



ECOFEMINISM: RECOGNITION OF SELF EXISTENT IN OTHHAPPU: THE SCENT OF THE OTHER SIDE BY SARAH JOSEPH

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ABSTRACT

The women of today need to seek the power within them. The present paper is an attempt to emphasize on the recognition of self existent, quest for identity, and struggle for survival of women in **Oththappu: The Scent of the other side**. Ecofeminism as an ideology and movement finds that the oppression of women is interlinked to the oppression of nature with the same masculine centered attitudes and practices concerning to the patriarchal society. Ecofeminism has its roots in literature also.

As Carolyn Merchant points out, ***“We make by act trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their seasons, and to come up and bear more speedily than their natural course they do. We make them by act greater, much more than their nature, and their fruit greater and sweeter and of differing taste, smell, color and figure from their nature.”***



KEYWORDS: self existent, quest for identity, patriarchal society.

INTRODUCTION:

Thus nature came to be seen as more like a woman to be raped and even the violation of nature is linked with the violation of women. The protagonist of Sarah Joseph's novel rightly gives the answer of Ayn Rand's the question, ***isn't who is going to let me; its' who is going to stop me*** by their revolutionary steps throughout the novel. This paper will also examine the cultural and spiritual ecofeminism as ecofeminism is an ideology for the recognition of women, for the preservation of nature and for the sustenance of life on earth.

The prime objective of this chapter is to deal with Sarah Joseph's selected novel in the context of ecofeminism. For this purpose of analysis, the research scholar has selected the novel Oththappu- The Scent of the Otherside. A humble attempt is made here to find out the elements of ecofeminism in her novel. The present chapter tries to reveal the features of ecofeminism through the portrayal of character—Margalitha in the novel.

SARAH JOSEPH: A LIVING LEGEND

Introducing Sarah Joseph, the author, environmentalist, a social activist, and an artist is a living legend of the present generation. She is the most renowned contemporary Indian female writer in Kerala. She occupies a prominent place in Indian writing in English. By contributing 'Ecriture-feminine' (writing seen as a feminist concept, in which the writer makes use of female constructions of identity), a stream in Malayalam literature through her collection of short stories 'Paapathara' (1989), she becomes the God mother of feminist movement in Kerala. She has also seen the impact of her writing as she says it has changed the perception of young people:

"I think it created a moment, a change internally. I have had many boys telling me that it changed the way they looked at their mother and sister."

(www.thehindu.com)

It has also inspired critic and poet K. Satchidanandan to coin the word, 'Pennezhuthu', an equivalent of *Écriture feminine*. This short story collection also won the Muttathu Varkey Award in 2011. Born on 10th February 1946 into a conservative and traditional Christian family in Kuriyachira in Thrissur city in southern India, she grew up with her parents, her father Louis who was inclined to Marxist ideology by reading various periodicals and magazines related to it, And her mother Kochumariam was a typical Christian house wife, like other conservative mothers, she was also taking special and keen interest to marry her daughter off before the age of fifteen.

As a result, at the age of 15, when she was in IX standard, was married to Joseph. For Sarah getting marry at the early age means being submissive to a stranger in a conservative Christian family, where a girl has no voice. However the couple have one daughter whose name is Sangeetha Srinivasam. After marriage, she could continue her education and went on to the teacher's training course and started her professional career as a school teacher. Later on she enrolled for her B.A and M.A. in Malayalam at Sanskrit college, Pattambi as a private candidate and appointed as a Malayalam Lecturer in Government Sanskrit College in Kerala.

However it's a turning point for her as she started participating in social activities and movement. According to her,

"Pattambi, which was coloured in blood red with the strength of revolutionary movements and unified vigour of the leftist movement, is responsible for the deep changes that happened in my life."

(Joseph Sarah. Ormakal Chrishalabhangalalla, Bhashoposhini Varshikapathippu, 2005. P. 20)

Sarah Joseph is indisputably one of the leading figures in Kerala. She also became active in student group activities and theatre. So she observes that the phase of her teaching career as a professor had a major role in changing her life and had a tremendous effect on her which was resulted in Sarah Joseph as a feminist. And it gave opportunity to her to face the realities of life and she finds that through education we can change the society. After the retirement from the government service, she lives at 'Geethanjali' Mulamkunnathukav in Thrissur.

Moreover she started writing short stories and novels. Her short story collections consists of Manassile Ti Matram (1973), Kadinte Sangeetham (1975, anthology of short stories), Paapathara, Oduvilanthe Suryakanthi, Nilav Nirayunnu, Puthuramayam, Kaadithu Kandaayo Kaanthal, Namathinmakalude vriksham (anthology of short stories) and Grumb (clove). Among them Paapathara is measured as a milestone in her feminist writing in Malayalam which are based on the theme of the underprivileged, deprived and marginalized women – struggling to free themselves from the operation and supremacy of social, cultural and economic constitutions and system of the society. She also got fame from her distinctive narrative technique by her subversive reading of Ramayana, "Ramayana Kathakal"

Belonging to the conservative Christian family, she says,

"Nature is a natural companion. In Alahayude Penmakkal, Annie stands in the space between three jackfruit trees. My childhood was like that amidst trees of all kinds, bamboo, coconut etc. I walked amidst them, feeling the breeze and hearing the rustling leaves. Minute things made me happy and I noticed creepers that grew wild and those that stuck to a tree."

(<http://www.thehindu.com/books/books-authors/her-voice/article5483068.ece>)

Therefore she loves, cares and admires nature from her childhood. Out curiosity for nature and of her closeness and oneness with nature in the past, she becomes the representative of nature and woman in literature.

Being a feminist and an environmentalist, Sarah Joseph focuses on the women and nature themes, issues of inequalities and injustice and development and materialism which leads to the ecological

destructions, in her trilogy- Alahayude Pennmakal, the first, the second Maathathi and the third is Otthappu- the scent of the other side.

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Sarah Joseph won Kerala Sahitya Awards and Kendra Sahitya Academy Award for her first novel- Alahayude Pennmakal (Daughters of God- the father) in 2001 and also received Valyalur Award in 2003 as well as Literary Award in 2004 for her first novel.

She has returned her award condemning the murder of rationalist writer M M Kalburgi. She said, *"The Sahitya Akademi has remained silent over all of this, when it should have been the first to speak out. I am returning my award in protest."* The novelist Shashi Deshpande has also given her resignation from the Shitya academy General council.

The woman-nature links are visible in her novels as she coins her characters with nature. The well known poet and critic, Sachidanandam rightly said about Sarah Joseph, *"She brought about a paradigm shift in Malayalam Literature."*

Through her writing, Sarah Joseph proved that art and activism could bring changes in male dominated society and culture and it could create the eco friendly atmosphere as they are necessary or essential means of social change and transformation. As a result, she was severally criticized and condemned by others as she is blending art and activism in her writing.

However she never bothers about it and she has published her third novel- Otthappu in 2005 which was translated into English by Valson Thampu which received recently Vodafone Crossword Translation Award in 2009. For the present study, I have selected Otthappu which depicts the story of a nun.

The 67 years old writer Sarah is also known as the eminent figure and social activist of feminist movement in Kerala, since 1980. She has fought hundreds of cases of dowry deaths, sexual slavery, women trafficking and domestic violence.

In 1986, she has founded 'Manushi', a political women's organisation which is the organization of thinking women, the first of its kind. This organization worked on women issues like dowry death, trafficking, domestic violence and sexual slavery and fought hundreds of offences against women including the case of Thankamani (Mass rape of women by the policemen in the village of Thankamani), Suryanelli continual rape case, Kaviyoor case and many more in list brought awareness in Kerala and since then no incidents of violence against women were reported. It does not exist today, but she has no regrets as it was a floating body and it has done. In one of her interviews she says,

"The work of Manushi and other feminist groups in the past three decades has enhanced the status of women in Kerala, challenged rigid moral codes, furthered gender equality and found space in society for alternative sexualities. Much more remains to be achieved." (www.thehindu.com).

