

THE TRAJECTORY OF FEMINIST IDEALS

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ABSTRACT

Many feminist theories originated in the West and therefore reflected the social and cultural background of the writers and the nature of social configurations within which they sought explanations. More relevant for us are the family—immediate and extended—with its hold over loyalties of its members, a deeply hierarchic society stratified by caste and class, and persistent conflicts over religion, language, ethnicity and other differences.

Studied here are two novels, both translated from Malayalam—one ‘Fire, My Witness’ called ‘Agnisakshi in Malayalam, written by Lalithambika Antharjanam, and ‘The Scent of the Other Side’ called ‘Othappu’ in Malayalam, written by Sarah Joseph. The first one was published in 1975 and the second one in 2005. This paper traces the trajectory of feminist ideals over the span of 35 years and concludes that women have always tried to grapple with the question of women’s subjectivity and agency. They have been victims of patriarchal systems and are partial collaborators. Women sometimes wear the marks of their subordination and their inferiority with pride.

Devaki in Fire, My Witness and Margalitha in The Scent of the Other Side are the two characters studied to work out a conclusion.

The Indian woman has indeed achieved success in half a century of independence, but if there is to be a truly female empowerment, much remains to be done.

KEYWORDS: *Feminine Qualities, Social and Political, Class, Caste, Antiquity and Prestige, Nambudiri, Christian.*

INTRODUCTION

Lalithambika Antharjanam’s book Agnisakshi was originally serialized in the Mathruhhumi Illustrated Weekly. It was published as a book by Current Books in 1976. It tells the story of a Nambudiri woman, who is attracted towards into the battle for social and political liberation but cannot easily ward off the shackles of convention that bind her. The novel dealt with disguised condemnation of aspects of class structure and activities.

The novel Agnisakshi was the only one written by Lalithambika Antharjanam's. Her short stories and poems are well-known in the literary circles of Kerala. This novel was penned in the late middle age years of her life. And it went on to achieve a ‘trend setter’ status in the history of Malayalam fiction, which is viewed and studied for its classical features also. It received the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award and Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award.

The book was translated into English by Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan, named ‘Fire, My Witness’ in 1950. The name of the original work in Malayalam ‘Agnisakshi’ would henceforth be used in this paper.

Thethikutty (Devaki or Sumitarananda), the protagonist is married to Unni Narnbudiri of the well-known Brahmin family named Manampillyllam. The young, virtuous, and loving Unni, is too conformist to be the husband of a woman with Thethikutty's progressive views. As more and more restrictions are imposed on her life at the 'Illam', some of them that even interfere with their marital life, Thethikutty leaves her husband's home when the situation so demands. The elders in the family warn her that she can never return. Thethikutty reaches her paternal home in frustration. Unni wastes away his life, immersed in pious rituals and dies in sadness. His family labels him an eccentric.

Thethikutty, meanwhile, is unable to accept the new-found freedom. She is not able to attain spiritual peace nor is she able to completely detach herself from filial bonds. As part of her retreat to a life of penance in the Himalayas, a chance meeting with her husband's half-sister, the sixty-year old Mrs. K.M.K Nair (Thankam) with whom she shared a close bond of friendship, shakes her to a realization of the meaninglessness of the journey she had till then undertaken. In an intensely emotional moment, that breaks free the chains of the ascetic in her, she relates to Mrs.Nair's son as her own unborn child whom she yearned for during her unconsummated married life. Thethikutty then hands over her wedding pendant to Mrs. Nair's granddaughter with a request to cherish it with due regard.

In the novel, the author explores the ideas of choice, detachment, renunciation, love and loyalty through three of her main characters - two women Thethikutty (Sumitarananda, Devaki Manarnpilli or Devi Bahen), Thankam Nair and one man Unni Nambudiri.

Agnisakshi was a trendsetting novel that went on to break traditional approaches to enquire into the unhealthy practices and the oppression that women in the Namboothiri community suffer in their homes. It was a novel that shocked the consciousness of the community. People within the cloistered existence of the Nambudiri community as well as the others who were closely associated with the same community were taken aback to learn about what went on inside the walls of the 'illam'. Agnisakshi written by Lalithambika Antharjanam remains one among the most celebrated works in Malayalam literature.

