

An Analysis of O. V. Vijayan's *The Infinity of Grace* as a Quest Narrative

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Preface

This project attempts a study of the spiritual journey undergone by a journalist from Palakkad in Kerala, as depicted in O.V. Vijayan's *Gurusagaram* published in the year 1991 in Malayalam. The same was translated to English as *The Infinity of Grace* by the author himself and a co-author named Dr. Remesh Menon

This project comprises three chapters. The first chapter deals with Spirituality and the significance of spiritual journey in the Indian context. The second chapter depicts the journey towards spirituality of the protagonist Kunjunni and the people associated with him. The third and final chapter is the conclusion.

Chapter One

Introduction

India has a great narrative tradition. Our epics, The Ramayana, Mahabharatha, the Vedas and Upanishads, Panchathantra stories and many others reflect the uniqueness of Indian narratives. The earlier writers through their works reflected the Indian culture, tradition, social values and also the Indian history. They used lived experiences and the modern writers give emphasis to Indian experience of the modern predicaments. The first book written by an Indian in English was by Dean Mahomet in 1759 and it is named the *Travels of Dean Mohomet*. The literary works in English by Michael Madhusudhanan Dutt, R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao; poets like Nissim Ezekiel, Kamala Das and Geive Patel were profoundly influenced by Movements like Surrealism, Existentialism, Absurdism and Symbolism.

Many of the nationalist leaders argued that English is an alien enemy language and its use would bring the humiliating colonial past, so they insisted that Indians should not write in English. But the fact is that India being a Multi cultured and Multilingual nation, like all other languages, English have also become a part of the Indian civil society. Indian literature represents the essence of Indian reality by linking experience and observations together. Indian English Literature refers to the body of work by Indian writers, who wrote in English language. It is a result of the commercial, cultural and literary encounter between India and Briton. The root of this could be traced from the attempts of British and other European cultures to understand and interpret India.

The widespread use of English in India is the intensive work of Missionaries of Christianity through the mode of Education.

Indian novels give a substantial contribution to world literature. Indian writing in English in the present-day scenario enjoys equal status with the literature of the other countries. Our writers gained extraordinary confidence in tackling new themes, experimenting with new techniques and handling the themes in an effective manner. Besides, the legendary writers like Rabindranath Tagore and R.K. Narayan, the later novelists like Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Nayantara Sehgal, Shobha De, Salman Rushdie, Kamala Markandaya, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor have made their mark in the literary sphere.

In India, spirituality and religion are part of people's everyday life. Personal devotional belief, rituals and temple worship, have created the most amazing architecture. India is known for its rich past and cultural heritage. Thus, there is great importance of spiritualism in Indian life. The Indians prefer spiritual pursuits to other pursuits of human life; Artha and Kama, which are much subordinate to it. As the same leads them to attain moksh; a state of existence of a Jeevanamukta or a liberated soul.

Spiritual values in the creation of meaning included building a source of energy, development and hope linked to mutual giving and taking, helping and being helped. Having the energy and strength to struggle helped the suffering patient to maintain her/his dignity as a human being.

Indian philosophical view, it is in achieving perfection through three goals of life: Artha (prosperity), Kāma (desire) and Dharma (righteous living) that the fourth and the ultimate goal of life, Moksha can be attained.

Spirituality involves the recognition of a feeling or sense or belief that there is something greater than myself, something more to being human than sensory experience, and that the greater whole of which we are part is cosmic or divine in nature.

Some have argued that religiosity and religious-based spirituality could promote unethical behavior. Discrimination against another person who does not share one's belief system is an instance. It might even flow into hiring practices and how one treats another colleague at work. So, spirituality can be accepted as a determinant of ethical decision-making. If there is a quest for more ethical decisions and action, a more inclusive, holistic and peaceful state of consciousness leading to a spiritual self is to be developed.

Healthy spirituality gives a sense of peace, wholeness and balance among the physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspects of our lives. However, for most people the path to such spirituality passes through struggles and suffering, and often includes experiences that are frightening and painful. In India, spiritualism is not an obsession of the human mind, rather it is a heritage as well as a continuous tradition, writes Dr Asha Goswami. Out of the varied values of Indian culture, and those based on spiritualism have contributed a lot harnessing the spirit of the Indians throughout the ages. With the result, the spiritual-minded Indians have succeeded in maintaining their Indianness which could not have been possible otherwise. It has been also possible due to the fact that the Indian life is dominated by the temperament which is well marked with spiritualism.

Consequent upon that, the Indians have developed various thoughts of philosophy and spiritualism and gave to the world maximum number of

systems of spiritualism in the form of philosophical thoughts such as Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Yoga and Vedanta. The Vedas provide spiritual orientation to the Indians giving them the basics of spiritual and moral life. Hence, the Vedic Rishis should be acclaimed as the earliest spiritual masters on earth as their mantras resound with the kernel of spiritualism, and the Indian nation as the cradle of spiritualism. In India, spiritualism is not an obsession of the human mind; rather, it is a heritage as well as a continuous tradition.

For, right from the Vedic times, India has enjoyed a rich spiritual tradition. The Indian scriptures also throughout covering a gamut of every human emotion and aspiration have made a sublime contribution to Indian spiritualism. Due to which, India has always attained a reverent place in the world. The evolution of Indian spiritualism can be traced back to the Vedic age, which was spiritually coded and the same spirit was further nurtured by great spiritual thinkers like Yajnavalkya, Maitereyi, Gargi and Nachiketas. Thus, in this form, the Indian spiritualism is termed as a form of philosophy, Darshana or sight, and the Upanishads be held as proper sources of Indian spiritualism. As such, these tenets representing the high Himalayas of Indian spiritualism, determine the height of the country's wisdom. As to the question what is spiritualism, the answer would be it is the inner quest; a pathway for reaching the higher truth in life; a composite thinking for enlightening the realities of life, for considering challenges of life, human values and their evaluation.

However, under the purview of spiritualism are also included queries regarding the nature of God, about the creation of the world; essential values of a human being and his ethics. The last constituent of spiritualism is ethics

reflecting the fine side of Indian culture, which emphasises unity in diversity, and treating the entire universe as pervaded by one Almighty Brahman.

In the terminology of the *Bhagavad Gita*, it is called Buddhiyoga or the Samatvarupayoga. Some treat spiritualism as identical with religion, religious cults and practices. Spiritualism is also considered as an experimental aspect of religion and not merely a ritual or theological stream. Basically, spiritualism differs from religion. Religion affirms a faith or belief about God's supremacy over the beings and the matter, and also enjoins man's faith in the rituals and cultic practices; whereas, spiritualism exhorts his faith in the collective reality of the world, and imparts knowledge of the oneness of God with the whole world. Hence, spiritualism should be treated as a theoretical approach to truth; and religion as the practical approach to the same goal. As spiritualism also deals with some religious practices, that way according to some, even the Fine Arts- music, dance and painting are also part of spiritualism, since they also represent the experimental aspect of the religious spirit.

Spiritualism is also defined as the science of soul or Adhyaatmaavidya the higher knowledge which helps man to rise above the worldly agonies; knowing which everything else of the world is known. It is also believed that a person bereft of spiritual knowledge can never bring any worldly activity to success. Thus, there is great importance of spiritualism in Indian life.

In India, spiritual wisdom, which has gained an upper hand over material prosperity, teaches practicing such attitudes that man is divine by nature.

Since the Vedas extol him as the offspring of divine - Amratasya putra, the divine resides in every being, high or low, big or small. Every human

being carries within him divine potentiality.

Spiritualism in India is a complete philosophy of human life, the correct way of living and right way of thinking. A spiritual man is one who is detached from the dual effects of karma (success or failure); who is devoid of self-interest, egoism and sees God everywhere, permeated in all the beings; who keeps himself in continuous communication with God, and hence is messenger of God and the benefactor of mankind.

Spiritualism, a philosophy of values, if adapted at large by people, would usher in civilisation that is; socially just (Satyam), emotionally integral (Shivam), and aesthetically beautiful (Sundaram). No wonder, if the age-long spiritual formula of India claiming creation is full, so is the creator. The individual is full equally, the absolute is full and thus it turns out as the highest watermark of man's spiritual speculations about the supreme power.

The history of India would remain enigmatic, particularly, the remarkable phenomenon of the continuity of Indian culture through the millennia would remain a mystery if we do not take into account the role that spirituality has played not only in determining the direction of other philosophical and cultural efforts, but also in replenishing the springs of creativity at every crucial hour in the long and often weary journey. It is true that spirituality has played a role in every civilization and that no culture can claim a monopoly for spirituality. And yet, it can safely be affirmed that the unique greatness and continuity of Indian culture can be traced to her unparalleled experimentation, discovery and achievement in the vast field of spirituality.

Indian culture has recognized spirituality not only as the supreme

occupation of man but also as his all-integrating occupation. Similarly, the entire spectrum of Indian culture, its religion, ethics, philosophy, literature, art, architecture, dance, music, and even its polity and socio-economic organization-all these have been constantly influenced and moulded by the inspiring force of a multi-sided spirituality.

The distinctive character of Indian spirituality is its conscious and deliberate insistence on direct experience. It affirms that deep within the heart and high above the mind there is accessible to our consciousness, a realm of truth, power and ecstasy that we can, by methodised effort of Yoga, realize in direct experience, hold permanently, and express in varying degrees through our instruments of the mind, life and body.

Yoga is a comprehensive system of concentration, passive and dynamic, leading to living contact, union and identity with realities or reality underlying the universe, with appropriate consequences in our nature and action, individual and cosmic. In recent times, Yoga is often misrepresented to be identical with Hathayoga, a system of physical and subtle exercises, which is only a specialisation, and a dispensable one, of the real comprehensive system.

The entire development of religion in India has introduced in the body of religion the recognition that direct experience of the spirit is far superior to dogma, belief and ritualism, and that dogmatic religion can and must ultimately be surpassed by experiential spirituality. Consequently, the history of Indian spirituality and religion shows a remarkable spirit of research, of an increasing subtlety, plasticity, sounding of depths, extension of seeking. There have been systems of specialization and also conflicting claims and counter-

claims, but the supervening tendency has been to combine, assimilate, harmonize and synthesize. In the past, there have been at least four great stages of synthesis, represented by the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gita, and the Tantra. And, in modern times, we are passing through the fifth stage, represented by a new synthesis, which is in the making.

It is impossible to describe Indian spirituality and religion by any exclusive label. Even in its advanced forms, it cannot be described as monotheism or monism or pantheism or nihilism or transcendentalism, although each one of these is present in it in some subtle or pronounced way. Even the spiritual truths behind the primitive forms such as those of animism, spiritism, fetishism and totemism have been allowed to play a role in its complex totality, although their external forms have been discouraged and are not valid or applicable to those who lead an inner mental and spiritual life. It is this complexity that bewilders the foreign student when he tries to define Indian spirituality and religion in terms and under criteria that are not born of the Indian experiment. But things become easier once it is grasped that the fundamental point of reference is not the outward form of a given belief and practice but the spirit behind and the justifying spiritual experience.

Indian scriptures and records abound with the statements and descriptions of varieties of spiritual experience. But there are three central spiritual experiences in terms of which all these varieties can be readily understood. The first is that of the individual in a state of complete detachment from all movement, dynamism, activity. In this state, the individual finds himself in an utter passivity and inactivity, but also of a complete luminosity and discrimination between himself as an eternal witness (*sakshin*), free from

the sense of ego and the activities of Nature in the universe. This experience is the basis of the Sankhya philosophy.

The second experience is that of the eternal and infinite reality above space and time in which all that we call individuality and universality are completely silenced and sublimed, and the experiencing consciousness discovers itself to be that reality (*tat sat*), one, without the second (Ekamevaadvitiam), entirely silent and immobile, the pure being, so ineffable that even to describe it as being is to violate its sheer transcendence. This experience has given rise to the philosophy of Adwaita (Non-Dualism), in particular that of Illusionistic Adwaita, which proclaims that only the brahmin is real, and the world is an illusion.

The third experience is the one in which the individual and cosmos are found to be free expressions of the supreme reality (Purushottama) which, although above space and time, determines space and time and all activities through various intermediary expressions of itself. This experience and some variations of it form the basis of various theistic philosophies of India. These theistic philosophies are those of qualified monism (Vishishtadwaita philosophy), integral monism (Poornadwaita philosophy) and dualistic philosophy (Dwaita philosophy). These experiences, when permanently established give liberation (moksha), and it is this which has in India been regarded as a high consummation of man's destiny upon earth. But, more importantly, the ancient ideal as given by the Vedas, Upanishads and the Gita, was to achieve an integrality of all these experiences, to combine utter Silence with effective Action, to be liberated from ego and yet at the same time to be a free-living centre (Jivanmukta) of luminous action that would aid

the progressive unity of mankind (Lokasangraha).

This integral ideal was to be realized in its integrality not only by a few exceptional individuals but also by increasing number of people, groups, collectivities, even on massive scale, through a long and conscious preparation and training. This great and difficult task has passed through two main stages, while a third has taken initial steps and promises to be the destiny of India's future.

The early Vedic was the first stage; the Purano-Tantric was the second stage. In the former, an attempt was made to approach the mass-mind through the physical mind of man and make it familiar. The date of the Vedic age is controversial, but according to a conservative hypothesis, its origins are dated back to 2000 B.C. The Purano-Tantric age can be regarded to have extended from 600 B.C. to 800 B.C.

With the Godhead in the universe through the symbol of the sacrificial fire (Yajna). In the latter, deeper approaches of man's inner mind and life to the Divine in the universe were attempted through the development of great philosophies, many-sided epic literature (particularly Ramayana and Mahabharata), systems of Puranas and Tantras, and even art and science. An enlarged secular turn was given, and this was balanced by deepening of the intensities of psycho-religious experience. New tendencies and mystic forms and disciplines attempted to seize not only the soul and the intellect, but the emotions, the senses, the vital and the aesthetic nature of man and turn them into stuff of the spiritual life. But this great effort and achievement which covered all the time between the Vedic age and the decline of Buddhism, was still not the last possibility of the spiritual and religious evolution open to

Indian culture. A further development through the third stage was attempted, but it was arrested as it synchronized with a period of general exhaustion, and, in the eighteenth century, which can be regarded as the period of dense obscurity, the work that had begun seemed almost lost.

The aim of this third stage was to approach not only the inner mind and life of man, but to approach his whole mental, psychical and physical living, his totality of being and activity, and to turn it into a first beginning of at least a generalized spiritual life. Philosophers and saints such as Sri Chaitanya (1485-1533) and others of the 15th and 16th centuries belong to this stage.

There are particularly, the six systems, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Poorva Mimamsa and Uttara Mimamsa and their numerous interpretations and commentaries. These 6 systems are Vedic systems or philosophy. There developed also Buddhism and Jainism and their numerous philosophical systems which did not accept the authority of the Vedas. Similarly, charvaka philosophy, the philosophy of materialism, which also developed during this period, was entirely anti-Vedic. There are 18 Puranas. Each Purana has five parts:

- 1) Creation of the world,
- 2) Destruction and recreation of the world,
- 3) Reigns and periods of Manus,
- 4) Geneology and Gods, and
- 5) Dynasties of solar and lunar kings.

While Puranas are Vedic, Tantras are Vedic only indirectly, and they are called Agamas. We do not know the exact number of Agamas, but it is estimated that there are 64 of them.

Tantras are devoted to the methods of utilising the dynamic energies of life in order to open up the doors of the Divine Power for a triumphant mastery over the world-activities was also during this period a remarkable attempt to combine Vedanta and Islam or of establishing lasting communal harmony. In particular, the work of Guru Nanak (1469-1538) and of the subsequent Sikh Khalsa movement was astonishingly original and novel. The specialty of this third stage was an intense outburst and fresh creativity, not a revivalism, but based upon a deep assimilation of the past, a new effort and a new formulation. But the time was not yet ripe, and India had to pass through a period of an eclipse, almost total and disastrous.

Happily, the 19th century witnessed a great awakening and a new spiritual impulse pregnant with a power to fulfill the mission of the work that had started in the third stage. Great and flaming pioneers appeared, Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1836-1886) and Swami Vivekananda (1862-1902) to name just two of them and through their work the entire country was electrified not only spiritually but even socially and politically. India became reascent, and there began to develop a capacity for a new synthesis, not only of the threads of Indian culture but also of world culture. Nationalism came to be proclaimed as the new spirituality, and this nationalism was right from the beginning international in its spirit and sweep. Not an escape from life, but acceptance of life, integration of life and transformation of life by an integral spirituality. This ideal came to be felt and expressed in various ways and through various activities of the reascent India.

Gradually, it has become evident that this new movement has to do not merely with India but fundamentally with the essential problem of Man and

his future evolution. It is becoming clearer that Man is a field of interaction between Matter and Spirit; that this interaction has reached a point of criticality, and that this criticality demands a new knowledge, an integral knowledge of Matter and Spirit.

This is the task which Free India has begun to perceive as central to her real fulfillment. It is significant that we have in India a most comprehensive statement of this task in the luminous writings of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), who has been described by Romain Rolland as “the completest synthesis of the East and the West” (*Ali Satsang Communications*). Sri Aurobindo has declared that man is a transitional being, that his destiny is to be the spiritual superman, and that the present hour is the hour of his evolutionary crisis in which his entire life, his very body, must undergo an integral spiritual transformation, not indeed by an escape into some far-off heavens, but here, in this physical earth itself, by a victorious union of spirit and matter. This, he has declared, is not an issue of an individual but of collectivity, not an issue of Indian spirituality and culture, but of the entire world's upward aspiration and fulfillment.

It must be noted that in this task of universal importance, India, the East, has received from the West a collaboration of incalculable magnitude and value. For it is from France that the Mother Madame Mira Alfassa (1878-1973) came to Sri Aurobindo and made India her permanent home in order to collaborate with him and to fulfill this task of integral transformation. The work that she has done is not yet sufficiently known, but we find in her the highest heights that Indian spirituality has reached, and we feel that the near future will show the revolutionary effects of her work for humanity, for its

lasting unity and harmony, and for its transmutation into super-humanity.

Indeed, the renascent spirituality of India opens up new vistas of experience and research. It transcends the boundaries of dogma and exclusive claims of Truth. It is not opposed to any religion, but points to a way to a synthesis and integrality of spiritual experience in the light of which the truth behind each religion is understood and permitted to grow to its fullness and to meet in harmony with all the others. The important thing is to turn the human mentality, vitality and physicality to the realm of spiritual experiences and to transform the human mould by an ever-widening light of the Spirit. In this perception, even skepticism, agnosticism and atheism have a meaning and value as an indispensable stage for a certain line of mental development. But here too the dogma and denial behind the doubt and atheism have to be surpassed, and whether by rigorous methods of philosophy and science or by a deeper plunge into deeper experiences, a way can be opened to transcend the dogmatic refusal to seek and to discover. It is in this direction that we seem to reach a point where a fruitful synthesis of science and spirituality can be effectuated.

The renascent spirituality is all-embracing and is deeply committed to undertake all activities of human life and to transform them. It has begun to influence literature and art and music, education and physical culture. Even social and economic and political fields are being taken up, not indeed to cast them once again into some rigid formula of a religious dogma but rather to liberate them and to inundate them with a spiritual light and motive and to restructure them by a gradual evolution so that they may breathe widely and freely the progressive harmonies of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Thus,

is it that the old forms of society, casteism and all the rest, are being broken and there is a fresh search for new forms, plastic and flexible, to permit the highest possible perfectibility of the individual and the collectivity to blossom spontaneously and perpetually. In the ultimate analysis, it is through such a vast and potent change in the social milieu that the total man can be uplifted to his next stage of evolutionary mutation.

It is in this context that India views the great social-political upheavals of the recent times as a sign and a promise of the coming of the New World. It views modern man's concern for the collective life as something unprecedented. The experiments that have been heralded by the great revolutions have contributed to the re-making of the collective life of Man. It is felt that these experiments will continue to grow until the highest and the deepest in the individual and the collectivity are brought forward in the task of the new transformation. It is in this direction that the new spirituality seems to be moving. It is in this direction that the new philosophies are likely to flower. India has already taken this new direction and it hopes to place the fruits of this new endeavor at the service of mankind for its highest welfare.

The term spirituality has been used in a great variety of ways, both religious and secular. When associated with religion, the term is practically inextricable from God and the myriad concepts connected with a belief in a higher power that guides, directs, and rewards human beings for leading a life in accordance with religious principles. From a secular perspective, the term is aligned with the workings of the mind, the senses, and the perceived material and, in some cases, immaterial world. For instance, the American transcendentalists used spirituality as a special mark of those superior intellects able to perceive a

reality beyond the material world, a world of the spirit which is not necessarily dependent on the physical senses to interpret.

Evangelical Christianity reserves the term to describe tender religious emotions, while, in contrast, the French have appropriated it as the name for the finer perceptions of life, which implies a firm link with the material evidence of reality around us. Various derivatives of the term include spiritual, spiritualism, spiritualist, spiritism, and the spirit, all words implying slightly more nuanced interpretations of the disconnect between the perceived reality of the physical world and a conceived reality of a realm beyond it, one that is not relative to, nor dependent on, the senses reacting in conjunction with the mind. If all of this sounds rather mysterious, it is primarily because the conceptual nature of the term has its etymological roots in the Hebrew word *Ruach*, which refers to the ethereal or elusive nature of spirit, breath, or wind, as that which gives life and animation to something. Further, the term gets its modern implications from the Latin definition of immaterial, which consists of an essence that cannot be seen, contained, or even proven in a validated manner (i.e., scientifically). Thus, spirituality is a quality that is associated with persons or things but is paradoxically distinct from material or worldly concerns.

Indeed, as the Scottish evangelist Henry Drummond stated in *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883), “No spiritual man ever claims that his spirituality is his own” (89). This distinction between the material or natural world and the immaterial or spiritual world is central to the history of the debate regarding the nature of spirituality. By the 19th century, this debate assumed even greater proportions after Charles Darwin published *On the*

Origin of Species, which posited man's descent from apes through a process of natural selection, thereby calling into doubt the validity of man's creation by God as depicted in the book of Genesis in the Bible. The struggle to define spirituality in terms that account for this ongoing debate has continued ever since. However, what can be stated with assurance is that the concept of spirituality relates directly to the conception of faith and arises from a creative and dynamic synthesis of faith and life. Broadly interpreted, fiction is about the human condition, and spirituality is that sense of ourselves as linked in some relational way to the larger concept of the universe.

As such, this theme permeates nearly all fiction in ways that can be either subtle or dramatically overt, depending on how we as readers react to the conceptual, and frequently nonmaterial, clues provided by the author. Concepts such as the divine (or divinity), the soul or spirit, the mystical, transcendence, suffering, love, ecstasy, and even human egotism are linked in multiple complex ways to our understanding and practice of spirituality. Among the Christians (especially the mystics) and the Sufis, the main concern of spiritual life is with the human mind and its divine essence. As Saint Catherine of Genoa, a renowned Christian mystic, wrote, "My Me is God, nor do I recognize any other Me" (Huxley 11). Within a religious context, there are myriad guides to understanding what constitutes the spiritual since religious history provides us with textual references that document, historicize, and instruct the individual understands of the universe and his place in it. These guides include the Bible, the Torah, the Quran, and the writings of Buddha, the Hindu gods, and Confucius, to name but a few. Yet, the spiritual cannot be confined to merely the religious and textual

foundations of belief, since the spiritual also puts us in touch with that center of ourselves that is silent, mystical, and profoundly aware of the awesome beauty and power of what is clearly felt, yet beyond our control, the emotive force and energy of love; the symmetry and perfection of nature; and, not least of all, the passions and beliefs that ignite the soul. In more explicitly fictional terms, spirituality can be thematically reflected in texts through a number of literary devices that evoke specific spiritual responses from the reader.

Readers may feel transformed in their consciousness or their lives, either vicariously through the fictive experience of one or more characters or more directly through a cathartic (energizing or healing) response to the work as a whole. Readers might also experience and know God through the creation of a fictional world. These works serve as allegories and are frequently imitative of previous works.

Some works describe quest narratives that take one or more characters through the stages of a spiritual journey toward greater understanding of themselves; of the world around them; and of the nature of faith, hope, and love. Works that describe spirituality on this level may involve actual or imaginative travel to realms of otherworldliness, flights of fancy, or human physical/mental transport that defies the limitations of time and place. Other works infuse mystical feeling into their settings and natural worlds, such that a divine influence or presence is rendered as an aesthetic sensibility (an artistic, visual representation of beauty). Poetry, in particular, abounds with examples of natural imagery that is imbued with an ethereal quality reminiscent of spiritual perfection.

Writers might also include symbols and motifs that emphasize aspects

of faith particular to one or more sets of religious beliefs and values (the theology that can give rise to different spiritualities). Such references are usually universally identifiable by virtue of their iconic significance or historical prevalence, and they can include both occult as well as monotheistic images, such as angels, the all-seeing eye, butterflies, the cross of Christianity, the Celtic cross, the dove, the circle (or ring), the evil eye, the hexagram (or six-pointed star), the serpent or snake, the trident, and the triangle (or pyramid). For example, works such as Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* address the theme of spirituality within an exclusively religious or ecclesiastical context, since each work is essentially an allegory or parable that posits a fictional account of the respective Catholic, Puritan, and Episcopal traditions of religious life and afterlife as described by believers.

Indeed, the function of parable in religion is to exhibit form by form. Thus, natural phenomena serve mainly an illustrative function in religion. Accordingly, within each of these works, the path to spiritual awareness is well documented and the lines between good and evil are clearly drawn; the individual's experience in life and on earth is characterized as a precursor to the progress of their soul after death. Similarly, works such as Herman Melville's *Billy Budd, Sailor*; Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*; George Eliot's *Silas Marner*; and William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* can also be considered parables in which the individual is subjected to external, natural, and social forces characterized as both good and evil in order to illustrate the power of the spirit over the materiality and grossness of the world, albeit at a price.

Chapter Two

Transformation to Spirituality

The book *The Infinity of Grace* makes us ponder about the meaning of our existence. Is it really a meaningful position that we adorn in our family and in our society? Are we really confined to these four dimensions of existence? Is there a God who can bless us so that we can see the truth and soon? The narrative traces the journey of Kunjunni without the limits of space and time and the man becoming a teacher and a student at the same time. The protagonist in search of a Guru realizes that Guru is present in everything in the universe; in the tip of a grass and the depth of the ocean, in the vastness of the sky and the chirping of the birds. Everything teaches us something.

Many beginners who forage into Malayalam literature start reading with *Khasakinte Ithihasam* by O.V.Vijayan. *The Infinity of Grace* (*Gurusaagaram*) by Vijayan won the Sahitya Academy award. It tells the tale of Kunjunni, who is a war correspondent. He is sent to Kolkata to cover the Bangladesh war. Kunjunni's estranged wife Shivani and their daughter Kalyani are also in Kolkata, which does make him uncomfortable, but the longing to meet his daughter wins. We do meet an innumerable array of characters. By virtue of his gripping prose style, Vijayan puts forth the harsh realities of war. Spirituality, existentialism, depression, loneliness, and so on are the themes dealt with so deftly in this work. The best thing about this novel is the way story develops. It is beyond the current place, people and time. The work gives a great treat to our thoughts.

The book makes us think deep on the question of emotional and

intellectual evolution of ourselves through the experiences, thoughts and portrayal of the protagonist. Many people don't personally subscribe to the political leanings of the author nor the book but they recommend this to all voracious readers.

Magic realism is often associated with Latin American literature. It is defined as a literary or artistic genre in which realistic narrative and naturalistic technique are combined with surreal elements of dream or fantasy. It is also referred to as Fabulism, owing to the usage of fables, myths and allegories. The proponents of this fantastic style of writing like Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges and Salman Rushdie will remain all-time favourites. A name that is often left out or even unknown to the lovers of magic realism is Ottupulackal Velukutty Vijayan or O.V.Vijayan.

O.V.Vijayan was born in Palakkad, Kerala in 1930. A sickly child, who mostly stayed indoors in the early years of his life, he started formal schooling at the age of 12 and eventually went on to graduate from Victoria College and obtain a Master's Degree in English Literature from Presidency College, Madras.

Kerala is a land filled with folklore, myth and dark humour. As a child Vijayan grew up listening to these stories and it had an effect on his writing style and form. The book that brought him wide recognition was definitely *Khasakinte Ithihasam* or *The Legends of Khasak*, which was published in 1969, just two years after Gabriel Garcia Marquez's seminal work - *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. It took Vijayan 12 years of writing and rewriting to give the book its final shape.

The novels of Marquez and Vijayan have certain similarities. Both are

set in fictional towns (Macondo in the case of Marquez and Khasak in Vijayan's case) where occult and supernatural practices are part of the people's daily lives. These are worlds where magic and folklore merge seamlessly with reality or the very perception of it. *The Legends of Khasak* was a landmark book. So popular was the book that it irrevocably split Kerala literature into pre-Khasak and post-Khasak phases.

It was *Gurusagaram (The Infinity of Grace)*, a novel which is a spiritual odyssey into the human psyche that won him the Sahitya Academy Award and is probably his most accessible novel in the realm of spiritual quest.

A prolific cartoonist as well, O.V.Vijayan worked for publications such as *The Hindu* and *Statesman* to name a few. His works also appeared in *The New York Times* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*. His searing commentary on Indira Gandhi's return to power in the 1980s remains a high point of cartooning in India.

O.V.Vijayan was a master writer, cartoonist, political commentator and a complex human being. With a blend of myth, dark humour, eroticism and fantasy, he created a uniquely Indian brand of magic realism. He is an Indian author who definitely needs to be read by more people.

Vijayan showed to the world through *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* something that was truly magical. It was like the Bhagavat Gita to many youngsters. In fact, the most romantic name in our lexicon as college students was Ravi, the protagonist of the novel.

It took twelve years of writing and rewriting for Vijayan to finally serialise *Khasakkinte Ithihasam* in Mathrubhumi in 1969. Vijayan needed only

that one book, *Khasakinte Ithihasam*, to make him a legend in Malayalam literature. It was read and re-read by people, printed and reprinted several times, it has sold the maximum number of copies ever, and has been discussed at many forums. And still, the reader finds a new dimension to it every time he/she reads it.

By the time Vijayan wrote *Gurusagaram* (*The Infinity of Grace* in English) in 1987, he was an old man devoid of any existential anguish, a man who was at peace with himself and the world. His ardent admirers in Kerala, especially the so called intellectuals were disappointed to read about spirituality in a book by O. V. Vijayan.

These people never grew up or let Vijayan grow as a person. But the book loving fraternity considers *The Infinity of Grace* (*Gurusagaram*) as one of the most elevating books read in their life. It was written from the perspective of a man who had seen life's agonies and had finally reached a stage where the only thing that mattered to him was peace.

If *Khasakinte Ithihasam* disturbed, *The Infinity of Grace* (*Gurusagaram*) opened a world of tranquility. Perhaps, a generation would have grown up from a confused teenager to a calm adult by the time they read *Gurusagaram*.

O.V. Vijayan began his writing and intellectual career as a communist and materialist. It has been rightly said that the depth of the inner being of an author gets reflected in his literary expressions. Mutation occurring in consciousness during the intellectual life an author can have a strong bearing on his works. But gradually, Vijayan evolved into a spiritualist. It was an evolutionary process from a youthful existential angst to a realization of the

organic oneness of the cosmos.

The novel *The Infinity of Grace (Gurusagaram)* marked the peak of his spiritual transformation. It underscores the inspiring nature of human existence. The experiences its protagonist undergoes are touchingly portrayed. Eventually, he finds the answer to his existential problems. Towards the end of his life, he finds comfort in the ultimate wisdom of which the seers of yore spoke. In a sense, the search of Ravi from *The Legends of Khasak* bears fruit in Kunjunni, who now stands prayerfully before the cosmic nature cleansed of his karmic stains. The author interlaces the whole story by handpicking references and imagery from history, politics and mythology. The spiritual seeds in *Khasak* have germinated, sprouted and grown into a sturdy, all - encircling tree.

The central character in the novel *The Infinity of Grace* is a Delhi-based journalist from Kerala. One of his assignments was to report the Bangladesh war of liberation. Pained and exhausted by life, he looks for meaning in life, which compels him to look for a spiritual guru. During his search, he comes across many persons and goes through many excruciating experiences. The novel whose prologue ends with an *Upanishad* mantra mainly moves through flashbacks. Kunjunni's musings in the prologue put the theme of the novel in a nut shell. "All things grow lucid, and shiny in the grace of the Guru which wells everywhere" (328).

The novel begins with Kunjunni coming back to his ancestral home. Towards the end of his life, he gets to know the guru's presence in his life. His first guru is his father, clutching whose hands he used to roam about his village when he was a kid. Even then, he was exposed to the intricacies of the

ineluctable karmic bondage and its mysteries.

The author, through the medium of the protagonist, portrays closely knitted incidents after incidents in the shape stories related to spirituality and tailored it in the appropriate places in the novel without hindering the flow of the story. His father said, “Unni (Kunjunni), walk without looking back” (329).

Twenty-five years ago, Kunjunni was a boy of eleven. Holding father’s hand, he walked along the red mud track, through the dusk he shared with his father, his GURU.

FATHER: Does Unni know what will happen if he turns to look back?

KUNJUNNI: I’ll trip and fall

FATHER: And what will happen if you fall

KUNJUNNI: Our relatives will laugh, isn’t that what you’ve told me? (329)

How could he forget what his father said? He hadn’t forgotten a single thing about his grandfather he had never seen, about his grandfather’s father, and further back, all the generations of men who came to receive their progeny’s offerings by sacred lamp light, beneath the old banyan tree. When he sat alone, walked alone, plucked flowers, when he lay on his face, watching the milling schools of sword fish in the river wandering, he always felt the love of his ancestors enfold him, he heard them speak to him with his father’s words, but he wanted to turn back and look, the cartman was lashing the buffalo with his whip.

“Look father,he is whipping the buffalo again” said Kunjunni (329). There are two buffaloes, aren’t there, Unni? But it is only the yoked on the right which receives all the blows. Because the whip is in the cartman’s right hand,” said his father (329). Kunjunni said, “Will it be the same buffalo on the right ride every day? It will, it comes to be yoked there to receive retribution for its KARMA” (329).

This search continues until he meets his formal guru, Swami Nirmalananda who was his childhood friend and whose insights into the Nachiketas episode from the *Upanishad* underpin the oceanic grace of Guru, after which the novel is titled. “The quest and arrivals are both delusions of pilgrims’ journeys; between them, the union of Guru and shishya was the perennial truth” (354).

Nirmalanda, the childhood friend of Kunjunni was an Army Major while the incidents which leads him for transformation as a Spiritual GURU was also inevitable. The untimely death of his wife and daughter in an aero plane accident made him half sensitive. His un-expected meeting with Tadrupananda, a saint, fully attracted him and his transformation to spirituality happened.

And O V Vijayan beautifully sketched Colonel Balakrishnan’s (then Major Balakrishnan) recollection of that incident as follows:

That day, in the battle of Chushul, in the hour before dawn, as Major Balakrishnan walked up the hill slope towards the line of fire, it was Sepoy Beliram walked beside him...

Apart from these rare occasions, men staggered along the great pathways of Karma, never touching that sorrow of that

tapasya. They donned the motley fatigues of the soldier and climbed dark hill slopes towards the line of fire. And, gouging out rocks and earth with unseen, violet hands, tinting the darkness with hues of flame, shells exploded. Major Balakrishnan knelt over the fallen Beliram. The gauze pad he held to the stricken Sepoy's mortal wound could not stop the blood which spouted from the wound. The Major did not know where the rest of his men had scattered, He strove to receive the wisdom of the tapswin trees and the crimson blood from the soldier's spine. In the soft sounds of the receding battle that subtle wisdom seeped in to his being. Now the leaves of the trees were all aquiver. All round him soldiers' bodies were undone into their elements, they dissolved in to the mist and sunlight and re-entered the earth, and they rose again, through root and sap, and flowered on verdant branches. Everywhere, the pervasive shade of the canopy, the muffled sounds of fireworks from the old temple, echoing out unreachable childhood. (337)

Olga a Czech media professional mauled by her memories of her nation being taken over and crushed by the Russian Army is another Guru presence in his life. Many more persons on his journey become his guru. Even Lalitha whom he seduced becomes his Guru. It is ultimately his assumed daughter, Kalyani that becomes his final guru who teaches him the ultimate oneness of human existence and the futility of trying to decipher life by millions of binaries and contradictions that tear up human life. Kunjunni's

estrangement with his wife, Sivani, is a chemical agent which makes his life more absorbed. Their daughter Kalyani whom he loved so much was the bridge between their shaky lives. But Kalyani dies of blood cancer. It is only when Kalyani dies of the mortal disease that his wife Sivani reveals the life-shattering secret that Kalyani was not the daughter of Kunjunni.

Kunjunni is stunned, and anguished. But, in an inner dialogue he has with Kalyani, she reminds him of the thousands of births during which they were father and daughter. It is our petty egos that prevent us from perceiving the wholeness and interconnectedness of existence.

The question of duality is an intricate issue in philosophy including the ultimate duality of the creator and the created. In a feverish dream vision, Kunjunni asks, “Dear God, he grieved, why do you hunt yourself as the journey and the journeyer? The voice of the Guru spoke again “Open your eyes” (442).

Kunjunni was dreaming that he was the Garuda, the sacred vehicle of the Lord Vishnu. Vishnu and the ocean on which he was lying and Kunjunni’s identification with Garuda were all now gone.

He has an advaitic vision which becomes rooted in the aftermath of the death of his dear daughter towards the end of the novel. He was a pulsating luminance, at once an infinitesimal seed and the infinite Universe, as he flew through the spaces of the Brahman.

The author here and elsewhere uses beautiful parallelisms with materials drawn from Indian mythology. In the basic, life experiences, we find it hard to go beyond dualities. It is because life is so cold and hard. Even the scientific insights of modern Physics can have similar ironies here. The

ordinary people who live in a fierce and hard world of endless binaries cannot accept the claim of the illusionary nature of solidity of matter.

The Vedantic quest of Kunjunni is fulfilled by the insights he gets through his painful experiences. The novelist beautifully recreates the Vyasa-Suka episode in the novel in his enchanting language. The writer evokes the story of Suka, the son of Vyasa, who attained Samadhi in the fire of knowledge. In quest of ultimate wisdom, Suka came to King Janaka's palace. Seeing the lustrous celibate, Janaka was filled with love. The king went to Vyasa and said, "If your son gains this last wisdom, he will leave his body". Vyasa said, "I have no right to stop my son" (453).

Janaka imparted the final wisdom to Suka. Suka blazed in its ecstasy, he abandoned the mortal coil, and was one with the primordial elements. Great Vyasa, the sage, was a grieving father again. A father's simple, profound sorrow returned to him. He wandered through the elements in search of Suka (453).

Kunjunni is troubled by his feeling of estrangement with his daughter even for a moment due to false sense of pride. When he confides to his childhood friend Colonel Balakrishnan, now Swami Nirmalananda, the confessional statement made by Sivani becomes an ocean of compassion and motherhood with sorrowing waves. Kunjunni asks Balakrishnan to initiate him into sanyasa. He can now outdo his ego and realize the spiritual significance of his inner dialogue with Kalyani. Here are the dialogues, Balakrishnan asks Kunjunni:

BALAKRISHNA: Unni, are you not seeking a Guru?

KUNJUNNI: I am.

BALAKRISHNAN: Look, here is your Guru (453)

Here the Guru becomes not just a human person, but the graceful manifold presence of Brahman. In a disembodied voice, Kalyani asks:

KALYANI: Father, are you grieving?

FATHER: I am, my daughter.

KALYANI: Didn't your Parikshit teach you about the eternity of life?

FATHER: He did.

KALYANI: Was't it only in this life that I was not born your child? Look back. Don't you remember? I was Suka and you were Vyasa, father". (453)

Here Kalyani refers to Kunjuni's pet cat who is dead and named after the puranic king Parikshit whose mortal fear of delaying death was lessened by listening to the Bhagavata Purana.

