

## Exploring the Tapestry of Time: Mapping the Print Landscape of O.V. Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*

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O.V. Vijayan's magnum opus, *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*, stands as a seminal work in Malayalam literature, acclaimed for its profound narrative and socio-political commentary. The research article delves into the intricate tapestry of time that surrounds the print landscape of this celebrated classic novel by using the method of bibliographic research. Through a meticulous exploration of editions, translations, adaptations, and critical reception spanning decades, this study seeks to unravel the multifaceted layers of the novel's evolution and history. By examining its journey from the moment of inception to its global reception, this research sheds light on the enduring impact and cultural significance of Vijayan's literary masterpiece.

**Keywords:** *Khasakkinte Ithihasam, publication history, bibliographic research, Malayalam literature, Reception*

*Khasakkinte Ithihasam* is generally considered to be one of the greatest Malayalam novels of all time. The novel is accredited with dividing Malayalam novel literature into pre-Khasak and post-Khasak. It serves as an example of how Malayalam literature acquired modernity through experimental writing and incorporating themes like existential angst and the search for identity. The critics had also pointed out its connection with Latin American author Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for its use of magical realism. The narrative's use of magic realism was a radical break from the popular

works at the time, both in Malayalam and elsewhere. The storyteller Vijayan turns into the conjurer-conduit, and the listener is the one who experiences awe and amazement. Humanistic writings by O.V. Vijayan thus revolutionized Malayalam literature by transcending linguistic barriers to reach a spiritual realm of meaning through encounters with fellow human beings and nature.

Ottupulackal Velukkuty Vijayan, often known as O. V. Vijayan, is an Indian author and cartoonist who had a significant impact on contemporary Malayalam writing. O. V. Vijayan was born on July 2, 1931, in the village of Vilayanchaathanoor in the Kerala district of Palakkad, and he passed away on March 30, 2005. M. Mukundan opines that “no other Malayalee writer of his time has lived in the imagination of the readers as he did” (Mukundan, 2005, p. 86). Vijayan started his career as a cartoonist, worked for *Shankar’s Weekly* and *Statesman*, and entered the literary scene through *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*. Following its publication, the novel received no attention for at least five years. The novel gained popularity through word-of-mouth, and critics hailed it as the novel of the century written in Malayalam (Mukundan 86).

By maintaining a certain continuity of the tradition set by Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, O.V. Vijayan has remained a complete Indian writer. He accomplishes this by delving deeply into Malayalam subcultures and subtle dialectical nuances while also relating his work to postmodern reality. Ravi, the protagonist of *Khasakkkinte Ithihasam*, is a well-educated young man who becomes lost in a remote village when he volunteers to teach at an elementary school. He had previously escaped modernity’s suffocating confines, which included metropolitan life and cities, intellectual life, and a prospective astrophysics job in the United States. When the village falls apart due to the outside world’s interference and modernizing forces, Ravi sees himself as an invader and flees the village. However, while waiting for the bus to return to the city, he permits himself to get bitten by a snake.

The protagonist, Ravi, and an extensive cast of rural residents in Khasak, a fictional reproduction of the village of Tasarak, are central to the story. He has an unsettled soul and perpetually searches for

solutions to his troubling issues. The novel took shape in the same decade that Albert Camus passed away; in his book *Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argued that the most pressing philosophical issue of the day was the topic of suicide (Mukundan, 2005, p. 87). In the end, Ravi also commits suicide by offering his foot to a deadly snake. We see him waiting for his ultimate journey at the end of the novel. The village, the people, and the language are all infused with stark realism. But the enchantment of images resides behind the realities. It is about country life, with believable characters, an all-encompassing spiritual rainbow, and incessant self-examinations. In the end, it's the tale of a remote community, collected under the urban glare, steeped in local myths and tales.

The protagonist Ravi's quest for meaning, which is ingrained in both the movable and immovable components of nature, becomes a universal human endeavor. The fictional community of Khasak turns into a microcosm of the entire world. Contrary to common misconceptions, Vijayan's work has nothing to do with Western varieties of existentialist philosophy, and he gets his inspiration from post-independence Indian realities, as he indicated in his 1986 memoir on the writing of *Khasakkinte Itihasam*. Thus, the deliberate rejection of Western modernism characterizes Malayalam postmodernism.

In the context of book history and O.V. Vijayan's literary life, the publication history of *Khasakkinte Itihasam* is examined. This case study of the publication history of the novel can be categorized as bibliographic research, and it involves consulting bibliographies, library catalogs, and other sources to identify all known editions and translations of the novel. This case study adds to the corpus of knowledge about the evolution of methods used in the creation, circulation, reception, and use of books. The study of the Malayalam novel *Khazakinte Itihasam* through the methodology of bibliographic research provides a comprehensive understanding of the literary work's historical and cultural context.

