

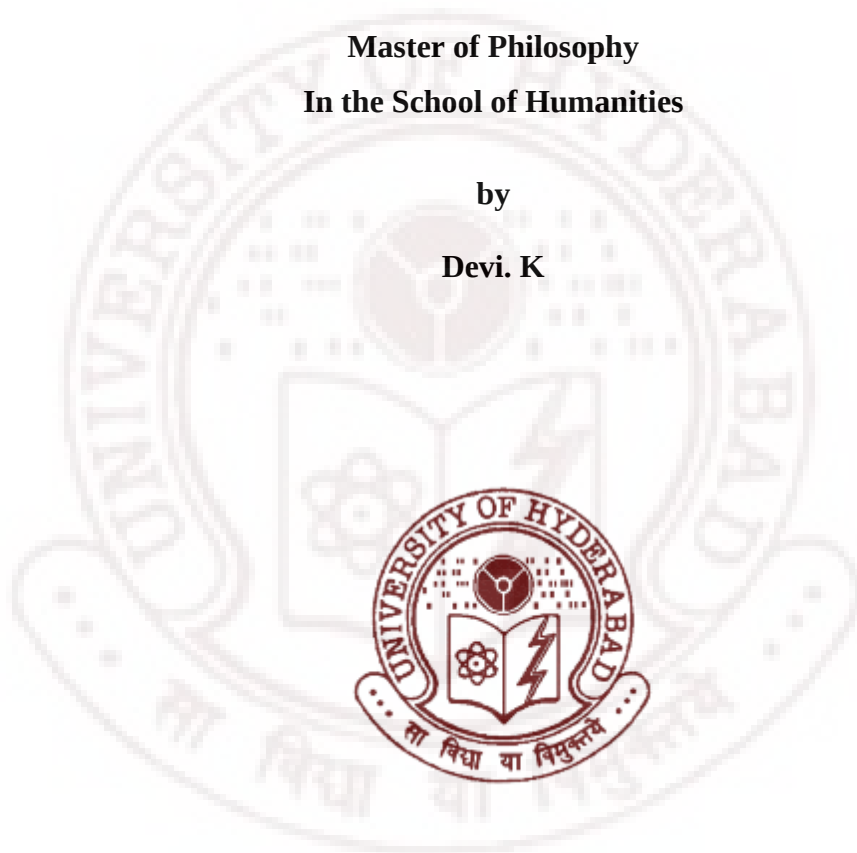
**SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF  
FAMILY AND RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF  
ALICE WALKER AND SARAH JOSEPH**

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Philosophy  
In the School of Humanities**

**by**

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This is to certify that I, Devi. K, have carried out the research embodied in the present dissertation for the full period prescribed under M. Phil., ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this dissertation was earlier submitted for the award of research degree of any University.

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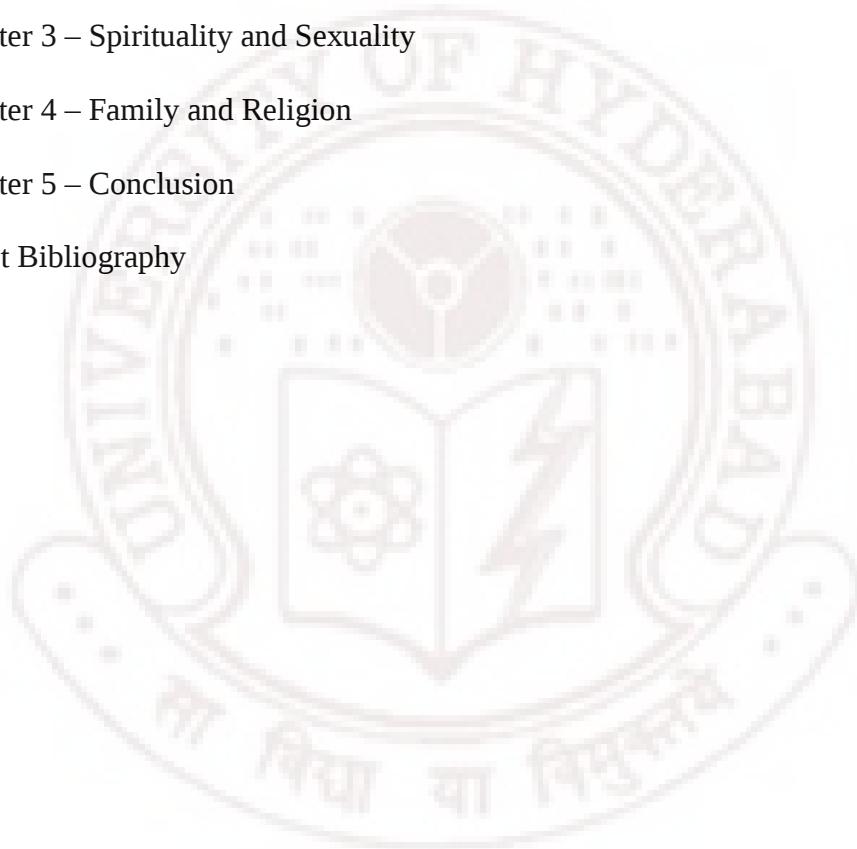
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. K. Suneetha Rani for her extreme support, understanding and patience. Her valuable suggestions and keen interest incited me to work. Her constructive suggestions, theoretical constructs and the critical viewpoints have given much clarity to my work.

I thank the Head of the Department, Professor Sachidananda Mohanty for the course on Research Methodology and for going through my draft and giving insightful suggestions. I also think graciously of Professor Alladi Uma for her creative speculations, astute guidance and intellectual bounty. I owe to Professor M. Sridhar for the courses he has taught. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Sowmya Dechamma for her willingness to provide me with valuable suggestions.

I am indebted to the English Department office staff, Mr. R. Nagarajan, Mr. Y. Sreenath, Mr. B. Ganesh, Mr. Suresh and Ms. Smitha Swaraj for their help. My sincere gratitude to The Indira Gandhi Memorial Library staff, the staff of Anveshi Library and OUCIP.

A special thanks to my dear friend Devi. G, for being there for me all the time and extending the technical and mental support. My deepest gratitude to Reshma for painstakingly proof reading my work. I remember thankfully Ashitha, Varsha, Megha, Girish Chandra, Sheeba, Liji, Gopi, Arathi and all my other friends and class mates, who helped me in completing my dissertation.

I cannot forget Kuttimmama, Madhuettan and Divyachechi for the encouragement and support they lavished on me.

Last but not the least, to Achan, Amma and Ettan for dreaming the accomplishment of my dreams and letting me go to pursue it.

**Devi. K**

## Chapter 1

### INSTITUTION VS INDIVIDUAL

Institutionalizing something, let it be a religion, the base of the society family or an abstract feeling like love, means setting certain standards and going by some unwritten and at times written laws. When something gets institutionalized it naturally collides with the interest of the individual, especially woman. Religion is an appealing concern in the writings of many writers all over the world. Christianity or any religion for that matter has been indulged with vivid colours by both insiders and outsiders of that religion. Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph, one from African American and the other from Indian context, deal with the nuances of religion and how it is intertwined with individual lives. The credentials of the author to discuss that subject become a matter of dispute in many cases. In the case of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph there is no such violation of the credentials as both of them are insiders. But from the angle of experience, Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph stand in two extreme poles.

As I have suggested in the title of this chapter here the clash is between the individual and the institution. If we take the history of literature in different ages we can see that anything written against religion is considered blasphemous and becomes the target of attack. Alice walker herself is a good example for the direct attack of the society against exposing it, which may hamper the interests of the institutions. The explicit portrayal of racial and sexual attacks on Black women in her *The Color Purple* (1982) has drawn wide grudge from the American society. Beyond that, the Black men's despise for their aggressive portrayal instigated their anger and at last the book was banned for its over

sexual portrayals. In a similar manner, many writers across the world and across religions have responded to the religious issues. One such prominent figure is Taslima Nasrin from Bangladesh. She used literature to fight certain practices in Islam and attracted the abhorrence of the fundamentalists worldwide. The loathing of the fundamentalist world has left her in lifelong exodus and she is still not welcomed in her own country.

Alice Walker, an African American feminist writer, and Sarah Joseph, a feminist writer from Kerala, are brought together in this thesis for a comparative study to analyze how different issues like religion, sexuality, spirituality and family are treated by writers from different regions. Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia. She comes from a family of share croppers from the South. Educated at Spelman and Sarah Lawrence colleges, Walker was an active participant in the Civil Rights Movement. She has won many awards for her works. The Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Award, both for *The Color Purple* are two important feathers in her crown. Her collections of essays are a celebration of feminism proposed by her, Womanism. Obviously, her achievements as a writer are characterized by an astounding flexibility. She is equally dexterous in poetry and fiction. Her essays have moved the reading public all over the world. But it is her novels for which she is best known. As Mary Helen Washington describes, “her works—short fiction, poems, essays, novels—reveal the complexity of moral decision-making and the tattered fabric of life in the day-to-day existence of Black women”(Washington 25). Alice Walker who hails from a slave past and has seen a frightening history has a different story to tell. Her important works other than *The Color Purple* (1982) are two collections of short fiction, *In Love and Trouble* (1973), *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (1981), collection of poetry, collection of essays *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), *Living*

by the Word (1988) and novels, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), *Meridian* (1976), *The Temple of my Familiar* (1990), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), and *By the Light of my Father's Smile* (1998).

Sarah Joseph was born in 1946 in Trichur district, Keralam, as the daughter of Mr. Louis and Ms. Kochumariyam. Sarah Joseph has taught in different government colleges in Keralam. She has been one of the first organizers and workers of the feminist movement of Keralam. In addition to that she has also been a member of Kerala Sahitya Akademi. She has bagged Kerala Sahitya Akademi (2001) and Kendra Sahitya Akademi awards (2003) for her novel *Alahayude Penmakkal* (1999). Besides that she has won many other prestigious awards. Her other important works are *Kadinte Sangeetham* (1979), *Nanmathinmakalude Vriksham* (1989), *Papathara* (1990), *Nilavu Ariyunnu* (1994), *Oduvilathe Suryakanthi* (1998), *Nammude Adukkala Thirichupidikkuka* (2000) and *Bhagavad Geethayude Adukkalayil Ezhuthukar Vevikkunnathu* (2000), *Kadithhu Kandayo Kantha* (2001), *Mattathi* (2003), *Puthuramayam* (2006), The literary world of Sarah Joseph is a neatly carved scenario where she represents the woman taking her out from the place which she is given by the patriarchal world. She goes to the depth of the life of the individual woman to give a minute study of her life. A plethora of issues come into play in her works. As the history of Christianity in Keralam suggests, Catholics are initiated into Christianity by St. Thomas. And more than that, four Brahmin families got converted into Christianity first and the present day Catholics are the successors of these Brahmin families. So they are extremely powerful in Keralam and boast of their cultural superiority. Both Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph ridicule the complex and oppressive ways in which religion operates.

Another important factor at this point is that both of them belong to the “non-mainstream” sections and come from a marginalized background. There can be different levels of marginalization in any society as stratification is based on different factors. There can be weaker and powerful sections among the marginalized themselves. Though Kerala Christians don’t have a frightful history like the African Americans we can consider Sarah Joseph a writer belonging to the marginalized section. Writing in regional language is one reason for the marginalization in terms of the recognition regional language literatures get in the literary world. Added to this Christianity itself is a minority religion in India, which has not been able to get rid of the casteist character of Hinduism. More than this, being a woman writer who deals with the basic issues of women, the issues that a highly moralistic state like Kerala looks down upon, adds to the marginalization. The African Americans are more prominent in the global scene. Because of the regional and economic factors their growth and voice are being noticed by the world. This is one element that makes the comparison between these writers tangible. Though the immediate backgrounds are different we can identify some common grounds on which the comparison is possible. Both Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph deal with the treatment of issues like sexuality and spirituality of the woman and rather than that how her movement is curbed by patriarchal institutions like religion and marriage. Another important constituent is the imagery used by these writers. For example, the household chores like cooking and sewing are quite common in the works of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph. In the definition given by Alice Walker in her *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens* she asserts that Womanist is against “girlish i.e. (frivolous, irresponsible, not serious)” (Walker, 1983 xi). A Womanist is a black feminist or feminist of colour. She usually is “outrageous, audacious, courageous/ wilful” (xi). She

must be interested in the acts of grownups, the forefathers and foremothers and responsible to her people. A Womanist is a woman who loves other women sexually or nonsexually. She “appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female” (xi). A Womanist is always capable. To add to that a Womanist “loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” (xii). Alice Walker’s works, both fictional and nonfictional, are a reaffirmation of her idea about Womanism. Abundant love for oneself is the key stone of the Womanist ideology. It is a reclaiming of one’s past and tradition. The sense of community and togetherness that Black people feel is indicated by Walker in her *In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens*. For a Womanist, liberation is achieved through herself. Liberation through oneself is a predominant feature of Sarah Joseph’s work also. Liberation here is not a single dimensional term. It can be spiritual, individual and economic. Though there are male characters who contribute to the uplift of women characters the essential steps are taken by women themselves. Homosexuality which is an important factor in Womanism does not appear in the writings of Sarah Joseph. As she says in an interview with Sreedevi. K. Nair, for her love is an involvement between man and woman. However, she is not against homosexuality.

Another interesting factor that attracted me towards a comparative approach is the idea of sexuality as equal to spirituality proposed by both these writers. Through her character Margaleetha, in *Othappu* and through her interviews Sarah Joseph proposes this idea. To become a nun according to Sarah Joseph, is the dream of any Catholic girl brought up in a

conventional Christian household. As Sarah Joseph points out in the Authors note to the translated version of *Othappu*

The desire to be a nun lingers in the flowering-time of every Catholic girl's life. Without this desire, her teenage is not complete. 'Piety' is a haunting passion for a girl from an orthodox background. Surrounded by moral values strongly based on the teachings of family and religion, she wanders in a mysterious world of passion for Jesus Christ (Joseph, 2009 ix)

Thus the dilemma to understand one's spirituality and sexuality begins. Alice Walker also presents the same concept through her characters in *By the Light of my Father's Smile*. Though Alice Walker has dealt with this topic in other works, this book attracted me in particular because of the simple way of narration and some other unique qualities like relationships in a changed context and the role of family, especially father, in the sexual and spiritual growth of daughters. In her other novels like *The Color Purple* and *The Temple of my Familiar* race is discussed extensively and Blacks suffer as slaves and secondary citizens. *By the Light of my Father's Smile* subverts this victim victimizer theory. Here the Black Robinson family comes in the position of the victimizer and the tribal people are the victims. Here it is the attitude of the Blacks towards natives. Natives are considered uncouth and uncivilized group who have loose moral values.

Sarah Joseph's *Othappu* is her first book where she discusses sexuality and spirituality at length. This novel discusses sexuality from the point of view of a nun. Despite the differences and distance, these writers surprisingly put forward the same ideas. Even then one

of the striking differences in the writings of these two writers is in the treatment of sexuality. While Alice Walker's characters speak up and defend their cause, Sarah's characters except a few are not that assertive. It may be because of the particular situation that exists in Kerala. As Sarah Joseph herself says she is not able to freely express her idea of woman's sexuality. It is because the topic of sexuality itself is shrouded in Kerala. But African American literature has moved beyond because the situation is different. Kerala has a different culture and politics of the body. Body is still a centre of conflict and a clear manifestation of this conflict can be seen in the ongoing dispute over the dress code of women in Kerala. The controversy over the dress code to be followed by women in Guruvayoor temple and some other temples itself is a perfect example for this. The stir that the autobiography of Nalini Jameela, *Oru Laingikathozhilaliyude Atmakadha* (2005) (The Autobiography of a Sex Worker), created itself is a proof for the stringent moral policing in the Kerala society. Quite contrary to this west has a different notion of physicality. Though African Americans are considered a part of the western culture there is a difference in the approach of the west as Black women are still considered hypersexual.

Alice Walker's non-fiction *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* and Sarah Joseph's essays discuss the contradictions in Christianity. As Walker says, kneeling in front of a white God who doesn't appeal to black people is a difficult act for a woman like her. In Sarah Joseph's essay *Bhagavad Geethayude Adukkalayil Ezhuthukar Vevikkunnathu* (The Things That Writers Cook in the Kitchen of Bhagavad Geetha) Sarah Joseph discusses not only the double standards of Christianity but also the pangs in Hinduism. Christianity preaches equality and the same has been the reason for the rampant conversions in the erstwhile colonies. But as history shows Christianity has never been successful in putting

this idea into practice. Conversions that happen in India are a good example for this. Dalits convert to Christianity with the hope that the conversion will change their positions ultimately. But instead of becoming Christians they become lower caste Christians. Blacks in America have been brought to an alien land by the same whites and they tried to civilize the uncivilized ways of these “pagans”. Though slavery was abolished later legally and equal status has been promised it remained a dream for a long time. Christianity has been an oppressive force used against Blacks and natives. The psychological cleft that it created is portrayed well by the Native Canadian writer Beth Brant in her *Writing as Witness*. As she says: “I long for a conclusion to the new age religion, and in its place a healthy respect for sovereignty and the culture that makes nationhood. We do not object to non–natives praying with us (if invited). We object to the theft of our prayers that have no psychic meaning to them” (Brant 34). However, in the context of Dalits, Christianity has helped them to achieve their goals to an extent through education. Religion is much more than a ritual and a spiritual activity for Dalits. Alice Walker has moved a step further in discussing the rampant conversions of Blacks into Islam. In her fictional and non fictional works she has suggested her idea regarding this. In her well known short story *Roselily* she establishes her confusion in jumping from one danger to another. As she says Roselily, through her marriage with a Muslim moves to a religion where women are supposed to cover their head and pray in separated cloisters to where they have to take the back door. For Blacks Christianity has been a colonial burden and they try to cling to their ancestral African values. But in Keralam there is no going back to the origins. Since later generation Christians are born into that religion they are not concerned about the starting point. The difference comes to foreground only when the question of caste comes. The difficulty is in mixing with the

lower caste converts.