The novel portrays in chronological order the struggles of a progressive Namboothiri (Brahmin) woman when she gets married to a highly orthodox family. The plot revolves around Thethikutty and the strife she suffers in the highly male-centred Namboodiri (house) and her passage towards emancipation. The novel picturises her conversion into a radical and later on her reconciled life in an ashram.

Othappu is a Malayalam novel written by Sarah Joseph and published in 2005. The novel is the last in the trilogy which includes 'Alaahayude Penmakal' and 'Mattathi'. While 'Mattathi' is a kind of sequel to 'Alaahayude Penmakal', 'Othappu' follows the pattern by having a central female character and protagonist. The novel deals with the decision of a nun to step outside the congregation and to adopt a life that is free from the bondage of conventional standards and practices. In this, the character 'Marghalitha', is in conflict with the religious order and the community which is against her personal views and individual freedom. The church refuses to accept and expect her to obey the rules to the structure in place regarding those joining the convent. The English translation of the book was done by Valson Thampu and named 'Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side'. It won the Crossword Book Award for translation. The name of the original work in Malayalam Gthopyu would henceforth be used in this paper.

On the surface, Othappu is the journey of an impetuous young nun, who stumbles impulsively into the wrong profession and then leaves it as she is disillusioned, of an absorbed and focused young priest who is clear that his

priesthood is his family's only monetary escape route, of a mad woman who calls herself receiver of the Holy Spirit, of a radical priest who lives in the jungle and of a family that is too well-known to receive an ex-nun even if she is the only daughter of the house. But beneath the polished layer the story pierces through the thin and fragile shell of complications brought forth due to orthodoxy and the struggle faced by moral conditioning.

The Protagonists

Devaki or Thethikutty is married to Unni Namboodiri and joins the illustrious Manampalli as a young bride. In the solitude that the 'illam' (the Namboothiri household) forces upon her and its oppressive rules— she is unable to step out of the household, is chided for her revolutionary brother's ways during the freedom struggle and has no exposure to the books and magazines that she grew up with.

Unni is very good-natured but prudent and puts a life full of rituals before anything else. He loves his wife but is unable to find time for her.

Devaki soon realizes that she will turn mad if she continues to live in that household. Till the end of the novel, it remains a question as to whether Devaki finds her much sought-after freedom. Does she find it as she walks in and out of different roles—the young, dreamy Thethikutty, the fiery political activist Devaki Manampalli, the Gandhian social activist and finally, the sanyasin Surnitrananda? It is a question that leaves the reader thinking. She wanted to break free but is still bound by some unnamed bond to her husband to the very end.

Within days of her arrival she realizes that she is in the wrong place and her husband is the wrong man. Not that he is ever cruel or angry or unconcerned towards her; only, he is a slave to the age-old rituals and customs of what is expected of the eldest male member of a traditional Namboodiri family. She says:

He believes that it is his duty to strictly adhere to the dharma”
enshrined in the religious text and practiced over the centuries by his
ancestors” (25 Antharjanam). Consequently, he has no time for his
young bride; nor is he willing to take steps towards changing the
traditional ways. He never gets angry and quietly follows the
conservative elders of the family led by the powerful Aphan
Namboodiri. Unni's mother says: “Nainboodiri women were to restrict
their entire lives to the kitchen and the prayer room. Their destiny was to
read only the Ramayanam and the Shiva Puranam” (24 Antharjanam).

However, the inevitable confrontation occurs when Tethy insists upon going to her house to visit her sick mother, which is objected to by Unni's family. Their objection is that Tethy's brother has been excommunicated because he had participated in the freedom struggle movement. Tethy decides to visit her mother despite these objections. To her surprise, her husband keeps quiet at the crucial moment. Neither does he say yes nor 'no'. This is both a turning point in the life of Tethy as it indicates her initial step towards liberating her cloistered state in search of her identity and also in the novel. She becomes Devi Bahen and joins Gandhi's ashram. Before moving to Gandhi's ashram, she becomes a reputed public

speaker, championing the cause of reform and progress among women. She becomes a close associate of Gandhi and saves a child when he is beaten up by the police. She gets injured. She accompanies Gandhi during his tour. During the pilgrimage to the Bengal region, Gandhiji used to say, “Look at Devi Bahen. The greatest symbol of fame is stamped on her forehead. It is because of that I took her along with me during this journey” (91 Antharjanam). Her disillusionment with the freedom movement and consequent trip to Benaras influence her and she becomes a disciple of a Muni in an ashram and turns spiritual accepting the name of Sumitrananda. After the death of Muni, she herself becomes a sanyasini with several disciples.

Margalitha

As Sarah Joseph in the author’s note very rightly puts, ‘the desire to be a nun lingers in the flowering time of every catholic girl’s life’, Margalitha Varkey also was carried away by that same desire. Her loving family of mother, father, an elder and a younger brother agree to her wish, though they were first taken aback to allow the only daughter in the house to accept a spiritual life. But the honour that the family would celebrate took the better viewpoint and she is given permission to join the habit and become a nun. But it was misunderstood desire. Marghalita wanted to serve humanity to the core, she found her spirituality against the conventions of the church, she was too rebellious to be a passive nun and so for the peace of her soul, destroying everything that the society respected, she walks out of her ascetic life.

Meanwhile the only person she asks for some help before leaving is the young, aspiring, assistant vicar Father Roy Francis Karikkan. Karikkan is the hope of his family and unlike Margalitha has seen and lived in deprivation. But he is torn between serving humanity and a section of humanity (Catholic believers under the church) and his completely balanced world, endures an erupting volcano with the realizations his heart come up with, concerning Margalitha. While her family completely rejects her walkout first by locking her in a dark room in her house itself, and later by cancelling all rights she may have on the inheritance, even on an employment that would have allowed her to live respectfully. On the other hand, Karikkan and the church try everything within the circle of their powers, from counseling to meditation sessions to promotion as Vicar, in order to not let him walk the forbidden path, but he against his own judgment goes out seeking her like a love struck teenager. And then begins the long adventure— an ex-nun and an ex-priest having walked out on the faith decide to live together. The very society that had revered them now treat them as outcasts, even beat them up. Without a roof on their heads, and not a penny with them, they become living examples of what happens to people who betray the faith of the community.

It is bitter realization for Marghalitha and Karikken that their rights as human beings and their needs as sexual beings were not going to be recognized because they had betrayed the faith of the community. They would be treated as outcasts from the much revered status that they were adorned by as Priest and Nun. No one had anything to do with them except a wandering atheist and the family of a Syrian priest who was son to a Syrian Christian father and a Roman Catholic mother. The other characters who fill the canvas are Marghalita’s brothers who are intoxicated by family honour, Karikken’s father who commits suicide to escape social humiliation, an ex- assistant to an atheist turned miracle healer, a priest who conducts mass for the tribals, without the frills of the church, with water as wine and tapioca as flesh of Christ — only add to the ups and troughs of the voyage of the offenders and to top it Karikkan’s guilt ridden conscience haunts him to a great extent.

Margalitha has not desired for material things. She breaks the closed religious order realizing her stay as impossible. She is snatched of her property right in her patriarchal family because she has joined the religious order and as

a woman, she is subdued. The eminent author, Sarah Joseph with a woman's consciousness contends on the conflicting circumstances of her female protagonists as wage earners.

Many atrocities are inflicted on women in the controlled system of society. This is visible in the depiction of female characters of Sarah Joseph in *Othappu*. Society imposes norms to follow but rarely rescues women from the assaults. Renegade Margalitha takes shelter in the house of Yohannan Kasseessa, a friend of Karikkan. Then the scandalous attitude of the society creates a commotion in the life of Kasseessa linking his name with Margalitha. Karikkan has visited Kasseessa's home and has waited hours together to have a glance of Margalitha. But when she expects his support, he is conscious of social morality and disappears from the scene. The strong belief of religious principles insists the society to condemn the ex-nun, Margalitha for marrying the parish priest which results in the suicide of Karikkan's father. Margalitha is firm in her decision. But though Karikkan is inclined towards Margalitha, he exhibits weak mind through his deeds. That results in the humiliation and hostility of Margalitha. She never alters her mind even though society blames her. When Margalitha experiences motherhood in her life, society criticizes her as the seducer of Karikkan. She is held responsible for all the disastrous in the life of Karikkan. He is termed as naive against all odds. Deceived by Karikkan, Margalitha is burdened with Naanu from Augustine, who wants to be free from that child. The entrance of this child in Margalitha's life creates a lot of rumours among the people. Margalitha's act of stepping outside the nunnery brews so many stories in the society. Her journey as ex-nun from her parental home, her travelling in the train without ticket aimlessly, her stay at Kasseessa's home and her days with Rebekka and with Karikkan torment her wounded heart in the misogynist world. Society expects strict celibacy and morality from the religious members of the church. If any member comes out of that system, it thinks him or her as the deceiver of the sacred world and stays behind to extend the helping hand.

Margalitha searches God through service to the poor. She juxtaposes spirituality and sexuality. Her way of seeking peace and God is against church rules. That's why, she is outcasted and excluded from society. Inside the convent: In the convent, Margalitha used to attend the Mass only to discharge a duty. Day after day, again and again, she lent her voice, not her soul, to the printed prayers that had lost their resonance and fragrance. The two eras

Set during the Indian Independence struggle, at a time when Kerala society was slowly attempting to break its casteist shackles, Agnisakshi tells a very touching story of personal losses [of brahmins and other so called 'forward castes']. While talking about casteist practices and misogyny, the story focuses a lot on the sense of 'purpose' and 'satisfaction' among its characters.

Lalithambika writes, "When her father, a learned man of progressive views, heard that a daughter had been born to him, he exclaimed angrily, "No, I will not live here any longer. I'll go away, maybe to Madras, become a Christian, and marry an Englishwoman." "And what if she has a daughter too?" asked my mother. "At least I will be allowed to bring her up like a human being. I will have the liberty to educate her, give her the freedom to grow, get her married to a good man."

Lalithambika's father's words echo a father's desperation at the torturous life of a generation of Namboodiri women in Kerala, including foreseeing and imagining the same for his own newborn daughter, at the turn of the last century. The Kerala Brahmin caste of Namboodiris in the 1900s were mostly wealthy landowners "whose influence extended to the royal houses of Travancore and Malabar, and who were widely regarded as keepers' of the Hindu

scriptures, brahminical learning, and the Hindu caste hierarchy since they occupied its topmost tier in the state”(Introduction. ‘Fire, My Witness’).

While Namboodiri men exercised a good deal of social, cultural, and personal power, the community boasted of a strict patriarchal and matrilineal cycle of ritual seclusion for their women, often giving adolescent girls in marriage to men fifty or sixty years older than them, restricting women exclusively to the kitchen at puberty, preventing them from getting an education, ordering rigorous ritual seclusion for widows, including child widows, prohibiting widow remarriage, and ostracising women from family and community if they dared to question, confront or reject any of the strictures placed upon them. The term “antharjanam” is a Namboodiri caste name; it literally means “one who lives in the interiors”

It was primarily this women’s world that Lalithambika sketched with ‘great compassion and boundless imagination’ in over a hundred short stories written over a period of forty years between the late 1930s and 1970s. In throwing light on the inhuman indignities suffered by Namboodiri women in Kerala, Lalithambika’s stories shed light on all poisonous patriarchal structures and held them accountable for the gendered abuse of women for all times.

Lalithambika was born in 1909 to a traditional Namboodiri household in Kottavattom in Kollam district, Kerala. Unlike many Namboodiri girls of her generation, Lalithambika's parents, particularly her progressive father, allowed her to secure an informal primary education along with her brothers that was supplemented with informal discourses on literature, religion, nationalism etc that dangerously rippled through the family home as well as the larger Kerala society.

In *Ormeyle Nidhigal* (The Treasures of Memory), Lalithambika writes that “as she grew older, she was aware that people disapproved of the way she was being brought up. They thought that a growing girl had no right to so much freedom”. In her autobiography, Lalithambika details a cultural milieu where in the far southern corner of the nation, news of the slow and steady fervor of a brewing nationalism and independence movement brought the external world with its full force of new ideas to a young girl growing up in protected isolation.

In the early 1930s, when Lalithambika started writing, Kerala was a brewing pot of social reform movements that confronted several social inequities, particularly the intersectional oppression perpetrated on lower castes, non-Hindu religions, and women, through a sickly confluence of caste, religion and gender prejudices. These oppressive practices included untouchability and inapproachability through an obscure system of ritual distances of pollution between upper and lower castes enabled by the janmi-kudiyam feudal economic system, as well as prohibiting the “lower” castes from entering temples or other public places.

The anti-colonial and anti-feudal Mappilla Uprising (1921), and Vaikom Satyagraham (1924), and Guruvayur Satyagraham (1931) against untouchability were all social protests against such inequities. Namboodiri women and Muslim women were the most ritually secluded in terms of their access to education and freedom of movement. In her writings, Lalithambika often acknowledges her debt to Sree Narayana Guru who advocated for who connected gender oppression to caste oppression in his famous long poem *Duravastha* where a Namboodiri woman falls in love with a lower caste Pulaya man in the fiery days of the Mappila rebellion.

Yet, in many ways, the book offers an interesting and useful window into the world of Kerala's upper-caste elites who for years resisted social change through a mix of obscurantism and patriarchy. Antharjanam herself wrote in her

preface to the 1980 edition, "(I will be satisfied) if this serves to help women of the younger generation to understand their mothers and their grandmothers; (if it helps) members of the older generation to conduct self-examination."

Sarah Joseph's ('scandal') is steeped in the Christian tradition. Even while the novel's protagonists fall foul of the Chiirch, there is no ambiguity about their desire to follow Christ. The work is casually peppered with references to the Bible. What can be more central to the worldview of Margalitha and Karikkan, a lapsed nun and defrocked wpriest '? The couple find themselves locked in a passionate embrace, and the flow of words is suddenly stemmed: "Word became flesh."

Here is a novel that recreates the hypocrisies of Christian community life in Kerala, telling the story of a Christianity still to be discovered there — a faith rooted in the individual consciousness, free of societal control. Love and loneliness, messy life and stoic acceptance Joseph weaves it all into this moving account.

Margalitha turns her back on the convent. Her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience were taken in all sincerity, but inside the convent, she finds her soul rebelling, still seeking.

Among her friends is a quiet acceptance of a 'system' — "Once you are caught in a system, it is best to cooperate with its dictates. If you walk out, your rebellion will exact a crushing. . . cost," (58 Joseph), says Aabelamma, Margalitha's superior in the convent.

Margalitha has a 'confessor', a young Catholic priest to whom she writes letters that bare her soul. Roy Francis Karikkan is an idealistic young priest, stuck in a priesthood that expects quiet acceptance of status quo. "Why catch a tiger by its tail?" (12 Joseph) the young priest is asked, when he finds a mysterious corpse and seeks to intervene. The older priest won't has his sleep disturbed by such trivial matters — just keep quiet and out of it, Daniel Achen tells Karikkan.

Karikkan and Margalitha, though, come from vastly different families — Karikkan's father is a coolie, who makes his living carrying loads on his head. Margalitha is from a wealthy family, landed and aristocratic. To Karikkan's parents and siblings, having one of their own among the priests is a matter of great pride. So when the priest-son returns home with a woman, there is deep shame, great shock. Karikkan's father's world lies shattered, and he commits suicide. Even ritually pouring dust into his father's grave is something Karikkan can only do in the cover of darkness, alone, unnoticed.

In Othappu, Joseph employs the concept of 'othappu' as a tool of resistance to subvert the authority of the church over its laity to liberate them from the constraints that the church imposes upon them. Margalitha's decision to defrock herself is a resistance to the church's norm that a priest or nun is not supposed to renounce their vocation. Paul Zacharia notes that "We tend to view the person who renounces the chosen path of celibacy as tainted..." (250). By defrocking herself Margalitha not only subverts this common belief regarding holy vocation but also shows her fellow members that it is all a matter of choice, and they can also do the same thing, if they feel like. Her offering of holy sacrament is an open flouting of the custom that the nuns are not allowed to offer holy sacrament. According to the teachings of the church, sexuality and priesthood are mutually exclusive ideas. By developing a romantic relationship with Father Karikkan, Margalitha who is a nun openly defies this notion. Being a nun, Margalitha is a public figure in the church and she is supposed to be a role model for the believers. The believers, the church hopes, will learn from a priest or a nun as to how to live their life the right way. When a nun who is supposed to uphold the teachings of the church in public commits a prohibited act, it turns out to be a temptation for her followers to do the same act. By openly committing all the acts that the church sees as anathema, Margalitha causes othappu' not only to the common believers but to 165 of her fellow

members of the church as well. Margalitha turns othappu into a powerful tool of subversion and resistance. The same is the case with Brother Manikyan and Father Augustine who have severed their ties with the kind of Christianity that Catholic Church professes. Father Augustine subverts the accepted structure of celebrating the sacrament of Holy Mass. He does it publicly thereby showing that anybody has the authority to perform it in whatever ways one wants. In the eyes of the church it is an act of othappu', but it functions here as a way of resisting the authority of the church. In the eyes of the church, Brother Manikyan's attempt to set up a black seminary' where people, especially the lower casts, can search for God through nature is an act of othappu' because the ideas of Manikyan's black seminary is at logger heads with the teachings of the church. It causes others to lose their faith in the framework of the church. Rebecca is another character in the novel that employs othappu as mechanism of resistance against the church. She publicly rebels against the conventional faith practices of the church by claiming that she has direct link with Christ and can heal people. She cures the sick and consoles hundreds of people who ignore the church and flock to her prayer sessions. Her parallel religious practices that draw people away from the teachings of the church are obviously an act of othappu'. But this othappu' is not a means of control rather it is an empowering position. In short, the entire novel functions as an othappu', an attempt to challenge the authoritarian teachings of the church.

The term 'othappu' being the Christian dialectic form of Malayalam, meaning to set a bad example that may cause people to deviate from true way of faith. The attempts to subvert the cultural binaries of male domination by the self-assertive feminine is strongly revealed through the words of Sister Jeremia when, with her co-nuns offered the Mass secretly at night, and was demanded to confess her blasphemy before Mother Superior, 'You have no authority to offer the eucharistic sacrifice to God.' 'God has accepted mine.' 'How do you know?' 'I know, exactly the same way as all priests know'. (152 Joseph). Living amid harsh scandals and poverty, she remains with the same courage of determination that motivated her to step out of her home.

And even after giving up her habit, Margalitha never renounces the way of God, as shown by Christ, the lord. Living together with Karikkan she remains faithful to her soul, but he, though struggles hard to keep himself strong in his beliefs, and fails to his own self. Being spiritually tired of knowing her womb nourishing a new life, he flees to nowhere in search of an unseen God, to be saved from the harshness of conflicting soul. But she responds to the urges of her body, talks to the growing life within and at the same time involves in spiritual queries on serving the humanity, for the brimming up of the fullness of life. Sarah emphatically asserts, "For a woman, sexuality is not a matter of physical or mechanical indulgence. It is absurd to categorize these complicated experiences of the body and mind into opposing, abstract columns called sexuality and spirituality" and adds "the 'Christ' defined by man is not the 'Christ' defined by woman"(10 Joseph)

Agnisakshi', --a bold statement on the social status of Namboodiri women of a disturbing era. 'Agnisakshi' is as much the story of the misdeeds of the forward classes, crumbling of the feudal order, nationalism and the rise of bourgeoisie after Independence, as it is about the complexities of man-woman relationship, ascension of woman power, and the conflicts between the temporal and the spiritual. The evolution from Thethikutty to Devaki Behn to Sumitrananda has not been forced but rather affected by force of circumstance. Witnessing these changes is Thangam, her husband's cousin and her only companion in the cruel, compassionless' illom'.

In my opinion, agnisakshi could be called special due to contemporary relevance: We are not done with casteism and misogyny. Not yet. Focus on the perils of orthodoxy and inertia:

Agnisakshi is a quick reminder of the consequences of not adapting/changing with time. Focus on sense of purpose and self-actualization: Given the basic needs of food-clothing and shelter are fulfilled, sense of purpose and self-actualization is a universal struggle. a time less one. Denial of love and respect: Again, this is universal and timeless. To the Keralite society

Agnisakshi reminds us how far we have come. And how much more we have to go

Namboodiris were more orthodox than other communities like Nairs and Christians. They were most reluctant to reform and resisted the changes that occurred in Kerala in the twentieth century. “But a revolutionary upheaval of thought and tradition occurred in the 1920s when V.T Bhattathirippad and EMS Narnboodiiirippad began to question and challenge the inhuman practices prevalent within the confines of their own caste.

Feminist Ideals

K. Saraswathi Amma, acknowledged as one of the finest authors of her generation, K. Saraswathi Amma (14 April 1919 – 26 December 1975) was a Malavalam feminist writer whose short stories have been anthologised in translation in several American texts. According to critic Jancv James, "In the entire history of women's writing in Kerala, Saraswathi Amina's is the most tragic case of the deliberate neglect of female genius" "Stories from a Forgotten Feminist."

Saraswathi Amma made her entry into the Malayalam literary scenario with a short story published in 1938, which was followed by 12 volumes of short stories, one novel, a play. In 1958, a book of essays titled *Purushanmarillatha Lokam* came out. In her time, she was called aa 'man hater'. But is now celebrated as a genius by the current feminist scholars.

In the 1940s and '50s, K. Saraswathi Amma criticized the existence of endogamy in modern marriage, but she also thought that an enduring union cannot have passion as a basis. The same generation fought in the legislatures of the princely states for women's full entry into government service, including the police force, and against the rule that married women could not keep their employment. Even though they entered these bodies as members of their respective caste-communities, most of them made it clear that they would step over such boundaries whenever necessary, and emphasised that their voice was indeed of the women of their communities.

Lalithambika Antharjanam was a writer who helped to shape Kerala's feminist literature.

Feminism is still marginal, beleaguered and reviled in Malayali society like it was in her times, but it continues to apply relentless pressure on the authorities, then and now. The work of Lalithambika Antharjanam has been translated into many languages. Antharjanam has influenced the female members of the Namboothiri community to a large extent. It was the time of renaissance. “Younger generation supported her trial to bring the reformation through her writings. Positive changes had occurred in the society. Her writings also helped to uplift the Namboothiri community. She fought against the restrictions and limitations of worsen which were put forwarded by the society” (Alfred,572)

The novels of Lalithambika Antharjanam show how Namboodiri women of that period, without much access to freedom, have initiated to make changes in a way or the other. Even though women of 21st century have access to all sources, they are still being subjugated. Even after decades, these novels offer inspiration to those women who were subjugated or oppressed.

Devaki and Margalita stand out as representatives of women who have broken free from the shackles of restrictions imposed by their respective community. Viewing their progressive strides in society, it is understand that they faced criticism and even condemnation from all quarters, even within their own families.

In the year 1975, when jaws dropped as Devaki stepped out of her 'illam' to join the political arena, 30 years later, eyebrows were raised and tongues lagged to accuse Margalita of the highest form of treachery in stepping out of the nunnery and succeeding in bringing a priest out of too Living amid harsh scandals and poverty, she remains with the same courage and determination that motivated her to step out of her home. And even after giving up her habit, Margalitha never renounces the way of God, as shown by Christ, the lord. Living together with Karikkan she remains faithful to her soul, but he, though struggles hard to keep himself strong in his beliefs, and fails to his own self. Being spiritually tired of knowing her womb nourishing a new life, he flees to nowhere in search of an unseen God, to be saved from the harshness of conflicting soul. But she responds to the urges of her body, talks to the growing life within and at the same time involves in spiritual queries on serving the humanity, for the brimming up of the fullness of life. Sarah emphatically asserts, "for a woman, sexuality is not a matter of physical or mechanical indulgence. It is absurd to categorize these complicated experiences of the body and mind into opposing, abstract columns called sexuality and spirituality" and adds "the 'Christ' defined by man is not the 'Christ' defined by woman" (Joseph 10).

CONCLUSIONS

The two characters, Devaki and Margalitha are the representatives of empowered women, though not in the mrxlern sense of the word. They dared to think and act differently. And act with courage. It was not their male partners they depended upon for support and security, but chose to battle the rxlds on their own. Unni Nainbodhiri still remained the core of Devaki's being even when she turns a sanyasin. Karikkanand Margalitha were still bound by an exceptional attachment, even after he abandons her to find solace elsewhere. This brings home the point that women, whether in the Seventies or Twenties, remained in bondage. The feminist ideals that were influencing the women at large through literature, drama and art have not brought about much change in the thought process of women towards a betterment of their condition.

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