While looking at a text from a book historical perspective, the inception of a work is considered. Vijayan spent twelve years writing and rewriting *Khasakkinte Itihasam*, his first novel, before it was

published in 1969 as a book (Vijayan, 2022, p.26). After being serialized in Mathrubhumi weekly for 28 weeks, beginning on January 28, 1968 and ending on August 4, 1968, the novel had begun a huge literary revolution. The book diverts from the conventional themes of the Malayalam novels and investigates the existential conundrum of man. By fusing Malayalam, Tamil, and Palakkad dialects, the work pioneered a new style of writing. It also created a storytelling technique that switched back and forth between myths and reality. Another interesting aspect of serialization in periodicals is the accompanying illustrations. Every chapter of the novel has an illustration by A.S.Nair.

The illustrations that accompanied the novels helped the paintings receive more recognition and mass appeal. Paintings discovered a means to serve as literary illustrations in publications. The drawings of A.S.Nair were primarily distinguished by their use of figures that were drawn in a linear and expressive manner in the Madras School tradition. A. S. Nair developed his unique figuration, modelling, shading, and hatching technique. With broken lines, A. S. Nair's stylizations of graphic arts like woodcut and linocut are quite expressive; some even had the appearance of watercolour treatment with a wash effect. (Antherjanam, 2018, p.53). The eye-catching illustrations he created for O. V. Vijayan's *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* improved the reading experience on both a purely aesthetic and functional level. A great deal has changed since the 1950s in terms of the way characters, scenes, and emotions are represented since linear representations have replaced "realistic" drawings and photographs. This has gained visual arts like painting the support of intellectuals and artists as a conversational subject on par with much more complex literature. Furthermore, the illustrations included in the novels made Malayali readers aware of current trends in painting, who are typically accustomed to seeing Raja Ravi Varma's paintings of gods and goddesses.

The novel's serialization in the Mathrubhumi weekly helped O.V. Vijayan gain recognition as a writer. The popularity of the work as a serial novel and the favorable reader feedback benefited the author and the publishing business (Vargheese, 2022, p.161). The serialization aids the author's search for a publisher and allows the

publisher to forecast whether a given book will sell or not. The Malayalam novel *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* by O.V. Vijayan has been published by several different publishers over the years. Current Books, Thrissur, originally released the book in 1969. Professor Joseph Mundassery found Current Books, a leading Malayalam publisher in the year 1960. The publisher has published a wide range of books, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and children's books. The first edition of the novel sold 2000 copies. The cover page was illustrated by Vijayan himself using his unique handwritten font. After numerous revisions, SPCS, Kottayam, released the second edition. A group of Malayalam writers founded the cooperative publishing business SPCS in 1945, and this publisher supports the author by paying a 30% royalty to the author. SPCS' main goals were to make it easier for authors to get their novels published and, more importantly, to stabilize the writer as a contributing, self-assured part of society (SPCS). A preface from the author was included in the second edition of the book. Vijayan claims that the work is not his own perspective on life and requests that readers refer to "Kunjamina" as "Aaminakutty". In addition, he asks the readers to tell Aamina to marry Ravi because it will give Ravi a rebirth. This authorial preface was not included in the succeeding editions by SPCS. Vijayan himself illustrated the cover page for every SPCS edition, from the second edition that was released in March 1973 to the ninth edition that was released in August 1988. Most of the time, authors were not given the opportunity to choose important para-textual elements like book covers. Yet, these editions show the author's active participation in choosing the book cover and producing a suitable visual interpretation of the text. SPCS editions also included blurbs that gave the reader some hints about the novel's plot.

In 1990, D.C. Books published the tenth edition of *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* with a new cover design by Asok. In 1982, DC Kizhekkemuri founded D.C. Books, another leading Malayalam publisher. It has also published a wide range of books, including fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and children's books. D.C. Books is known for its innovative and experimental publications. DC released the hundredth black classic edition of the novel in September 2022, incorporating the author's biography, publisher's note, authorial preface Vijayan wrote for the second edition by SPCS, and illustrations by AS Nair. DC

Books had played a huge role in canonizing Vijayan's 'Ithihasam' as a modern classic. DC Books also released a few special editions of the novel, which include hardcover editions and collector's editions. These special editions helped make *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* a coveted item for book collectors. DC Books invested heavily in the marketing and promotion of the novel, and the novel has never gone out of print.

*Khasakkinte Ithihasam* has been translated into several languages. The English translation, titled *The Legends of Khasak*, was published by Penguin Books in 1994. The book is marketed as a "modern classic" and is self-translated by the author. The English version has enjoyed a pan-Indian appeal. The sensitivity of this version is very different from the Malayalam original. Instead of viewing this as a translation, the majority of readers prefer to read it as another original work by Vijayan. The publishers of the translations of the novel are all leading publishers in their respective languages. The French translation of the novel titled *Les Legendes de Khasak* is translated by Dominique Vitalyos and was published in 2004 by Fayard Publishers. The German translation, *Die Legenden von Khasak*, is translated by Ursula Gräfe and was published by Insel-Verlag in 2004. The Turkish translation, titled *Khasak Efsaneleri*, was translated by Oguzan Aydin and published by Dedalus Kitap. The publishers of *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* and its translations have played an important role in promoting the novel and making it accessible to a wider audience. They have also helped to establish the novel as a classic of Indian literature. The publication in Malayalam and its translations into other languages have helped to introduce the novel to new readers and have contributed to its enduring popularity. The publishers of the novel have also helped to raise awareness of the novel's importance and its contribution to Indian literature.