Discussing sexuality in public is a taboo in most of the societies even now. In the same manner in matters related to spirituality and family, religion has a different stand. Feminist movements in America and Keralam have different histories. Feminist movements started to take root in Keralam only in 1980s. But by then Black America had begun to propose alternative feminisms like Womanism. While the women of America began to burn their bra as part of liberation movement the lower caste women in Keralam have been fighting to get the right to cover their breasts. The feminist movements of Keralam comprehend that women are subjugated by the oppressive system despite the differences. Though this may be interpreted as a generalized statement it is a fact that feminism hasn't reached such a stage in Keralam to propose sisterhood. Even then people like Sarah Joseph, C S Chandrika, J Devika and many others suggest the necessity of a different feminism rather than the one proposed by the western feminists. For early writers like Lalithambika Antharjanam, though she has created characters like Tatri, emancipation of the secluded was the primary concern. But in the case of later women writers it moves to further realms and concerns. Both Sarah Joseph and Lalithambika Antharjanam have drawn themes from the concerned cultures. But there is essential difference in the experience level. For the outside world Keralam is a liberating space for women. Keralam has a number of success stories to display, like high literacy rate of women, low infant mortality rate etc. But all these are used in creating the ideal woman, "the house wife", rather than empowering the woman. The phony morals and the ever-changing patriarchal attitudes of that society cater only to nurture the women in confines. Though externally they may look empowered and free, their freedom of speech is also limited.

Education across the world became a strong cause in bringing revolution in the living condition of women. It helped women to question the existing notions regarding their position in society and family. Feminism has been the prerogative of upper class and middle class women. As it is said by C.S. Chandrika in her *Arthavamulla Streekal* (Menstruating Women) women started to come into different movements in Kerala in 1920s. While they discussed the education of women and equality before law, position of women inside the four walls of the house also became a matter of concern. As it has been a difficult time for women to come out of the four walls such a discussion has been essential. These women went on with their works in the field of the emancipation of women and their participation in cultural scene. Later women started to work in political parties and tried to assert their individuality. After some time they recognized the double standards of politics and moved out to work independently. Widespread agitations for equality had already started all over the world by that time. The first wave of feminism came to India as a response to all kinds of exploitations against women. The first step towards feminism as such came into being in Kerala in 1980s. The latter half of twentieth century brought about predominant changes in the field of feminism. Gender and sexuality became a bigger concern during this period.

A white Christ who is created in the image of a white man evokes the figure of the oppressor. Sarah Joseph talks about a religion that is oppressive and evasive especially in the case of women. Womanism, feminism of Black women, proposed by Alice Walker, talks about all these issues in detail and asserts the need for a Black woman's theology. Womanists challenge all the constructed notions of religion including the pattern of worship in the Black church. They ask the larger question of how blackness is addressed by the Bible and the Church. As Alice Walker puts it in her *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens* the

white man's God is given to the Blacks and their offspring "to pacify him as a slave". But later that itself became "an antidote against bitterness". Because the Blacks were brought to this alien land for the well being of the whites and they came leaving their age old traditions, culture and beliefs, for the later generations there was nothing to cling on. So accepting an alien god who didn't hold any cultural significance was an indispensable necessity. Alice Walker renounced Christianity as a college student. As she says in *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*:

....and it took me years to realize that though they had been force-fed a white man's palliative, in the form of religion, they had made it in to something at once simple and noble. True, even today, they can never successfully picture a God who is not white, and that is a major cruelty... (Walker, 1983 16)

And she insists that the life of the Blacks is more or less in accordance with the preaching of Christ and they have better faith than the whites who segregate people on the basis of colour. As we can see the history, Christianity was introduced in the third world countries using both the Bible and the sword. Rather than taking it as a weapon to wield power we can find it as an aspect of religion which exerts brain to subjugate the psyche of the believer. Religion is used as a sedative.

The Black people had to take great effort to form a significant self-regulating belief. It was not easy for them to establish such communities being in the position of slaves. Though

the Blacks were replanted and imbibed into the master's culture the culture of the old world from where they came remained with them. As it is cited in the Wikipedia:

In the context of religion, expressive and ritual elements included “call and response” interactions, shouting and dance. These became incorporated into the expressive aspects of African American worship as slaves and free Blacks converted to Christianity and made it their own. Slaves mixed evangelical Christianity with African beliefs and rhythm (Wikipedia).

On the other hand, Christian community in Keralam is a diverse group. Even then most Kerala Christian followers exercise certain common practices taken from local cultural influences such as wedding customs, and use of Malayalam language in church for worship. The entry of Christianity into the African American world and Keralam was different. Because in a place like Keralam the colonizers did not require slaves. They wanted better prospering of their business. But African countries were their depository of human resources and they are a good laboratory.

As Sarah Joseph insists in her essay *Pennezhuthu Oru Vimochana Sasthram* women have to fight the patriarchal, economic, cultural and social structures. Feminism dreams of a new ideology, a system in which men and women are equal. We cannot merely wish away the term male domination. A woman's problem is not just her problem. The entire society including men is responsible for that. According to Sarah Joseph feminism is the democratization of a world in which both men and women simply exist. It is fighting the

authorities and rules which are patriarchal. So democratizing oneself through these fights is feminism for her. My aim here is to study two novels of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph, *By the Light of my Father's Smile* and *Othappu* respectively, and to explore the interrelatedness of religion, sexuality, spirituality and family. Rules and regulations are the creation of the patriarchal world. Religion is the biggest example for this. Though religion has a restraining effect in the lives of all, women are the ultimate prey. The underplay of religion in the case of the woman's sexuality afflicts all the paths of her life.

As we can see from the history of Christianity in Keralam, the church and the law have been anti-women in their attitudes. The inequality that existed in the property rights is a good example for their attitude towards women. The reformation of that law has been a part of the wide spread influence of the women's movements in Keralam. It comes to an end only after the long legal fights by Mary Roy and the resultant declaration of the Supreme Court in 1986. As I mentioned before, the long struggle for equal property rights has been the biggest success of the growing feminist ideas in Keralam. Until then girls, like everywhere else, didn't have any right in the property of the father. As Sindhu Thulaseedharan says in her study *Christian Women and Property Rights in Kerala – Gender Equality in Practice* there existed a system in Keralam which denied "inheritance rights to females even when there were only daughters. In such case the property went to the collateral heirs by denying the daughters any share in the ancestral property" (Thulaseedharan 88). A good example for this is given in Arudhathi Roy's novel *The God of Small Things* (1998) the backdrop of which is Keralam. The central character in the novel, Ammu, comes back home with her two children leaving an unsuccessful marital life. When she reaches home what she gets is quite cruel. She doesn't have any access to her

ancestral property. Everything that is supposed to be hers naturally goes to her brother. She remains helpless. Similarly the combat between the women priests and the church to get access to the high offices of church is also a major issue. This part paves way to the larger discussion on how Christianity deals with intense issues like women's sexuality, spirituality and how it brings power politics into relationships between sexes. Religions denounce sex and alternative spirituality because it helps them to have a grip over people and only then can patriarchal institutions survive.

Feminism and the related issues have been widely discussed by many writers before Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph. Malayalam literature begins such discussions with the rising of Saraswathi Amma (1919–1975). Through her essays like *Purushanmarillatha Lokam* (World Without Men) (1958) she suggests and demands for complete freedom for women from the clutches of men. Besides that in her short stories she portrays the mire inherent to the system of marriage and how women become property for sale. But Saraswathi Amma's ideas have only been the first step towards a feminist ideology. She wanted to break open the world of illusions in which we reside. Though such discussions have been rampant on the scene, religion and woman's body haven't been disputed. It becomes a larger concern in the writings of later writers. So right from Saraswathi Amma women's issues became a concern in Malayalam literature.

Later on writers like Rajalakshmi (1930–1965) and Madhavikkutty (1932–2009), (Kamala Das to the English speaking world), came to the forefront. It has been Madhavikkutty who revolutionized the platform and psyche of Malayalam literature. If Saraswathi Amma's has been an attempt to move outside the bounds of the patriarchal society, Das's has been an attempt of retrospection or a journey inwards. Because, rather

than trying to move out as Saraswathi Amma does, Kamala Das comes back to herself. It is bringing a woman back to herself considering her feelings, emotions and desires. Woman's body and desires come to the vanguard in Malayalam literature during the period of Madhavikkutty. She has been another writer in Malayalam who responded to the indivisible relation between the soul and the body. Through her works she suggests the same thing that Sarah Joseph and Alice Walker propose. As she says, body is the abode of soul. So we cannot relegate the importance of the body. It is through one's body that one can touch one's soul. The poems of Kamala Das question the negation of body and celebrate the physical potential and the way it leads to self discovery. She considers sex as real love between two people. But the male ideals of a woman which does not reciprocate to this idea, is deeply imprinted in the psyche of a conservative society like Keralam, shun the ideas and try to smother the raising voices of women. Kamala Das's widely discussed autobiography *My Story*, (1976) which is still considered a revolutionary text, stirred the false moral consciousness of a portion of the reading public and the explicit portrayal of her own sexuality faced staunch set back. As a result many years later she had to announce that it was only a fictional piece.

When Sarah Joseph started writing in 1970s, feminism was just a budding movement in Keralam. Manushi, a feminist organization in which Sarah Joseph has been an active participant, played an active role in asserting the importance of feminism in Keralam. The main demands of Manushi have been women's education, economic justice and equal social status. Writers like Gracy, Chandramathi, P. Valsala, Ashitha and many others discussed women's issues in their works. But Sarah Joseph questions the basic premises of a religion like Christianity. She questions ideas like chastity, inflicted by religion. As Sarah Joseph

suggests in her essay *Streepaksha Chintha Malayala Sahithyathil*, chastity is a vow only meant for women. Religion and the safeguards of religion insist on the chastity of women. It is not the idea of one particular religion as such but every religion insists on the importance of chastity of women. By tying women with the chain of chastity, religion is able to keep its claws intact on the neck of women. On the other hand, Alice Walker through her essays tries to trace back women writers' history. Only when we know the paths in which our foremothers have moved we can move on confidently. Before Alice Walker there have been many Black feminist writers beginning from the 19<sup>th</sup> century itself. Writers like Zora Neal Hurston and Sojourner Truth succeeded in developing a way to respond to the multilayered oppression of Black women. Alice walker discusses the life of Zora Neal Hurston elaborately in her collection *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*. Although Zora has written many works including her famous novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), primarily because of her gender that her works and life were never very popular with the public. It was Alice Walker who brought into light the works of Zora Neal Hurston. Other important writers like Phillis Wheatley, Gwendolyn Brooks, Maya Angelou and Paule Marshall prepared the ground for the future feminist writers. They revolutionized the language, tone and subject matter of literature. They corrected the idea that language is a prerogative of the male dominated world and showed the world the possibility of a woman's language.

In scriptures women are regarded as a commodity. More than that it is a woman who violates the law put forward by God. As it says man is created in God's own image and woman's existence is just as a helper so the term "helpmate" in Bible. The only use of a woman is to bear children. Religion is the primary propagator of this negative image of women. As Sarah Joseph reminds us Christ has never asked us to make churches in his

name. And these people fight over the church in the name of God and they run to find new ways to control women taking up that name. So with what face they will go in front of the God. Jesus selected seashores, and valleys for his prayer and we misinterpret his words. How can we justify ourselves? Alice Walker also proposes the same idea in her award winning work *The Color Purple*. The growth of Celie from talking to a God in secret to telling that God likes everything including sex and God is there in everything is a good suggestion.

The creativity of women is an important concern in Alice Walker's and Sarah Joseph's work. Alice Walker in her *In Search of her Mothers' Gardens* tells us how the creativity of the woman has been smothered by the patriarchal institutions. To sustain and manifest their creativity, making quilts and gardening has been the only way for women. Women who want to become writers get smothered under the weight of white power. She narrates her own experience to reinforce the condition of creative women. When her award winning novel *The Color Purple* was published it became a big controversy. Even the Black community couldn't offer solidarity to her in this endeavour. Black men alleged her of being more explicit in the matter of Black male atrocities on Black women.

Sarah Joseph also cites examples from her life for the light treatment of women writers. For instance, nowhere in the history of Malayalam literature we will be able to see an anthology of Saraswathi Amma's short stories. Similarly, Sarah Josephs' thought-provoking social critique *Alahayude Penmakkal* is never appreciated or discussed by the male critics. This neglect of a woman's intellect is there in all the societies despite the difference in region, creed and social background. She discusses this elaborately in her essay *Stree Paksha Chintha Malayala Sahithyathil*. Being a writer in a hardcore moralist

society where women's roles are defined is quite difficult for a woman. To emphasize her point she alludes to the example of Lalithambika Antharjanam who came out of the bounds of home fighting Brahminical faith. To become a writer may be easy for a man, but not for a woman. Rather than the literary quality of a work, the premises on which the book is written and the sex and background of the author become the point of discussion. All these are the concerns of feminists. The earlier comment made regarding the acceptability of a work could be read in connection with the ban on books which reveal explicitly the dark sides of religion, class, caste and gender inequality. Of these religion plays a fatal role.

Religion is a larger issue which frames and imposes rules and regulates the movement of people. The manifold of oppression that women experience also is advocated by the same agency. The core areas of life which are affected by this encroachment are woman's sexuality, spirituality, and family. The theory used by religion here to control different aspects of the woman's life is the imposition of fear. Not just in one religion but in all religions body and pleasure don't go together. We say that India is different in the pleasure seeking theory and the murals and paintings in India are a good example for our attitude. India is the land where body is celebrated even in temples. The carvings in the temples and the erotic principle of much worshipped Lord Siva are evidence for the irrevocable acceptance of sex as a natural part of life. But even then there were classifications among women. Those who were supposed to give pleasure to men were never in the "respectable" group. For another group called family women, these pleasures were out of question. Moral policing became more stringent in India after colonization. Though there were texts like *Manusmriti* to regulate the boundaries of women it became extreme during this period. In the introduction to *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita describe the

experience of Muddupalani. She wrote explicitly erotic poetry and it got wide appraisal. But after colonization there were no prints to be found. On the other hand, the open and sensual expression of this “other woman” was attacked by Indians, some of them being staunch social reformers who took up women’s issues.

Thinking of one’s body or trying to get acquainted with it is a sin even in present day society. For everything there are some “defined” and “refined” ways. Though time and space change and we don’t share the experiences of the previous generations, the stigma suffered by women does not change. Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph try to find out alternatives and solutions for these problems. Religion and the faith in which one is grown are crucial and they influence all the terrains of one’s life. This is discussed here in the first chapter which deals with the paradigm in which the novel is written and the impact of religion on different aspects of life. What both these writers are trying to propose is the idea that body and spirit are not two distinct things which have to be seen differently. It is not just part of the whole. Instead it is complete in itself. So negating one’s body is negating one’s spirit. My attempt is to justify the idea that sexuality is equal to spirituality and the present day taboos affect the different walks of a woman’s life. Ultimately all these taboos affect personal relationships.

While the first chapter, Introduction, is a study of the issues dealt with in the essays of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph, the next three chapters will be based on Sarah Joseph’s *Othappu* and Alice Walker’s *By the Light of my Father’s Smile*. The second chapter, “Woman’s Sexuality–Dealing with the Ancient and Hidden”, delves into the different ways in which a woman’s sexuality is negotiated and how different institutions operate in holding back woman’s potentials. Spirituality of a woman is a subsided issue. Being Black and

marginalized makes things even more serious. How a woman's spirituality is accepted is the question here. This will be dealt with in detail in the third chapter, "Spirituality and Sexuality". The attempt will be to prove the idea that sexuality is equal to spirituality. Family plays a crucial role in the construction of a healthy atmosphere in the growth of a child. But instead of doing that it becomes the tongue of other institutions and teaches the children to be ashamed of their sexual prowess. So covering up and growing up with a distorted psyche are the results. The aftermath of this interference of family in the life of children makes them incapable of continuing serious and healthy relationships. The much discussed and studied work of D. H. Lawrence, *Sons and Lovers* (1913) is a well known example for the casualties that family and relationships can cause.

My fourth chapter, "Family and Religion", will be an attempt to comprehend the role of family in the healthy growth of a child. The discussion of body and spirit does not end there. It continues in the other writings of these authors and it is an evolving theme. An analysis of the other writings of these authors to find out the continuing discussions will be the aim of the last chapter, "Conclusion". For that I will be taking up a collection of short stories of Sarah Joseph and novels of Alice Walker like *Meridian* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. There also these writers discuss elaborately the issues discussed above.

In the novels that I am going to deal with in detail in the coming chapters, the idea of the suppression of sexuality and spirituality of women is discussed. In a set up where everything is under the veil of religion and patriarchy, it is certain that subduing of sexuality and faith will happen. Thus the topics come more vigorously to the forefront. Curbing something means giving ample opportunity for it to rise up. The individual and institution

are always in conflict and the restrictions and the following eruption of the individual's feelings are represented by a number of writers all over the world.



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## Chapter 2

### WOMAN'S SEXUALITY - DEALING WITH THE ANCIENT

#### AND THE HIDDEN

The Sexuality of women is much disputed and dissipated by every religion. All the speculations of religion, by and large, preach to keep away from the company of women because they are sexually provoking and promiscuous. Exactly like the colonial representation of Africa as “the dark continent”, woman’s sexuality is a dark hole in the history. As women’s history itself is a meager chapter in history as a whole, female sexuality is never discussed from women’s perspective. As Audre Lorde suggests in her *Sister Outsider*:

These places of possibility within ourselves are dark because they are ancient and hidden; they have survived and grown strong through that darkness. Within these deep places, each one of us holds an incredible reserve and creativity and power, of unexamined and unrecorded emotion and feeling. The woman’s place of power within each of us is neither white nor surface, it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep (Lorde 36).

From the myths that are passed down from generation to generation and records like Jane Frazer’s *Golden Bough* (1937) we understand how women’s sexuality has been treated by the ancient people. The existence of the goddesses of fertility, sexuality and love prove the importance given to human sexuality in the ancient traditions. But the later practices to

retain morality, order and control resulted in restrictions over woman's sexuality. As Dani Cavallaro points out in his *The Body for Beginners*:

... many non-western cultures possess ancient traditions of explicitly erotic art which may or may not be considered obscene. Indian representations of sexuality are often based on the idea that orgasm is a form of spiritual enlightenment, a way of bridging the gap between the human and the divine (Cavallaro 37).

Alice Walker's *By the light of my Father's Smile* and Sarah Joseph's *Othappu* are treatises on the woman's sexuality and spirituality. Such explicit and realist portrayal of these issues has not been quite usual in literature. Both of them try to work out the reason as to why history negates space to woman's sexuality as that is an indispensable component of it. Society is always afraid of the reserve of energy in women. This is explained through a myth by Irene in Walker's novel. "... Lily, an ancient symbol for the yoni. People used to think that with just a lily and her yoni a woman could impregnate herself" (Walker, 1998 198). These sorts of thoughts could be threatening to the continuation of the running of the institutions like family and religion. My understanding of the term sexuality is only a part of the whole. People have different definitions for this widely studied term and as I understand it is not just "a discourse of desire". Sexuality is loving each other using body. It is not submission or subordination. It is liberation from all constraints including the fear of body. It is understanding each other's body and understanding each other through body.

The protagonists of Alice Walker's and Sarah Joseph's novels free themselves of the sexual colonization and regain the control of their body which they lost long back. And beyond that they claim the sacredness of body and sexuality. Religion is the primary cause in generating or evoking this fright. The colonizing western powers came to teach the natives the values and perfected a new woman according to their value system. Similarly, societies and parents that we see in these novels create dreadful moments in the lives of their children.

Alice Walker's novel *By the Light of my Father's Smile* is a voice raised for freeing woman's sexuality which is wrapped in multiple layers of restrictions like religion and family which are run by patriarchy. The existence of such patriarchal institutions depends on the restraining of woman's sexuality. Woman's body is a potential weapon for the patriarchal order to exercise control over them. Women are considered vile by these institutions because of the necessity of keeping power in men's hands. Through different myths and stories they successfully instill a sense of guilt in the woman and snatch her control from her. The best way to do this is to curb the sexual freedom of women.

Alice Walker's novel portrays a family with parents and two girls. Family is the central point of discussion in this novel. The difference between the pre-colonial and post-colonial morality affects the family life also. In a pre-colonial world every land had its own law but after colonization the moral standards of the colonizer became the trendsetter. The anthropologist couple Robinson and Langley's ability and inability in understanding human beings and coping with the situations is shown here as a contradiction to their profession. Children born to the same parents may have different personal traits and idiosyncrasies. So Magdalena and Susannah, the two daughters have entirely different temperaments. The

shifting of the ambience to Mexico becomes a deciding factor here. This shift to study the life of the Mundo tribe in Mexico, who are half African and half Mexican, change the Robinsons' definition of family. To reprimand the lack of fund for anthropological studies they decide to disguise themselves as pastors. This attitude towards religion itself shows the phony ideals of the contemporary times. The stay at Mexico and the different stages of growth of the daughters bring drastic transformation in their relationship. What brings the spark of hostility between the father and daughter here is the alleged wildness of the daughter. Though Alice Walker's subject matter has a wide range, race is discussed in almost all her works. Normally it is the struggle between Blacks and whites. But here it is the fight between elite, light skinned Blacks and native tribes. The identity of the author comes through the narration of the strain between the "civilized" group and the tribes.

The expectations of the father clash here with the interests and individuality of the daughter. When Robinson finds out Magdalena's sexual indulgence with Manuelito, a Mundo boy, he punishes her severely. This day and the mental agony stay in the mind of Magdalena as in a snap shot. Though she never becomes a receiver of this dismal attack directly, Susannah also gets affected by this moment of violation of her sister's pride. This infringement of one moment becomes a deciding factor in the lives of these sisters. Magdalena is never able to have a healthy relation with anyone after that. She never makes pact with her father and hates it when others adore him. Susannah, though just a witness, also grows distanced to her father. The way in which Magdalena responds to the atrocity of that day is through gluttony. She starts to overeat and becomes obese. Susannah, though married initially to Pedro, a Greek man, finds solace in same sex love.

The novel is written as narrated by different people through different perspectives. Another interesting point here is that the reconciliation is made among the spirits after the death of all these characters. When Robinson meets Manuelito after death he really understands the importance and meaning of the practices of the Mundo tribe. The other important characters who come in between the novel are Susannah's lesbian friend Pauline and the dwarf she meets at Greece, Irene. The Mundo way of life is quite close to nature. On the other hand the synthetic life that they lead in the city is moving away from the culture of earth. The novel's proposition is to show how spirituality and sexuality are intertwined.

Sarah Joseph's *Othappu* (2005) criticizes different religious practices and how the woman's body becomes obscene and irrelevant in religion. Here Sarah Joseph gives voice to a woman to tell how she conceives her own body. It becomes more interesting when people from religious orders like a nun and a priest tell their experiences. As Sarah Joseph says there is no exact translation for the word "othappu". It is a colloquial usage for attracting someone, entangling one in trouble and tempting to make mistakes. The central characters in the novel are Margaleetha and Roy Francis Kareekkan. She is from an influential Christian family and is a nun. That adds pride to the family. When she recognizes the power politics inside the religious institutions she leaves her holy dress and comes back to the family. The same people who look at her with respect, including her mother, when she joined nunnery, look down upon her now.

Margaleetha understands family as a prison of emotions. It is Kareekkan who helps Margaleetha to come out of the nunnery. Though he is not able to keep the thought of Margaleetha out of his mind he finds it an evil intrusion. She is an intruder between him and his God. What we can see here is a tug of war between boundless spirituality based on one's

soul and institutionalized spirituality. Kareekkan is a representative of institutionalized spirituality. The question here is how one can overcome the needs of body though it is instructed by religion. Although Margaleetha and Kareekkan get married, the idea of sin related to sexuality comes to his mind. Margaleetha is denied access to the property and the premises of the family. The pull between the society and the individual becomes intense here. Sex is a sin and people derive pleasure out of sin is the idea that Kareekkan breeds in his mind. The fright of public eyes drives Kareekkan away leaving Margaleetha and his unborn child. Though Margaleetha is aware of the nature of her spirituality her dreams could be read as suggestive of her internal conflicts. She dreams constantly a man who had hanged himself. There is no fixed face for the dead man. She recognizes them from their toes. In the midst of the story some other characters like Fr. Augustine and Br. Manikyan come who are against institutionalized religion. Margaleetha has an entirely different view on sexuality and how it is related to spirituality. She believes in spirituality which doesn't negate sexuality or get quizzical at this juxtaposition. God holds a different meaning for Margaleetha. She can feel God in all the elements of nature and in each moment of bliss.

Alice Walker's novel portrays a number of women characters who suffer in the hands of parents. Here parents become the emissaries of religion. Walker's protagonist Magdalena is caught in the agony of one moment when she gets beaten up by her father brutally for taking pleasure in her body with a boy from the Mundo tribe. Another character Pauline, who has a lesbian relationship with Magdalena's sister, Susannah, thinks of the sex life of her mother. Pauline wonders whether her mother has ever known the beauty of sex. As she says "she drops put a baby every year and she picks it up" (Walker, 1998 113). She does it as returning the debt for the rib which is taken out of Adam to make Eve. Mothers hold an important role

in the growth and death of the spirit and individuality of the daughters. Here also we can see different categories. Langley here is an understanding mother who is ready to accept the growth of the daughter. On the other hand Margaleetha's mother and Pauline's mother stick to the traditional roles and attitudes. Rather than liberating the daughters they try to instill fear in them regarding everything which may help the society have control over them. In Pauline's case it increases her deterioration. The first teachers of a child are parents. Most of the children fail to respond to certain life and social situations because they never get the assistance or support of the family. Since a girl can easily identify with the mother it would be easier for her if the mother gives her the initial steps to understand her body. On the contrary the mother becomes a part in the disintegration of the life of the daughter. In Margaleetha's case her mother is like any other conventional and conservative mother who trains daughters to live in eternal fear. The way they answer the queries of the children regarding birth itself is delimiting for them. As we understand from the novel Magdalena's father is happy with her when she is timid, silent and wears long dresses which cover her entire body. It is an onslaught in to the primary and basic nature of a woman.

In ancient societies like Greece, carnal desire was not an evil aspect instead it was sacred and essential. The Mundo tribe in Walker's novel is a good example for this. The Mundos teach their children, men and women, the importance of respecting each other's body in intercourse. Proper sex education is given to the children of this tribe of mixed races despite their "cultural backwardness" as alleged by the modern society. By the time a boy is fifteen his father or uncles teach him how not to impregnate a woman. Magdalena says:

Worshipped is how it felt. To know myself so thought of, so cared about, to know that he would withdraw from me at just the right moment, no matter that I held him tight. To feel in myself and in my response to Manuelito such depths of trust and desire caused me to feel innately holy, as if our love made a magic circle about me.... (28)

Since Christianity in Keralam doesn't have a story like that of the Blacks to back up, it is difficult to trace the ancient element. The over exposure of the African Americans in the global scene also gives way to the digging up of their ancient element and sexuality. The Black societies and their repressed spirituality and sexuality have been studied. Though the growth of Kerala Christians as a powerful group is studied the transformations in the attitude towards body never get discussed anywhere.

On the other hand, Margaleetha the central figure in Sarah Joseph's work wants to take up the duty of a nun and she joins the seminary. There she identifies the strain in controlling passion and realizes that it is quite like the passion she felt for service. Christ is not born of a relationship between a man and a woman. So the holy wives of Christ are not expected to think on this matter. Margaleetha's relationship with Roy Francis Kareekkan meets a tragic end because of his religious idea of sex. Whenever Kareekkan is reminded of Margaleetha he finds it an evil intervention. He tries to believe that any beautiful object is an evidence of the mastery of God and there is nothing wrong in enjoying the beauty of it. The idea that every human being is a sinner by birth haunts him always. It is Margaleetha who becomes the spokesperson of spirituality which is not devoid of sexuality. As Margaleetha says, love must be the religion of the world. There is nothing wrong in enjoying one's body in love.

Here Kareekkan misunderstands sex for lust. When Kareekkan touches the head of Margaleetha, he does it with an attitude to say that all your sins are forgiven. But he doesn't succeed in that. On the other hand he feels the pressure and enjoyment of that touch. But he is unable to admit that. When he says sorry to her for touching her he is cheating himself. Whenever he thinks of Margaleetha or anything that is related to this world he feels that he is sinning against God, church, priesthood and himself. It is this sense of sin that is the core of Christianity which leads Kareekkan. Contrary to this Margaleetha nurtures a positive attitude towards life and religion. When he touches her she feels the bliss for which all these people run and work hard for the entire life. She is on the waves of bliss and finds out that when two people touch and their bodies come together they feel spiritual pleasure. Then no one is above or below the other person. As Margaleetha says it is like darkness pregnant with light.

As Sarah Joseph says the life of a Roman Catholic priest is entirely different from other fractions of Christianity. Because, others can serve the society without denying their sexuality and body. But a Roman Catholic priest has to lead a life of isolation in a house near the church. They need a priest who is untouched by women. They can have all the worldly pleasures except the company of women. Sex is something which indulges only body not mind that is why they speak against it. What she suggests through this idea is the fact that a revision of these rules is essential. As it is suggested in *The Scent of the Other Side* (translation of *Othappu*), “‘Celibacy’ is a way of life that is constantly at war with the body and nature. Inside the confines of the abbeys and Convents, clad in sanctified robes, people fight and gasp, striking out against nature, striking out against their own bodies” (Joseph, 2009 x). The basic idea of priesthood in Christianity is the fact that they

have to practice chastity and poverty. As it is evident like daylight they don't practice poverty. But celibacy becomes compulsory. Because, the religious leaders know that when we free them to decide their sexual orientation it is a liberating act and sex means liberation. Once they are let free it will be difficult to regain the control. And, more than that the woman is the temptress and once someone is into that temptation there won't be a coming out. To justify these ideas they put forward a fantastic story of "Virgin Mary". Christ is not born out of the sexual indulgence between a woman and a man. So he is not born out of the sinful, dark space genital of a woman who is the embodiment of evil and Satan.

A live example of the consequences of celibacy in priesthood is the recently published Malayalam book by Sister Jesmi, *Amen* (2009), who has been a nun in the order. Though it is published after the publication of Sarah Joseph's work, it is important as it is a firsthand narrative of a Sister's experience. The insides of the nunnery become a place of forbidden pleasures and smothered desires. As she says in the book homosexuality is a frequent issue that the authority has to face inside the nunnery and it is the most despised and unnatural way of seeking pleasure according to religion. Even inside the hostels they make it compulsory to keep the needed distance. But the body is beyond all these moral policing. The natural pull to be together without any bound conquers the moral lessons inflicted on them. At the end of the narrative Sarah Joseph also draws such an incident to show that killing the natural instincts completely is not possible. When the sisters come to visit Margaleetha during a house visit they bring different gifts for the baby in Margaleetha's womb. The shyness that is spread on their face when they handover the gifts is quite similar to that of Margaleetha's during pregnancy. One of them mentions Margaleetha's expectation about the future. Motherhood and the bliss that it gives cannot be expected in their life.

Margaleetha recognizes that the bliss that she feels when she loves is the real spiritual pleasure. She loves each nook and cranny of her body because body is the seat of spiritual pleasure. It is like exploring a new world. When a girl grows up she is taught not to touch her own body or know it until and unless someone initiates her into that area. All the dark and hidden spaces in her body are considered vile and obnoxious. So her body becomes a strange world with secret things which are not to be known or revealed to her or the outer world. All the pleasures and experiences that body can give her become strange to her. Standing in such a location Margaleetha says “she searches for her God through her body” (Joseph, 2005 45) (*Translation mine*). She never feels sorry for that. She doesn’t distinguish between the immortal soul and mortal body. When she is in love, her body crosses the mind and mind crosses the body. When she is in love, she can love everything and in that way she can move from her limitations to a freer world. Celibacy is one’s personal choice. It should not be a rule or compulsion. Body is not the property of religion or any institution for that matter. Kareekkan stands at the other extreme of Margaleetha in the matter of ideas. Though he dreams of physical indulgence with Margaleetha he doubts if losing himself in Margaleetha is the world and the life.

In olden times sexuality was considered equal to spirituality by some groups of people. For instance the Greeks found sexuality as something sacred. As Jennifer Barker Woolger and Rojer J. Woolger points out in their *The Goddess Within*:

They still retained that strong sense that sexuality is a sacred gift and not a commodity to be exploited, which is why they honoured Aphrodite. It is only the modern world that is so

obsessed with Aphrodite's physical charms that it has almost lost touch with her sacred dimension (Woolger 135).

That is one way of liberation. But to the modern society these two are two distinct things which never come together, sexuality and sacredness. Love and sex are institutionalized and in this context it is intricate to juxtapose sexuality and spirituality. Religion has a completely patriarchal attitude towards woman's sexuality. But through the readings of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph we can see how this idea is further justified. As Sarah Joseph suggests, the idea of sin is embedded in Christianity. Man's birth itself is that sin because we are born out of a sexual indulgence. So the way in which we came into the world itself is the problem. Instead of finding it just as an activity to find pleasure or as a part of creativity, religion finds sexual pleasure a sin and leads the believers to a kind of anarchy.

The irony of morality upheld by the institutionalized religions is shown through the response of the priests when they come to know about Margaleetha. Though they don't express themselves obviously when they get private time they discuss how she looks and whether her body is perfect. Such is the impact of compulsory celibacy. As Kareekkan reveals that he fights to get rid of three evils, world, Satan, and body, we can understand the heaviness in the imposition of celibacy. Overcoming physicality is the biggest challenge among these people. And keeping away from the company of women is the solution that the saints and church find for that. Woman is considered a lower creature because she lures men towards Satan. Or to put it in another way woman is Satan in disguise according to religion. When Margaleetha and Kareekkan indulge in sexual relationship they find peace which they hadn't experienced before. He knows that the fake morality which he practices is a hurdle which prevents him from living the life of ordinary people.

The “Mad Dog” image that Alice Walker presents in front of us is a symbolic representation of what a girl is, needs to be and what she is made by the societal agencies like family and religion. Magdalena’s changing names show the transformation in her personality and her growth to become a complete being. Though she was named Magdalena, she was called Maggie in the beginning. That is the stage in which a girl has no control over her matters. Maggie is the daddy’s little girl which he thinks she is and that she has never been. By ten Maggie becomes Mac Doc against her will to become Mad Dog. Her father insists on her remaining Maggie and Magdalena. But she finds music in the name Mad Dog. As she tries to move to the heights of Mad Dog, which is considered wise by the Mundo, her father finds it necessary to tame her. So it supports the common idea that a woman must be a tamed, domestic animal. Being Mad Dog is not socially acceptable, especially in the case of a minister’s daughter.

Mad dogs are deemed wise because they lose their mind and stay connected to their emotions rather than to their head. But compromising with the societal need is throttling the instincts and identity of one self. So Mad Dog accepts another name, June. Though Robinson is perplexed about this name he prefers this to Mad Dog or Mac Doc. On the contrary people in the Mundo tribe are able to understand the change that is coming over in Magdalena. The societal pressure on a growing girl and her desperateness to cope with the ideals created by society are portrayed here.

What Robinson tries to do here is to recreate the archetype of the protected woman. According to the Indian philosophers also women are supposed to be protected by someone at each stage of her life. Though centuries have gone by and the entire world is transformed, the archetype of the protected woman exists in the psyche of the people. A woman who is

without the company of man is considered licentious and sexually available by the male dominated society. The silent and coy attitude that she keeps becomes a promising sign for the men to dominate her. Robinson never admits the fact that Magdalena knows what she wants. So naturally it becomes a clash between the truth of the daughter who represents the younger generation of all the periods and the father figure who is always portrayed as the protector. As J. Devika rightly quotes from Young in her essay, “Bodies Gone Awry”, the idea of a protected woman:

Constitutes the ‘good’ men who protect their women and children by relation to other ‘bad’ men liable to attack.... the ‘good’ woman who is protected in exchange for loyalty and submission, and the ‘bad’ woman who refuses protection by claiming the right to run her own life (qtd. in Devika 40).

Similarly when Margaleetha converses with men about religion and life in highly philosophical and spiritual way even women cannot accept it. Because such high sounding, profound thoughts are not expected from a woman. That is a socially constructed notion regarding the intelligence of women. So both these novels are the responses of women after the confrontation with insulting agencies like family and religion. The result of the working of all these agencies is the conflicts that happen in the relationship between sexes. This idea of the protected woman is negated by Sarah Joseph also. Margaleetha who liberates herself from the sophisticated dominions of religion and closed and constricted sexuality is a big question raised towards the concept of a protected woman. The growing stage of a girl is portrayed beautifully by Alice Walker in this novel. Like any other living thing a girl also is curious about the facts of life like sex, marriage and birth. She is curious about the

possibilities of her own body. But all these natural developments in a girl are plucked out at an early stage of life.

Controlling bodily passions is beyond the boundary of beings. What the society expects the children to do is to prepare themselves to become good social servants. Society puts forward some rules and prescribes socially acceptable ways of living. Whatever a human being is inside, he or she has to forge to fit into this acceptable ways of living. So the only alternative to escape these restrictions, which are double in the case of women, is marriage. That is the only space where body can be used without outside interference. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) discusses the causes of man's control over woman. The most important reason for the overpowering is the reproductive capacity of women. The much discussed womb envy is suggested to be the reason for the subjugation and control of women. As it is said the reproductive capacity of the woman bewilders and threatens the authority of men and naturally they tend to subordinate them using power. As Firestone envisions, a complete technological revolution can save the women from the cruelty of reproduction and it may bring equality between the sexes.

But even the reproductive capability is not free from the surveillance of religion and society. Thus there is no private space free from the eyes of the social agencies. A good example for this is the case of Pauline's mother that I have mentioned earlier. She is always pregnant and as her daughter rightly puts it, drops a baby every year. The term abortion is beyond question because women are destined to bear children with pain and children, god's blessing, are not to be destroyed. So she bears the fruit of her man's hunger and lust and is left without any option to take care of her body. The struggle for sexuality is secondary as struggle for survival comes as primary in everybody's life. Woman's refusal to participate

in the social phenomena here is a result of the numb upbringing of the woman to fit into the societal roles. The collision between the public and private space is evident here. The space permitted for Pauline's mother is limited and she doesn't have access to the public spaces which control the social behaviour and attitude of the individual. Some women can use power in both these spaces and some others have no control over these.

Both religion and the exponents of that institution, men, try to appropriate the body of women. The intrusion into the body of woman is with the permission of religion and other agencies. The womb of women which can bear the posterity is the primary source of attack. It is closely connected to her emotions and body. As it is said in Alice Walker's *The Temple of my Familiar* women had a superior status and stand in culture and politics in ancient societies. The first reason for this was man's ignorance of the child bearing power of woman. As the creators of life women got supremacy in the society and they were worshipped as goddesses. Besides that they were the priests in temples. This gave them superiority in the societal matters. All these changed when men got access to the secret of birth.

The men grew sick of the women they worshiped. And by now they had made an important discovery about woman's ability to produce life. That discovery was—and it had been kept well hidden by woman for a very long time—that the life that woman produced came out of a hole at her bottom! But not the hole man also had, as had been suspected...., but a different one. Then it was thought that anyone with such a

hole at his or her bottom could produce life through it.

(Walker, 1989 50)

Pauline's mother and Irene's mother are good examples for the cruelty perpetrated on women through the agencies of religion and family. Pauline's mother has ten children. These constant pregnancies make her body worn out and as Pauline says it becomes the cause of her death. The belief that bringing a life on to earth is sacred and only God has the right to take it back is the driving force here which leads people like Pauline's mother. Religion maintains that abortion is a sin and women like Pauline's mother who don't have either the economic status or the physical strength for that, oblige this rule blindfolded and die cursing themselves. When Irene's mother was raped, "her father and brothers chose not to believe this. She was beaten" (Walker, 1998 59). She died like an orphan without getting any attention. When Susannah reaches Greece and communicates with Irene, she is traumatized to find out that they used to stone women there accusing violation of societal regulations. *By the Light of my Father's Smile* is a treatise on the interference of religion even in the extremely personal realms like body. Family which is a direct agency of religion ruthlessly takes part in this chopping down of the complete growth of the daughters. Women are just helpers in the works of men and it is like that in the Indian context also. A good woman is one who focuses all her attention and expends all her energy on her husband and her family. Beyond that there is no magnitude to her sexuality or body.

A coy and silent woman is the ideal one in the eyes of the society. They are like the bonded labourers of the yesteryears. As it is said about Susannah and Robinson: "it was clear he thought her beautiful only when she was moving very slowly, or when she was still. He would gaze at her as if she were a flower, with no more mobility than a flower

possesses” (102). Though religious institutions are supposed to be spreading the message of love and equality they actually become the envoy of segregation based on different factors like sex and caste. Margaleetha’s experience in the nunnery shows how women are strangled even in such institutions because she is different from man in appearance. Women are kept aloof from the province of their own body. The central figure in Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple*, Celie, is a good example to prove this. Celie becomes aware of her own body when Shug Avery leads her through the strange and dark vicinity of her body.

Alice Walker’s characters Magdalena, Susannah, and Pauline dare to go beyond the line drawn by the society and enrich their access to their body. Soul exists because of the body. So there cannot be an existence without body. It is essential to give vent to the repressed passions of the body. A person becomes complete when he/she is understood as a whole unit comprising body and soul. Otherwise it will be a partial representation. All these women want to be liberated of religious and patriarchal fangs and gratify the need of their soul to be free. As religion proposes if women get power, the way of the world itself will be different and difficult. It is an essential component of human existence.

As Susannah says: “women all over the world have been brainwashed to think sex is not meant to be pleasurable to them, only to the men fucking them” (143). The idea that sex is only meant for the enjoyment of men is maintained by the majority in society. The daughter is always under surveillance because she is not supposed to know the prowess of her body until and unless her man initiates her into it after marriage. As we get from Walker these sorts of rigorous laws inflicted on the girl child prevent her growth and never free her to progress.

Similarly, every religion imposes moral taboo on homosexuality. Religious contention is that heterosexuality is the normal state and having feelings for a person from the same sex is against the natural law. But as Alice Walker proposes it is a physical and mental liberation for a woman to love another woman with whom she can identify. It is accepting the body without comparing it to the other. The base of the relationship between Pauline and Susannah is understanding and a common space to share experiences. Celie comes close to Shug Avery in *The Color Purple* because of the same reason. It is questioning the traditional religious idea of heterosexual relationship which is recognized by the society as natural. As Celie says, touching one's body in love feels like a prayer. When Pauline is curious and anxious about the treatment of women in Greece, Pedro gets irritated and he is much interested in a conjugal relationship rather than discussing the life of women.

This inability of men to empathize with women drives women towards the same sex. For Celie it is a completely liberating act in all the ways. This is a major factor discussed by Alice Walker in Womanist ideology. Sexually loving another woman is a step towards universal love and sisterhood. This mutual understanding and love give them the freedom to outgrow the state of being a victim forever. Bringing up the word 'sex' in public is a taboo in a society like Keralam. This difference in appraisal and attitude is evident in the writings of Sarah Joseph. When Alice Walker discusses body in her works her language is blunt and more expressive. But this explicitness is not seen in the writings of Sarah Joseph. Women in Alice Walker's *By the Light of my Father's Smile*, like Susannah, Pauline and Magdalene, voice their longing in beautiful and open language. But Margaleetha is not equipped with this prowess of language. In one context when she discusses religious matters with a man others find it inappropriate. Because, the traditional concept comes to play a big role in this.

Women are the light of home so their lives begin from there and end there. No discussion beyond that is needed.

Religion finds seeking pleasure in sex as perversion. Susannah's father is a representative of this reproach of body. As his daughter says the incongruity lies in the fact that they enjoy sex themselves and leave their children bound within the shroud of morality. But it is only the father who doesn't understand the anxiety of the daughters. On the other hand Magdalene's mother, Langley, understands her daughter pretty well. As Robinson says even at an early age Magdalena was interested in knowing what was concealed inside the trousers of men. But Langley has an entirely different view about this:

My wife did not see this as a problem. Leave the child alone, she advised as we prepared for bed at night, children are curious! I complained that Maggie embarrassed us by her boldness. Her staring and her sliding boys up to three times her age. She is curious, my sweet daughter, said my wife (16).

The physique and spirit are interrelated and part of the other. This concept of the relation between spirit and body is a part of many ancient cultures. In some ancient societies they used to put a man and a woman together in a hut for copulation while they sowed the land. Because they believed that the union of a man and woman would enrich the fertility of the land and produce good yield. When Magdalena meets Manuelito and Susannah meets Pauline what they are trying to do is recovering themselves from the agonies of the past through the support of each other. Thus sexual relationship becomes spiritual elevation and helps them reach the "wholeness" that Alice Walker projects in her idea of Womanism.

Even the parents don't believe in this idea of killing the instincts. Even then they try to impose phony rules on their children and break their lives into fractions. Magdalena says her father was "a man who was fucking all the time, and when he wasn't fucking, thinking about fucking" (126). Thus the masquerading that Robinson and his wife do as a minister and his wife is pertained in all the areas of their life including in giving a complete life to their daughters. As Susannah says the orgasmic freedom which has been a prerogative of men for years is a great freedom. And fathers lock their daughters out of this pleasure.

Love is spiritual and when body is involved it doesn't become otherwise. When Manuelito touches Magdalena's obese body after a long time he is bringing her back to her wholeness. Sexuality is considered sacred by the Mundo. As it is narrated by Manuelito the Mundos kiss five parts of a child's body when it is born. "Its ears are kissed, its eyes, its nose, its mouth and the place where life begins. When someone dies those who intimately love her or him will also kiss these same places" (179). The onslaught on his sacred sexuality of the Mundo tribe by the foreign religion is narrated by Manuelito. The ceremonies during their marriage frightened and questioned the moral thoughts of the invaders. At the time of their marriage the parents bless the children touching their breasts and kissing the vulva and phallus. "We explained that the kissing was respectful, the lightest touch. But they did not care. Because we practiced this, they raided our villages, hacked off our heads with machetes, enslaved us to work in the gold and silver mines. Burned our children alive" (180). This moral judgement using the invader's values degraded the ancient idea of sacred sex.

A society which has found man-woman relationship just a means to sustain the generations need not understand the bond between sexes. If a free willed woman challenges

this idea she is made desperate to feel guilty for being sexually explicit. As Irene says it is high time to move away from the world of illusions. These illusions are the creation of the male dominated world. And it is essential to undo the archetype of women created by men. If a woman has to obliterate this idea of woman's body and sexuality she has to rewrite the story from her point of view as Margaleetha does. When she narrates the story of Christ he turns out to be just a mason at Nazareth.

For Margaleetha and Magdalena sex is moving towards eternal peace. It is body which seeks the pleasure of the spirit. As Margaleetha says when the doors of pleasure open all the venom and squander flow out and it makes the body and soul lighter. Woman's soul and body are not two distinct things. She sees her God with the help of this body. Knowing body is like a prayer as Celie says in *The Color Purple*. Let it be Zede of *The Temple of my Familiar*, Celie or Magdalena, the broken selves of these women are brought back to themselves and made complete through this liberating act of coming together of two bodies.

Deconstructing and revising the notion and approach towards body is the thrust of the life stories narrated by Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph. When sexuality becomes a device to cast away a particular life condition like poverty it loses all its sacredness. As Pauline says suggesting her own experience, it becomes something like mounting a castle which has all its doors closed. The abundance of energy if utilized properly liberates you and the entire being loses its weight. The experience of Walker's and Sarah's characters establishes this as true. The conditioning institutions may not digest this idea. But as these authors say, spirituality comes primarily from the groin rather than from the mind.

Obviously Pauline is doing loving like Jesus couldn't and wouldn't. At least not in the version handed down to the adoring and gullible. After being made love to by Pauline you didn't say, as the hot Christian ladies do, Amen; no, you said what the wild Indians say after a powerful prayer: Ho! (121).

While we discuss woman's sexuality and its institutionalization Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *A Handmaid's Tale* (1985) needs to be mentioned. It presents a world where the woman is relegated to the corner and the primary purpose of a woman's body is reproduction. The ban on the book itself reveals the heights to which it could provoke the institutions. The patriarchal society has laid down clear hierarchy and the women in this novel are categorized for easy recognition. It tells about an imaginary world called Gilead. What we have to think is the psychology behind the creation of such imaginary worlds. In the novels discussed above there are different categories based on the sexual orientation of people. Some are homosexuals, some go for heterosexual relationship and there is another group who are not interested in sex.

There are two specific groups in Alice Walker's and Sarah Joseph's novels, people who believe in the idea of sexuality as equal to spirituality and people who hold that sexuality and spirituality are not connected. For them spirituality is something which deals with only the spirit. It does not include physique. My contention is that spirit or the essence doesn't have an existence without body. Even according to the scriptures body is the temple in which the spirit resides. Though this idea is sometimes subverted to use against sex and body it ultimately proves the importance of body and its indispensable relation with the spirit.

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## Chapter 3

### SPIRITUALITY AND SEXUALITY

The inferior position accorded to women in all societies decides the attitude of religion towards woman's spirituality. Spirituality, like sexuality, does not have a unified definition as it depends on the attitude of the individual. As I understand, spirituality doesn't have anything to do with the sort of devotion (bhakti) that people grow. Such devotion is an outlet to the accumulated fear and tensions. Even there can be exceptions as some people find it their spirituality. The intimacy that we share with people, the silence that we enjoy and the waves of happiness that we obtain in each moment of our life could be called spirituality. As it could be seen from literature, the traditional portrayal of women was related to their promiscuity and vulnerability. In Hindu mythologies also the position of women is as mere receivers of lust, anger and passion of their male counterparts. The story in Mahabharata where Yudhishtira curses his mother for keeping a secret is significant. Because the consequence of that curse, that a woman will never be able to bear secrets is experienced by women even today in the form of wild and vulgar comments. In Semitic religions woman is the sinner who tempts man and leads him to the ultimate fall. The male counterparts hold that women are not supposed to teach in the church and they cannot go above the authority of men. As Sister Jesmi quotes St. Paul in her *Amen*, women shouldn't preach in public or be given access to the high offices. So she may not be ordained to positions which deal with religion. There is a clear distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion is just an order created by the people to bring together the folk and construct a social structure. On the other hand spirituality is something which could not be contained in such fixed structures. It is in the way one perceives one's personal feelings on the spirit. It is true that the emotional

and physical bliss of body is actually dealt in religion rather than in spirituality. But the bliss that one experiences through body directly affects the mind and lightens the spirit. Body is never perceived in the way religion suggested though it influences the understanding. Though body is a much discussed topic in religion it is bereft of any sexual attributes.

Even some years before the only position a Christian woman could hold inside the church has been that of a nun. They could not lead the Mass. In Buddhist order also women were not permitted initially in the monasteries as they would be the cause of distraction for the male monks. Different theories which hold high the intellectual inferiority of women used to justify the stand of the religions. For the male dominated religious orders spirituality is something which negates sexuality. Both Sarah Joseph and Alice walker instigate the connection between spirituality and sexuality in their novels. Sarah Joseph's *Othappu* pictures spirituality in a diverse way. Margaleetha pursues herself in a different tone. She searches for her own God in a different way and as Sarah Joseph herself says Margaleetha begins from where everyone stops. She knows how to lead a straightforward and spiritual life, without hating oneself in this sort of a crooked world.

Church promotes a manner of spirituality which is said to be in favour of the deprived and spiritually thirsty. But the experiences that Sarah describes here make us dizzy and doubtful. Nuns feel the urge to go in a different line in matters of faith. They do offerings to Christ secretly and the authority can never digest the idea of women doing such things. Margaleetha leaves the nunnery recognizing the double standards of church life and moves to family life. A live example for this is Sister Jesmi, whose book *Amen* I have mentioned earlier, who left the nunnery recently fighting the authority that preaches one and practices

the opposite. As she quotes St. Paul in her book, the dress code, behaviour and even the ornaments that could be used by a woman are predetermined. According to St. Paul, a woman is supposed to keep quiet in public. The only way in which the redemption could be attained is through maternity. In this sort of a situation there arises no question of woman's spirituality. This idea of innate sinfulness of woman is what Margaleetha also questions. Family life and living for someone and oneself also is part of spirituality and an offering. What she wants to do is not prayer but practice. When she communicates with the baby inside her, she enjoys the bliss. The baby unborn could be called a manifestation of the sexual ecstasy experienced by Margaleetha. But it is a produce of the love of all those moments. Though religion and society altogether may consider an unwed mother like Margaleetha a wanton woman and the baby a proof of her licentiousness, the experience of Margaleetha is different. Bringing a new life to earth and being the light, water, breath and body of that is a spiritual experience for the mother, let her be wed or unwed.

Rebecca, a cousin of Margaleetha is another outcast who doesn't believe in the power of priests and church. She creates a language of her own to communicate with her god and believes that she possesses "the holy spirit". According to the church authority there cannot be an independent believer as Rebecca suggests. You are saved and religious only when you come under the leadership of the organized religion. What we can see here is the fact that when people are not able to cope with the fabricated realities put forward by the religion for them to believe, they search for alternate realities to show the world that there is another mode of spirituality. Even then the term alternate spirituality is a bit distressing. Because spirituality is something extremely personal and no external agency can have any claim on a person's spirituality. Thus each person's spirituality is valid in its own right. In that case the

term alternate spirituality is not apposite. As Sarah Joseph says in one of her essays the prospect of viewing God as a man and doing rituals that are apt to that God is a deceit in the history.

A similar idea is put forward by Alice Walker's Langley in *By the Light of my Father's Smile*. When she makes pots with the Mundo tribes, in which they store their food and water, she wonders how it is possible to picture the creator as a man after seeing the dexterity of women in pottery. As Alice Walker says in her *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*, spirituality of the Black women is intense and there was no outlet for them to express it. Their body was just an object to unleash the tensions of their men who suffered in the hands of the white superiors and also was a vessel to accept the atrocities of the white slave owners. So, regaining their body and spirit was the only solution for their spiritual rebirth. But the proximity for such a re-appropriation was less in a slave-owning society. Thus the only possible way for them was to express them through their "passion and their calm" (Walker, 1983 233). Their spirituality was their art, their way of loving people.

For these grandmothers and mothers of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release. They were creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality- which is the basis of Art- that the strain of enduring their unused and unwanted talent drove them insane. Throwing away this spirituality was their pathetic attempt to lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear (233).

As I suggested earlier many other writers across the countries have discussed women's sexuality and spirituality. Beth Brant, a Native Canadian feminist writer is one among them. Beth Brant also suggests this idea of creativity as something spiritual. It is like the sacred physical union, a "spiritual communication". To deny spirit is to put one's spirituality in war with one's sexuality.

Another valid thing to talk about Rebecca is the language that she speaks when she is possessed with Holy Spirit. She utters a language which is beyond the understanding of common people. When we connect it with the description that Kareekkan gives about the complex language that Fr Daniel uses in between the speeches we understand that by using such complex language he is ousting others from the world of prayers. As Sarah Joseph says in *Othappu* language is history, so it is one's life which is expressed through language. When Danielachan uses Latin or any other language in the midst of his speech he creates a wall around him which is closed to the common people. Then there won't be any access for women. We can reread Rebecca's use of the other language in this context. Here she is creating a language of her own to which no one including her husband has access.

The Hindu classics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are also male dominated ideologies. Religion is always on the side of the powerful. The preposition of sex is a sin in Hinduism also. Even then the natural instincts catch hold of every individual. Chastity is presented as a big power in Hindu mythologies also. Margaleetha is a woman who questions all sorts of institutions. Men wanted power to have control over other men and women became the prey of this power craving. Woman's sexuality gets restrained as a result of this proposal to maintain power. The stories presented in the epics and other religious texts are done with the prospect of spreading these ideals. The idea of chastity is a result of this proposal to

control the sexuality of woman. As Sarah Joseph proposes in her essays it is a concept to be maintained by women. Kanyaka (virgin) is the word she points out to express this notion. There is no word to denote the chastity of a man. Even the history of language deceives women in this matter. Alice Walker also shares a similar concern in her novel *By the Light of my Father's Smile*. A woman who is sexually loose is denoted using a number of adjectives like wanton, licentious etc. There are a number of such markers in the lexicon. But a male counterpart who transgresses the line of control remains just a man. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's utopian novel *Herland* (1979) discusses an exclusive space for women where no man is visible. It is a feminist utopia where no man is needed for reproduction. So sexuality is not a major concern for the women of Herland. Since virginity is a concept of the heterosexual society and it is a no man's land there is no meaning for it. In this way she is trying to undo the socially constructed ideas of femininity. Likewise a woman's spirituality also gets neglected when it is not according to the tunes of the mainstream belief system.

Alice Walker proposes a new theology for women. This theology makes sure the importance of enquiring the role of women in the liturgical matters. Womanist theology seeks women's tradition and reinforces their activity. More than that in the old tradition they give prominence to the spirit. Such an analysis of spirituality could be seen in Alice Walker's *By the Light of my Father's Smile*. The Mundo tribe doesn't believe in the idea of sin or consider the woman as a temptress. Religion proposes spirituality which is based principally on fear. It is when one overcomes that fear that one moves to the real terrain of spirituality. The Mundo tribe is an example for that. Their songs and the way sex education

is given to young children unfurl the interrelation with everything in life including spirituality and sexuality.

But in a religion like Christianity or any religion for that matter (excluding some cults like the Mundo and Saiva where practices related to body are observed) sex is related to sin and Satan. Other than the reproductive function there is no discussion of sex. The approach of religion towards women is obnoxious. Woman is just an object to be stoned. As Sarah Joseph reminds us in one of her essays the position accorded to women by Christianity is thought provoking. From the beginning itself it is just the “father, son and holy spirit”, woman comes nowhere in the picture. As *Bible* says a woman has to clarify her doubts from her husband. She doesn't have to ponder or rake her brain to find solutions. It is in this context that Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph make the controversial connection between spirituality and sexuality.

Margaleetha reflexes that to serve this world is the advice given by Christ. So that itself is the heaven propounded by him. Her search is to transform work into worship. Worship without negating body and quite close to nature is another important thing discussed by Sarah Joseph in this novel. The life of Fr. Augustine is an example for spirituality which includes the forces of nature. The woods in the surroundings of Fr. Augustine's residence become the centre of spiritual revelation for Margaleetha. The way he feeds animals and birds and his expertise in looking beyond the body attracts her. Her growth begins the moment she steps inside the premises of Fr. Augustine's ashram. His residence is called an ashram because it is not an exclusive space meant for privacy. It is a shared space where every being, trees and plants coexist. When he asks her who she is, she responds in a very simple way. Rather than telling him the name of the person who sent her there she merely

tells her name to introduce herself. The move to herself had already started in the case of Margaleetha. But this move to internalize the values of outside helps her in her introspection. Margaleetha comes to ask Fr. Augustine to show her a way to serve humanity without getting entangled in the web of institutionalized services. But he never shows her any way. He lets her accompany him in his travels to see patients and introduces her to the enigma of nature. She experiences real life in Augustine's ashram and feels its pain and dampness on her own. He never tells her what to do or doesn't lead her anywhere. There Sarah Joseph makes fun of the services done by people belonging to the upper line of the ladder. They have good food, live a better life and enjoy good social position. So they serve the society enjoying a comfortable position. Margaleetha is from the upper strata of the society and she is familiar with that culture. So the only indication that Fr. Augustine gives her is not to select the path of the high class society serving. Instead of that she wishes to be among the needy and serve them from inside. Her association with Augustine inexorably affects in a shift of attitude towards service.

Another instance of countering the existing patterns is shown through the special mass conducted secretly by the rebelling nuns of the order. As it is narrated by Margaleetha, she becomes a part of the proposals of Sister Jeremiah, who is against many practices of the church, to register her protest. There Sarah Joseph claims a sisterhood among these sisters. She suggests that these sisters stay together in all the conditions. Sister Jeremiah declared her own freedom to do any kind of worship that she wants. The wholeness that Alice Walker suggests through her works is the driving force in the case of these sisters also. Margaleetha's indulgence with the body, free from all the associations made by religion elevates her to the rein of spirituality. Quite contrary to Kareekkan, her association with the

body opens up a new world of rich possibilities for her and as many other western writers have written, she enjoys the bliss that people in the religious order thrive to attain.

When Margaleetha participates in the secret mass of sister Jeremiah she is countering the arguments of the popularly accepted culture of depriving women of the right to do services in the church. As Sister Jeremiah says the holy service becomes complete only when a woman is an active part in it. What she does while doing the service is interesting. She removes all the attires which compel her to behave in a particular manner, the apparel of a nun, which is accepted by the society. She becomes lighter in the long robe which doesn't prevent her from moving. She says: "this power is deposited in me for the liberty of widows, prostitutes, tender virgins, witches and all those who bleed. Pray for me." (Joseph, 2005 134) (*Translation mine*). She believes that God doesn't need the comforts of the palace like church and doesn't expect us to do royal services. God resides not only in the mansions and glittering golden talismen but also in the minds of the poor workers.

Though we are talking here about the spirituality of women we have another equally important subject to ponder on. It is the story of Br. Manikyan that Sarah Joseph narrates in her novel. Like that of the women, spirituality of the lower caste people is also smothered to death. Both the downtrodden and women are underprivileged here. Their right to know the prowess of their own self is throttled and the natural inclination to be like everyone else is treated with abhorrence and disrespect. Br. Manikyan who is a lower caste convert into Christianity understands with awe that he cannot be a priest in Christian order. His next generation also won't have that privilege. May be his grandson can hope for serving the humanity through church. They cannot even keep good Christian names. All those are meant for the purpose of the higher caste people. His mother can only be "Terutha", not

“Theresa”. So, similar to the night classes of Sister Jeremiah, Br. Manikyan assumes himself to be a priest and does services to the god quite unlike that happens in a church. He makes the preserve around Fr. Augustine’s dwelling his altar and the poor workers in the plantations become the participants in the mass. Here it could be called alternative spirituality as the act of Br. Manikyan is a manifestation of his rebellion. A similar instance of non-belonging and agony is presented in a Dalit Writer Bama’s autobiographical work *Karukku* (1992). Bama writes from her own experience as a nun in the order. The superior asks her if she is a Paraya or Palla. The lower caste converts get only a secondary position in the nunnery. Her dream of emancipation from untouchability through Christianity is shattered when she understands the casteist nature of nunnery and she comes out of it. The rebellion of Br. Manikyan and Bama’s leaving of nunnery are a backlash to the ill treatment of the religious societies.

Margaleetha’s spirituality is narrated through the beautiful movements in the nature. Because woman is quite closer to nature it is easy for her to identify with nature’s elements. It reminds us of the portrayal of spirituality by Beth Brant, a native Canadian lesbian writer, and Audre Lorde, an African American lesbian feminist writer. As they say sex is like a blossoming, something sprouting, getting a new birth. Life is ever-flowing like a river. Each moment is new and fresh. Herman Hesse’s classic book *Siddhartha* (1922) shows us how Siddhartha really becomes Buddha. Nothing is able to teach him the meaning and essence of life. At last it is the flowing river which shows him the real meaning of life. Death also means consummation. So it meant when two people enjoy sex and reach consummation it is like death. And they come to life again as phoenix does as two changed people. Beth Brant narrates her experience very poetically in her *Writing as Witness*. She

calls sexuality a physical prayer. Every pore of the body opens with that prayer. Religion tries to take hold of the body to confine the possibilities of the followers. She narrates one of her experiences with her lesbian partner.

As I felt the first tremors of orgasm take hold of me, a Blue Heron entered my body and I became her. Each pulse of orgasm was a flap of wings, a preparation for flight, and as orgasm took hold of me, I felt myself lifting from the ground, wings gathering strength, flying. I opened my long, yellow beak and gave a cry. (Brant 61)

At this juncture body is leaving that mere sense of flesh and moving beyond that to higher realms. It becomes a divine moment in the life of the person involved. As I suggested earlier a woman's body and life are inexorably related to the movements of nature. This irrevocable connection between nature and the body of the woman plays a larger role in the spiritual growth of a woman.

Alice Walker's eco-spirituality, which suggests the undeniable relationship between nature and beings, also advocates this indispensable relation. As Walker opines in her interview with John O'Brien she doesn't "believe there is a God beyond nature. The world is God. Man is God. So is a leaf or a snake" (O'Brien 150). The external agencies coerce the individual here to make a selection between physicality and spirituality. Alice Walker throughout her novels reinforces her idea of woman's spirituality making it explicit from the generation of foremothers. As she points out in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* Christianity has been an apparatus to conquer the parochial minds of the Africans.

A good instance for this could be seen in Chinua Achebe's works *The Arrow of God* (1964) and *Things Fall Apart* (1959). What is significant to the original owners of the land doesn't hold any significance to the invaders. The people who live relying on the swings of nature are not able to understand the ways of the foreigner. They stand baffled without reaching anywhere. As I suggested earlier the main idea of the foreign invaders was to propagate their religion. For that they tried to ignore the ways of the indigenous people who stood close to nature. A similar instance is there in the autobiographical work of the well known Dalit writer Bama. Though they are converted into another religion, the attitude of the people towards the religion of which they have been a part for a long time doesn't change. Their special performance that they do in front of the church during the occasion of Easter is a part of the Hindu culture. Even though religion changes, that spirit which each culture contains is sustained. In this sort of circumstances the culture and spirituality of women never become a point of discussion. Like the gypsies in Alice Walker's novel who have never known acceptance and continue a course of life as a pilgrimage which reminds them of their former life, the women and the downtrodden cling to connect their past with the present.

For Alice Walker's Magdalena, Susannah and Pauline and Sarah Joseph's Margaleetha, body is a way to travel beyond the body. The revelation of this new understanding makes them even more powerful and prepares them for everything that is there in store for them. As Dossier rightly quotes Rousseau and Gallagher in his article, "sex should be to a couple what prayer is to a contemplative religious [person] or the Eucharist is to a priest" (qtd in Dossier 19). Body becomes the instrument in search of God. Though every religion admits that creativity, physical, is noble and gives due respect to the creator,

it is the way in which creation is done that becomes objectionable. The possibility of drawing pleasure from physical indulgence rather than procreative purpose is the reason for the objection of the religion. By neglecting the way in which one is born, every institution tries to suppress the abundance of energy in individual and makes them docile for the promotion of these institutions. In a conversation between Magdalena and Susannah when the term God comes, Magdalena responds in a dejected manner. She asks Susannah to keep “the trouble maker” out of their conversation.

The songs depicted in the novels of Sarah Joseph and Alice Walker are revealing of the cultural disparity between the indigenous culture and the foreign religion. Songs are a common factor in Alice Walker’s *By the Light of my Father’s Smile* and Sarah Joseph’s *Othappu*. The songs are incorporated in these novels for different purposes. Though songs don’t acquire the central stage in Sarah Joseph, it is an irreproachable element in it. Songs are a part and parcel of African culture. For that matter rhythm has a primacy in all cultures. The songs of each region are the repository of knowledge and the unwritten histories of a subdued generation which didn’t have an entrance to the world of scripts. Since anything written is culturally superior to the songs, the happiness, pangs and anxieties of a group of people are marginalized. In Keralam also songs are the artifact of people from the lower classes which never attain the classical position. Since they don’t have any recorded history they inscribe it in the memories of their people to pass it from generation to generation. In this case the stories of the forefathers are flexible and vulnerable and could be reshaped according to the interests of the posterity.

In Alice Walker’s work it is the songs of the Mundo tribe. In Sarah Joseph’s work it is the song sung by Br. Manikyan. He sings it to an old Christian historian to show light to him

to the bias of history towards particular sects. If history is presented from the perspective of the people from the fringes it will look drastic to the supporters of power. Though the historian registers the important incidents in the history, the converted, lower caste Christian comes nowhere in it. Likewise the history of women also is absent from the mainstream history. History written from the surface without seeping into the depths won't be helpful for the hapless sections of the society.

Many of the Mundo songs are not permitted in Robinson's church as they involve human body and passion. One song that Magdalena always hums,

Anyone can see that the sky is naked

and if the sky is naked

then the earth must be naked

also (Walker, 1998 100)

. . . "is about the oneness of the unclothed human body and the nakedness of the sky" (23). This is the Mundo initiation song singing which Manuelito dies. It is considered lucky by them. The attraction towards body is a natural outcome of the love one soul feels for the other. They are not answerable to the external agencies. Even Robinson who is an emissary of the foreign religion believes that the admiration of corn and melon is more complete than the appreciation of Christ. On the contrary the songs that people like Robinson promote are with the intention of propagating the religion. But the refrain of Magdalena had obvious carnal message. This was not permitted inside the church. Robinson recognizes:

The tribe had seemed hypnotized by it. Taken some place deeper than church, where they had to stay riveted on the convoluted ideas, customs, and lives of foreigners in a book, the Bible, that had no particular fascination for. The song was not written down. . . It was a power, not only over the God we'd come to share with these people, it was a power over me. (24)

As Manuelito says, it is the creative energy of a being that draws him or her closer to God. They respect their women and believe that it is injustice to think of women as the problem behind the fall of the man. They request the preacher never to reveal this story to their women as they will feel offended and isolated. Black feminist writer Audre Lorde also proposes the distinctive relation between spirituality and sexuality. The principle of erotica is a driving force in every human being's life, as she says. Those who shun the erotic follow the path paved by white Christian males. Alice Walker's insistence on the existence of spirit is an important point which shows light to the way of belief of their predecessors. So knowing each other physically leads to the knowledge of oneself. As knowing oneself is the ultimate aim of the spirituality when we attain that goal we start to grow as beings. As Wibra Ibrahim Manimo puts it in her essay, people like Zora Neal Hurston decline the patriarchal foreign religion and embrace their African tradition. As Wibra says Hurston rejects the salvation that they preach and goes with the traditional African belief that death is not the end of life, it is returning to life. More than that Africa has a goddess cult where women are revered. This trend is absent in Christianity which subsides women as the root cause of all the problems. Virgin Mary became the focus of attention of the believers only a

long time after the establishment of Christianity. Most of the priests were against the worship of Mary as a holy presence. So the ideals of this religion never mix with the traditional African beliefs. It is this distance in faith that Alice Walker tries to project through juxtaposing Christian pastor Robinson and the Mundo Manuelito. As Alice Walker suggests spirituality is a feeling which comes in connection with many things especially nature and the body of another being. This regeneration through the contact with another individual is the spirituality that Alice Walker proposes. Sarah Joseph also says that the answers of God and his presence are felt through the thunder, wind, rain and lightening. Though all these are quite obvious, we continue searching for God in the organized religions. As she says “God speaks through the dew drop that falls on the earth, through the fluttering of the wings of a butterfly, through the falling of a leaf and the blooming of a tree” (135) (*Translation mine*).

Br. Manikyan gives a different interpretation to the teachings of Jesus Christ. As Lissie in *The Temple of my Familiar* says, they (white lords) fabricated stories which helped them to have absolute authority over the lives of the slaves. So there is no meaning in clinging to that old patriarchal theology. Thus Manikyan reinterprets the Christian story of providing five thousand people with five breads. As he says Christ had been showing us how to be diplomatic in sharing the property of a country. The human capital is high and the resources are less. Christ is giving us an example to tackle this sort of a political situation. Then we can make sure that everyone gets a share though it is scanty. For Manikyan spirituality is the great lesson of sharing. For a woman like Margaleetha it is the sharing of everything including the sufferings, happiness and the body. The secrets of the insides are externalized through this vehicle.

The healing power of sex is portrayed through the characters of Magdalena and Pauline by Alice Walker. Sarah Joseph's Margaleetha also is a proof for that. Magdalena lives with scars on her mind and body which debilitate her possibility of reconciliation with her father. She feels like reaching back to life and made whole again when she meets Manuelito again in the middle age. When his fingers touch her she feels that her childhood and youth which got stuck somewhere in the past are regenerating. Again Pauline, who never understands how she got pregnant, finds sex rejuvenating when she meets with Gena and gets introduced to her body. The broken self of a woman is made whole again here by the abundant power of touch. The shattered self of Margaleetha who had to go through a lot of painful and insulting moments is reassembled at last through her contact with Roy Francis Kareekkan. The disintegrated self of Margaleetha comes to full life when she is with Kareekkan. It is their love and touch which hold them together in the strange and agonizing stages of their life. As Kareekkan understands the soul of a woman is her body itself, it gives him tranquility which not even religion could give him. This finding leads him to the ultimate decision of leaving the monastery which is against the body.

As I pointed out in the Introduction, there is a clear cut difference between the beliefs of Margaleetha and Kareekkan. His roots are in institutionalized spirituality. On the other hand Margaleetha belongs to the boundless spirituality which is based on faith in oneself. When they decide to live together and when the mishaps follow, it is Kareekkan who is bewildered. Though he always wants to be with Margaleetha he is constantly reminded of the sin and its results. His words after his father's death push Margaleetha into despair: "The earning of sin is death" (Joseph, 2005 178). The failure of organized religion in bringing together the followers could be seen here. As Margaleetha says a person, when he/she is

ordained into such jobs, takes vow to leave all the worldly pleasures and relations. But it is not an easy job. Margaleetha recognizes this earlier than Kareekkan. Kareekkan opposes the ideas propagated by religion but he favours it at the same time.

Though Kareekkan recognizes the consoling power of nature when he is with Margaleetha, as he has never known before, the next moment the sense of sin engulfs him. The strong religious teachings that a person gets from the childhood instill this fear of sin in individual. When a child grows up his free thinking also matures with him. Religion cannot curb this intellectual growth. This conflict between the cultivated faith and independent, individual will leads to the dislocation of Kareekkan. On the contrary Margaleetha is clear in mind. She is after her soul from the beginning itself. As it is said:

On one hand he denied the religious customs and ritualistic deeds. On the other hand he thrived for all that. And his thirst was akin to that of one who didn't get water in the desert. Especially now, when he is not a part of either the church or the monastery. He even wishes if he could regain everything . . . he too has the ill luck of those who build the bridge between logic and faith. Proofs please him. The enigma beyond the proof frightens him . . . he wishes to correct it (179) (*Translation mine*).

Quite similar is the case of Robinson, the anthropologist masquerading as pastor. As his own daughter testifies against him he never considered all those things as right that he preached as a pastor. As I have suggested earlier, Robinson finds the ethnic patterns inside

the church enticing and soothing. For it reminds him of his grandmother's farm and the dampness and warmth of that earth. But the church authority is not able to accept the idea of a vibrant church and they prefer the grey walls for the green and moist ones. The masquerade persists in his life until his fatal meeting with Manuelito after their death. Unlike him his wife Langley has a strong persona and she wishes to conceive God as a woman.

In the beginning of her involvement with Kareekkan, Margaleetha feels that body is unimportant in love. But later the revelation comes to her that ruling out the body is impossible as every emotion and expression is experienced through the same body. Dr. Chandy is another tool that Sarah Joseph uses to demolish the existing pattern of spirituality. He is a preacher who prays for the good health of all kinds of patients. The only one who disturbs his work is Rebecca. She understands well the folly of his preaching and comes to his meetings and destroys the session. Since he is not able to debilitate the power of Rebecca he begins using the old allegation of the original sin. No one, including the women, retaliates. He preaches in the public: "Her heart is a snare and a web. And hands chains. The blessed will escape from her. But sinners will be entangled in her trap" (135) (*Translation mine*). This speech of Dr. Chandy is an offshoot of the popular concept of women generated by religion.

The general impression of a woman's spirituality is as something which is inferior to that of men. The experience of the three Sisters which William Andrews discusses in his *Sisters of the Spirit* (1986) tells us how women's spirituality and their urge to serve the holy order got through the trials of the man-made systems. Patriarchal order framed the present spirituality. The life of the three women here is a good example for the way patriarchy tries

to blow off the spark of selfhood in a woman. Though some groups admitted women to the leading roles in church, married women were not permitted for service in church previously. The lives of these three women, Jarena Lee, Zilpha Elaw, and Julia Foote show the extreme sacrifices women have to do in order to travel towards a realm which is in odds with the societal roles of a woman. The advent of these three women into the service of Christ was after a long saga of suffering. The importance of these three Black sisters' service was their courage to shove off the practices and preaching of the male authority. They insisted their Christian sisters to be true to God and themselves and never abide by the fake orders just to make the society happy. The noteworthy point here is their faith in the spirit. Though they belonged to Christianity and preached that, the ancient property, the faith in spirit, didn't fade. All these women gave ear to the call of their spirit and that redeemed them.

The transformation of an individual into a being with self knowledge is the spirituality discussed in the writings of Sarah Joseph and Alice Walker. It is the understanding of the light in every small thing. As it is beautifully depicted in *Othappu*, spirituality is the prayer to mix the dead body to the earth, fire and water so that they can return to earth as a raindrop and as a lightning which help the facile growth of life on earth. Alice Walker also implies this through the conversation between Manuelito and Robinson. "In the end, people will be driven back to trees. To streams. To rocks that do not have anything built on them" (Walker, 1998 213). The reason for the suffering of the characters in Alice Walker's work is "spirit fracture". Walker's and Sarah Joseph's idea of spirituality includes everything including nature and the natural instincts. When Margaleetha begins the story of Christ she is redefining her idea of spirituality and life. Moving out rather than strangling the self inside is the policy adopted by Margaleetha. Though stifles oneself inside the ghetto

of past memories, Walker's characters also get out of the mire created by oneself at the end. When the story ends we see Margaleetha without any support or help from anyone, fully pregnant and with Nanu, the orphan child. Suffering is considered as the greatest way to redemption by religions. Though the stories are read and heard, the essence is forgotten by everybody for the sake of convenience. But Margaleetha doesn't forget this. She accepts the soul of the religious teachings not the distorting stories which try to tie down individual to the stake of organized religion. So in her story Jesus is converted into a mason who lived in Nazareth.

The assimilation of sex and spirit is the base of spirituality in Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph. Everything is interrelated here. The important thing here is the fact that neither of these writers conform to the notion of the constructed, structured religious patterns. Beyond that they don't mix religion with spirituality. They try to shatter the stereotypical, docile, pious and conforming figure of a woman. The patriarchal society's idea of a woman's spirituality becomes illogical as these writers reveal the independent nature of it. To both of them spirituality is being close to earth. An individual is made complete through love and affection. The lesson of sharing is a common factor in both these novels. There is sharing with the fellow beings and sharing with nature.

The basic dogma of Christianity that everything that comes from earth should go back to earth is the theory behind this. The coming together of the natural principles, the body and the spirit is the sole way to accomplish completion. Otherwise a person must be like the fractured spirits of the daughters in both these novels. Celebrating the body is a natural action in the Mundo tribe. For them body is not a sinful object to be ruled out. They know everything including the communion with women and moon during their menstruation.

They know how to revere the body by blessing the sexual act and body parts. Knowing one's original self leads to the essential spiritual growth. This self knowledge is attained through the body. The meeting of the earthy and the indigenous with the phony, sophisticated, townsmen deconstructs the fake ideal of spirituality of the "civilized" world.



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## Chapter 4

### FAMILY AND RELIGION

Family is one of the important institutions that help to maintain the equilibrium of the society. The operation of family in a patriarchal society will be in accordance with the norms and conditions created by the powerful. There is definite hierarchy in family. As Marx says, family is a product of capitalism and it is the rootcause of patriarchy. In an institution like family where the man is situated at the upper layer of the stratification women and children become unpaid labourers. As an outcome, the surplus goes to the capitalist. It is a clash between the private and public space. Although women and children are placed in the same category, here children become the victimized, powerless sections who are placed at the lowest strata. The moral policing of the family cripples the growth of the children and their life gets hampered forever. It is the family which sees the different stages of a child's growth like childhood, adolescence and youth. A child goes through many intricacies during these stages and the family can be the best supporter.

Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph have portrayed a plethora of families in their works and we can see how family becomes the catalyst in the degeneration of people inside the four walls. As already seen in the previous chapters, the meddling of the family in different stages of the development of a child impinges on his/her entire life. One important character in Walker's work, Pauline, reaches a stage of committing suicide because her family pushes her into a relationship which she is not able to adjust with. Likewise her mother is just a baby-making machine and father is stuck behind a meat table because he has ten mouths to feed. Another character, Irene, is thrown out of the family because she is born out of a rape.

Magdalena's never ending gluttony is the aftermath of the rules imposed on her by her father. When she reaches puberty her father tries to protect her and keeps her away from her friends.

Similarly, Sarah Joseph's Margaleetha and Rebecca suffer until the end of their life because family doesn't give the essential support which is needed at particular junctures of their life. Though children, irrespective of the sex difference, are under the control of the family, girl children suffer manifold oppression. While one part of a woman succumbs to the written and unwritten laws of all the institutions in the society, the other fraction tends to retaliate and rebel. So the fragmentation or division of an individual begins at the family level.

Since the principal and most important purpose of a woman's body is procreation and she is condemned by God to bear children with pain, the concept of abortion is invalid. Abortion is against the will of God. Children are the blessings of God and it is the fate of a woman to go through whatever God has ordained. As C S Chandrika says in her *Arthavamulla Streekal*, the woman is a labourer inside the family in every sense. And outside she is just a sex symbol. The necessity of a woman inside the family ends when she gives birth to the heir of that family. So it is a method to have complete authority and power over the reproductive rights and the body of woman. As she says, house becomes a space which is not secure for women. As most sociological texts say, one of the primary functions of every family is to produce children and the maintenance of the sociological order. Thus the child imbibes the social laws and internalizes them unconsciously. This is what happens in the case of Pauline. As a child she is filled with the idea that she is supposed to take care of the young ones.

The man-made values in the Euro-American society are a remarkable influence in the forming of family. Another interesting incident from the novel shows how family strangles the intellect of a woman. Susannah's mother-in-law sends Susannah away because she asks unwanted questions regarding Greek culture and the treatment of women. A woman who asks questions is a threat to the smooth running of the family. So the natural inquisitiveness of a woman gets killed in such a patriarchal set up. As Irene says, a woman who moves beyond the limits of the society gets stoned.

On the other hand, Sarah Joseph's Margaleetha is disowned by her family because she breaks the rules of the religion. Her brothers become the safeguards of religion here. Those who walk parallel to the institutions are not wanted by both the family and society. Her sisters-in-law want to show her sympathy. But the moral police of the family hold them back. She is even negated the rights in family property because she violated the society and family by leaving the nunnery. In such families a woman's life is just a concession. As Sarah Joseph herself says in an interview, family or man-woman relations for that matter has never been free. Everything is built upon some "base". Family has always been considered as the microcosmic representation of the larger economic structures. We don't have democratic families or relationships. So every child is brought up in such an undemocratic setup. Let it be Indian culture or western culture, the reign will be in the hands of men. They want to maintain power through any method. Family becomes a catalyst in this odd bid.

Christianity addresses every one as a sinner and it propagates that women are the primary cause in sinning. In this rat race women are subsided and are avoided completely from the scene. According to Sarah Joseph the only way to change the condition of women

is to change the structure of family. Liberating women does not mean controlling men and keeping them under the feet of women. As Sarah Joseph proposes, men and women have to work together to change this particular situation and marriage is the concern of the individual. No external agency has a function in it. When the external forces voluntarily take up the task of finding a partner for a girl or a boy they are doing the worst crime towards the individual.

Family that is said to be the cradle of harmony and sanctity is not that simple in the modern world. In Walker's work, family curbs the growth of the children internally and externally. When Pauline or Irene speaks, we hear the suffocated sound of the repressed which has not been heard for a long time. Magdalena is free and happy only with Manuelito as he is the one who brings her back her childhood. As the first wave feminists point out, the inequality in the family begins from the roles attributed to men and women of that family. The well-defined gender roles decide the place of a woman inside the family and in the society. People whose ideas never go in concert live under the same roof and it kills the self. Rather than taking an active part in the making of a family, the woman in the family just provides for the nourishment of the other members. The world in which she is supposed to live is chosen by others for her. In the process of becoming a socially responsible, loving being, the "I" gets misplaced.

A further important fact we have to note here is the impossibility of divorce in Christianity quite unlike in other Semitic religions like Islam. People once tied together are supposed to continue it like that. So, family can be productive and destructive. Thus religion advocated through family is the primary killer of the instincts and creativity of the members. As Margaleetha says, family is a prison of emotions and the foundation of any family is

greed. As she suggests women partners are loftier and more imaginative than their male partners. The different roles that women play inside the family are clearly defined. Certain behavioral pattern is expected from her when she plays each role. A woman is a mother, sister, wife, daughter and a lot other titles are given to her. But one of the important and demanding roles of all these, is the role of a dutiful, submissive daughter. So to keep pace with the social standards the daughters abandon or hide their original self and prepare the ground for their own destruction. The daughter is good only when she fulfills the role of a good daughter.

When we discuss the important unit in the social structure, family, we can not rule out the changing definition of the concept called family. Earlier the term family brought into our mind a single dimensional picture—a family which is the abode of protection and mutual support, comprised of parents and children. But now it is not a one-dimensional word. For that matter there is a difference in the family setups of Keralam and America. In Keralam there were traditional family houses where everyone used to live together. Such a set up was both a boon and a curse for the residents. The present situation has changed a lot and the old definitions don't exist that widely as it used to be. Even then the social pressure and the repeating question of values and morality compel the Kerala community to continue the old ways. In America, a family consists of mainly the father, mother and the off-spring. This sort of families have transformed now into different levels which was beyond imagination once. Now there are single parent families, gay and lesbian couple raising children and parents living with adopted children.

An important factor in the case of the Blacks is their past of slavery and the difficulties they had to suffer to keep their children with them. Though they gave birth they were not let

to keep their children with them. The concept of family differs further in their case. With their negated sexuality and motherhood Black women were the mere receivers of the emotional attacks of Black and white men. While the white women struggled to raise their children and left them in the custody of the mammies, something else was going on with the Black women. The African American slaves had no families and no rights even if they had families. So first of all they had to fight to regain their right to raise their children. They got it much later after a long fight. So for having a full-fledged family including their children and their men they had to wait for a long time.

Women are considered mere caretakers of the family in the growth of which they are - not accorded any position. They are just the human capital which is at the lower strata of the hierarchy. Women and children get subjected to all the tension that affects the head of the family directly or indirectly. The incidents that happen in the work place or the public sphere affect the peaceful existence of the family. To escape this subjectivity, children find some temporary asylums and accept it real and completely rely upon them. The drug addiction of children in general, and to cite from the text, the overeating of Magdalena, the writings of Susannah are all examples for this temporary asylum.

Some works are traditionally attributed to women. Mother's role inside the family is taken for granted. The household works and every responsibility related to the nurturing of the entire family is upon the shoulders of the women of the family. Though the economic freedom of the present day women has brought about some changes in the status of women inside and outside the family, still they are obligated to do the household chores. Then they do both the paid and unpaid labour. More than that the works to which women have easy access is the extension of the works that they do in the family. Even now all those

conventional jobs are considered as most appropriate for women. In fact, it is difficult for a man also in a middle class society to sustain and support the family. The expectations are high and the earning is low. Thus, economic factor becomes a deciding aspect in the smooth running of the family.

There are a number of families presented in Alice Walker's and Sarah Joseph's works. Some of them are from the striving faction which works hard to make the two ends meet. As I have discussed earlier, Pauline's family goes through all the mishaps and her father is glued behind a table in the meat factory because of their destitution. Another family in *By the Light of my Father's Smile* is that of Robinson and Langley. Their academic aspirations are thwarted because of the economic backwardness and the following masquerade is a result of that. But the difference here is the fact that unlike the case of Pauline's family, there are only three mouths to be provided here. It is the moral question which ruins the atmosphere and shatters the emotional balance and attachment of the family in this case.

For a character like Irene, family holds an entirely different meaning. She is a redundant child born out of rape. Her family members give her to the church because she is unwanted and a dwarf, a result of her mother's sin as they say. Here we can see a family which doubts the integrity of the daughter. They never believe the rape story of the daughter. Instead they choose to disbelieve her and she dies without the compassion of the family members. A rather socially accepted type of family here is that of Petro, Susannah's Greek husband. The mother cooks delicious food each time, takes care of the entire family and unquestionably accepts the religious laws and has complete faith in the orders put forward by them. These are the family prototypes in Walker's work.

The central family in Sarah Joseph's work is that of Margaleetha. As in Walker's work there are a plethora of families in Sarah's work also. As a matter of fact most of them fail in providing the essential support for the wholesome growth of their children. Margaleetha is grown up in a well known and well off family. She never comes to see a bad day in her life. She is always well protected and supported by her father. The ill matched marriage between Rebecca and Thomas Vaidyar ends up in brutal violence and complete imbalance. Kareekkan's family, which is absolutely based on the Christian faith and the pride that a son brings, gets destroyed when the son disobeys the religious order. For Fr. Augustine, family is a bigger unit which comprises everything under the sun. All the human beings, animals, plants and trees are a part of his family. The revolutionary family of the old historian Kunhippalu and his son Yohannan Kasheesha is another group. Beyond all these there are people like Br. Manikyan, the inmates of the nunnery and the people who live in the street without any name and address. Family is a different concept for each of these people.

The parent-child relationship is said to be the strongest and untainted of all relationships. Parents are the initial teachers of every child. And they endow the child with the power to deal with different future relationships and situations. As it is rightly said, a child learns the primary lesson of socialization from the family. Even then at times we find family as a strange unit. Because people who have different disposition are brought together under the same roof and they are compelled to live like that because of the social pressures. The members are normally emotionally attached and feel for each other. There is a communicable character in the matters of the family. This is clearly manifest in the case of the Robinson family. One incident that happens in the life of Magdalena encircles the entire family like a disease and it affects the relationship of the other members also. Thus these

characters' alienation from the family becomes complete. An episode in the life of Magdalena topples down the emotional attachment among the other characters. Even Susannah who loved her father starts to distance herself from him because of his brutality towards her sister.

In a slave–master relationship, the slave is supposed to accept the capricious behavior of the owner. The roles of the slave and the master are reenacted here through the parent and child figures. The father here is committed to the wellbeing of the family members and mother is tied to the stake because of the social responsibilities. Here children are the innocent receivers of all oddities. In the case of Pauline, family becomes her deceiver. At a very tender age she is compelled to parent her baby brothers and sisters though she loves to go to school. Her mother who knows the pain of unwanted relations and pregnancies well becomes the active agent in the deterioration of her daughter. It is she who helps in impregnating her daughter by intoxicating her. Though she does it because of the utter poverty that the family suffers it ultimately harnesses her psychological growth. It is only when she runs away from her husband that she grows psychologically and recognizes that her body is her own. Until then sex is something done to her rather than something in which she is a dynamic partaker. In this family everyone is a slave.

An interesting factor in the case of Pauline is that her brothers choose not to marry and for accomplishing their physical needs they go to sex workers. So rather than committing their life to the false cause of marriage they believe in the essentialities of their body. This attitude of the brothers of Pauline shows the level of disintegration of the family system. They frame the idea of family from their own experience. From their childhood itself they see their father working the whole day without earning enough for supporting the needs of

the entire family. In this sort of a situation it is quite natural for them to form such an idea of family in their mind. For them marriage becomes an institution only to provide sexual comfort, creating children and ending up in eternal suffering. Thus they renounce the idea of forming a family themselves. In the case of Susannah and Magdalena family meant something initially. But later it becomes an institution which strangles the natural curiosity of a child. For Magdalena her father never acknowledges her difference and tries to bring her up to his tunes. Though Robinson recognizes the difference in the spirit of Magdalena, he tries to transform it according to the religious and socially acceptable norms. This results in the dislocation of the sexuality of these girls.

Sarah Joseph's Margaleetha, as I discussed earlier is from a prosperous family. Though her father supports her in everything, her mother tries to bring her up according to the social values that may transform her into a socially acceptable woman. But she never has any liking for the social system called family. Hence she decides to renounce the family life, which according to her is based on greed. Later she recognizes the difficulty in leaving the ties which one used to count invaluable. When her mother asks her for permission to hold her hands and she is treated with the respect normally shown to an outsider, she understands that it is not easy to unwire oneself from the world of relationships. Though people selected to serve Christ and the church are supposed to leave all the worldly relationships they are never able to do that. Kareekkan suffers these agonies because he finds himself guilty and responsible for the death of his father. When he is appointed as the priest of his parish the only thing that tempts him to accept that duty is the happiness and the rising social position of his family. His father who has been a coolie in the market will finally be acknowledged by the society. He also feels the drive to work instead of his father and to support his family.

Though a priest take the vow to alienate himself/herself from all the worldly ties it is not possible always. The experiences narrated by Sister Jesmi are a good example for this.

Family treats boy child and girl child in different ways. There are fixed behavioural patterns for boys and girls. The definition of luck also is different for them. A boy has the fortune to attain all his wishes. On the other hand the height of a girl's luck is her husband and the primary role of her is that of the nurturer. The boy is supposed to be virile, daring and strong. On the other hand a girl is meant to be coy, submissive and agile. Pauline's mother pushes her own daughter into the bedroom of an elderly stranger without giving her any prior information and later reminds her of her luck. Because her husband is able to provide her plenty and he is there with her when she is pregnant. Robinson is quite happy with his daughters when they are quiet, walk slowly and wear long dresses. When a daughter like Magdalena slowly transforms into a woman and pursues her will, he is unable to accept it. A woman must be like a tamed animal as he believes. So he thinks of the necessity of taming his daughter. They are good only when they wear long skirts and live in the world of books. To divert her from her natural curiosities and glue her energy to something other than men he encourages her overeating. When Langley notices the overeating of Magdalena she reports it to Robinson as something unnatural but he doesn't care about it. Instead he promotes it as a way of distraction and a means to make her submissive. Thus he paves way for the destruction of his own daughter. The different dress codes maintained by the boys and girls in the same society declare the way in which the character of the boys and girls are moulded. When boys are given dresses which won't be a hindrance to running or playing freely, girls are given apparels which nag them always to be careful about their movement. To make it worse they always get long lectures and lessons

from the members of the family, especially women to sit, walk, stand and eat properly. All these lessons of appropriateness are never given to the boys of the family.

Margaleetha and Kareekkan's family is an example for the evolving families of the present day society. Making all the socially formulated laws mere witness, they decide to live together without signing any contract or accepting the blessings and permission of family or the religious institutions. They begin their family breaking the hierarchical structure of a conventional family. Thus it is a sign of the changing times and attitudes. Their marriage is not based on any law or regulation. It is just a coming together of two souls who wish to be together physically and spiritually. But in the case of Rebecca, for instance, marriage is a permanent arrangement made by the family and society without the consent of the woman. Thus what a child is to become in future is decided by the atmosphere provided at home. So everything begins at home, let it be growth or retardation.

The social structures like religion play a big role in forming the ideals of family, so is the case with Margaleetha, Magdalena or Kareekkan. The deciding factor in the family is the religious belief. In Kareekkan's case his father commits suicide because of the impossibility of facing the society and especially the church. His mother shoves him off the family because she is afraid of the society especially the church because it will affect the future of her daughters. As Chandrika says it is not that a person makes these religious laws on her own. She cites the example of her own mother. The practice of keeping menstruating women away from the regular activities of life, especially from religious matters, has been a common practice in Kerala. As Chandrika says, her mother is not responsible for the formation of this sort of a regulation. But she is made the custodian of all such rules which strangle her own freedom. This is a frightening game being played by the patriarchal

society. Women and children face different kinds of atrocities inside the family. It may be physical, psychological or sexual. Sarah Joseph's and Alice Walker's characters go through all these traumatic experiences. Magdalena, Margaleetha, Rebecca and Pauline suffer the physical pains inflicted by the family members to keep the social laws intact. Even the religious books and preachings have approved the infliction of violence over women if she misbehaves. Geetha in her essay *The Treatment of Women in Different Cultures* notes that every religion including the so called free, respecting Hindu religion supports meting out punishment because if women start to disobey the entire order of the society will be lost. As in the case of Pauline, the woman becomes a tool to manipulate the attention of the strangers so that there would be someone to provide for the family. Whoever gives the support, love and shows compassion is the family for these characters.

For instance Irene does not experience the compassion or attention of the family. But the women of the families who come to visit her share with her their plights and this connectedness makes them feel at home and creates an at home feeling for them. But a girl like Magdalena is not able to communicate with her father and this lack of communication between the members of the family compel a person like Robinson to posit that there is something mysterious going on with his daughter. The family of Margaleetha feels that she is an erred woman. As long as she is pious and religious, she is the ideal of the family and they are happy when her niece shows the same streak. When she renounces the fake attributes of religion and decides to follow her own spirituality, she is disowned by the same family.

Thus family becomes a companion only in convenience for Margaleetha, except her mother who loves her in the depths of her mind despite of her dissatisfaction with her

daughter. But it is not the same for Magdalena or Susannah, their life is made a nightmare because Magdalena never lets go of the moment of violation of her pride by her father. Though he wants to expiate his act he never gets a chance as his daughter gets devastated because of that violent moment and instigates her younger sister also not to forget the monstrous behaviour of their father. Though family is a painful experience for most of the characters of these novels, there is a coming back at some stage of the life, there is a reunion. In the case of Magdalena and Robinson there ultimately happens a meeting after the death. It is not a mere meeting, but reconciliation with the long lost father. The meeting and the subsequent action of the father, begging forgiveness for the past action of violence, give them a possibility of regaining the lost confidence between the father and the daughter. Margaleetha, out of the compulsion of others, also makes a return journey to the warmth of her home, though without much avail. In each moment of her journey she is enthralled by the past memories of a secure, safe and supportive home.

Susannah recognizes her loss at a stage of her life and from the tarot cards of Irene tries to assume what has been done to her all this time. Reading her tarot cards Irene tells her that all these while the two women in her life, Pauline her sexual partner and Magdalena her sister, have been trying to get access to her childhood. Margaleetha had a broken childhood because of her independent and non-conforming attitude. But she has seen Susannah gliding and glittering in her childhood glory. According to Magdalena, Susannah was favoured by her father in all the matters. Thus her brokenness becomes complete. In the case of Pauline she had to act the role of a mother at a very small age. As it could be seen in any society a girl child grows rather earlier than a boy child. Because it is considered the responsibility of the daughters of the family to take care of the younger children, Pauline

acts as a mother to her younger brothers. So her childhood was a deprived and destitute one in all the senses. So she wants Susannah's childhood when she was able to enjoy being the darling of a nuclear family with two children. Susannah has seen a lot of places as a small girl and her parents could give her the pleasures of life and they expend all their love on her. This is one of the reasons why Magdalena is comfortable with Manuelito. When he utters her name and touches her she is given back her childhood. Only he can bring the childhood back to her and make her life whole.

The restrictions imposed on individual through the different agencies create strain in the relationship between sexes. While considering the condition of relationships in Sarah Joseph's novel we can understand the difficulty and strain in fulfilling different roles and relations. Initially family is a cozy space for the child to grow up. But when the individuation process begins the clash also starts. The loss of security and dislocation from the family make Magdalena the divided and broken self. When religion comes in between the mother and daughter, Margaleetha becomes a divine and untouchable thing to her own mother. Same is the reason for the weakening of the relationship between Margaleetha and Kareekkan. Margaleetha finds a meaning for the term house when she is with Kareekkan. But his incapability to understand the value of relations outside the regular ones with the consent of religion fails their relationship.

The energy of a woman's body is regulated and restricted by a number of factors and family is an indispensable factor in this. It is actually family which produces independent individuals. So the same family can make it topsy-turvy also. Shulamith Firestone in her *Dialectic of Sex* notes how family becomes the important instrument in the subjugation of the woman. The emotional bonding between members and the need to be together are two

things that make a family. Margaleetha, when she comes out of the ashram of Fr. Augustine leaving Nanu, the small boy, imagines that she is moving into a family. But ultimately she composes a family consisting of Nanu and her unborn child who need her presence and love. Rebecca is a victim of violence inside the family. She escapes from there with her two girls and when she returns she is without children. There is no answer for the absence of the children. Their father didn't want them because they were girls. He was mad at Rebecca for giving birth to girls again and again. The decision of Rebecca to stay alone in a filthy street is a challenge to the male dominated society which makes life impossible for a woman. This paves way to the transformation of Rebecca from a suffering wife to an independent woman. The acquisition of roles inside and outside the family depends on the invisible training that one gets from the society. A girl naturally tends to identify with her mother and what she beholds inside the family is complete submission of the identity of the mother. Thus this identification with the mother dwindles the possibility of growth in the case of the girl child.

In the case of a Black girl child, things are much more complicated. It is not just gender which is in the game but a multitude of other factors. In her case class, race and gender build the identity together. Though the discussion of such an issue is not obvious in this novel by Alice Walker, the influence of all these elements in the formation of one's identity is portrayed well in other works. For instance in the case of Celie in *The Color Purple*, she is compelled to believe that she looks ugly by her step father who rapes her and by her husband who brutalizes her. This concept, beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, torments Celie from her childhood itself. She is just a black, ugly woman. While being a woman itself is a negative thing, these women are Black and they don't fit to the beauty

standards of the white male dominated world. All these factors affect the character formation of a child. They are treated like black blisters or moles on a beautiful white body.

Let us take the general conception of a Black woman's behaviour and physique. Black women are healthy, flabby and here licentious sexual attributes. They don't have any spirituality which can stand with the white man's religion. They are good nurturers and cooks. All these are the common conception of a Black woman. This is created as a result of the consolidated exertion of race, class and gender. Toni Morrison's *Bluest Eye* (1970) is a noteworthy example for the impact of western created beauty standards on a Black woman. When a girl like Pecola pleads to God for blue eyes she wants to get co opted by the white world. She falls prey to this ideal of beauty because of the cruelty of both the Black and white society. At home also she is made to believe that she is ugly and her mother adds fire to this notion. When she lavishes her affection on the white children in whose house she is a mammy, Pecola gets distracted completely. But here we cannot rule out the role of Black families which pass over to the next generation stories and songs which are the repository of traditional knowledge. That is one reason for Alice Walker's search for a female tradition among Blacks. Black women were good artists and their children had the luck to grow up hearing these stories. Such enriching family experiences cannot be obliterated from this discussion. Though their stories could be enjoyed by the white child better they were taken directly from the lifelong experiences of these women. So it is directly related to their history.

In the case of Keralam it is not race. It is caste and more than that class. The life story of Br. Manikyan itself is a good instance for the ways in which a child's identity is formed. The lessons of discrimination are taught by the authority itself. Another instance of

discrimination is narrated by Margaleetha herself. In the nunnery the parents of the sisters from wealthy houses are treated with all affection, respect and care. But at the same time when the family members of the sisters from downtrodden families come to visit their children they were treated as secondary. A further discussion on the formation of identity of a child is done by Sarah Joseph in her essays and short stories. In her essays she narrates her life experiences of being born in a Christian family and how the upper caste people make them invisible from the courtyards. When a small child is asked to wait outside the backdoors, because she is born into a particular group, it affects her psychological development.

