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MYTH, MEMORY, AND SOCIO-CULTURAL REPRESENTATION IN THE SELECTED FICTION OF SARAH JOSEPH

Vivek Malik

Research Scholar, Department of English, Baba Mastnath University, Asthal Bohar Rohtak

vivekmalik04@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intricate relationship between mythical reconstruction, cultural remembrance, and feminist resistance in Sarah Joseph's major fictional works, including Aalahayude Penmakkal, Mattathi, Othappu, and Gift in Green. Employing postcolonial feminist and ecofeminist analytical frameworks, the study investigates how Joseph strategically deploys myth and collective memory as narrative instruments to interrogate entrenched patriarchal ideologies, caste hierarchies, and religious orthodoxies within Kerala's socio-cultural landscape. Through close textual analysis, the research demonstrates that Joseph's fiction transforms inherited mythological narratives and community memories into sites of feminist contestation, wherein marginalized female subjects—including Dalit women, Syrian Christian communities, and ecologically displaced populations—articulate alternative modes of subjectivity and resistance. The analysis reveals how Joseph's narrative strategies, particularly her employment of child narrators, non-linear temporalities, and corporeal language reminiscent of écriture féminine, dismantle phallocentric discourse while foregrounding women's embodied experiences of trauma, desire, and survival. The study further explores the convergence of gender oppression and environmental degradation in Joseph's ecofeminist imagination, arguing that her texts position ecological memory and women's relationship to land and water as crucial resources for political resistance against developmental capitalism.

By reinterpreting Christian theological myths of chastity, virginity, and sacrificial motherhood alongside indigenous eco-spiritual narratives, Joseph creates what this paper terms a "feminist counter-archive" that documents subaltern women's histories while challenging dominant historiographical erasures. The findings underscore Joseph's significant contribution to Indian feminist literary discourse, demonstrating how her reworking of myth and mobilization of memory expand possibilities for female agency, historical consciousness, and liberatory imagination within contemporary Malayalam fiction and beyond.

Keywords: Sarah Joseph, Myth and Memory, Feminist Literature, Ecofeminism, Malayalam Fiction, Écriture Féminine, Subaltern Narratives, Patriarchal Resistance, Body Politics, Cultural Memory, Kerala Studies, Gender and Caste, Environmental Justice, Counter-Archive

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INTRODUCTION

Sarah Joseph has emerged as one of the most influential feminist voices in contemporary Malayalam fiction, distinguished by her sustained engagement with questions of gender, caste, religion, environment and the everyday lives of marginalised communities in Kerala. Her novels and short stories, written from within the socio-cultural formations of Syrian Christian and Dalit localities, interrogate both inherited myths and institutionalized religiosity while foregrounding women's struggles for subjectivity and dignity. *Aalahayude Penmakkal, Mattathi, Othappu* and *Gift in Green*, together with powerful short stories such as "Vanadurga" and "Kunjimathu," construct a dense narrative universe in which myth, memory and socio-cultural representation are inseparable from feminist resistance and the politics of the body. Critics have recognized Joseph as "a great myth-maker and a myth-breaker," a writer who creates new myths around subaltern women while demythifying patriarchal narratives that restrict women's bodies, desires and destinies (Satchidanandan, qtd. in Times of India).

The triadic focus on myth, memory and socio-cultural representation is particularly crucial in understanding Joseph's fiction because her narratives repeatedly return to how communities remember, narrate and ritualize their histories. In *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, the child-narrator Annie inherits from her grandmother Mariyam a repertoire of stories—prayers, origin tales of Kokkanchira, fragments of oral history—that function as an alternative archive for a community of scavengers, widows and abandoned women whose existence is barely registered in official histories. In *Othappu*, Margalitha and Rebekka inhabit and contest the deeply gendered myths of Christian chastity and sacrificial wifehood, while in *Gift in Green* the people of Aathi sustain an eco-spiritual "water-life" through nightly storytelling and embodied practices that resist the developmentalist myth of progress. These narrative memories do not simply recall the past; they become performative acts through which women renegotiate trauma, reshape identity and imagine liberation within oppressive socio-cultural structures (Abraham 135).

