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Exploring the Saga of Self-Realisation Through Protagonists in O. V. Vijayan's Selected Novels

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Abstract: O. V. Vijayan's novels explore the deep journey of self-realisation through characters who face personal, social, and spiritual challenges. His protagonists are often shown searching for meaning in life while dealing with the conflicts of tradition, modernity, and inner emptiness. This paper discusses how Vijayan presents the idea of self-discovery in novels like "The Legends of Khasak" and "The Saga of Dharmapuri", where the main characters experience a spiritual quest that goes beyond their everyday lives. Vijayan uses symbols, myths, philosophical ideas, and beliefs. The clash of old customs with modern realities, along with the burden of history, forms the setting for these inner journeys. The paper also studies Vijayan's unique writing style, which blends realistic situations with mystical and spiritual reflections, bringing out the emotional and intellectual struggles of his characters.

Keywords: self-realisation; identity crises; peace; personality; conflicts; protagonist.

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1. Introduction

O. V. Vijayan's full name was Ottupulakkal Velukkuty Vijaya, born in 1930 in Palghat, Kerala. He is also known for his thought-provoking and multi-layered novels that often delve into complex themes and social issues. Vijayan's novels are often symbolic and can represent larger societal or philosophical ideas. The background elements, such as the political climate, economic disparities, and social injustices, are often used to highlight and critique the issues prevalent in society. He delves deep into the essence of language, seeking the eternal truths within it. By exploring the human mind, he reveals inner struggles, loneliness, anguish, and suffocation. Like many novelists, he carries visionary realities present in the physical world. Characters in the novel speak in the language of day-to-day life. O. V. Vijayan's novels depict the journey of self-realisation as an intense inward exploration, where protagonists are compelled to face their inner conflicts, desires, and uncertainties about existence. Characters such as Ravi in *The Legends of Khasak* and the central figure in *The Saga of Dharmapuri* encounter a society plagued by moral decay and spiritual disillusionment, which drives them towards introspection. Vijayan skillfully intertwines mythical elements, cultural narratives, and philosophical reflections to demonstrate how external realities mirror the characters' inner turmoil. The quest for self-awareness in his works is portrayed as a complex, non-linear journey filled with cycles of doubt, suffering, and sudden moments of clarity.

2. Concept of Self-Realisation

The journey towards self-realisation often serves as a narrative backbone, guiding characters through trials and tribulations as they navigate the complexities of their inner worlds and external realities. It often involves a search for inner peace, happiness, and fulfillment. At its core, the quest for self-realisation is a deeply personal and introspective journey. Characters grapple with questions of identity, grappling with questions such as: Who am I? What do I value? What is my purpose? These existential inquiries drive characters to embark on journeys of self-discovery, often propelled by inner conflicts, external pressures, or transformative experiences. Self-realisation is often depicted as a transformative journey marked by growth, enlightenment, and empowerment. Characters evolve as they confront their inner demons, overcome obstacles, and embrace their true selves. O. V. Vijayan's novels are a captivating exploration of existential pursuits, self-realisation, and the quest for freedom of self. His narratives often depict individuals confronted with the complexities of life, seeking meaning and purpose amidst societal pressures and personal struggles. His characters ultimately strive to break free from the shackles of conformity and societal expectations, embracing the freedom to define themselves on their own terms.

3. Literature Review

Legends of Khasak transformed Malayalam literature by presenting characters with rich inner lives and blending vivid depictions of rural landscapes, folk traditions, caste structures, and diverse dialects (Selvalakshmi & Jayant, 2016:1-8). His later work, *The Saga of Dharmapuri*, shifts to a dystopian allegory of post-colonial realities, reflecting political disillusionment and societal unrest (Thaliath, 2017:110-115). Rooted in his early communist and materialist leanings, Vijayan's fiction reveals how an author's inner consciousness shapes creative expression (Rajendran, 2018:89-95). In *Khasak*, this consciousness is embedded in folklore, myths, and religious customs, where politics and governance are inseparable from inherited traditions (Akhil and Geetha, 2019:375-377).

4. Research Methodology

This research paper relies on a combination of primary and secondary data. The original works by the selected author are used as primary sources. The selected novel for carrying forward the research work is critically evaluated and analysed. The secondary sources will include the use of libraries, research journals, magazines, and internet. These sources provide help and guidance for examining the works in depth and for further multiple interpretations.

5. A Saga of Self-Realisation in the Selected Novels

In *The Legends of Khasak* and *The Saga of Dharmapuri*, the exploration of self-realisation serves as a key theme, where the main characters embark on a personal journey of introspection and awakening. Ravi's arrival in Khasak transcends mere physical movement; it represents his endeavour to confront his inner turmoil and unresolved emotions. The local lore, spiritual depth, and enchanting environment of Khasak reflect his fragmented psyche, slowly leading him to embrace the eternal rhythms of existence. Similarly, in Dharmapuri, the journalist-hero navigates a corrupt and absurd socio-political landscape that compels him to examine the illusions of power and identity. His journey turns into an allegorical representation of humanity's continuous pursuit of truth within a deceptive and chaotic reality.

Vijayan presents self-realisation not as a moment of glory but as a serene acceptance of life's riddles and contradictions. This enlightenment involves the erasure of the self—Ravi merges with Khasak's age-old folklore, while the reporter in Dharmapuri finds wisdom through his experiences of disillusionment. Through poetic descriptions and subtle philosophical reflections, Vijayan creates narratives where self-awareness is born from embracing life's uncertainties, representing a universal pursuit of inner emancipation.

6. Concluding Remarks

Vijayan was often met with criticism for the unconventional themes and deep philosophical layers in his writing. The detailed psychological depth of his characters invited considerable examination from critics and readers. Several of his works stirred controversy at the time of their release for challenging dominant social, cultural, and political values. Yet, his literature still holds a prominent place today, maintaining its relevance in academic discussions and continuing to engage and inspire new generations of readers. O. V. Vijayan's novels offer an insightful portrayal of the journey towards self-awareness. Through complex plots and deeply introspective characters, he investigates the core dilemmas of human existence. His stories often depict individuals struggling to find meaning amidst societal demands and inner conflicts. As they confront existential challenges and moments of revelation, Vijayan's characters strive to break free from social constraints, seeking the freedom to define their true selves. His works delve into the psyche of individuals yearning for self-realisation and independence, often facing both personal and collective traumas to attain authenticity. Vijayan's narratives encourage readers to reflect on the intricacies of identity, freedom, and the human quest for truth. The struggles of his characters against various forms of oppression serve as a strong critique of the societal complexities of his time. Through the lives and struggles of the characters, the novel offers a profound exploration of the different dimensions of freedom, in the larger context of a changing society and nation.

Vijayan's works remain socially relevant today, as their exploration of identity, liberty, and moral challenges resonates with present-day realities. His insights into human consciousness and his critical view of societal structures continue to provoke thought and dialogue. Regularly featured in academic study and research, his novels maintain a firm place

in literary discourse. This ongoing attention highlights the enduring literary success of his writings among scholars and readers alike.

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