**Vijayan, O. V. (1930-2005)**

Chitra Panikkar

O.V. Vijayan was a writer, thinker, political observer, and cartoonist, born in Palakkad, Kerala and rose to prominence with his first novel, *Khasakkinte Itihasam* (Legends of Khasak, 1969). Such was the influence of this novel on the minds of the readers that the whole of modern Malayalam fiction came to be defined in terms of a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ in relation to it. *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* tells the story of a young, brilliant Astrophysics student, Ravi – an agnostic, who leaves a promising career to take up a primary teacher’s job in a remote village called Khasak, immerses himself in the bewitching sensuousness of its rustic, amoral world, only to emerge an involved outsider and succumb to a self-invited death. Critics acknowledged the modern sensibility ingrained in Vijayan’s first novel and appreciated his contribution to Malayalam, crediting him with the creation of a new evocative prose style infused with slang, dialect and rich poetic images. It appeared as if Vijayan allowed himself to be deeply scarred by the political turmoil of the 1960s and the 70s in Kerala and the tyrannical regimes of power at the Centre that destroyed the idea of India. His next novel, *Dharmapuranam* (1985), was a scathing critique of the political establishment as also the tools and means of governance. In the meantime, as a professional cartoonist, through deft strokes and crisp statements, Vijayan positioned himself as the observer and commentator of life in India. His short stories and essays too reflected a thinking mind, an aesthete’s heart, and an anguished soul. A bilingual artist, Vijayan used both the language of lines, and the verbal medium for creative expression. As the translator of his own stories and novels into English, Vijayan introduced a new idiom in English that could compete with the best of Indian writing in English. In these effective and successful translations, he sometimes took liberties with his own material, and unconsciously recorded the transitions in his own self which moved from a Marxist position to an agnostic one and then to a believer’s outlook. In his novel *Gurusagaram* (1987)*,* Vijayan emerged as a seeker in need of the Guru’s grace, desirous of certitudes. His later fiction comprising *Pravachakante Vazhi* (1992) and *Thalamurakal* (1997) showed a Vijayan who was reflective of the human condition and who posed as the writer-philosopher bent on giving a unified meaning to human relations, familial ties spanning generations, existence. Many readers found it easier to identify with the indeterminate, polyphonous early phase of Vijayan’s writing career. But for Vijayan, it was perhaps as if years of illness and internal strife needed an ultimate resolution in some singular comfort. Rendered physically mute and crippled by a disabling Parkinson’s disease, Vijayan died in Hyderabad in 2005. All along, he sat far away from Kerala in cities like Delhi and Secunderabad, and lamented the prospective decline and loss of Malayalam in the hands of an uncaring new world, while caring to strengthen it as best as he could.

**Time Line**

1969. *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*

1985. *Dharmapuranam*

1987. *Gurusagaram*

1992. *Pravachakante Vazhi*

1997. *Thalamurakal*

2000. *O. V. Vijayante Kathakal*

2003. Awarded Padmabhushan

**Bibliography**

English translations of Vijayan’s works:

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*The Legends of Khasak* (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994).

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Further Reading:

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Pillai, C. Gopinathan. *The Political Novels of Milan Kundera and O. V. Vijayan* (New Delhi: Prestige, 1996).

Secondary works: