Chapter 3

Existential Politics

O. V. Vijayan represents a distinctive voice in the Indian English literature. His trail-blazing work *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* (*The Legends of Khasak*) signalled a new era in Malayalam literature. Until the publication of the *Khashak*, Malayalam fiction was trapped in the conformist mesh of realistic writing. In this revolutionary first novel, Vijayan experimented with several innovative techniques of demystification. He used various novelistic devices with telling effect to depict the sense of existential futility of the contemporary world. His controversial work, *The Saga of Dharmapuri* is a dystopian fantasy which gives horrible and nauseating pictures of man caught up in the labyrinth of power politics. It is the by-product of a sensitive mind’s reaction to the proclamation of the state of Emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975. Vijayan’s imagination revolted against the new tyrannical order prevalent in the postcolonial India, which could ultimately toll the death knell of our nation. All basic human values were subverted and the entire idea of democracy was turned topsy-turvy. The novel
could be read as a bold enquiry into the operations of power in the post-Independence political situation of India.

*The Saga* emphasizes the need for emancipation from the suppressive powers of authoritarianism in newly independent Third World nations and for an adequate civilizational alternative for contemporary man. The treatment of an unusual subject matter with extraordinary images and symbols makes it a unique piece of literature. Vijayan’s political vision becomes complex and assumes universal dimensions as it embraces existential, metaphysical and ecological realms. The novel is a transparent allegory of the dirty power politics of the twentieth-century India. V. Rajakrishnan’s remarks are very pertinent here:

Vijayan’s novel contains something more than the projection of the novelist’s fears and misgivings about the present state of affairs into a distant and imaginary future. It is built on all too familiar lineaments of the history of our times, most of the characters and political groups portrayed in the novel have their counterparts in Indian national life since Independence; some of the crisis situations rendered in the novel conform almost entirely to facts; and the scene of international alignments satirized here reproduces the pattern familiar during the Sixties and Seventies. (49)
The Saga proclaims that the horrors of existence cannot be effectively articulated by employing conventional canons of fictional writing. The framework of magic realism alone was found to be quite inadequate to powerfully express the enormity and gravity of the subject matter the novelist was handling. Hence Vijayan resorted to other strategies of demystification like excremental and scatological imagery. One could identify traces of Jonathan Swift and Lawrence Stern in his literary expression. The Saga takes a concrete historical moment viz. the Emergency from the twentieth-century India and portrays the paradoxes of existence under totalitarian regime. The fascist tendencies of the contemporary Indian rulers coupled with the traumatic experience of the Emergency days provided the much needed spark for the author. With his incisive style, he draws the absurd and grotesque Indian political situation which is only a microcosm of the general human predicament, occasionally casting a backward glance at the sacrificing idealism of the freedom movement represented by Mahatma Gandhi. Contemporary Indian society is synonymous with any Third World country which has been recently freed from the colonial yoke. Hence the author is attempting to take the particular to the universal.

Politically decolonized societies are being colonized again in a different way. The new imperial masters try to take possession of
the psyche of these nations through a deliberate intrusion into their social, political and economic life. The superpowers sponsor puppet governments in these countries as part of their efforts to sabotage cultural and economic resurgence. These forces of lust and greed ultimately prove to be devastating for the hapless common people. As the very title denotes, the central focus of the novel is on Dharmapuri, its subjects and the political structure headed by a debased President. It has recently become free from its colonial masters. Dharmapuri is sovereign only in name and has been plunged into a state of deep crisis. It is ruled by a President who is an incarnation of corruption, tyranny and moral depravity. P. K. Rajan gives a true picture of the predicament in Dharmapuri:

Dharmapuri, under its debased President, is a land where inhumanity, deceit, hypocrisy, sycophancy and immorality define everyday life. A land of soulless people who have sold their freedom to a degenerate tyranny, Dharmapuri has entirely forgot its own glorious tradition of the freedom struggle against the Feringhee Empire. (120)

Though there are flamboyant manifestations of freedom in the physical sense, the ideal of psychological freedom is yet to arrive in Dharmapuri. Its very description disproves its assumed nature of freedom: “Feringhee Empire’s freed colony” (TSD 15). Its sovereignty is only in name as they are mere pawns in the hands of big powers.
The superpowers are interested in Dharmapuri, mainly because of their political and economic benefit. The entire institutional structure of Dharmapuri continues to be under the colonial control though with new respectable names. They encourage increased consumption of goods and a more systematic exploitation of resources as inevitable adjustments in the transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism.

The two colonial powers identified in the novel are the White Confederacy which stands for America and the Red Tarter Republic resembling Soviet–Russia. The superpowers have appointed their own spies who have their secret places in the President's court. The dirty manoeuvres of the superpowers become palpable only when the country does not follow the direction set by them. The President and his sycophants make loud anti-imperialist rhetoric which is primarily meant for blindfolding the illiterate masses in the country. These miserable lots are fed on a regular diet of falsehood by the government owned Radio and Television which makes it impossible for them to realize the enormity of deception practised on them. The economy of Dharmapuri is also controlled indirectly by the imperialist nations:

Imperialism had its presence in Shantigrama in the form of the Confederate trading houses; these fortress-like structures
caused the citizens, as they passed them, to rage and smoulder. (TSD 20)

The colonialists strive to placate the President by accommodating his sons and sons-in-law in their various establishments. The ordinary people considered this gesture as Dharmapuri’s supremacy over the superpowers:

These fourteen, spoilt children of people’s power, had not found time in their youth to master letters, and were even worse at reckoning, but were much praised by Prava as leaders of the new decolonized cultures. The Confederates, on their part, kept the fourteen in comfort, giving them gleaming limousines to travel in, big blonde women attendants, and stocks of aphrodisiacs and striped candy. (TSD 20)

The armed forces of Dharmapuri too are under the manipulating schemes of the colonialists: “Dharmapuri’s armouries were replenished regularly by the White Confederacy . . .” (TSD 19). At the time of decolonization the departing colonizers had bequeathed costume kits and archaic weapons to their freed colonies. Vijayan writes:

Much of the weaponry bore White Confederate patents and were obsolete by a century: ironclads, and flying machines so primitive that one fancied they nested, and explosive devices
that raised palls of stench and dust. But Dharmapuri had no military budget, only a budget for Sorrowing and Persuading, and so became the most pacific nation on earth. (TSD 18)

The President of Dharmapuri is a typical representative of the servile soul of the newly independent nation. He is a tyrannical dictator and is surrounded by a band of unscrupulous sycophants. He is given to excessive eroticism and sensual pleasures which form the principal basis of his ethics of power. The President is the focal image of depravity and corruption. He is portrayed as a sadist who inflicts physical and mental injuries upon the weak. There are elaborate descriptions of the main activities of the President which consist of eating, defecating and sleeping with his concubines. In his perpetration of atrocities and perpetuation of authoritarianism, the President reminds us of the archetypal dictator in Márquez’s *The Autumn of the Patriarch*.

After introducing the shallow despicable character of the President, Vijayan unfolds the gloomy and macabre state of existence in Dharmapuri. The President and his ministers, who are busy keeping themselves in favour of the external imperialists, are totally oblivious of the poverty and misery of their citizens who live in a state of perpetual nightmare. The ruling class in Dharmapuri is shown to be hopelessly sold out to foreign interests. The devious
reigning class bombard the minds of the people with false notions of progress and freedom.

Vijayan draws gruesome pictures of sexual and economic exploitation by the political mafia in the novel. Individual liberty is under continuous threat and law-enforcing agencies have turned into machines of oppression and exploitation. V. Rajakrishnan aptly records:

In Dharmapuri, under the President’s dispensation politics of the street has come to replace democratic functioning of the government based on respect of law and the principles of justice. Forms of rabble-rousing and planned assault on the intelligence of ordinary citizens through frequent appeals to their patriotic duty have become acceptable political means for legitimizing the tyranny of the state. (42)

Contrary to the high claims of the ruling class, Dharmapuri is on the verge of total devastation in all respects. Poverty drives the people to sell their near and dear ones to be converted into exportable cadavers. The President has entered into a secret deal with the Confederacy for exporting cadavers on a regular basis. The recurring presence of Kaanchanamaala lends a poignant touch to the scenes of senseless brutality depicted in the novel. The blindness of Kaanchanamaala is due to the malnutrition of her mother during her pregnancy period. It is suggestive of the extreme
poverty of the people in Dharmapuri. The travails of Laavannya and her son Sunanda exemplify the total break down of morality and the utter state of degeneration in Dharmapuri. She was in search of her missing husband when she was besieged by the state officers. Her resistance to their attempts of rape was interpreted as treason. She explains her pitiable plight to her son: “Whatever your mother is doing is for the country, and countries make demands that are often inscrutable to their citizens” (TSD 38).

The tunnel through which Laavannya journeys with her son is a replica of the veritable hell. They are encountered by several nightmarish scenes which dramatize exploitative acts of the most bizarre kind. It is in the tunnel where the exportable cadavers are processed. There are hordes of cadavers of men, women and children “. . . drawn in calisthenics of despair, and the ululation of primordial sorrow” (TSD 62-63). The most grotesque and repulsive sight was that of an attendant copulating with the inert body of a beautiful woman. Even dead bodies are not spared in Dharmapuri. It was the ultimate picture of ethical decadence.

There is another horrifying picture of a young boy who is declared a traitor and a spy of imperialism by a furious mob. The cry for his death is so strong and powerful that even his kith and kin ask for his blood. The judges without conducting a proper trial go with popular sentiments and pronounce him guilty. Vijayan
directs his powerful pen against the new culture of slogans. Slogans repudiate all possibilities of sensible discourse on anything. Siddhaartha, who is presented as a sharp contrast to the reckless President exclaims about the chant of slogans thus: “... what voice is this, which is not of man nor animal, neither of the mate nor of the offspring?” (TSD 110) And he concludes it as the “... eunuch voice of history!” (TSD 110)

When the President notices some threat to his authority, he whips up the patriotic fervour by declaring a mock-war with the neighbouring Samarkhand. In Dharmapuri, nationalism has become a mask for anti-national activities. The people are forced to join the military service and those who question it are treated as traitors. All the able-bodied men have been posted in hills and on mountains to lie-in wait for the supposed enemies of the country. The media and the press are silenced and the official propaganda is strengthened to justify the gains of the new dispensation. The paradox of such a forged war is that both the warring sides emerge as winners while losers will definitely be the passive, unfortunate people on both the sides. War in the modern society is an escapist method to divert the attention of the people from domestic problems.

There is a complete breakdown of the democratic principles in Dharmapuri. It gets substituted by the politics of the street. Bold
and original techniques are used by the rulers to assault the commonsense of ordinary citizens and their patriotic inclinations. The prolonged oppression leaves the menfolk emasculated and women resign to their fate as mere objects for sexual gratification. The people are in the dark as to how their leaders forfeit the dignity and honour of the nation. The concubine of the Prime Minister of Samarkhand has a clear perception of the state of affairs when she broods:

The vision of her nation as a pimp, its armed legions and its flying machines and flotillas, its spies and prosecutors and judges, its convocations, protocols and glittering ceremony, all the many arms of a pimp-god, made the concubine sad. (TSD 69)

It is against such a backdrop that the writer introduces Siddhaartha who is the embodiment of spiritual freedom. He is the incarnation of the Buddhist qualities like quietness, modesty and kindness. The character of Siddhaartha is created as a contrast to the duplicitous President. The author splendidly balances the pathetic predicament of moral and political degeneration in Dharmapuri with the definite, though feeble stirrings for change that Siddhaartha stands for. He counters the nihilism of state ambition with his infinite feeling of compassion and love. He tries to instil in the people of Dharmapuri, the basic ideals of self-respect
and dignity. He is portrayed as an *avatar* with a difference. He does not take up arms to revolt against the evils. There is no direct confrontation of Siddhaarth with the King. Paraashara, Dharmapuri’s chief of the armed forces comes under the magical spell of Siddhaarth.

The novelist tears apart the apparent democratic freedom prevalent in the Third World nations and the repulsive face of the state sponsored repressive techniques practised on the people. He is trying to record a period marked by violent political gimmicks and made absurd by ludicrous political games. P. K. Rajan ruminates:

*The Saga of Dharmapuri* presents three distinctive movements. The first movement is governed by a choking sense of horror and disgust over the appalling conditions of living in a modern nation of the third world under despotic power. The novel allegorically represents India of the Emergency period (1975-77), but Dharmapuri is at the same time any newly independent Afro-Asian country where life has become a frightening nightmare. Secondly, there is a mounting sense of resentment and revolt against this depressing situation punctuated by a pervasive note of futility and doom. The third movement is conditioned by a conviction
that the ultimate answer to the tragedy of these new nations lies in the spiritual sphere. (119)

The state of affairs in Dharmapuri can be easily identified with the condition prevalent in India during the two year long Emergency period. Vijayan’s sensitive mind was deeply upset by the atrocities of the infamous Emergency regime. As a gesture of protest, he stopped drawing his much famed cartoons. He faced its incomprehensible emptiness with an outward calm and an inward watchfulness all through. The ache and frustration he felt, found their outrageous expression in *The Saga*. He invented new literary devices to shock the reader out of his complacency. The author discarded all conventional modes of writing and experimented with new strategies of demystification for the purpose of unravelling the horrible state of affairs in the modern political establishments.

Vijayan ingeniously employs a new narrative strategy in *The Saga* to present the degeneration of India’s democratic system. He experiments with a variety of unpleasant literary techniques to depict the moral degradation and cultural disintegration of the contemporary world. By the deft deployment of excremental and erotic fantasy, Vijayan unleashes a relentless onslaught on the absurd and absolutely irrational neo-colonial realities. He devastatingly exposes the excess filth, obscenity and horror rampant in power politics. Excremental imagery is freely used by
the novelist as an artistic device to expose the shams, pretensions and pettiness of the perverted, power-seeking and moronic politicians of Third World countries in general and India in particular. The novel opens with a disgusting description of the defecation of the President:

As the President squirmed on his throne, and signalled his intent to defecate, a tremulous disquiet passed over the gathering in the Audience Hall, for it was not yet sundown, the Hour of the Second Defecation. (TSD 11)

The status quo of the state is closely aligned to the punctuality of the President’s bowel movement and the satisfactory working of his genitals. His absolute authority over the state is suggested by the playing of National Anthem at the time of his defecation. Hence what the President throws out becomes the seismograph of the nation. The press was also invited to witness the rare occasion of defecation and it carried elaborate pictures of the few privileged “Excrement-venerators” (TSD 11). Vijayan writes in a mock-heroic way:

Even these privileged ones had to obtain the Excrement through elaborate strategies; and then they secured mere smatterings, which they mixed with rare and valuable spices and feasted on with garnish ceremony. (TSD 11)
These fortunate few are typical of the sycophantic opportunists who gather around centres of power. Paraashara carries a jewelled turd on ceremonious occasions. The minister of Sorrowing, Rumannuaan has remnants of the sacrament in the crevices of his teeth. Pestilential stench emanates from his mouth. Vijayan uses such sickening and nauseating images in the novel with telling effect. He seeks to generate a sense of disgust and resentment in the readers against the prevailing political culture and its diverse manifestations with the help of startling verbal images. He perfects his excremental language to articulate what is too deep for any conventional means of verbal expression. Through the endless repetition of the President’s act of shitting and the hyperbolic description of the excrement of diverse shape and taste, Vijayan reveals the complete subservience of a populace steeped in the dirt of servility. A banquet hosted by the Confederate for the President and his family provides another repulsive faecal image:

As the chase for food got underway, one of the presidential offspring shat in the excitement of pursuit and circled the banquet table with a trail of smile. Then another shat, and yet another; soon the whole brood followed suit. (TSD 20-21)

The complete submission of the President before the imperial superpowers is brought out with the help of a similar image:
The President prostrated himself before the white man, which threw his behind into relief. The sight of that behind, with scab of excrement, terrified the Imperialist, and beat a hasty retreat. (TSD 116)

Vijayan dexterously makes use of the excremental imagery to portray the critical moments in the political history of Dharmapuri. Fear and anxiety invariably make the President and the ministers defecate. The declaration of the state of Crisis by the President out of fear of a threat to his authority synchronizes with the very act of defecation:

When he had done with his preface, he stood tense, and the Ministers, trembling, told one another, ‘A proclamation, it is a Proclamation!’ The President bent forward and crowed, and out came a turd as big as a sewer rat; and with that was promulgated what came to be known as the State of Crisis. (TSD 22)

The scatological imagery that permeates the narrative is intended to convey the rottenness and decay of absolutist power centres. It conveys the limitless depravity of the rulers and the ruled in Dharmapuri and it also exposes the physiological and psychological structure of a fawning generation. Scatological imagery remains the defining feature of the novelist’s technique.
Next to scatology, Vijayan employs erotic imagery as a demystifying device, intended to unleash a systematic assault on the decaying centres of power. He reinforces excremental vision with the imagery of decadent eroticism. He weaves into the texture of the novel many pictures of defiled eroticism as part of his attempt to present the degeneration and moral breakdown in Dharmapuri’s public life. Scatology and eroticism are the main tools with the help of which Vijayan draws hyperbolical pictures of the dreadful existential situation created by the callous and desensitized rulers of postcolonial India. Whores and pimps hold political sway in Dharmapuri. The debased President and the deceitful mafia around him have transformed Dharmapuri into a land of pimps and whores. Sex has ceased to be a private concern and has become a means to gain access to the seats of power. The Prime Minister of Samarkhand tells his concubine in bed that his Begum on that day “. . . goes to bed with a Confederate credit agency” (TSD 69). The concubine wonders, “A whole agency, sire?” (TSD 69) The Prime Minister melancholically justifies this by saying that Samarkhand needs money from the Confederate to replenish its wardrobes and cellars. This is suggestive of the extreme servility of the newly freed colonies in spite of their decorous trappings of freedom.
Nudity performs the function of a metaphor for political oppression in *The Saga*. The President is always seen naked in the company of concubines. Self-eroticism, homosexuality and lesbianism had found their roots in the libidinal life of the people of Dharmapuri. The ruling class treats the body of women as sheer objects of pleasure. Nudity figures as a metaphor of political oppression. Laavannya, the kitchen maid frequently becomes the victim of sexual violence. Priyamvada, one of the concubines of the amorous President, copulates in the open without any inhibition in order to promote her personal interests. She arrogantly refers to her amorous liaison with Rumannuaan when she says: “The old man held me and not knowing what to do with me, spilled over my navel and crotch” (TSD 122). There is a brazen disregard for the decencies of moral conduct in Dharmapuri. T. N. Dhar remarks on this aspect of the novel:

The extensive focus of President genitals and his fornications with concubines, from kitchen-maids to the wives of his ministers, is significant because Vijayan uses sex as a metaphor for domination and subjugation. The details of President’s promiscuous sex with men and women are meant to project their loveless aspect. Vijayan also uses them to symbolize his dictatorial yearnings. His excessive indulgence also suggests that it is a perversity. The important point here
is that the pleasures of the body, such as eating, drinking, and sex, which stand for freedom and liberation in folk traditions, to which Dharmapuri claims to aspire, are made by Vijayan into symptoms of oppression and perversion. ("Entering History" 235)

The ultimate degradation of morality is suggested through the erotic imagery employed in the scenes of men copulating with the corpses in the House of Healing. When Siddhaarthra along with Laavannya and Sunanda were walking through its corridor, they came across men copulating with corpses. Vijayan records the resentful attitude of the attendant when he writes: “Taking off his own clothes, he mounted the inert body. ‘Merchant’s daughter! Exploiter of the toiling people! This is class struggle, the Retribution!’” (TSD 62) There is yet another shocking picture of an incest love between a brother and sister in the novel. They represent the hippy generation that flouts conventional standards of organized society in favour of unrestrained living. In front of them on lotus leaves, spread on the uncarpeted floor, are fish and loaves. They signify the resurgence of the pleasure principle that militates against the repressions of civilized life.

Through the erotic images in the novel, Vijayan implies that civilization is the sum total of the sustained sublimation of erotic energy. He also points to mankind’s loss of contact with the natural
rhythms of life. Man’s catastrophic loss of contact with the organic rhythms of nature resulted in the total depravation of moral codes. He believes that unimaginative planning and injudicious scientific and technological activities play havoc with nature. Large scale deforestation and rapid industrialization contribute to the depletion of earth’s resources. The consumerist culture has corrupted man enormously and his carnal desires have further distanced him from the age old values of civilization. Mankind has embraced the primitivistic and animal ways of libidinal behaviour, a view of the tragedy of modern civilization. In the novel, Kashyapa stands for Vijayan’s sensitive mind that seeks perfect harmony between man and his environment. His heart bleeds as the blue sky is darkened and the pellucid water of river is polluted.

Vulgarity in the hands of Vijayan becomes an excellent demystifying device which exposes the lacerating wounds of history. He uses it not as a titillating subject matter, but as a shocking mode of discourse. In order to depict the dismal and dreadful theme, the author needed such horrible and pervasive literary techniques like eroticism and scatology. In E. V. Ramakrishnan’s observation:

Vijayan’s erotic and scatological metaphors point to the violation of the individual’s solitude which is the first moral code to be broken when fascist tendencies surface in the
state. The life-giving libido degenerates into a desecration of the body. While the subjects of Dharmapuri are relentlessly driven to submission and defeat along the dismal tract between memory and oblivion, they shed all their sense of human identity. (68).

Repeated suggestions of necrophilia and cannibalism intensify the horrifying representation of existence in Dharmapuri. Necrophilia, which is based on a passionate affinity for dead bodies, represents a degenerate dream in Vijayan. Export of cadavers is the main source of income in Dharmapuri. There is an ironical statement by the guardsman in the tunnel where dead bodies are processed for exporting. He says: “Each cadaver shipped out to the Confederacy brings money to the exchequer, and much of this money goes into our campaigns against Imperialism” (TSD 63).

The war, which is an expression of the malignant aggressiveness and sadism of dictators, ensures a steady supply of human flesh. Clandestine export of the canned meat of children to the imperialist countries is done on a regular basis. Vijayan gives a pathetic picture of a boy who was turned away from the canning centre since he was diseased. He goes to the exhibition hall to get a chance there, where again he was rejected. The guardsman says:

‘Alas, my child, that was truly a misfortune. But under no circumstance can we export diseased meat and sully the fair
name of the country. And since you are not truly an orphan, we cannot put you on exhibition either. (TSD 151)

A section of the ruling elite is also known to relish the flesh of children as delicious food. Vijayan records:

A maid entered, bearing a trayful of flavoursome food, human flesh dressed as sunflower and fruit. . . . Shakuni sliced a portion daintily and raised it to his mouth; the room was filled with the heady smell of the flesh. (TSD 134)

There is yet another grotesque picture of cannibalism of a captain of an industry in Confederate city along with his wife enjoying the dishes made of “. . . flesh of humans from the black brown continents, processed by the alchemists and transfigured into peaceable fruit and flower” (TSD 139). When there was the announcement of the phoney nuclear war between Dharmapuri and Samarkhand, the resident spy of the imperialists in Dharmapuri reports to his masters:

‘We can continue to import meat as usual from Dharmapuri as well as Samarkhand. There is no danger of nuclear contamination, as the most lethal ingredient in this war is saltpetre. (TSD 138)

This sarcastic comment brings out the primitiveness of the war fought between undeveloped countries. The writer employs the
third person narrative technique in a very ingenious way which lends the text an impersonal and objective perspective. The novelist does not take sides nor does he ridicule the characters. He pampers them with utmost care and sympathy. A. J. Jose Alilakuzhy remarks:

With the detachment of a sage the novelist is laughing at everything in Dharmapuri. It is very like the laughter of Siddhaartha that frees Paraashara from his illusions. The laughter shocks us into the reality that he is ridiculing us and himself. We realize that the laughter is a form of revolt that comes from a heart that bleeds for his people. (225)

Vijayan corroborates the disgusting and ridiculous behaviour of the President by attributing it to his poor and disgraceful path of life in his moments of reminiscences:

He recollected his orphanhood after his father's passing, the desolate paths of the pimp, the painted faces of his sisters, the slights at the hands of strangers, the sad and stale suppers, and then the rabble, the demagogy and the incendiarism, and at last the Palace! (TSD 136)

Apart from using totally unorthodox erotic and excremental imagery, Vijayan has deftly exploited the possibilities of other literary devices as well for the purpose of demystification. He has
mastered strategies like; irony, satire, allegory, magic realism, fantasy, parallelism and metaphoric allusions; and uses them with precision and lyrical grace. The novelist perfects an archaic tone to deal with the problems of power in an emerging state. The lyrical potential of the archaic form is highlighted in his portrayal of the Siddhaartha motif. The demystifying techniques employed by Vijayan often clash with his archaic vocabulary and are capable of interrogating the hollow claims of the nationalist discourse.

Vijayan’s vocabulary effectively exposes the forked nature of his excoriating.

Vijayan adopts a satirical framework for the entire novel. Almost all the characters are depicted in a savagely sardonic way. The biting satire is pointed towards the individuals who have become victims of the systems they create. The atmosphere of black humour that permeates the entire play is synonymous with the murkiness of the contemporary world order. Vijayan records:

With peace and wisdom become the protocols of state, it was decided that Dharmapuri would use its armies not to fight but to assuage the ills of the people; armies changed overnight into Congregations of Persuaders, and the murderous encounters with the neighbouring countries, which took place ever so often, were designated the Sorrows of Dharmapuri. Rabble-rousers and storm troopers, who,
during the days of Empire, had done the State small-time violence, now called themselves Partisans and banded into the Convention of the Holy Spirit and took over the governance of the new republic. (TSD 15)

Through the President and the sycophants around him, Vijayan satirizes the corrupt and perverted politicians of the contemporary times. His stingy satire does not make an individualistic attack on the persona of the President, instead it is directed against the way he functions as the head of a sovereign state. The complete subjugation of the President to the imperial powers is ridiculed by Vijayan, when he presents Dharmapuri as a nation of pimps and the President as a pimp-god. The impotency of the President is an indication of his absolute failure as the head of the state. His defecation on the throne is symbolic of the misuse of power in the Third World countries and perverted sexual exploitation stands for the inhuman and unlawful exploitation of the vulnerable souls by the powerful rulers.

Satire aims at exposing and criticizing a world which is characterized by ugliness, cruelty and oppression. It is the deviation from the normal or desirable that pricks the mind of a satirist which makes him unleash his satiric weapons on the reprehensible elements. The writer sharpens his satiric discourse by complementing it with effective use of humour, irony, fantasy,
magic realism, etc. The time, locale, characters and images all function like double edged swords with literal meaning at one end and a deeper underlying meaning at the other.

The satirist in Vijayan tries to dramatize a pattern of grossness and stench in order to produce the desired emotional response of disgust and anger from the reader who is beleaguered by the fierce force of his lampoon all along. The novelist satirically comments on the infected body politic of India which reached its extreme point with the declaration of Emergency by Mrs. Gandhi in 1975. The state of Crisis declared in Dharmpuri out of fear of the threat to his authority is a veiled reference to the Emergency proclamation in India. The use of extreme form of excremental imagery to satirize the proclamation makes it repulsive and disgusting. The fake crisis situation becomes more ridiculous when the President laments: “We promised the people a Sorrow, we promised them an enemy, and time is running out . . .” (TSD 23-24).

The exaggeration of an exclusively private act as defecation into a grandiose event of enormous implications itself suggests the incisive sharpness of his piercing satire. Even the political temperature of Dharmpuri is determined by the timely bowel movements of the President. Vijayan could not find another way out to put across his deeply felt disgust and resentment against the diseased political structure of the post-Independence India. By
employing such extreme form of satiric devices, Vijayan wants to
give a heavy jolt to his generation. He shoots his satiric arrow point
blank at the power centres of the Fourth-estate which give undue
popularity to trivial matters and there by ignore the welfare of the
unfortunate citizens. Vijayan sarcastically comments on the
hypocrisy of the press when he writes:

The President was early by almost an hour that evening, and
as the whispered disquiet grew, the doyen of the press corps
made bold to address the President’s Press Councillor. ‘Sir,
this is an unusual hour’. . . . (TSD 12)

The complete control over the press enables the ruling class to
obliterate the memory of the people through well-planned
propaganda. The censorship of the press and the wholesale arrests
of people during the state of crisis is a reference to the draconian
laws which are promulgated during the Emergency to suppress any
voice of dissent. Vijayan’s genial humour fills with sarcasm when
he refers to the antique armoury of Dharmapuri, supplied by the
imperialists. Most of these weapons are archaic by a century.
Explosive devices raise palls of stench and dust. Dharmapuri does
not need a military budget because it is projected as the most
pacific nation on earth. There is only a budget for sorrowing and
persuading. Scholars flocked to Dharmapuri to study the ancient
military artefacts:
The scrutinies and obstacles were so numerous that most of the scholars went back; and for those who eventually made it to the armouries the shock of witnessing their own baroque past was often the cause of neurotic indisposition. There were also occasions, not infrequent, when a spy of the Confederacy was caught pilfering Dharmapuri’s military secrets, his embarrassment all the greater because this was intelligence concerning his own obsolete weapons. (TSD 18)

Vijayan’s corrosive sarcasm targets the common people also for their blind submission to the ruling power-hungry politicians. For the layman, employment of the President’s kith and kin in the confederate trading houses is a testimony to their country’s hegemony over imperialism. Paraashara organizes a popular uprising against the authoritarian power in Dharmapuri. He was almost successful in over throwing the, “President-Vermin” (TSD 115), and his evil empire. But suddenly the very people who were freed by Paraashara came back to battle against him. Vijayan seems to suggest that ordinary masses are afraid of liberty and the subsequent responsibility it brings in its wake. The saviour figures who appear in their midst are rejected unceremoniously. People, who are derisively cowed down by the elaborate power structure in the technological age, shy away from the sight of true redemption. Again Vijayan uses his biting sarcasm when the President declares
a phoney nuclear war in order to curb the popular uprising under the leadership of Paraashara. It is done in such a way as not to jeopardize the state’s cadaver exporting prospects. The imperialists would not accept the meat contaminated by nuclear radiations. Shakuni wonders: “After all, what is all this war and massacre for, but to facilitate your fornications?” (TSD 134) Vijayan’s sarcasm also extends to the traders in cadavers who are insensitive to the pathetic human predicament. The satiric thrust would become more pronounced through contrasts in plot.

Vijayan explores the signifying possibilities of verbal irony and turns it into an effective strategy in *The Saga*. He deconstructs the genteel ironic mode of mimetic fiction to subvert the nationalist discourse based on a patriarchal concept of order and stability. A pungent touch of irony is apparent in almost all the incidents cited in *The Saga*. The novelist ironically clarifies the reason for the declaration of the state of Emergency; not as the threat to the country, but as a manifestation of the President’s fear of his past sins. He is terrified that his past actions might recoil on him, “. . . his past with its shame of pimping and vagrancy, demagogy and terrorism, and the frenetic pursuit of food” (TSD 22). Vijayan ironically comments on the shameful lust for power and indecent power manipulation prevalent during the seventies of last century.
Irony comes handy in the description of the failure of Paraashara. His initial victory over the President boomerangs on him when the very soldiers he had liberated come back instinctively to fight on behalf of the President. Paraashara, realizing the futility of his armed action withdraws from it. His conscience began to prick with a sense of sin because he has violated the norms of non-violence taught by Siddhaartha. He ruminates:

*My sin has been punished, thought Paraashara, contrite, the sin of my own war. I took up arms, and so I disobeyed my King. O Bodhisattva, your laughter does not well within this mountain when we most need it. Have I choked its subtle spring with my sin?* (TSD 146)

The author emphasizes the fact that modern generation is petrified at the very thought of emancipation. They seem to be comfortable with their complacent servility. One of the followers of Paraashara makes a caustic comment after the defeat:

‘General, ours is a blighted species with no future, I am not blaming you or the King. Look at this suicide that is written into our genetic substance. People demanding war, women craving widowhood, and children, destitution. Tell us what we should do’. (TSD 147)
Through this ironical statement, the writer seems to be brooding over the apparent death-eroticism which animates humanity. People get intimidated by the overpowering centres of oppression and deny themselves the path of true redemption. They are happy wallowing in the dung of psychological subservience. Towards the end Paraashara laments: “The very people we freed, deny us. They go back and offer themselves up for insane slaughter. You will call it Leela! It is incredible, my King” (TSD 157).

The allegorical structure adopted by the writer becomes too transparent at times to reveal glaringly familiar events and persons of the socio-political scene of our country. The Communards and the White confederacy are clear reference to the Russians and Americans who meddle with the internal affairs of India. Vijayan makes a scathing attack on the pseudo-Communists who discuss and interpret history in the sensuous embrace of their concubines. The Mendicant Father is definitely a disguised portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi. The first major reference to him occurs in Laavannya’s conversation with Siddhaartha. For her the mendicant was the, “Father of Our Nation” (TSD 41), who had already died. The minister of Sorrowing reminds us of Krishna Menon when his concubine mentions about his speech in Assembly of Nations, UNO. Through the death of the Mendicant Father, the writer implies that the values and ideals for which he stood has been lost.
forever without any traces. With his death, people had lost the inspiration to fight the repressive forces.

Dharmapuri aspired to become a welfare state after decolonization but ended up as a place where people had to sell their near and dear ones for their daily bread. Vijayan constantly reminds us of the difference between what Dharmapuri aspired to be and what it actually became, through a series of contrasts worked into the movement of the plot. The norms of this contrast get radiated mainly through two characters; the Mendicant father and Siddhaartha.

Siddhaartha is a vague reference to Gautama Buddha and stands in the novel as the embodiment of love, compassion, charity and service. Vijayan depicts him as a redeeming force amidst the moral chaos of Dharmapuri. His towering personality is in sharp contrast to the obnoxious presence of the patriarchal President and his pusillanimous ministers. Siddhaartha’s incredible virtues make the vices of the President look preposterous. He looms large in the background of the novel as a voice of sanity and reason, contrasted with the oppression and inhumanity that is dramatized in the novel. He brings cheer and peace to the oppressed people by keeping alive the prospects of hope. Kaanchanamaala remarks about Siddhaartha: “A great benediction has come upon Dharmapuri . . .” (TSD 93). Through the character of Siddhaartha,
the author visualizes a moral resurgence in public life. The spiritual motif epitomized by Siddhaarttha helps the author to incorporate mythical, fantastic and metaphysical elements into the plot design. P. K. Rajan comments:

The Siddhaarttha motif, integral to the scheme of the novel, provides it with a structure of counterpoint as well as a point of view, which has its ideological implications. This, I believe, is the basis on which the novel develops its pattern of many-layered parallelisms-mythical and temporal, metaphysical and materialistic-and moves on to a resolution of the problems the narrative raises. (124)

Siddhaartha is the manifestation of Vijayan’s expectation of a high political culture. He is the incarnation of Buddhist principles of quietness, modesty and kindness. Siddhaartha functions as a prism which refracts the life of Dharmapuri in its true colours. Vijayan employs fantasy to represent the extraordinary powers of Siddhaartha. The fantastic and the magical powers attributed to him enable him to assume a vision of the future. Siddhaartha also brings the mythical element when he reveals to Paraashara the clue to human suffering: “This is Leela, the play of the Great Delusion, and they are but wafted along on its tides” (TSD 157). Siddhaartha continues with a significant statement which could be considered as the philosophy implied in the narrative:
‘It is far from my mind to mock you, Paraashara. But know this from me: the frivolous maker of history and the dim-witted subject who follows him into senseless war and death are both seers, chosen ones’. (TSD 157)

The mythical touch of Leela is given by the writer as a final critique to the political treatise in the novel. Vijayan introduced the character of Siddhaartha because his political anxieties were always in search for someone with a prophetic vision. Vijayan vindicates himself in an interview:

Power was held and defended as a means to almost frivolous gratifications. In other words, we had a terribly inefficient tyranny, and an inefficient resistance. The ridiculous aspect is present up to a point! Thereafter the Indian mind, the mind of the renunciant comes into play, and behind its clumsiness and failure we witness an ancient wisdom, a primordial compassion which exists event today at the level of folk consciousness. This is the great Indian principle of enlightened failure. . . . That is why I introduced Bodhisatwa as a hero. (“The Sage” 93)

The twenty-seventh chapter of the novel, ‘The Revelation’, contains a scene of expressionist fantasy, which comes as the climax of a dream experienced by Siddhaartha. He is sitting on the banks of the river Jaahnavi and is brooding of climbing a
mysterious edifice, storey after storey which is “... rising tier upon tier, its distant cupola lost in the clouds” (TSD 152). He keeps asking the question: “... ‘who desires war, and who profits from it?’” (TSD 152) The occupants answer him sadly that no one has ever put this question. The lone men sat on each tier did not answer him, but pointed their fingers upward: “Siddhaartha climbed again; this was the last of the storeys. This was where all masters had pointed” (TSD 153). There, he was greeted by a strange echo, “Ooooh!” (TSD 153) He again climbed that last flight of steps which led to the throne in the cupola. He could not see anyone on the throne. There again he hears the echo, “Ooooh!” (TSD 152) He stopped his flight upstairs: “Then Siddhaartha saw: he gazed in disbelief at the dimunitive and decrepit thing that clung to the arches of the cupola . . .” (TSD 154). It was none other than man’s great ancestor. Its insane hoot reminded him of the hollowness and futility of the entire edifice of civilization. This takes him to the awareness that the custodian of the answer to the riddle of war is an ugly monkey. Vijayan furnishes his interpretation for such a vision, when he writes: “Every inquiry . . . takes you to the Genesis” (TSD 154).

Vijayan effectively deploys the inventive expressionist fantasy as a demystifying technique to make an eloquent expression of his antipathy toward contemporary technological revolution. He has a
strong conviction that unimaginative planning and injudicious scientific and technological activities conducted extensively by the modern political dictatorships world wide, are leading humanity to nowhere but to total catastrophe. Through Siddhaartha’s vision, the novelist makes a rejection of technological progress and materialism and attempts a nostalgic evocation of a primordial past.

The novelist forcefully utilizes the artistic possibility of magic realism towards the end of the novel. The novel closes with a, “resplendent and miraculous vision” (TSD 159), the image of the “great pipal tree” (TSD 159) into which Siddhaartha has metamorphosed on the river bank. Vijayan writes:

Paraashara lifted his gaze to its majestic canopy, and tears streamed down his face. He kneeled down before the tree, he flung his arms around its trunk. ‘Siddhaartha, my King,’ he cried, ‘is this you?’ (TSD 159)

This mystical scene emphasizes the ethereal nature of Siddhaartha. He existed only in a semi-divine realm and was not conceived as a character with human traits. He was an apparition, a sublime presence. He represents sensibility and culture as opposed to the forces of technological depersonalization. The author skilfully handles the demystifying techniques like fantasy and magic realism in order to raise the work to a mythical level. He perceives spirituality to be the only realm left before mankind for
their deliverance. It remains the sole salvation where humanity will be redeemed of its sins.

The vein of hyperbole which again is a new strategy apparent in *The Saga*, can be attributed to the cartoonist imagination of Vijayan. The President and his cronies’ remind us of unscrupulous people indulging in blood-chilling acts for their selfish gains. Vijayan endeavours to unfold the impact of power politics on human civilization by means of unique fictional strategies. The subtle experiments with fictional form, lend an additional dimension to the intellectually stimulating novel. The central paradox between theme and form arises when a totally historical problem gets dramatized through a completely ahistorical method. He makes a radical departure from the traditional narratology and introduces an altogether new package of demystifying fictional strategies.

Vijayan directs his artistic energies to make a harangue on a sinful humanity obsessed with a hysterical passion for war and total destruction. He strategically manipulates the demystifying techniques to emphasize the fact that politics has degraded into a crass device for exploitation and domination. He marshals the linguistic repertoire and employs the semantic potential of the colonizer’s language; perfecting it into a powerful weapon with which he could assail the formidable fort of corruption, nepotism
and sycophancy that characterized the post-Independence India. The quintessential modernist in Vijayan makes a scathing comment on the Indian political skulduggery in *The Saga* by making a bold mixture of sexuality and politics in his own inimitable style. It is definitely a novel of protest, a predetermined offensive about the whole concept of the state and war. It becomes a representative Indian English novel which has employed unconventional fictional strategies for unravelling the postcolonial predicament of the Third World countries.