The book cover designers have helped to shape the public perception of the novel in a number of ways. Their cover art has helped to create a visual identity for the novel and has made it more recognizable to readers. The cover art has also helped to communicate the themes and mood of the novel to readers. One of the most notable book covers for the novel was designed by Asok. Vijayan is shown walking through a picturesque Palakkadan village filled with Asian palmyra trees on the cover. This photographic cover acts as a doorway

to the author, the locale, and the plot. The book cover designers have played an important role in making the novel more accessible to readers and in contributing to its enduring legacy. Their cover art has helped to create a visual representation of the novel that has resonated with readers for generations. Book cover designs by Vijayan are unique and minimalistic and contain nuanced symbolism. These covers designed by Vijayan were later used by DC Books as book covers in diverse editions with slight modifications. Therefore, the book cover designers of *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* have played a significant role in shaping the public perception of the novel and in contributing to its enduring legacy. Their cover art has helped to create a visual identity for the novel and has made it more accessible to readers.

The novel transcends linguistic boundaries through translations into numerous languages. The translations and theater adaptation faced the challenge of translating Vijayan's intricate prose and highlighting the cultural resonance of the novel in different linguistic and cultural contexts. Deepan Sivaraman's theater adaptation, also titled *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*, showcases the novel's enduring appeal beyond literature. Deepan Sivaraman is an accomplished dramatist who has worked as a director and scenographer on stages all over the world. It was difficult to translate this famous work for the stage while maintaining Vijayan's original intent. Nevertheless, Deepan Sivaraman, a playwright with decades of experience both nationally and internationally, envisioned a play that brought the hamlet of Khasak to life. Almost as if drawing comparisons between the little town of Kasargod and the imaginary village of Khasak, the play was developed in conjunction with an art initiative in the small town of Trikaripur, and Deepan invited locals to participate in the performance. He wrote a script that told the stories of the diverse residents of Khasak in a multi-narrative format rather than concentrating on the single narrative of the novel's hero. In order to construct the backdrop for his play, Deepan drew on the original text, motifs of rural life in Kerala, and the folk form of Theyyam. Three sides of the set have elevated portions where various acts take place, and one section of the set is designed to resemble a traditional promenade through the fields that were typical in Kerala. Deepan devised a scene that is appropriate for depicting this story and blurs the line between realism and myth by having the

characters stroll through muddy walkways, sit on benches, burn torches, and trek through the pouring rain. The play was first staged in 2015 and was well-received by critics both inside and outside of Kerala.

We cannot ignore one of the conflicts that the book faced during its early years of publication while examining its publication history. In his article “Bungarvadiyude Ithihasam,” Prof. G. N. Panikker argues that Vijayan’s book was lifted verbatim from Vyankatesh Madgulkar’s 1954 Marathi novel *Bungarvadi*. In 1958, the book was also translated into English under the title *The Village has No Walls* (97 Panikker). It tells the tale of a young school teacher’s adventures in a shepherds’ community in the 1940s princely state of Aundh. According to G.N. Panikker, there are numerous similarities between the plots of *Bungarvadi* and *Khasakkinte Ithihasam*, including the primitive village and its inhabitants. Vijayan argues in *Ithihasathinte Ithihasam* that he had published part of his novel in Mathrubhumi in October 1958 and that it was almost impossible to take ideas from the English translation of *Bungarvadi*. It was a short story called “Appukkili” that combined the chapters “Nari” and “Sandhya” from the novel (Vijayan, 2022). Despite these concerns, the novel’s publication history demonstrates that it has weathered the test of time and merits recognition as a genuine Malayalam masterpiece in every sense.

The publication history of O.V. Vijayan’s *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* is a testament to its enduring literary and cultural significance. By tracing its journey through time, from its inception to its global presence, we gain a comprehensive understanding of the novel’s evolution and its impact on the literary landscape. In conclusion, the exploration of the publication history of the Malayalam novel *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* sheds light on its enduring significance in the literary landscape of Kerala. Through a meticulous analysis of its origins, reception, and impact, this research article has provided valuable insights into the novel’s evolution and the socio-cultural context within which it emerged. By tracing its journey from its first publication to its status as a timeless classic, this study highlights the novel’s ability to captivate readers across generations, transcending temporal and cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the examination of critical reception

and adaptations underscores the novel's adaptability and its resonance with diverse audiences. As a seminal work of literature, the novel continues to inspire scholars, writers, and readers alike, emphasizing its enduring legacy and its pivotal role in shaping the literary heritage of Malayalam literature.

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