Recently in January 2014, Sarah Joseph has joined Aam Aadmi Party and contested the 2014 parliament election but lost to C. N. Jayadevan of Communist Party of India and became the active member of it as she thinks that it is time to clean up the system and the power should be back with the people. She is impressed by the AAP's people friendly projects as it offers a ray of hope to the down trodden people in the society. She has also supported Amnesty International known as AI (a London-based non government organisation focused on human rights) in the controversy against ABVP in 2016.

Valson Thampu is a fortuitous translator from Malayalam to English, Christian theologian, Indian educator, priest of the church of north, principal of St. Stephen's college university of Delhi, Delhi. His translations are unique as it is translated as the original work being written by the author. He is a peace campaigner, activist and writer too. As a writer he is interested in religion, spirituality, political and socio cultural issues. He has written more than 400 articles on politics and socio cultural issues and 10 publications on religion and spirituality. As a translator he has translated Sarah Joseph's Othhappu – The Scent of the Other Side which got the crossword award and Gift in Green in 2011.

OTHHAPPU: THE SCENT OF THE OTHER SIDE

“We can sanctify others only if we purify ourselves. To give knowledge to others, we have to know. To give light to others, we have to be lights. Only after attain the presence of God, should we venture to lead others there...”

(Joseph Sarah. *‘Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side’*. Oxford Book Press. p.122)

The women of today need to seek the power within them. Ecofeminism as a philosophy as well as movement finds the interconnection between the oppression and domination of women and of nature with the same masculine centred attitudes, system and traditions concerning to the patriarchal society. Ecofeminism has its roots in literature also as literature is a truthful expression of the contemporary era. .

Thus nature came to be seen as more like a woman to be raped and even the violation of nature is linked with the violation of women. The protagonist of Sarah Joseph’s novel rightly gives the answer of Ayn Rand’s question, ‘It’s who is going to let me? It’s who is going to stop me?’ by their revolutionary steps throughout the novel. This research will also examine the cultural and spiritual ecofeminism as ecofeminism is an ideology for the recognition of women, for the preservation and conservation of nature and mostly for the sustenance of life on earth.

Ecofeminism grew out of Radical or Cultural feminism rather than from Liberal feminism. Ecofeminism as a philosophy and a movement aims at the welfare of women and nature. ecofeminist writers realize the connection between the domination and oppression of women and of nature by capitalist - patriarchal attitudes and practices in their writings. Today our situation as a human being on this planet are as following: the beautiful system of our planet is being violated, polluted, degraded and resulting in damaged yet very less people showing their concerns towards the GAIA-That is the Earth.

As Carolyn Merchant points out,

“We make by act trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their seasons, and to come up and bear more speedily than their natural course they do. We make them by act greater, much more than their nature, and their fruit greater and sweeter and of differing taste, smell, colour and figure from their nature”

This transformation of nature or climate change occurred due to the exploitation and operation of growing capitalism and materialism. As a result, Men devalued nature and the natural phenomenon. While on the other hand, Women were also devalued and the patriarchal society took hold, devaluing and exploiting the earth and women. The earth must be valued because people are reliant upon it to sustain life. They have the harmonious relationship with the environments and their surroundings. Due to this Women are spoiled most by the exploitation of the earth because they are the most vulnerable in patriarchal society. So the main focus is on women who are more at threat because they undergo double oppression of poverty, race, and education as they have been constructed under a thick slack layer of prejudice, ignorance and convention. However education has brought a change and awareness as well as empowerment in the life of women today.

As far as tradition is concerned, the language, symbols, rituals, myths and behaviour patterns of our cultural tradition has shaped the individual’s behaviours, morals and beliefs. However under the tag of ‘culturally acceptable’ many things are passed off or overlooked such as violence and crime against children and women, domestic abuse and many other. Thus culture plays a role of our curse and our hope as well as the problem and the solution. In Patriarchal society, fear of women and nature set the stage for biocide must be named as the problem. These women have been the victims of humiliations, oppression, torture and exploitation in Western development. Hence due to cultural and social institutions, woman’s life lies in between pleasures and danger.

The focus of Ecofeminism is to save trees, animals or soil, the whole environment as well as woman as it is sacred, or it is necessary for the continued existence of people. In this chapter, I focus on the Social, Political, Economic and Psychological impact on women and environment, in an eco-feminist perspective. It also brings out an analysis of the novel ***Othappu: The Scent of the other side*** with the light of this.

Sarah Joseph, an eminent writer and a woman activist, in her author's note, talks about her teenage yearning to become a Nun and wanted to be one with Christ. But Sarah Joseph didn't get Jesus' call, Instead she chooses to become writer but never neglected Christ. Othappu is her exploration of search for Christ. It is both the quest for a spirituality build on norms of social, economic and gender justice and also discusses other issues such as sexual pity, malayali family and culture, social norms and most important is the independence of self and lacking of it. In Othappu, an effort has been made to depict the life of a Nun who belongs to conservative Christian family. The story highlights the influence of religion on the protagonist which often guides her. She has also presented the character of Margalitha who holds strong inner chaos under the oppressive mechanism of the closed society. But she does not want to be a puppet. So aspired by self reliance and in quest of her own identity and in search of real Christ, she dares to cross defying patriarchal rules and norms.

The three foremost wings of ecofeminism are Cultural, Spiritual and Social Ecofeminism and their prime importance is to define the natural connection of woman and supports the concept of **"Mother Earth" and "Femininity of Nature"**.

The novel unfolds a woman's strive who dares to fight in opposition with family, tradition and brutal customs centring to women's surrenders to the rigid system of convent. Earlier, due to the custom of convent, most of the nuns and priests suffered in silence which was described by Margalitha's superior Aabelamma in the convent. She says, *"Once you are caught in a system, it is best to cooperate with it dictates. If you walk out, your rebellion will exact a crushing physical and spiritual cost."*

(p. 05)

Margalitha with deep sigh takes off her veil and opens the door of convent and walks out into the wider world;

"I am leaving .

Like the wind that never returns...

Margalitha walked down the steps."

(p.07)

In fact now one is openly rebel against the traditional Christian society by questioning the church just like Margalitha and **Sister Jesme**. As **Sister Jesme through her book *Amen: the Autobiography of a Nun and Sister Mary Chandy's autobiography Nanma Niranjavale Swasthi (Peace to the One filled with Grace)* explored the life of a nun in a convent which caused a quite embarrassment to church as it throws light on the life of a nun. The 67 years old sister Mary, who walked out from the convent like Sarah Joseph's protagonist in Othappu, describes the harrowing story of a pregnant nun who is trying to kill her baby in convent:**

"After I broke open the door with the help of another nun, I grabbed the child and held it to my chest. I thought I was doing the right thing but the sisters turned against me. I want to know why. In a previous incident, when I hit a priest on his head with a stool when he tried to grab me, the nuns sympathised with the priest. From then on, I was watched carefully."

(<https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/14510.html>)

Sarah Joseph realizes, *"Most of the nuns and priests suffer in silence for suffering is a quality that they are conditioned to accept as a virtue. What you see here is the expression of the individual's conflict with the establishment. They did not have the courage till now to take on the establishment but now they are openly questioning it."*

(<https://www.hindujagruti.org/news/14510.html>)

Othappu, the book with a blemished female face and yellow round patch, originally is written in the tongue of Kerala, Malayalam and translated to English by Valson Thampu. It is the third in a trilogy of novels - the other two being *Alahayude Pennamakal* (1999) which won a Central Sahitya Akademi Award and *Matathi*(2001). *Othappu*(2003), a winner of two state level awards and recently won the Cross World prize and also won the 'Vodafone crossword Translation Award' of 2009. The novel revolves around Margalitha who is a nun and narrates the consequences of the nun's departure from the convent and dealing with the

other side Christian faith. She always suffers through a conflict and faces troubles of being a nun and a woman by male suppression and restrictions of traditions. The novel raises the issues like the freedom of the individual and the lack of it, spirituality, family, self consciousness and religious society.

The story of the novel portrays the Margalitha's bitter experiences in her life as well as also explores the grim reality of the churches and its notion that regards the Dalit Priests as their objects of charity. The novel, a gyno text is about the protagonist's yearning for true Christian spirituality and faith and search for her own sexuality which runs throughout the novel. Inside the convent to seek and bare her soul, Margalitha confesses through writing letters to the Roy Francis Karikkan, a young idealist priest which are full off Margalithas doubts, views, on various subjects like nature, prayer, God, Faith, endurance, reason and love.

It throws light on the socio - psychological proposition of convent life in Christianity and female subjectivity in the Malayali Christian family. Through the description of the Gosaikunnu-Margalitha's house, Sarah Joseph throws light on how life is changed so much at Gosaikunnu. Once there was a stiff challenge, today it has no challenge at all for anyone. The lawns, flower gardens, ornamental lamps, high rise walls and long rows of attractive houses had altogether transformed Gosaikunnu into wonderland:

"Today cars, buses and trucks beamed their headlights and climbed Gosaikunnu effortlessly. Heavy vehicles too. Auto rickshaws loaded with sawdust, firewood, rice sacks, provisions, vegetable, and cattle feed swept uphill." (p.63)

"All that remained were puddles of polluted water, black and dense like asphalt lying stagnant in small, scattered cesspools... the canal had degraded into garbage dump. They were filled with soil from an alien land. Concrete covered the surface."

(p.238)

The contrast between old and new one make Margalitha dissonant and degrading. She too is shocked to see the sight of her house,

"There were no cool shades or shadows. Sunlight blazed in the courtyard. The ancient mango tree had been cut down..."

(p. 239)

This text is also based on the Sigmund Freud's Psycho analytical theory – conscious and unconscious levels of human mind. At the beginning the protagonist Margalitha is in confused state of mind, "to be or not to be" like Hamlet in Shakespeare. The novel begins with sister Margalitha's agony, who steps outside the convent as she was confronted with a crisis of faith in the convent. So in order to seek her God, She chooses to walk out by managing to unlock the door of the convent and walked down the steps like the wind that never returns the life free from the religious practices and society by accepting her personal freedom and views. Fransis Roy Karikkan rightly describes her with a bird,

"She was a bird released to the sky: let her fly to her heart's content."

(p.67)

And about her revolutionary decision,

"The wind blows this way and goes. The same wind blew yesterday. After wandering about it will return as the wind of tomorrow"

(p.67)

In conscious state of mind Margalitha wants to get out from the convent but she is unaware about the struggles and difficulties she has to face from the patriarchal society after her revolutionary step.

Both Margalitha and Karikkan come from different families. Margalitha is from wealthy and aristocratic family where as Karikkan is from poor family. His father is a coolie. In Christian family, having a nun and priest is a matter of pride for other family members vice versa. It is a deep shame or shock when nun and priest returns home and it brings troubles for family.

According to Valson thampu, *"the book is a case study about any individual in any religion who is seeking the truth of faith and that's the universality of it. He believes that Christianity is not ready for powerful questions those Sarah asks. The hope of the individual, according to him lies with biblical Christianity not church Christianity."*

(www.thetimesofindia.com)

For Margalitha to Enter in a convent to become a nun and leaving a convent to re-enter the world as a defrocked nun are both difficult decision. As per the tradition, her former declaration to become a nun is appreciated by the family and society; but later on this the same society has condemned her on her second decision to run away from the convent. As The structural and ideological circumstances has affected on the limit of the total freedom and absolute choice of human. This thing also profoundly affected on the mind of women. Those woman who remained silent sufferers where as those who risk their lives in this case are called feminists which we can found in our protagonist Margalitha. In search of God, Margalitha first took the vows of chastity, poverty, obedience to god and till the end she never breaks that vows after defrocked. Hence margalitha proves as a rebellions who rebel against the brutal social customs and create her own identity. Sarah Joseph presents how women are prevented from freedom and their sufferings as well as restrictions on woman to survive as a human being. Sarah Joseph says as a feminist:

"I am proud that I am born a woman. I feel fortunate to be living in an age that harkens to the promising voice of women. As I am not male writer, I have no compulsions to reproduce the values of the ruling class. The culture of the dominant class is against woman, just as it is against those low of caste[.....] my duty is to write fearlessly about women- woman who denied self determining rights over their own bodies by oppressive gender regime."

(<http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-features/tp-literaryreview/crossing-the-threshold/article614713.ece>)

She thought, wrote and worked intensely for women's liberation, mobilizing women's movements to resist suppression and denial of dignity. She has an abiding faith in the potential of women.

Except her, there is no other writer in Malayalam who has shown such courage in word and deed. The Malayalam word Othappu is a case in point. It means faltering and thereby causing others to falter or 'stumble' or to go astray, that is the cause for someone to lose faith and turn to evil ways. The fear of causing 'Othappu' is to enforce nervous conformity in others with motive of controlling people. In every society, every individual faces this dilemma. According to Sarah Joseph the closest equivalent is 'scandal'. But the word 'scandal' approximate to Othappu only in a limited, lexical sense.

By the close reading of this book, I argue that translating Othappu as a scandal would be unfair to the spirit of the text. So the translator has given the title 'The scent of the other side' which is not literal but imaginative and thematic and appropriate.

Lokame Yatra (farewell, O world), an autobiographical poem by sister Mary Benigna is a very powerful and poignant poem on the theme of leaving a life of worldly attachments and joining cloister which is sublimated into accepting a lofty plane of spiritual communion with Divine Love from where 'There is no return.' Sarah also writes about the return of such a nun, the scandalous nature of which act has not diminished in intensity.

In search of God, first she leaves an affluent family to take the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. At the convent she experienced humility, meekness and obedience only as mere words, nothing more. She breaks no vows that she has taken until she leaves as she wishes to serve the community but she realises that this institution does not fulfil her wish:

"I made my first vows with many hopes and thoughts in my heart. I dreamt that I would share my life with the poor as the suffering, live and die for them... and the Jesus they worshipped there was a wealthy Jesus. There seemed to be no connection between God and the suffering poor."

(p.91)

When she returns to her family, her mother, brothers and sisters in-law are so horrified at the dishonour she has brought upon the family that as a result she is thrown into virtual dungeon the place outside the house which is used for keeping the raw bananas for ripening. She is locked up for three days without food or water.

"I thirst..." Margalitha groaned.

Even after quenching the thirst of the earth, the rain continued its downpour."

(p.46)

The rain is divine, she quenches the thirst of the mother earth and reduces her heaviness again and again, but this tenderness is lacking in human behaviour. Margalitha is shocked to see the drastic change in the attitude of her family members as this is the same family who had stood together at the door and waved good bye to her on the day she was going to become nun. But that family scene is shattered somewhere after her revolutionary step. And only the fresh air alone can keep Margalitha alive and conscious for some time in that forbidden place of her house. She faces the wrath of her mother and brother. Though the three children – John, Paul and Margalitha had equal rights on their father’s property legally, irrespective of gender, however she is abandoned from that too.

After realizing her family’s decision that the family does not show any concern for her, she leaves the home and goes from one refuge to another at Angamaly. She wonders around in search of shelter. But Margalitha knows that those who were cast out of their society, especially for a woman like her there is no place to stay, sit and rest or if she find the space in society, she would be violated at any risk in this male dominance society. Margalitha, full of hope and influential girl, finally realises that,
“For the time being, circumstances are hostile to me. But it need not be so forever. I see the light of hope on the face of tomorrow...I am free to delete, erase or correct. Can incorporate what I choose. Can flow like water or fly like a bird.”

(p.74)

Later on, she is brought by Fr. Karikkan to the home of Kasseessans, a Syrian Christian couple. Karikkan is slowly attracted by Margalitha. He realizes his fascination for Margalitha;

“The way she looked at him, the curls that lay sideways over her temples...he felt that every moment away from the sight and sound of all theses was a huge loss. All he needed was her mere presence, nothing more.”

(p.58)

She undergoes mental and physical pain, but she truly transcended the concerns of the world and reached that state, when she can forgive all and accept all in a blend of selfless love and compassion - the orphan child of an unknown street woman and her unborn child, whose father-Karikkan has fled from her as escapist. As she started believing in the Gospel words:

“Man shall not live by bread alone”

Luke 4:4(New Testament)

“Do not worry about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive or about cloths for your body...”

Mathew 6: 25-34(New Testament)

However by adopting and attaining motherhood, she becomes confident and realizes the true meaning of life and fights against the social norms and practices by refusing the wealth of her mother and trying to fulfil her individual identity. She confronts the traditional roles and image of woman in the society. Thus the story turns into a spellbinding and hypnotizing tale of joy and sorrow and magical power of one special woman.

Sarah Joseph is also making use of Biblical references like the Magi bring gifts for Infant Jesus referring to three nuns comes with gifts to meet Margalitha and her unborn child. She nurses Naanu by providing pure love and enormous nature. Like Mary who came to greet Elizabeth, the wife of Zechariah, *I have come to serve you. Rejoice and sing praises unto the lord* (St.Luke 1:39-45), Rebekka came to meet Margalitha and placed his hand on Margalitha’s belly and whispered:

“I feel the baby in your womb leap with your joy.

Rejoice! You are blessed!

(p.211-212)

And the miracle of *‘Jesus feeds five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes’* teaches us that Jesus shows the way to distributing a nation’s wealth to extremely hungry people and share and divide

equally five thousand times. Every one is sure to get his share and it will fill not only stomach but also the heart with love.

By the end of this novel, Karikkan would withdraw from Margalitha and separated from her.

“She came awake with start.

Karikkan was not by her side.”

(p.215)

She is alone with the little orphan Naanu and her unborn baby. In this modern world good people are not allowed to live peacefully where as people who cheat and exploit others can live happily. In search for peace of mind, she prefers to live a different sort of life and to walk the path which is preferred by her heart and to live free from the worries about the body inspired by the parable of birds:

“Therefore I tell you do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than cloths?

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? ...therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

(Matthew 6:25-34)

Jesus says, “don’t worry, be hopeful.” We all agree that worrying is just a waste of time on nothing as it will snatch away everything such as our mood, relations with friends, family and with God too. So instead of worrying on problems try to resolve some difficulties in our life.

So finally Margalitha understands this and she wishes to lead a humbler life, humbler than ever before,

“If my mind is serene and peaceful, I will find the way to happiness.”

(p.233)

And she has discovered her mission which will spread a new Gospel - *the Gospel of Faith in the saviour of the poor and the wretched*. She has accepted that her life is now for others and rebels against the set system for her and tries to have own freedom to grow and develop her personality or at the end of the novel, she proves that empowered woman can do anything against related oppressions with her strong will. Margalitha’s character’s reveals that woman can live alone with freedom in this society and can also raise her voice.

Margalitha is an othappu, or we can say an offence to all the patriarchal institutions - family, church, law and even educational pedagogy. In Indian history, we have female forces of liberation as a part of Bhakti Movement such as Mirabai, Akkamahadevi, Janabai and so on. In *Othappu*, Margalitha’s personal escapism, inherent in such liberation stories as she takes up the mission of service- the service of humanity through a maternity and motherhood that can mother the children of the earth, born and unborn.

To sum up, I must say that an empowered woman like Margalitha who represents all women, with strong will power and determination can do anything against this Patriarchal system and against the gender discrimination and oppression on her. This text also glances on faith, rebellion and devotion to a path outside of the Church positively. This novel is really the reflection of contemporary Kerala.

Here I want to conclude with the famous lines of Margaret Atwood’s poem, ‘You want to go back’, which truly describes female space and freedom,

“You want to go back

To where the sky was inside us

Animals run through us, our hands

Blessed and killed according to our wisdom.

Death made real blood come out.

But face it we have been improved, our heads float

Several inches above our neck...

Our bodies are populated with billions of soft pink numbers

*Multiplying and analyzing themselves, perfecting their own demands
No troubles to anyone."*

Today in this new era we need to support, to explore, to empower and to change the format of the society indeed to accept woman as an independent human being. And Joseph's female character stands as a reformer who confronts suppression by men and pours meaning into meaning full life.

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