Sarah Joseph's work is best situated within Indian feminist literary discourse that has, since the writings of Lalithambika Antharjanam, Kamala Das and later Anita Nair, interrogated the intersections of gender, caste, class and religion. What distinguishes Joseph, however, is her sustained attention to subaltern Christian and Dalit women in Kerala and her consistent deployment of ecofeminist and *écriture féminine* strategies to inscribe the female body, voice and landscape into narrative form (Krishna and Jha 103; Varghese 178). Ecofeminist criticism in India has underlined the structural links between the exploitation of women and the devastation of nature, especially under regimes of "mal-development" that displace communities in the name of globalization and urbanization, and Joseph's fiction provides a complex literary exploration of precisely these linkages in contexts such as Aathi and Kokkanchira (Shiva and Mies, qtd. in Krishna and Jha 103–04). At the same time, readings of *Othappu* and *Mattathi* through the lens of

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écriture féminine have emphasized Joseph's disruption of phallocentric language through non-linear narration, corporeal metaphors and an insistence on female bodily experience as the basis of meaning-making (Varghese 178–79).

The present paper employs postcolonial feminist and ecofeminist frameworks to undertake a close reading of *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, *Mattathi*, *Othappu*, *Gift in Green* and selected short stories, with particular attention to mythic reinterpretation, cultural memory, feminist resistance, gender and body politics, caste and religion, trauma and remembrance, and the formation of female subjectivity. It argues that Joseph reconstructs myth and mobilizes memory to contest entrenched patriarchal and caste hierarchies in Kerala society, producing a narrative space in which marginalized identities speak, remember and resist. The analysis will demonstrate how her female protagonists, child narrators and eco-spiritual communities reconfigure myths of wifehood, chastity, development and progress, and how their remembered and narrated experiences generate alternative socio-cultural imaginaries of resistance and liberation. The scope of the paper is thus twofold: first, to examine the textual strategies through which Joseph reworks myth and memory across her major works; and second, to assess the socio-cultural and feminist implications of these strategies within the wider landscape of Indian feminist literature and Kerala's historical consciousness.

ANALYSIS

Aalahayude Penmakkal (1999), often read as the foundational text of Joseph's feminist project, situates myth and memory within the bleak landscape of Kokkanchira, a "dumping ground" for carcasses and dead bodies that becomes the reluctant home of scavengers, Dalits and abandoned women. Narrated by eight-year-old Annie, the novel uses the child's perspective and idiom to record the everyday humiliations, violences and small acts of courage that structure women's lives in this marginalized settlement, turning the girl into what Mary M. Abraham calls "the sole possessor of her people's subculture and damnation" (Abraham 136). Through Mariyam's "Aalaha's prayer" and the Amara pandhal (the broad-bean enclosure), Joseph constructs a mythic-symbolic economy in which religious prayer and the climbing vine become intertwined figures of women's fragile hope, only to be brutally crushed by the road roller of "development" that destroys both the bean enclosure and the community's precarious habitat. In this way myth and memory are materialized as endangered, bodily realities—plants, prayers, stories, scarred flesh—rather than abstract symbols, foregrounding the body politics of urbanization and the caste segregation that relegates Kokkanchira's women to the "wasteland of main society" (Abraham 135).

Within this narrative, gender politics, caste and religion intersect in complex ways that are always mediated through Annie's witnessing of women's suffering. The figures of Kunjila, married off to a dying man and widowed at fifteen, Chinnamma, whose laughter disappears after a traumatic encounter with male desire, and Kochurothu, who waits endlessly for a husband who has

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abandoned her, embody what Abraham calls "the problems faced by entire women in our society" (137). These women experience their own bodies as sites of labor, sexuality and pain that are constantly monitored by both patriarchal kinship structures and church-sanctioned moralities, yet their stories are narrated with a fierce insistence on their courage, endurance and occasional refusal, such as Nonu's escape with the blacksmith boy when her husband's violence becomes unbearable (Abraham 136–37). Myth here emerges not only as religious narrative but as the everyday mythics of marriage, chastity and respectability that condemn poor women to what one might call a "sacrificial script," and Joseph's narrative voice—channelled through Annie—quietly but persistently exposes the brutality underlying these scripts. Memory in *Aalahayude Penmakkal* therefore functions as a counter-history, exposing the violence of caste and gender hierarchies while asserting the historical consciousness of women whose lives official records would treat as expendable.