Now Kunjuni is enlightened by the vision of organic oneness of the cosmic existence. He realizes that separation from it, due to human ego, causes human sufferings. It is, thus, the advaitic philosophy that is underscored in the novel. The novel ends with one of the most thrillingly poetical passages in literature. It sums up the theme and subtext of the novel. Kunjuni identifies Kalyani with Suka. Suka and Kalyani become one. And Kunjuni becomes another grieving Vyasa. On his journey back, Kunjuni, disconsolate, cried out, "Suka! My son!" (453).

Cosmic nature hearkened to his cry. He heard millions of leaf-voices, rivers and mountains were full of speech. Trees and plants, crystal springs and dumb stones answered reverberantly in Kalyani's voice: "Father! Oh, my

father” (453)

The treatment of *Advaita* philosophy is done with unbelievable craftsmanship in the novel. The novel does not become preachy anywhere. On the other hand, the philosophy is woven subtly into the novel. At the end of the novel, all identities merge into a singularly unified movement, Even the dumb stone speaks in Kalyani’s voice. It is not mere intellectualization, but a transcendental vision of non-duality.

Chapter Three

Conclusion

In order to provide an insight into the views, philosophy of life and the literary acumen of the author, the narrative analysis is given below in a nutshell in the following pages.

The story has been cast in the background of the Indo-Pak War of 1971 that culminated in the birth of Bangladesh. Kunjunni, based in Delhi, was going to the war front as a press reporter. He remained separated for long from his wife, Shivani pursuing research in medicine at Calcutta and his 7-year old daughter, Kalyani.

Back in his ancestral home of Melekkad Tharavad which he had left long ago, Kunjunni reflected over the meaninglessness of life and how man remains a helpless plaything in the hands of "Fate". In the ravages of time, he had lost all his near and dear ones and was all alone in this world with only a servant, Shyam Nandan Singh who was a cook in the Dogra Regiment earlier and whom his friend, Swami Nirmalanandan had provided him. He remembered having seen as an 11-year old boy his ancestor, the buffalo crying when the driver's whip repeatedly lashed his dark exterior as he was trudging uphill carrying a heavy load along the banks of Thootha Puzha. It was by chance (or fate) that he happened to be on the same side of the driver's hand wielding his whip to receive much harsher punishment than his partner.

Kunjunni again went through Kalyani's letter urging him to come to Calcutta soon since her mother was not inclined to come down to Delhi to meet him. She had written that she longed to be with him and if only someone

would emplane her, she would hasten to join him. A few days later she again wrote to him enquiring when he would come to Calcutta. She also added that Pinaki uncle was a frequent visitor there with his dog and though he was a great doctor, she did not like him. Pressurised by his servant, he finally agreed to leave for Calcutta.

Nirmalanandan was a former Colonel in the army by name Balakrishnan and had married Prabha, the daughter of a rich Punjabi farmer, but when destiny stole her and his only daughter through a plane accident, he lost all interest in material life and turned an ascetic and built an ashram by name Mukti Dham at the picturesque vast area of land a few hours' drive from Delhi gifted by his father-in-law.

Shortly, Kunjunni left for Calcutta en route to the refugee camps at Rana Ghat, Bongav and Petrapol housing the refugees who had come from East Pakistan. On reaching Calcutta, he proceeded to the old Hotel Arathoons run by an Armenian, which Kunjunni's father used to frequent when he was serving as a Major in the army. He telephoned Shivani's house from there only to be told by the maid servant that she had left for Digha along with Kalyani and Prof. Pinaki Sen Gupta four days ago and would be back only after a few days. He wondered why she had done so despite his intimating her of his proposed visit.

From the hotel, he telephoned Niharika Didi and at her invitation visited her. She was a middle-aged proud widow and still looking attractive. He had envisioned her as an accomplished mother or as a Devi. As a student, he had visited her house many a time. She was the widow of Dr. Sanatan Mukhopadhyaya who died a few years after their marriage. Sanatan and his

father were members of Brahma Samaj and Tagore used to visit their house to discuss poetry. But Sanatan somehow fell into bad ways and had an illegitimate affair. He had connections with terrorists too and one day his body was found in a slum with gunshot injuries. Her son, Tapas Chandran also followed in the footsteps of his father as a revolutionary and was arraigned in a murder case.

Towards the beginning of 1970s, carried away by the literature of Mao, some extremist elements in Bengal had declared big farmers and landlords as their class enemy and planned to eliminate them so as to bring about revolution.

When Niharika Didi related to him the tales of her son, Kunjunni remembered how his own elder brother, Chinnettan too had taken to the revolutionary path inspired by the teachings of Stalin and Rana Dive and had met with his untimely death long ago. He used to make country bombs and secretly married a fallen scavenger woman of low caste by name Neelamma. She was infidel to him and conceived through illicit relations while he was in jail. After release from jail, Chinnettan was mysteriously murdered, but Neelamma only grew haughtier, demanded and got a share in the family property and continued her wayward life. That was what Kunjunni had learnt about revolution from his own life. He felt that Tapas Chandran was probing the meaning of revolution through books and speeches of revolutionary leaders.

After his return to Arathoons Hotel, Kunjunni chanced to meet a revolutionary who bore great hatred towards Niharika Didi, the mother of Tapas Chandran under the false impression that she had got him released from

prison using her influence. But Kunjunni informed him that Tapas had not been released till that moment and also told him that revolutionaries like him would not understand the feelings of a convict's mother and their ideological texts cannot explain what all a martyr's mother would do. When Kunjunni related to him how he had his own experience of revolution through the life of his elder brother, his guest was almost apologetic for his earlier angry outbursts.

After Shivani's return from Digha, Kunjunni again telephoned her house, only to be told that she had gone to the hospital. Finding that Shivani was deliberately avoiding him, he went to her house and took his daughter Kalyani for a walk along the bank of River Hugli. He told her that the forebears who flow through Hugli to the sea return as rain to feed their children. He added that to meet their own ancestors, they have to go to the bank of Thootha Puzha in which they swim as fish in the crystal-clear water bearing the mild heat of the Valluvanadan sun and when they surface for breath, they look for their descendants. Presently, a flock of white storks flew against the darkness of the clouds and Kunjunni told Kalyani that they were the storks of Gadadhara Swami (Paramahamsan). Kunjunni assumed that he was seeing Guru Poornima (presence of the Swami), but could not fathom the message given by the storks. Kalyani stood still before her father, her Guru.

His mind rewound to the times he strolled with his father along the slums that lay scattered around the city of Calcutta. He had seen funeral pyres burning behind the huts of the slum-dwellers for want of space elsewhere unlike the ostentatious cremation grounds at Neemtala and Kevdathala. While cow dungflakes were used to burn the corpses at the slums, at the latter places,

they were burnt on sandalwood logs. At both places, they used to chant, *Bol Hari Bol* meaning O, Lord Krishna(382). Kunjunni's father had told him that though at both these places they invoke Lord Krishna, He might perhaps answer the call from the place where cow's dung was used, the difference being one of *Bhakti* and *Vibhakti* (Piety and Knowledge) .

He left Kalyani home and returned to the hotel. After a while, he telephoned Shivani. But their conversation was spaced by long silences and was like one between strangers. To his query when they could meet, she gave an evasive reply that she had some urgent work to be finished beforehand.

Having no work at Calcutta, the next day he left for Rana Ghat some 50 miles away. In the refugee camp he saw all kinds of inconceivable human sufferings like hunger, diseases, deaths and what not! In the hospital, he saw a couple of two-year old children, a girl and a boy. The father of the boy, a Muslim had carried the Hindu girl too, whose parents had died. In the afternoon, the children became quiet, but smiled at each other. The boy extended his arm and took the girl's in his—*Pani Grahanam*(414). And hand in hand, they died peacefully.

In the marshy land of the refugee camp on the East Pakistan border, everything appeared normal beyond the arrogance of revolution. In the mist of dawn, he saw tiny lamps of fireflies getting dim, Beetles ushering in the flowers, small creatures crawling through the soil feeling the touch of Mother Earth. Presently an explosion shook the earth, but after half an hour, everything was quiet again as if nothing had happened. The fireflies retreated beneath the leaves, sun birds hovered about shoe flowers looking for honey, ants continued their trudge carrying heavy loads, and crows rose in the sky

cawing. An old bus going from Khulna to Jessore chugged along. On its flanks were written, “Let Mujib-ur-Rehman live long; Bangala Desh, our nation”. Kunjunni wondered whether it was for this that the bomb had exploded, the tiny toddlers had died hand in hand and the modesty of countless chaste women was outraged. On the night of 3rd December, 1971, Pakistan’s Air Force attacked some north Indian centres. In Calcutta, right in the midst of the festival, Indira Didi laughed on seeing those sparklers. And on the very next day, she declared war. Fireworks were sounded at many places along the border and the limbs of soldiers rose like flower pots into the air and fell back to the earth.

The Indian army marched forward crossing the soldiers of Pakistan trapped inside the cities of East Pakistan. Pakistan’s Air Force was crippled and the Indian war planes flew over East Bengal’s sky freely. Below that on the earth, nocturnal war became a spectacle like sparklers. After liberation, the war of liberation spreads somewhere else and its firearms lie submerged in marsh and explode some other day killing peace. No war of independence has culminated in permanent independence. When Kunjunni returned to his hotel, Alla Bux related the tale of Dacca before partition of India—the Pakistani soldiers outraged the modesty of their women and when the war ended, only that remained. And Kunjunni thought that it was always so. Was not the crux of the Mahabharata war the stripping of Drowpati and one more thing: the Bhagavat Gita.

In times of old, the earlier preceptors (gurus) grieved at the repeated movement of troops through the Aaryavartam (the heart of Bharat lying between Mounts Vindhya and Himalayas where the Aryans settled). In those

days, Rivers Sindhu and Ganga went past watering its expanse and their banks had an exuberance of vegetation and Kalpaka trees (trees of heaven) bore nectar-like fruits. The Brahmins and Kshatriyas made offerings of these crops to the Gods of Nature. But they forbade the progenies of those of lower birth from making such offerings. Thus denied the right to worship and distanced from touch and proximity, the ostracized wandered in the peripheries.

Generations of preceptors grieved for them. Hearing that wailing, a preceptor took birth in a desert thousands of miles away. Turning his eyes to the crescent moon, he spoke to the Omnipresent whose revelations sounded personally and softly in his ears. From atop the minars in the oasis, he yelled through the desert, “Welcome to this house for worshipping the God sans parallel”.

Listening to this prophet the nomads who wandered grazing their sheep and camels raised their swords and raced across the sands in all directions. But the fact remained that even Brahmins had many Sudra preceptors. For instance, Sri Krishna. Wrong doing and correction; correction for the wrong and wrong again for correction. Entering the low caste Sambukan’s hermitage, Rama asked him whether he did not know that penance was forbidden for a low caste and he replied that the unified power called his mind lost in meditation. When Rama again asked him whether he did not know that such contact was forbidden for him, the latter prayed Rama to dispense justice as the most righteous king. While grieving that he was taking the life of a sage, Rama, the premier of all incarnations prayed that his soul be received by the Almighty. Smelling Sambukan’s blood that spilled, the sword-bearers from the desert that entered Aaryavartam bestowed the right to worship and proximity to God to the descendants of Sambukan. Those circumcised sword-bearers destroyed

the deities and made those who worshipped those partners of a new dispensation. And the divinities that resurrected from those stone idols returned to their original source. Kunjunni recalled— destruction of Somnath, another cruelty against the cruelty of the noble Rama Rajya.... partition of modern India.... beyond that again partition. The armies of India and Pakistan fought again and again without knowing its meaning.

Kunjunni telephoned Shivani from the hotel and informed her that he was leaving for Dacca the next day. He asked for Kalyani, but was told that she was indisposed and was taking rest. He offered to make a call, but she discouraged him saying Pinaki Sen Gupta was attending on her. In Dacca, he heard wailings of rape and burning of crop fields; yet the new leaders of Bangladesh came to Dacca from their security camps at Calcutta and Delhi to celebrate the victory along with Indian troops. People came in waves to witness the surrender of the Pakistani General and for jublations. He saw a crowd of a thousand people hunting a slightly built person venting their anger by pelting stones at him. He was a patriot till the previous day, a true nationalist who wanted a united Pakistan. But Kunjunni saw that in a moment the patriot was branded a rebel, traitor and enemy. The crowd roared “Joy Bangala, Joy Bangala” and pelted stones at him and he fell dead without a sob. The crowd kept his corpse on a pedestal and roared in frenzy. Presently, he saw a boy of nine years walking nonchalantly towards the pedestal, climbing it and lying beside his father’s body. The crowd yelled, “kill, kill” and mercilessly stoned the boy also to death.

While walking away from the scene, Kunjunni saw somebody flinging something at him and a deafening sound followed. When he woke up inside a

dark room, he was told that he was in the Military Hospital at Calcutta, had suffered grenade attack and had regained consciousness after two months. He felt that his hands, feet and head were bandaged. He asked the Calcutta correspondent who visited him to summon Shivani and Kalyani, but he told him gloomily that they had left for Bombay on some purpose.

When after weeks of convalescence, he was about to be discharged, the Calcutta correspondent hesitantly told him that Kalyani was admitted to a cancer hospital in Bombay. Incidentally, Kunjunni also enquired about the fate of Tapas' case and was told that he was awarded death penalty for murder. With his doctor's permission, Kunjunni left for Bombay the very next day. While on his flight to Bombay, he saw in a dream Tapu weeping for the widow of the person he killed as atonement for the crime he committed. He had donated his eyes so that the recipient would one day see the pitiable spectacles of revolution.

At the cancer hospital at Bombay, Pinaki Sen Gupta and Shivani greeted him. Kalyani who was afflicted by blood cancer was in a coma. When Kunjunni bent down to kiss her, Pinaki said that his touch would be painful for her, but added that in her fits of consciousness, she was asking for him. As Kunjunni was dead tired, Shivani took him to her hotel room for taking rest. And the moment he lay on the bed he drifted into a deep slumber. Shivani saw him crying and smiling in his sub conscious state. When he woke up, he asked her who was there beside Kalyani and she replied that Pinaki Babu was with her right from the previous night. Together they went to the hospital. There, after some time, Pinaki took Kunjunni to a secluded corner and made the stark revelation— that Kalyani had only one more day's lease of life left in the

world. After some time, Shivani took him to the sea shore to relax his agitated mind. Though they were together for a long time, neither spoke anything and the silence was unbearable Kunjunni.

After their return to the hotel, in a surprising move, Shivani stood before him and knelt down. When he tried to raise her up, she requested him to listen to her calmly and said, “Kalyani is leaving. We should not burden her in any way. You should patiently listen to what I have to say.” She went on, “You can never forgive my fault. You should not hate her. She should not leave with a burden.” Her sobs ended. He then heard a voice from some unfathomable depth never before experienced. She said, “Kalyani is not your progeny. She is Pinaki’s(444).”

The next day, Kalyani bid adieu to the world. After her cremation, Shivani, Pinaki and Kunjunni left for their respective destinations, all earthly relations having got severed by providence. Kunjunni wandered aimlessly as if on a blind pilgrimage. Standing on the edge of a canal carrying the filth of the city, he lost himself in meditation and muttered, “You are River Bhagirathi. Kindly make the passage of my daughter’s soul easy by the spring you have generated for purification of the ancestors (446).”

The next day, he went to Delhi, quit his job and decided to return to his native place. Before his meal, he kept a handful of rice in front of the lamp. And accepting his offerings, Bhagirathi flowed towards the dark waterfalls of the land of ancestors.

He felt as though he had traversed through the entire length and breadth of the long battle field of time and the era of war had ended. A traveler with the fine physical mass of a man who repeatedly made weapons and used

them now regretted the entire proceedings. Having longed for and failed to acquire the woods and waters of an ancient nature, that body renounced its physical form. He cursed the physical body that immersed itself in the haughtiness of war and the craftiness of logic and in the heat of that curse, cell disintegrated from cell and confessed for all the faults. He decided to immerse his memories in Thootha Puzha.

Kunjunni made his last visit to Mukti Dham, the ashram of Nirmalanandan. He unloaded the burden of his mind before him. Yet he could not contain his grief. He reflected over the confession made by Shivani assuming the form of an ocean with himself being tossed up and down as a wailing wave of negation. He begged Nirmalanandan to save him from the whirlpool of the ocean. The latter consoled him and asked, “Were you not searching for a guru ? Here is it—the ocean.” That moment Kunjunni heard Kalyani’s voice above the surface of the ocean. She asked him, “Father, why do you grieve? Have you not been told about the continuity of soul? Remember, only in this birth I have not been your daughter. Look back and see the times you were Vyasa and I, Suka(446)”.

On his retreat to his native village with a troubled mind Kunjunni’s conscience called out, “Suka, my son.....” And the trees, plants, springs and stone pavements replied in Kalyani’s voice, “My father, my father....(453)”

The Infinity of Grace (Gurusagaram) differs in language, vision and characterisation from Vijayan's earlier works. It is on the immanence of Guru in the life of the seeker. Guru is everywhere and is manifested in everybody. The seeker partakes of the grace of the Guru as he happens for him unawares and unconditional. The central character Kunjunni is a journalist from Kerala,

working in Delhi, going on an assignment to report the Bengal partition of 1971. He undergoes an excruciating experience both spiritually and physically to learn how to annihilate all forms of ego. During his search for the teacher, he encounters teachers from all spheres of life, each of them teaching him lessons that help him on the way, and he in turn becoming teacher to many of them.

Sri M, a spiritual teacher, social worker and an educationist speak of a beautiful book titled *Avadhootha Gita*. In the book the *avadhootha* says he has twenty four Gurus. He says that he has learned different things from different people, and also from other beings, including the bees. “The honey-bee is also my Guru, because it teaches me how to save for a rainy day” (qtd in pg.225 *Wisdom of the Rishis*). He says that the honey-bee reminds him of the ancient tradition; when monks had to beg from door to door for food, gathering a handful from each house so as not to tax the householder. This mode of *bhiksha* is called *madhukari*, meaning, like the bee, that goes from flower to flower collecting a little nectar and putting it all together.

We get a picture of how the many gurus in the course of his life journey have influenced the protagonist in O. V. Vijayan’s work. The beginning chapter gives an account of how Kunjunni’s father becomes a teacher to him and the chain of teachers that begins from there continues till the last chapter where he discovers his ultimate guru. The range of teachers include his childhood friend Colonel Balakrishnan, now Swami Nirmalanandan, Olga the Czech media person haunted by the aftermath of the war she had to endure, Haimavathi, the girl whom he molested, Lalitha, the shorthand writer at his office, and many more characters from so diverse

backgrounds. He is troubled by the separation from his wife Shivani, and is torn between her unwillingness to get back together and his love for their daughter Kalyani.

He often goes to Nirmalanandan to find solace, discussing himself with his friend. It is during such a visit that Kunjunni starts his journey along the lines of spirituality. On complaining about the restlessness in his life, Swami leaves him alone on the shores of the river where he finds the small insects living beneath grass fighting each other for their mere survival. This leads him to a new light and he leaves the place, learning to cultivate in him a respect, even for the grass that he steps on. "I won't be able to walk without hurting you(423)". This sentence that he speaks to the grass on which he steps shows the intensity of the knowledge he has acquired at this point. Though enlightened by some pieces of knowledge, he is still troubled by the problems encircling him. It is in the middle of these difficulties that he is sent to Kolkata to report the Bangladesh partition.

Once there, he revisits the places his father had taken him to as a child. Later we see him visiting these places again with his daughter, trying to transfer the knowledge he got from his father to his next generation. The specific transfer is supposed to occur at the time when they witness a flock of storks flying above, reminding Kunjunni of the enlightenment experience of Paramhansa. He experiences something of the sort and this is transferred through him to his daughter too.

The war reporting, too, teaches him many lessons, the most prominent teacher being the Muslim father, who decides to bury the Hindu girl who died holding hands with his son. The war and its violence seem to be the reflections

of his inner turmoil. The confusions he goes through and the fights that take place inside himself die down as the war too comes to an end. But just like the war created the partition, the end of his problems too comes with a wound – the revelation by Shivani that Kalyani is not his daughter. Though the truth is painful at first, this is the factor that leads him to find his *guru* and attain his knowledge. He leaves his job and goes back home, giving away all his books but *The Bhagavatam*, maybe due to the realization that all these knowledge gave him nothing at all.

In the last chapter we see Kunjunni finding his Guru in his daughter who was not his own. This makes him grow to the realisation that the whole world is a teacher, that each and everything, every person has a lesson to teach you. Thus his search for Guru ends in Kalyani yet it seems as if his search begins in her. The love that he had stored solely for her grows as big as the world, being transferred to the whole world.

The novel, in its totality gives the message that we are all tied by the bondage of karma. Karma refers to actions. The teacher that begins in his forefathers ending in his daughter is an example for this. Also, Kalyani herself becomes an example, as her life's aim, it seems, had been the enlightenment of Kunjunni. The way she is born from the wrong and yet she becomes the beacon of for Kunjunni, puzzles us to a certain degree. Another factor that shows the powerlessness of humans is the irony that Shivani's research was on blood cancer and her daughter died of the same disease.

Yet another thought presented is the futility of war. War has always created misery and sorrow. Even the agnostic Bertrand Russell has observed that unless man increases in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of

knowledge will only cause increase of sorrow. Primitive man had so little sorrow, because he had so little knowledge. So, this knowledge must rise to wisdom. This happens only when the external knowledge is tempered with the knowledge of the Infinite spiritual nature of man.

Through the many stories of war – from Kunjunni's elder brother to Olga and the Polish news reporter Yanush, Vijayan illustrates that no war has ever produced good. What is left is always the tears and pain of the victims.

One incident is described like this: Kunjunni set out for the office. It was just getting on nine, Already, the Editor would be in his room. Kunjunni walked through the empty newsroom and came to the Editor's cabin. The Chief sat in his swivel chair, his back turned to the door, gazing at map on the wall.

Many were the times they had dined at the home of Sahasrabudhe, their mountaineering correspondent. Using just the thumb and forefinger of each hand, their host flitted between his guests in his electric wheel chair, conversing animatedly with each one, often pouring their drinks himself, so that, though he was so cheerful himself, the others could hardly bear it.

Tall and handsome Major Sahasrabudhe had scaled many icy peaks; he was a talented painter, musician and an inspired writer about the mountains. The Major, who bore all his gifts so humbly, was wounded in the 1965 war.

Fighting beside him, Lieutenant Gurpreet Singh had disabled four Patton tanks with his bazooka before he fell. Sahasrabudhe and Gurpreet lay on adjacent beds in a ward in the Medical Institute in Delhi. Only cat's guts held Gurpreet together. When the Prime Minister came to visit the wounded soldiers, those sewn-together limbs attempted valiantly to rise and salute

him in the best martial tradition. This made news. And entrapped in the mesmerism of the media, Gurpreet's pregnant wife spent her days tending frenetically to other wounded soldiers. Finally, the cat's guts gave way and Gurpreet's body came apart, and his organs went their blighted, lonely ways like strangers, in blind dispersal. Gurpreet's wife found another husband; for just a while afterwards the War perused her like an obscene Joke.

Sahasrabudhe did not die. The bullet pierced his spine paralysed his body. Only a thumb and forefinger on each hand were left to him to use. But Sahasrabudhe's fiancé insisted on marrying him. Despite his earnestly advising her against it, Manasi moved with him. In his two-fingered paining, in the heroic tales he began to write, in his collection of rare paintings- Manasi did her best to absorb herself in all these. She tried to lose herself in the whirring of the electric wheelchair, the great toy which bore his living corpse from room to room. But after three months she could bear it no more. With tears in her eyes, begging him to forgive her, she left. Until she found herself another man, the obscene joke perused Manasi as well.

The war between himself and Shivani also ends in destruction as the two go separate ways. But, the underlying factor throughout is the message about the sea of teachers that lie before us. The message is that if we open our eyes and look around, we can find numerous instances that teach us what we seek and numerous individuals who teach us what we need. According to Vijayan, this novel was greatly inspired by the teachings of Karunakaraguru of Sree Santhigiri Ashram near Thiruvananthapuram. Vijayan underwent a spiritual transformation after meeting the guru and this change also reflected in his writings, the best example being *Gurusagaram/ The Infinity of Grace*.

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