Ars Artium: **An International Peer Reviewed-cum-Refereed Research Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences**
ISSN (Online) : 2395-2423 • ISSN (Print) : 2319-7889
Vol. 4, January 2016
Pp. 101-106

A Commentary on Locales and Treatment: O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak*

*–Neerja A. Gupta**

Abstract

The texts used as locales for rustic characters are in majority texts into which history, social fabric, and cultural contexts play a major role. The local imagery and context are found in abundance in such writings. In defining a text's "regional-ness," the matter of its genre might not seem a touchstone of much value. The plots themselves form motifs which are rich in history and manners, which rely upon relatively static, periodic, historical reference points to arrange and provide nomenclatures for such writings. The present paper stresses the rustic setting of characters, motifs, and stylistic conventions that can delineate the shape and presentation of a text (the text's genre, in other words) but also understands these matters as inevitably representing and promoting specific versions of culture.

Kerala is substantially recognizable as contingent upon certain identifiers: geographic, social, cultural, political, as well as historical and linguistic contingencies that make up what is known and named as "the Southern." We might begin to address definitional questions by noting that in the given time O.V. Vijayan's *The Legends of Khasak* has itself become a genre. The ideological as well as artistic processes that identified the introduction continued to do so throughout the novel against a national urban-education complex in the country.

Khasak is in a valley in the inner space of Mother Earth. Twelve mosques in ruin form a ring, a mandala around the village, holding the infinite time of Khasak stagnant. *The Legends of Khasak*, rich in imagery and thought sets itself into the task of interpreting the ramifications for traditional assumptions about their place within a conservative society. It combines pastoral thematic with modernist technical attitudes. The novel doesn't have any specific storyline. Instead a disjointed series of events brings forth a rich environment of myths driven society. Its stories, have not constructed idealized myths of a romantic or tragic past but by confronting falsely based narratives of dominance as found in any typical Indian setting.

Keywords: Locales, regional-ness, southern, legends, Khasak.

* *Principal, Bhavan's Sheth R. A. College of Arts and Commerce, Ahmedabad- 380001, Gujarat; Founder-cum-Director of Study Abroad Program and Diaspora Research Centre, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad & International Academic Co-Chair for GOPIO (Global Organization of People of Indian Origin) New York, USA. Email: drneerjaarun@yahoo.com*

Introduction

The texts used as locales for rustic characters are in majority texts into which history, social fabric, and cultural contexts play a major role. The local imagery and context are found in abundance in such writings. In defining a text's "regional-ness," the matter of its genre might not seem a touchstone of much value. The plots themselves form motifs which are rich in history and manners, which rely upon relatively static, periodic, historical reference points to arrange and provide nomenclatures for such writings.

The present paper stresses the rustic setting of characters, motifs, and stylistic conventions that can delineate the shape and presentation of a text (the text's genre, in other words) but also understands these matters as inevitably representing and promoting specific versions of culture.

> ... Long before the lizards, before the dinosaurs, two spores set out on an incredible journey. They came to a valley bathed in the placid glow of sunset.
>
> My elder sister, said the little spore to the bigger spore, let us seewhat lies beyond.
>
> This valley is green, replied the bigger spore, I shall journey no farther.
>
> 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 little spore journeyed on. The bigger spore stayed back in the valley. Her root pierced the damp earth and sought the nutrients of death and memory. She sprouted over the earth, green and contended.
>
> ... A girl with silver anklets and eyes prettied with surma 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!
>
> (Vijayan: "Introduction" *The Legends of Khasak*)

The Legends of Khasak in Relation to "The Southern":

Kerala is substantially recognizable as contingent upon certain identifiers: geographic, social, cultural, political, as well as historical and linguistic contingencies that make up what is known and named as "the Southern."

To claim that there are "southern" genres found in *The Legends of Khasak* might seem to divorce the South's writing from some larger concept of value, and indeed O.V. Vijayan has chafed under the sectional or regional label, regardless of how the term "southern" was being applied to the novel.

We might begin to address definitional questions by noting that in the given time *The Legends of Khasak* has itself become a genre: a body of texts bound together and meeting expectations of readers through similarities in areas of theme, setting, mood, message, structure, plot etc. The ideological as well as artistic processes that identified the introduction continued to do so throughout the novel against a national urban-education complex in the country. He invoked an ideal of communal memory in order to rebuke the disordered present, an agenda that identifies their productions as pastoral, a genre defined by its practitioners' intention to provide social critique within clearly defined literary conventions.

Khasak is in a valley in the inner space of Mother Earth. Twelve mosques in ruin form a ring, amandala around the village, holding the infinite time of Khasak stagnant. Ravi by entering the magic circle is submitting himself to its magic which in turn offers his self-healing and a degree of perfection. (LOK, 1)

Genre: Similarity and Difference

The selection of theme, characters and plot indicates a key element of the genre approach but *The Legends of Khasak* thrives and depends upon differences, not only differences inconventions and forms, but differences in the ways that groups within the same geographical places experience history. O.V. Vijayan, being a self-conscious writer, produced both what we might call an establishment modernist narrative and, as counter forms, the grotesque narrative and the "grit" narrative.

The Legends of Khasak presents life gnarled by harsh existence, women in love, children playing with the village idiot, and supernatural beings colour the land. Ravi starts living here, an outsider observing fantastic characters like Naizam Ali, Maimuna, interacting with Madhavan Nair, and teaching children that include the idiotic Appukili. Severely introspective, Ravi dives into his past. His mind carries layers of sin and guilt. His bed-ridden father, his relationship with his stepmother, and his girl-friend, dreaming to build a future with him, haunt his thoughts.

Meanwhile the village succumbs to a pestilence, smallpox. Ravi gets cured while many die. He becomes an insider by now. In the course of five years, the land with its sensuality sucks him like a quagmire. Finally, he is liberated when bitten by a snake.

The novel is a reminder of how we have lost our roots and our feel for our environment a glow with legends. The Indian philosophy of life as the consequences of our action and reaction is built into human life in its simplicity and subtlety. A life of contradictions where two rival religious groups, the Hindus and Muslims co-exist has an ironic tinge.

Vijayan turned out to be the most one of the most imaginative authors in Indian writhing in English. His style has been described as a landmark, expanding the use of the language and allegories of conveying the mystery of post-apocalyptic world. *The Legends of Khasak* brought revolutionary change in Malayalam fiction. The former era was romantic and realistic; the latter is modernist, post-modernist, and post-postmodernist, with tremendous experimentation in style and content. Vijayan released Malayalam fiction writing from the shackles of tradition.

Organizing by Genre: Scope and Limitations

The culture of pastoral Kerala is embedded in the novelas a subdued story of resistance. While *The Legends of Khasak* began to develop the rural setting as an idealized literary world populated by characters who developed into types, each expected to convey a set of personal qualities—virtues or vices—as well as to act according to fixed mannerisms of dress, gesture, and language. In the grab of superstitions, beliefs, myths, legends and patterns of life, certain writing codes also developed for regional writing as to project the background as popular social form. Often during the course of narrative the environment seems to belong to the genre of the historical romance that used Sir Walter Scott's works as a model.

This novel is tightly bound within conventions designed to accomplish anti-modernist goals. The "formula" of the rural narrative is something that the ex-rural writer understood only too well.

Vijayan drew upon specific details and situations that he took directly from several local environmental beliefs, but he also found his own form, combining epic, realism and sentiment to reach the largest reading audience. This attempt has brought the narrator's voice into public with modern practices through the genre of "neo-rustic narrative." In *The Legends of Khasak* we see how persistently the local identity, within and beyond its literature, was formed by and remains tied to its "peculiar institution" and its moment of attempted nationalism.

The Legends of Khasak: A Narrative:

The narrative of *The Legends of Khasak* is abundant with fictionalized accounts, used to leave inner revelations, such as expressions of self-discovery and individuality, in the background and to foreground the verifiable facts of representative experience, without adornment. The rural ordering of life in a Kerala village well into the twentieth century creates influence in the readers' mind. The village itself becomes a genre seeking to resolve the conflict between memories of a simpler past, associated with myths and rural society, and experience in a more complex present world. Vijayan has tried to undergo a dislocation from a familiar home world to turn to the conventions of the pastoral to envision that simpler locale from the vantage point of inevitable loss and removal. In pastoral, then, the past looms large, not so much as a particular historical time and place as an idealized, mythologized lost realm.

The Legends of Khasak is encouraged to make village settings into the "good lost land" of pastoral, in part to satisfy the longings of readers increasingly removed in the late nineteenth century from any real experience of country life. Its enchanting tales take into the mythologized local colour backdrop. Nevertheless, the tension between mythologized past and diminished present that characterizes all pastoral is embodied in *The Legends of Khasak* at many different places and times.

Local Colour:

The Legends of Khasak has found the advantage of devising a literary agenda to advance a political one and found in local colour writing a successful formula for this

program. For Vijayan, local colour fiction became a convenient tool for insinuating regional and religious paternalism into pastoral evocations of a traditional society. Popular taste dictated many of the properties of the novel: quaint locales, attention to details of dress, manner, and speech, colourful vernacular dialects, social plots which both highlight and overcome difference (between families, classes, and regions). The double structures are designed to highlight the gap between simple and "peculiar" or exotic folk, colourful and sympathetic though they may be, and the educated, realistic, framing voice that the reader has no choice but to accept as a higher authority. This comes swiftly in the characters of Ravi and Mullah. Here in the rural tension between the sophisticated man of the world like Ravi and the rural rustic like Mullah who has been left behind meet within a dual narrative structure. The people living in Khasak are Allappicha Mollakka, Appukkili, Shivaraman Nair, Madhavan Nair, Kuppuvachan, Maimoona, Khaliyar, Aliyar, and the students in Ravi's school are Kunhamina, Karuvu, Unipparadi, Kochusuhara and others. These are typical characters from the superstitions cherished environment.

