up *The Bhagavatam* alone. On account of reading *The Bhagavatam*, he was permeated with the love of the infinite. Kunjunni is told the stories of Krishna by his father and Kunjunni in his turn tells them to his daughter, Kalyani, his wife, Sivani to the bartender, Allah Buks, and to his friends, Lalitha, and Olga.

Kunjunni reflects on the glory of the Divine Grace, which floated on a pipal leaf. Shaji Jacob has claimed:

> The beloved religious symbol employed by Vijayan is Sree Krishna who appears as an infant, cowherd, lover, general, guru, and the advocate of the paths of karma, Gnana, and Yoga… Rejecting revolution, Vijayan chooses *The Vishnu Sahasranamam*. He chooses *The Bhagavat Gita* rejecting *The Communist Manifesto*. Rejecting materialism he embraces spiritualism (32-33).

Sree Krishna is the most recurring god in Vijayan’s oeuvre. And it is the baby Krishna, helpless, floating on a pipal leaf, that Vijayan harps on. “Peace descended on Ravi; he was the helpless infant god, afloat on the deluge, lying on a pipal leaf, the creator forever beginning his sorrows anew” (*The Legends* 127).

Apart from irony, Vijayan makes use of juxtaposition for drawing parallels, as well as, for drawing contrasts between the characters and events of his novels, with personalities and events from myth. Vijayan juxtaposes the images of Indira Gandhi with the image of Indra, Kunjunni’s edathiamma [sister-in-law]. Kunjunni’s edathiamma, depicting feminine grace, spreads light with the ‘sandyadeepam’ [lamp] while the other Indira has turned into a
terrible goddess of destruction with bombs in her hands. Vijayan again uses juxtaposition effectively in juxtaposing the biblical story of Christ asking Peter to cast his net to the right to catch fish with the ‘matsyavatara’ (the incarnation of lord Vishnu as a fish) of Hindu mythology.

In The Infinity, Kunjunni tries to drown his grief in drink. He has a confidant in the bar, Allah Bux, to whom he pours out all his worries. They also discuss current events. Allah Bux deplores the plight of the women of Dacca. “They strip our women. Once they did it during partition. Now again, when the war is over, only shame will remain.” Kunjunni responds: “It was always so, Allah Bux. The heart of the Mahabharata war was the disrobing of Draupati. When the war was over only that remained” (The Infinity 425). Kunjunni later corrects himself:

“I was wrong Allah Bux. After the Mahabharata, it was not only the stripping of Draupadi, which survived. Something else remained.’

“What was that?” asked Allah Bux:

“The Bhagavad Gita.”

The barman smiled:

“May this war also leave us a Gita” (The Infinity 425).

Vijayan implies that there is a spiritual message overriding the narrative plot.

Kunjunni has a few experiences that are best described as transcendental. Once while walking with his ‘daughter’ Kalyani, a flock of storks leaves him dazzled and he was reminded of a similar experience that Ramakrishna Paramahamsa had.
He has yet another transcendental experience when he is in bed with his wife Sivani:

“Look at the sky, Sivani?”

“What is in the sky?”

“Gandharva voyagers.”

Sivani leaned against his chest and asked: “Where?”

“There. Look. There goes Thakshaka, the serpent king, after stinging Parikshit. There goes Karthikeya on his peacock. Look again, Sivani.”

In the playfulness of this guru’s words, she looked:

“What is there Unni?”

“The Viswarupa, the cosmic form of the Gita Singer” (The Infinity 426).

Even carnal love becomes an atavistic experience for Kunjunni and he has vision of Vishnu:

The moon face of a miraculous creature which rose from an ocean of milk, in another age.

“The Almighty God of bliss has created me again.”

The moon face being said to Kunjunni:

“I am cancer reborn—the peace of death and rebirth” (The Infinity 426).

Kunjunni’s next atavistic experience occurs to him in a dream he has in Sivani’s house. (In sleep one attains samadhi and is one with the divine.) “For a short while, Kunjunni feels that he is Garuda, the eagle which is the vehicle of Lord Vishnu. At the end of his experience, all identities are merged in one, and
Kunjunni is now part of a great luminiscence in the space of Brahman” (The Infinity 442), Vijayan explains in the footnotes.

The final atavistic experience that Kunjunni has is when he is with his guru. Kalyani is dead. More shattering than her death is Sivani’s confession that Kalyani is not his daughter. In his sorrow, Kunjunni requests Bala to initiate him into sanyasa or renunciation. Bala alias Nirmalananda shows Kunjunni, Bala’s guru:

Above the sound of the waves of the ocean, Kunjunni hears Kalyani calling him and consoling him that she had not been his daughter only in this birth. She had been Suka the beloved son of Vyasa who did not stand in the way of his son gaining final wisdom. Suka blazed in its ecstasy, he abandoned the mortal coil, and was one with the primordial elements (The Infinity 453).

Critics in Malayalam have been unanimous in their praise of Vijayan’s use of language. Never before, or after, has any writer, they aver, experimented the poetic dimensions of prose with such telling effect. In Khasakkinte Ithihasam, Vijayan is able to present Khasak as a mythical place of primordial purity by making use of a strange mixture of Tamil and Malayalam. While Ravi and Madhavan Nair speak pristine Malayalam, the natives use a crude mixture of Malayalam and Tamil. This is reinforced with powerful images and metaphors. Vijayan’s innovative and imaginative phrases include: “the monsoon lay over Khasak, indrawn in Samadhi” (43). “This is the loveless tale of karma; in it there is only parting and sorrow” (53). “The sunset filled the seedling house with the warmth of a sensuous fever” (53). “All twilight is
sadness” (78). “Little children died as she [Nallamma] suckled them in monstrous motherhood” (124).

M. Shanmughadas draws attention to some key words in Khasakkinte Ithihasam such as ‘rebirth’ and ‘karma.’ These words, he avers, are not used in their usual sense but with the insight of the Upanishads (121).

V. Rjakrishnan sums up the effect of Vijayan’s language aptly. “The language of The Legends aspires the status of the mantric chant of the poojari, or to rephrase it, has attained the dimension of pure art” (“Shailiyude Prakasattheerangal”).

Thus it can be seen that Vijayan’s mythmaking has undergone change. He started of as a traditional mythographer using biblical, Greek, Persian and Aryan myths in The Legends, but in The Infinity, Vijayan has privileged Aryan myths. In The Legends, he has created biblical themes of aetiology, Genesis, temptation, journey and exodus, and the ‘fall’ whereas in The Infinity, he has privileged the quest theme. Ravi is driven to commit suicide because he is not blessed by the grace of a Guru, whereas though Kunjunni’s troubles and worries are more grave and serious, he is saved by the grace of his Guru.