Mattathi (2003), a kind of sequel to *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, extends this project by focusing on Luci, a young woman whose life is shaped by the intersecting forces of poverty, Christian communal structures and the disciplinary gaze of "Malayala Manka" respectability. Critics have read *Mattathi* as a crucial instance of *écriture féminine* in Malayalam, emphasizing Joseph's attempt to "write the body" by foregrounding menstruation, sexual desire and maternal longing as sources of narrative energy rather than shame (Varghese 178–79). Luci's subjectivity is narrated through a language that repeatedly returns to corporeal sensations, smells, textures of fish markets and slums, thereby inscribing into text those bodily experiences that patriarchal discourse usually silences or renders abject. The myth Joseph dismantles in *Mattathi* is the ideal of the self-sacrificing, docile Christian woman: Luci's journey, shadowed by Brijitta's ambiguous generosity and the village's moral policing, becomes a process of slowly disentangling her sense of self from the prescriptive scripts of wifehood and feminine "purity." By refusing closure and leaving Luci in a state of precarious but active negotiation with her circumstances, the novel foregrounds the ongoing, processual nature of identity formation under conditions of social and religious control.

Othappu (2005), the final novel in the trilogy, thematizes myth and memory in even more explicit relation to Christian theology and institutional power by tracing the story of Margalitha, a nun who "sheds her habit and steps beyond the lakshmanrekha of the convent" in search of a more authentic spirituality and selfhood. In Veena S.'s analysis, *Othappu* exposes the Syrian Christian community's "fetish for female chastity," showing how ideals of wifehood and virginity operate as mechanisms for disciplining and punishing women who deviate from patriarchal norms (Veena 281–82). Rebekka, suspected by her husband Vaidyar of having a secret lover, is subjected to physical torture in an attempt to extract a confession, and her refusal either to confess or to perform the docile, apologetic femininity demanded of her marks a form of embodied dissent: "Flint firm, Rebekka neither admitted nor denied having a lover" (Joseph 29–30). Margalitha's own decision

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to leave the convent and her subsequent relationship with the priest Karikkan are read by family and community as scandalous "going astray," but the narrative frames them as part of what Jancy James calls the "birth pangs of a feminist spirituality" that refuses to separate sexuality from spirituality (James xv; Veena 282). In this sense *Othappu* rewrites central Christian myths—of virginity, sacrificial motherhood, obedience to Church authority—by narrating a woman's quest for a "Christ unbound, unshackled by the Church and the burden of tradition" (Times of India).

The body politics of *Othappu* are deeply entangled with language and narrative form. Subin Varghese argues that Joseph employs strategies of *écriture féminine*, such as non-linear narration, dream sequences and a syntax that privileges sensation and affect, to "overthrow the existing system of patriarchy" encoded in phallocentric language (Varghese 178–80). Margalitha's dreams of motherhood, her acute awareness of bodily desire and the novel's frank depiction of sexual intimacy with Karikkan work to reclaim female sexuality as a site of agency rather than sin, even as the narrative remains alert to how deeply patriarchal suspicion and guilt have penetrated both male and female psyches. The community's memory of "fallen" women, its gossip about "drama women" like Rebekka who work with Nasthikan George, and its moral panic about nuns and priests who cross the boundaries of celibacy together constitute a collective myth of scandal that seeks to police women's bodies in the name of communal honor (Veena 283). Joseph's text, however, patiently records women's perspectives on these events, thus creating a counter-memory that refuses shame and foregrounds the structural asymmetry whereby men's sexual transgressions are normalized while women are permanently stigmatized.

If *Aalahayude Penmakkal* and *Othappu* focus on caste-marked urban peripheries and the internal politics of Syrian Christian communities, *Gift in Green* (2011/2013) relocates Joseph's exploration of myth, memory and socio-cultural representation to the ecologically fragile island of Aathi. Here the central myth is what Niyathi R. Krishna and Pashupati Jha call "the intimate relationship between a people and their life-world," figured through the metaphor of "water-life" that sustains Aathi's culture, livelihoods and rituals (Krishna and Jha 105). The novel pits this eco-spiritual worldview against the predatory vision of Kumaran, who returns to Aathi after years away eager to transform it into a modern city, bringing in outside capital and technologies that threaten to pollute water sources, displace inhabitants and destroy the intricate balance between land, water and community (Krishna and Jha 105–06; Ganesh Kumar and Muthurajan 456). The characters' story nights, their careful rules about selling land only to fellow inhabitants, and their practices of sustainable fishing and agriculture function as rituals of remembrance that encode both ecological knowledge and communal ethics, turning memory into a political resource against the erasures of development ideology.

Gift in Green also extends Joseph's ecofeminist concerns by aligning the vulnerability of women's bodies with the vulnerability of the landscape. Ganesh Kumar and Muthurajan argue that the novel

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"delineates the impact of both cultural environmentalism and ecofeminism," showing how women and environment are "two highly valued but oppressed components in the world" (456). Female characters such as Shailaja, who rejects a polluted mainland marriage to remain in Aathi, and Gitanjali, who brings her troubled daughter Kayal to the island seeking healing, embody a desire for an alternative, more holistic mode of living in which care for the land and care for the self are mutually reinforcing (Krishna and Jha 105–06). The island itself is personified in the novel through a nameless female figure whose anguish over ecological destruction mirrors the women's own suffering, suggesting that the violation of rivers and wetlands is continuous with the violation of female bodies under patriarchal and capitalist regimes (Krishna and Jha 106). Myth, in this context, takes the form of local stories about Aathi's origins and spirits, but also of global myths of "progress" that justify environmental degradation; Joseph's narrative reclaims the former to challenge the latter, thus producing an eco-political mythopoesis grounded in women's lived experiences.

Joseph's short stories further illuminate how she uses myth and memory to connect gendered and ecological violence. An ecofeminist reading of stories such as "Vanadurga" demonstrates that "the destruction of Nature [is equated] with the destruction of Women," as the figure of the forest goddess is simultaneously a deity and a woman whose violation signifies both environmental and gendered catastrophe (Augustine 5). In "Kunjimathu," as Sruti Paul shows, the life of a girl in a rural Christian community becomes a parable of how patriarchal exploitation and ecological degradation reinforce each other, with the girl's body figured through metaphors of land, river and tree that are progressively despoiled by male greed and communal complicity (Paul 1–2). These stories foreground the materiality of women's bodies and of the non-human world, refusing abstract allegory and instead insisting on the concrete, bodily costs of both caste-class exploitation and environmental destruction. Memory, here, is often traumatic yet productive: women remember floods, evictions, rapes and "development" projects, and those memories, narrated in Joseph's prose, become both testimonies and warnings, "novels with a warning" in phrase (Krishna and Jha's 107).

Across these texts, then, Joseph's narrative practice reveals a consistent concern with how myth and memory mediate female subjectivity and socio-cultural representation. The child Annie, the subaltern Lucy, the ex-nun Margalitha, the women of Aathi and the protagonists of the short stories all inhabit histories of caste subordination, religious discipline and ecological dispossession, yet each articulates, in different ways, a resistant re-reading of inherited narratives. Whether through Annie's imaginative reconstruction of Aalaha's prayer, Luci's bodily awareness, Margalitha's feminist spirituality, or Shailaja's commitment to Aathi's water-life, Joseph's women transform both myth and memory into resources for rethinking what it means to live, suffer and resist as female subjects in contemporary Kerala.

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DISCUSSION

The broader implications of Joseph's reworking of myth and memory become clearer when her fiction is read alongside ecofeminist and postcolonial feminist theory. Ecofeminism, as articulated by thinkers such as Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, posits a structural connection between the domination of women and the exploitation of nature under patriarchal, capitalist development, arguing that both are treated as passive resources to be appropriated and controlled (Shiva and Mies, qtd. in Krishna and Jha 103–04). Joseph's Aathi in *Gift in Green* and Kokkanchira in *Aalahayude Penmakkal* embody precisely this double marginalization: they are spaces inhabited by poor, often Dalit or lower-caste Christian women, located at the literal margins of cities and islands, and they are also the sites most vulnerable to floods, pollution, displacement and the violence of land acquisition. By narrating these communities from within, and by foregrounding women's embodied knowledge of land and water, Joseph's fiction performs what Niyathi R. Krishna describes as an "eco-feminist resistance to the invasion of land and life," contesting both the masculinist myth of mastery over nature and the social myth that equates development with progress (Krishna and Jha 103–06).

At the same time, Joseph's rewriting of Christian and local myths must be seen as part of a broader feminist critique of religious and cultural narratives that naturalise women's subordination. In *Othappu*, the ideal of female chastity is exposed as a historically produced "artificial virtue" whose primary function is to secure male control over lineage, property and honor, echoing David Hume's account of chastity as shaped by "the general interests of society" as interpreted through patriarchal norms (Veena 281–82). Veena S. demonstrates how characters like Rebekka and Margalitha refuse the roles of the "chaste wife" and the obedient nun, thereby "problematizing chastity and dissent in patriarchy" and revealing the violence required to maintain these ideals (Veena 282–83). Joseph's narrative aligns with this critique by refusing to punish her protagonists with moralizing closure: while Margalitha faces ostracism, poverty and abandonment, the novel ends with her forging a new path with Naanu and her unborn child, suggesting that a feminist spirituality "counterpoints itself to the aberrations of a male dominated society that is hypocritical, materialistic, vain, cruel, and cowardly" (James xv; Veena 282). Myth, here, is no longer the property of the Church; it becomes something a woman can "tell anew," as Margalitha understands when she resolves to narrate her own version of the "son of Joseph" story (Times of India).

This reconceptualization of myth intersects with feminist discourses on *écriture féminine* and the politics of language. Helene Cixous's call for women to "write themselves" in a language that inscribes the female body and desire into text finds resonances in Joseph's stylistic choices, as Subin Varghese notes in his reading of *Othappu* as a Malayalam instance of *écriture féminine* (Varghese 178–80). In both *Mattathi* and *Othappu*, Joseph's narrative voice dwells on bodily sensations—menstrual blood, pregnancy, sexual longing—as well as on the non-linear temporality

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of dreams and memories, thereby challenging the rational, linear, often disembodied narrative modes associated with masculine authority (Varghese 1–3). This linguistic strategy not only validates experiences that patriarchal discourse devalues but also undermines what Varghese terms the "phallogocentric symbolic order" in which women's speech is either silenced or co-opted (Varghese 179–80). Joseph's women, by contrast, speak, remember and desire in idioms that are deeply rooted in the bodily and the local, thus expanding the possibilities for female subjectivity within Malayalam literary culture.

Memory in Joseph's fiction also functions as a mode of political resistance that parallels Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concern with whether "the subaltern can speak," especially in contexts where their histories are erased by dominant narratives. While Joseph does not theorize subalternity explicitly, her child narrators, Dalit women and island dwellers insistently narrate experiences—of caste humiliation, sexual violence, displacement and ecological loss—that mainstream Kerala history often glosses over. In *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, the oral histories recounted by Mariyam and the women of Kokkanchira transform personal suffering into collective memory, creating what Abraham calls "an unforgettable perspective of women" added to the history of the place (Abraham 137). Similarly, in *Gift in Green* the story nights of Aathi preserve the community's ecological memory and ethical codes, enabling inhabitants to articulate a critique of external "invasions" in their own narrative terms (Krishna and Jha 105–06; Ganesh Kumar and Muthurajan 456–57). Memory here is not simply retrospective; it is anticipatory and strategic, providing women with discursive tools to contest both patriarchal family structures and state-corporate projects that threaten their worlds.

Placed within Indian feminist literary discourse, Joseph's work both extends and complicates earlier feminist engagements with myth and socio-cultural representation. Writers such as Anita Nair also foreground women's struggles within patriarchal families and caste-stratified societies, and ecofeminist criticism has examined convergences between Joseph and Nair in their portrayal of women's relationship to environment and community (Krishna and Jha 103–07). Yet Joseph's specific focus on Malayalam Christian and Dalit milieus, and her sustained critique of Church institutions, caste prejudice within Christian communities, and development-induced displacement, give her fiction a distinctive socio-political edge. Abhirami Girija Sriram notes that Othappu "dares to explore the role of spirituality, sexuality and the freedom of the self in a self-consciously religious society," exposing how caste and patriarchy collude within the Church to reproduce a hierarchy "as deplorable as the caste system" in Hinduism (Sriram). This double critique—of both religious patriarchy and secular developmentalism—situates Joseph's fiction within a radical feminist tradition that sees gender justice as inseparable from struggles against caste, class and ecological exploitation.

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The intersection of myth and gender in Joseph's work also invites comparison with broader feminist revisions of mythology in Indian literatures. While many feminist writers have rewritten epics and myths from the perspective of marginalized female figures, Joseph's *Vigil (Oorukaaval)*, based on Angada from the Ramayana, and her Ramayana-based stories sit alongside *Aalahayude Penmakkal* and *Othappu* to form a corpus that persistently questions the ethics of war, sacrifice and chastity. In these texts, myths are not merely subverted but re-situated within the lifeworlds of those who bear the brunt of their prescriptions—women, "monkeys" like Angada, and the environment devastated by bridge-building and warfare (Krishna and Jha 106–07). By juxtaposing mythic narratives with contemporary Kerala contexts of caste violence, church politics and environmental degradation, Joseph encourages readers to rethink the taken-for-granted authority of foundational stories, and to recognize how those stories have historically legitimized gendered and ecological violence.

Finally, Joseph's sustained engagement with trauma, remembrance and identity formation contributes to an emerging "memory discourse" in Indian feminist writing. Her texts suggest that trauma—whether the trauma of marital abandonment, sexual assault, forced migration, or witnessing environmental destruction—cannot be healed without being remembered and narrated, yet they also warn against the dangers of remaining trapped in victimhood. Characters like Annie, Luci, Margalitha and Shailaja embody a spectrum of responses: from shock and confusion to rage, irony, quiet stubbornness and, occasionally, visionary resolve. Their journeys indicate that female subjectivity is forged not in isolation but through sustained engagement with community memories, inherited myths and the material realities of caste, religion and environment. In this sense Joseph's fiction models what might be called "remembered resistance": a mode of feminist praxis that insists on remembering pain and injustice while simultaneously imagining and enacting alternative ways of being.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has shown that Sarah Joseph's fiction constitutes a powerful literary exploration of how myth and memory shape, constrain and potentially liberate female subjectivity within the socio-cultural realities of contemporary Kerala. In *Aalahayude Penmakkal*, the oral histories and religious symbols of Kokkanchira become tools through which a child narrator records the lives of marginalized women, transforming their everyday suffering into a counter-memory that challenges both caste prejudice and developmentalist erasure. *Mattathi* and *Othappu* extend this project by directly confronting Christian myths of chastity, wifehood and spiritual authority, inscribing women's bodies and desires into narrative language and thereby unsettling the phallocentric discourses that have traditionally defined feminine virtue. *Gift in Green* and the short stories bring ecofeminist concerns to the fore, connecting the degradation of rivers, forests

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and islands with the exploitation of women, and offering eco-spiritual visions in which care for land and water is inseparable from the quest for justice and dignity.

Myth, in Joseph's work, is thus neither simply rejected nor nostalgically celebrated; it is interrogated, reinterpreted and re-narrated from the standpoint of women and other subaltern subjects. Whether through Margalitha's attempt to "tell the story of the son of Joseph anew," Annie's imaginative investment in Aalaha's prayer, or the story nights of Aathi, Joseph's characters appropriate and reshape mythic narratives in order to articulate feminist, ecological and subaltern perspectives that dominant discourses occlude. Memory, for its part, emerges as a political practice: by remembering floods, evictions, abuses and small acts of solidarity, Joseph's women both testify to historical injustice and preserve the knowledge necessary for collective survival and resistance. The intertwining of myth and memory in her fiction thus produces what might be called a feminist counter-archive of Kerala's social history, one that records the lives of scavengers, drama women, ex-nuns, island dwellers and forest goddesses alongside, and often against, official narratives.

Sarah Joseph's contribution to feminist literature lies not only in the themes she addresses but also in the formal innovations through which she inscribes female bodies, voices and landscapes into Malayalam narrative. By drawing on ecofeminist insights, *écriture féminine*, and a deep familiarity with Kerala's cultural and religious traditions, she crafts stories that link gender politics, body politics, caste and religion, trauma and remembrance, and resistance and liberation in a single imaginative field. Her work demonstrates that any meaningful critique of patriarchy in Kerala must attend simultaneously to the politics of caste, church and development, and that feminist resistance must grapple with the intertwined fates of women's bodies and the ecological worlds they inhabit. In reimagining myth and mobilizing memory from the vantage point of marginalized women, Joseph not only expands the horizons of Malayalam and Indian feminist fiction but also offers readers a powerful ethical and aesthetic framework for engaging with the crises of gender, caste and environment in the present.

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