Ravi's arrival in Khasak is as mysterious as the village itself. His guilt driven conscience leads him to a suicide that's caused by a snake-bite. Ravi is placed against the backdrop of the villagers and their connection to the land. His wish to purify is deep and his efforts to escape from guilt are widely exposed:

> I wish to escape nothing, Ravi answered from within his silence, I want to be the sand of the desert, each grain of sand; I want to be the lake, each minute droplet. I want to be the laya, the dissolution. (*The Legends of Khasak*, 79)
>
> Against the rustically rich environment the modern world is reflected through Ravi. He is exposed to the scientifically advanced society. 'Looking back, I thank Providence, because I missed writing the 'revolutionary' novel by a hair's breadth,' Vijayan wrote in the epilogue to Khasak. 'Had I written it, I would have merely made one more boring entry in Marxism's futile, repetitive bibliography.'
>
> His 'Stalinist claustrophobia' was broken. 'Destiny was in command, Khasak was waiting,' he wrote. He wrote about his affable protagonist Ravi, evidently himself, a school teacher who comes to teach in the hamlet of Khasak. He wove palpable characters into the fabric of his tale, and for many years after the novel was written, Thasarak drew among its visitors both the sceptical and the curious, who came there charmed by its magnetic allure. (Venugopal)

Vijayan places Ravi in the novel like a literary category and the regional bias dominates and leads to religious bias. Modern institutions are looked down with suspicion; the girl refuses to go to the "Kafir's" school as she takes oath on the "snake" and the "tamarind branch". Appu Killi-the parrot is the balancing force since it has the freedom of both the religions. It is intelligent enough to swing according to the demand of the situation. Nowhere the novel is pretended to be an educational journey. It simply forwards into haunted locals with spirits and superstitions. Amazing thing is that almost everyone has a story. Almost each character is possessed with some sort of nightmarish dream. Laden with myths, superstitions and legends Khasak

is a village that struggles to come in terms with the diverse communal population that lives there.

Satchidanandan writes that, "This novel literally revolutionised Malayalam fiction. Its interweaving of myth and reality, its lyrical intensity, its black humour, its freshness of idiom with its mixing of the provincial and the profound and its combinatorial wordplay, its juxtaposition of the erotic and the metaphysical, the crass and the sublime, the real and the surreal, guilt and expiation, physical desire and existential angst, and its innovative narrative strategy with its deft manipulation of time and space together created a new readership with a novel sensibility and transformed the Malayali imagination forever." (https://en.wikipedia.org) Satchidanandan further elucidates that "The characters of the novel have now become legendary: There is Ravi, the protagonist who lives at two levels, a mundane, instinctive level of lust and longing and a transcendental meditative level of detachment and spiritual quest. He is haunted by a sense of guilt for his past incestuous relationship with his stepmother and his desecration of an *ashram* by committing a sin with a *yogini* that prompts him to leave the peace of that shelter and walk into the blazing sun of Khasak to run a single-teacher school in that remote village. An intellectual who had tried to correlate astrophysics and Upanishadic metaphysics and was all set to go to the United States for higher studies, Ravi was driven by his shame and came to Khasak to expiate his sin: he is an alien among the rustic folk, seeing them with a kind of philosophical detachment, even while mixing with them at the level of everyday experience. But here too, desire overwhelms him and at the end of a series of events, facing the threat of suspension, he keeps his word to his beloved Padma to leave Khasak: he lies down in calm detachment in the white monsoon rain, waiting for his bus, affectionately watching the blue-hooded serpent that had struck him withdrawing content into its hole surrounded by the newborn grass." (Satchidanandan: *Frontline*)

Works Cited

- Vijayan, O.V. *The Legends of Khasak*. Penguine Books, 1969. Print.
- Venugopal, Bijoy. "The Infinite Grace of O.V. Vijayan." http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/mar/31speca.htm
- http://www.narthaki.com/info/reviews/rev349.htm
- http://www.rediff.com/news/2005/mar/31speca.htm "The infinite grace of O.V. Vijayan"
- "*KhasakkinteItihasam*". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khasakkinte_Itihasam#cite_note-6
- Satchidanandan, K. "A sage and an iconoclast." http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2208/stories/20050422003113200.htm

❑❑❑