Similar instances have been portrayed by Dalit writers in regional literature. Chaturvarya which existed in India is still vibrant in the scene and there are good examples. A well known story by Arjun Dangle, *Promotion*, draws beautifully the picture of the plight of a small boy who is punished by the neighbor for drinking water from their pot. The father thinks that his position in the society will be changed when he gets promotion. But the tears of the boy remind him of the unchanging attitude. These scars are imprinted in the minds of generations. So it is evident that these external social factors have an impact on the construction of an individual.

As feminist theoreticians suggest, the biological difference of women is a deciding factor in the position accorded to women in the family system. Having a body which is different from that of a man is a crime when the masculine body becomes the criterion for the beauty standards. As C S Chandrika says in *Arthavamulla Streekal* the adjectives used to modify the nouns related to femininity itself is a crime towards women. The general concept created by the media and the institutions handled by the patriarchal world project women as

“soft, fragile, heart, body, emotion and inactive” (Chandrika 27). On the contrary men are presented as “active, head, logic, strength and firm” (27). These are the stereotypes created by the patriarchal institutions through the centuries. All these distinctions are made on the basis of the biological dissimilarities. These dissimilarities result in the variation in opportunities for women. Even in this twenty first century women are negated some jobs because there is a possibility for them to go on maternity leave. So biology matters very much in the case of a woman’s progress. The experience of women becomes a justification for the supporters of the most quoted comment, “being a woman is a biological destiny”.

Another remarkable point while we take the case of the family is the different categories that exist inside. The clear distinction between the family woman and the other woman incites us to question the standards of womanhood. Family woman is the socially accepted type and the other woman who tries to question or disobey is outcast in the eyes of the society. A woman who lives alone supporting herself or a divorcee is grit in the eyes of the society. The category called housewife is a definite attack on the individuality and freedom of the woman. The domestic demands and the behavioural pattern expected of a woman are reiterated through the use of this coinage. It affirms the idea that a woman is the property of the house and her aim must be to fulfill the family’s requirements and that must be her world.

The proposal of feminists in countering the unequal familial system that exists now is to manage the division of labour. The important reason for the existing inequality is the disparity in division of labour. They also mention the Marxist idea of the unpaid labour and the capitalist plan of creating the maximum number of labourers. Only through eradicating the patriarchal setup we can bring equilibrium in the family life. Otherwise there will be

owners and labourers in families. The hierarchies created by religion also have to be changed. The scriptures placed men in full authority and made them the unquestionable masters. The hullabaloo created in relation to the decriminalization of homosexuality in India is a proof for the society's fear of the destruction of the constructed family pattern though it has already been ruptured at different levels. Moreover it will be a question raised against the age old teachings and authority of religious institutions. The religious laws and institutions facilitate the subjugation of women to an extent. As well known feminists say all these religious rules were created during particular periods and they were meant only for that particular period. It is impossible to judge modern situations using those age old value systems. Though family is considered a noble and basic unit by religion it is a result of the fall of man. The idea of apostles that the fall was a result of the vulnerability of the woman is still being read and taught. No revision has been made in these scriptures though this is the twenty first century. Since they occupy a higher space in comparison to the classics these scriptures still affect the thought process of the society.

The questions and answers regarding family, sexuality and spirituality don't end at this point in the works of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph. On the other hand it is a continuing and evolving process which finds manifestation further in their writings. A large part of their works deal with these concerns. The next chapter will take the discussion further.

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## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

Similar to Alice Walker's Magdalena and Sarah Joseph's Margaleetha the women characters in the other works of these writers are also in constant fight with the patriarchal institutions. And, from the constant confrontations with them we understand that there is not much gap between spirituality and sexuality and that there cannot be an existence for body or soul separately. Institutions like religion and family have constantly been trying to confiscate these urges of the woman and endeavoring to bring her under their control. According to Geetha the institutionalized religions have clear rules and regulations on the movement and behaviour of women. And these restrictions engendered by the religion are the main reason for the present condition of women. When religious texts give permission for the owner of the woman, man, to beat her when she misbehaves they are giving subtly the permission to perpetrate domestic violence. The ownership of the outside world is under the jurisdiction of men. The space intended for women ends at the doorsteps of the house. All the organized religions attempt to interfere in the relationship between individual and God. They insist on the idea that a third person or a mediator is essential to help any communication with God. Sarah Joseph's and Alice Walker's characters have a language of their own, either gestures or words, to communicate with God without the interference of the third party.

Sarah Joseph's *Alahayude Penmakal*, her short stories or any work for that matter constantly remind us of the presence of the suppressed instincts and how family on behalf of

religion pulls out the decaying tooth to save others from peril. The grandmother in *Alahayude Penmakkal* possesses this boon of the special language to converse with God.

Spirituality or the prowess of language is the domain appropriated and curtailed by the patriarchal institutions. The attempt of the grandmother is to free it from their clasp. Another interesting factor here is the grandmother's negation of the organized religion. The T B patient, grandma's son Francis, is the representative of a disintegrating and alienated world of ideologies which failed to an extent in addressing the basic issues of the people. While she considers the male dominated reign of priesthood, she tells us how far removed is today's idea of Christianity from the reality. Because, by speaking with the outcasts of the society like Maria Magdalene, Christ tried to revolutionize the stage. Beyond that there must have been many women in the company of Christ. But the notion of the woman as a temptress keeps her aloof from the corridors of religion. Thus removing the spiritual from the physical is not the way to continue life. We cannot sustain ruling out the physical aspect.

As it is discussed earlier, the consideration of sensuousness as spiritual could be seen in many cultures. It is the same in Indian tradition also. A good evidence for that are the murals and paintings of India. Besides this the ancient tantric knowledge also asserts the importance of body in evoking the spirit. Shakta Tantrism in the ancient period insisted on the worship of the feminine and attaining the sublime through sexual intercourse. They believe in using the "material in gaining the spiritual". Many of Alice Walker's characters indulge in homosexual relationships which are not there in the dictionary of religion. As I can see such relationships help them go beyond the level of submission and subservience. That also could be counted as spiritual elevation. On the contrary some heterosexual relationships never reach that grade. In one of her short stories, *The Lover*, Alice Walker

makes it clear that the institution of marriage gives us sexual comfort as sex outside the wedlock is not given the green card by society. But gradually people develop a tendency to move beyond that and the central character of the story says that when she meets the lover she feels the urge to make love after a long time. But the man drives her off since he doesn't like her "intense relation".

One of Sarah Joseph's stories, *Oro Ezhuthukariyude Ullilum* (In the Heart of Each Writer), also discusses this issue. Creativity of the woman is spiritual and everything to her. But the most important duty of the woman, as a wife, is providing apparatus for the sexual pleasures of the man and cooking for the whole family. There is no need or time for her creativity. In such desecrating circumstances the only way for her is to escape to the house of Aunt Mable. Their creativity becomes their prayer. Their spirituality is their life. For them living according to the precepts of different institutions and the interests of other people becomes a constricting experience. Alice Walker's *Everyday Use* is a similar story. A way of culture close to nature was an integral part of the lives of the Black women. The onslaught of the alien religion shakes the belief systems and she is a bit quizzical of the intentions of Islam also here. The representative of the modern generation Dee, now Wangero, has a relationship with a Muslim convert. While we discuss spirituality and religion of the African Americans we are bound to discuss the drastic conversion into Islam that has been going on in the Black community. The Islamic African American culture plays a substantial role in forming of the present day Black culture. If we consult history, we can see that there have been rampant conversions into Islam in the twentieth century. The unanswered question of the identity of Jesus Christ itself could be found as the prime reason for these massive conversions. The white bearded Jesus and the anti Black attitude of the

church gave momentum to the shifting attention of the Blacks. But the attitude of Alice Walker towards the new spreading religion was not bereft of doubt. Because the space given to women in all these religions is quite limited and she suggests this in an interview given to a magazine. So the identity of a Black Muslim woman is again at stake here.

Alice Walker in her *Possessing the Secrets of Joy* narrates the experience of a woman called Tashi as she undergoes circumcision to confirm loyalty to her tribe. That is a way of permanently closing the door of pleasure and experience in front of women. In that way the elusive and most discussed idea of virginity comes to the foreground. Through the heartrending narration of the pain that Tashi endures, Walker illustrates the decadent behaviour of society. To keep the chastity of the woman and to raise the pride of the tribe that way, the only means is to confiscate the sexual energy of woman through some man-made religious practices.

The interference of different institutions in the life of individuals leads to tension in the relationship between sexes. The husband and wife in Alice Walker's *The Lover* and even Sarah Joseph's epic characters like Sita and Shurpanaka substantiate this account. These characters challenge the basic perceptions of body and relationships that persist in the society. It is nature which filled the body of living things with desire. Thus no sex is responsible for this uncontrollable drive. The suffocating and self effacing relationships between the sexes, let the relation be anything, strangled their wit out of them. As Ruth D. Weston says "Walker writes about black women with the authority of the universal female experience, an experience made complex and contradictory by the phenomenon of love" (Weston). As she says what confines these women is the ignorance of love. Children are not able to converse with parents; husband and wife hide things because they are afraid

it may kill the relationship. This is an after effect of this too much control and pressure exerted by institutions.

The different stages in postcolonialism and feminism are much discussed and we always tend to read these stages together. There are notably three stages in postcolonialism called adopt, adapt and adept. Like that the three stages in feminism are female, feminine and feminist. These stages are actually transformations that have come over in the growth of postcolonialism and feminism. In the initial stage everything is mild and the writer tends to suppress his/her identity and conform to the external pressures. In the next stage the writer writes adapting the principles or ideas of the colonizer. In the third stage the entire scene is revolutionized. These changes are normally attributed to the writings of Sarah Joseph also. The initial stage depicts a different style of language which could not be compared to the later writings. The second phase sees completely evolved themes and styles. In the third stage she comes up with the issues concerning the muted groups of the society and brings it under a new light. An important feature of the writings of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph is the explicitness in dealing with the severe issues ignored by the society, like the sexuality and spirituality of women. History, which is always with the victorious and registers their words, shows partiality towards them.

The most dreadful deceit of history towards the sections that are in the margins has been the negligence of their faith. In a place like Africa where the pantheistic belief system existed the intruder's religion was a novelty. Because their beliefs were quite unlike those of the foreigners who came to conquer them. For the foreigner "Africa was a non believers' country". Because of the attitudinal disparity of the Africans towards God and the rituals they drew up this sort of a conclusion. So the attempt of the invaders was to turn these non-

believers community into a believer's group. This has been one of the important causes for the struggle of the Black community. Though their intervention supported the Blacks in succeeding in many ways like getting education, the natural order of their beliefs and lifestyle was lost somewhere in between. The important aim of the missionaries in helping the Black people was to accumulate more believers under the umbrella of their religion. The "survival of the wholeness of the entire people" was the aim of the religions of the Black people. But the aim of the foreign religion was the redemption from the sin which was inherent in human beings. Sexuality of the woman is considered such a sin. Spirituality of these women is manifest in many ways. As Walker says in *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*

We must fearlessly pull out of ourselves and look at and identify with our lives the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know. I stress 'some' of them because it is well known that the majority of our great-grandmothers knew, even without 'knowing' it, the reality of their spirituality, even if they didn't recognize it beyond what happened in the singing at church—and they never had any intention of giving it up (Walker, 1983 76).

There is abundant resource for the African American women. Their stories and songs and life altogether provide them the spirit to continue their narration. The exclusive policies of the patriarchal society approves only the sort of creativity, let it be writing, painting, cooking, gardening or dancing, which is whitewashed and so "womanly", from a woman. The primary proposition of the Womanists is the liberation of the woman from these ties.

The women characters of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph challenge the conventional notions of sexuality and spirituality of women as something obscure and elusive. Though the subject matter of the short stories of these two writers is much wider, the above suggested issues are majorly discussed in them. The prospect of finding spirituality distinct from sexuality is a common characteristic of the society and the institutions through which it is operated. Response to the woman's sexuality or her sexual orientation is quite pathetic. Growth of the children and their move towards free will and sexuality make the parents panic.

Women's sexual organs are shrouded in mystery. It is assumed that most of them are internal and hidden, but even the ones that are external are relatively shady. When little girls begin to ask questions their mothers provide them, if they are lucky, with crude diagrams of the sexual apparatus, in which the organs of pleasure feature much less prominently than the intricacies of tubes and ovaries. (Greer, 1971 39)

This comment of Germaine Greer regarding the woman's sexuality tells us about what happens in an average household. But even this may not happen in many cases. The novels which I dealt with in the preceding chapters drew upon this idea of woman's sexuality. The basic lack of knowledge compels women to think that, as Susannah suggests, sex and body are things not to be discussed and all the pleasures extracted from them are the right of men. "Love-making has become another male skill, of which women are the judges" (41). So there naturally exists a decayed and rotten tooth.

Sarah Joseph's short story, *Grampoo* (Clove) discusses this topic beautifully. Radha has toothache and she goes to consult a doctor. The remedy that her husband suggests for her pain is a clove. The journey undertaken by the lady to meet the doctor is suggestive of the intricacies of the human mind and the suppressed and neglected sexuality of a woman. Her response to the physical involvement with husband is worth mentioning. When her husband bites her cheek in between the intercourse, unaware of her toothache, she lets out a cry of agony. When she writhes under his body, may be with pain, it energizes him enormously. The remedy suggested by the husband is a home remedy, especially a kitchen remedy, which is the solution found out by the society for the sexual comforts of individuals. When she meets the doctor he says that only one tooth in the set is decayed and the possibility of it affecting the other teeth can not be neglected. This can be seen as the woman's search for a remedy to all her domestic frustrations outside the house. Again in this story Sarah Joseph recounts sexuality in terms of the movement of nature. As she says, the doctor smells like forest, symbolizing wildness of desire and sexuality. When he came near her,

. . . the smell of forest floated to her. The smell of smashed leaves flowers and fruits. The odor of the fluids from the cuts of the tree. The smell of milk from the plants. The smell of running frightened animals and the parting earth. It is difficult to go to forest. (Joseph, 1998 29-30)

She dashes back home leaving the doctor and goes for the kitchen remedy recommended by her husband. Her response to the sarcastic comment of her husband is interesting. When he mocks her telling that she could have done this before rather than

going to a doctor she reminds him that the doctor is still there at the end of some alley. Here the woman doesn't have a way open in front of her for self-expression. Eventually her agony comes out as a physical ache. Here the man is everywhere to interrupt her interaction with the outside world. Hers is an attempt to break out of this surveillance. The savior-lover who is there at the corner of some street is an enigma or fancy that the women with broken lives are nurturing. Alice Walker also suggests the relationship between nature, spirituality and sexuality in her works.

Though a much conversed justification for the existence of the family is the sharing of a common past and the emotional attachment between the members, it has become sheer history now. Though they trace back their past to a common thread each moment of that togetherness holds different meaning to each individual. Alice Walker's short story *Laurel* discusses this complexity in the relationship between people. Annie's love for Laurel starts from her shreds of physical understanding which grows into a longing for togetherness mentally and physically. But love holds a different connotation for these two individuals. Both of them hide things from each other. The multiple facets of a woman's self are portrayed here. She is a social worker, a lover, a wife, a mother and ultimately herself. This role-play entails a lot of hard work and energy on the part of women. When she feels the urge to be with Laurel she is pulled back by her restraints and responsibilities. Sexuality is mental and physical integrity. One is complete only with the union of body, soul, flesh and spirit. Here when Annie recognizes that Laurel has a wife back home and his attraction towards her was just for the carnal satisfaction, she tries to move away from him. But later she identifies that "a lot of love was lust. That threw me off for years until I realized lust can be a kind of love" (Walker, 1971 116). Though their main interest is sexual involvement

there is a craving to be together until the moment of parting. This is a point that both Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph have been trying to present throughout their writing career. But love without any passion or understanding is not promoted by both of them.

*Coming Apart*, another story by Alice Walker, deals with this topic and is another important one. Age-old portrayal of the Black woman as a sexual object is questioned in this story. The husband's interest in pornography becomes a gnawing issue for the wife and it incites her to rethink sexuality and what such a life has been made of. Audre Lorde's article that the central character reads puts forward a beautiful idea of the erotic which is wanting in such a marital life. The power of coming together of two bodies is shown through the line "moving into sunlight against the body of a woman I love" (46). This elevation to the world of pleasure and absolute bliss is lacking in a relationship where the man moves into the body of a woman thinking about the perfectly measured body of another woman. Thus the integrity of relations becomes a question mark here again. Rather than sharing the experiences with each other, sex becomes something which is done to the body of the partner. Here sexuality involves only body, the perfect figure, not the mind or spirit. Same is the problem with pornography. Victimization of a woman becomes complete with that. As the story quotes Lorde,

To share the power of each other's feelings is different from using another's feeling as we would use Kleenex. And when we look the other way from our experience, erotic or otherwise, we use rather than sharing the feelings of those others who participate in the experience with us. And use without the consent of the used is abuse (46).

Family and nature are big concerns in the short stories of Alice Walker and Sarah Joseph. One of Sarah Joseph's short stories, *Nalam Nilayile Jalakam* (The Window in the Fourth Floor) discusses the shifting meaning of body and family with ageing and the encroachment of modernization into the day to day lives of the people. Ammini a fifty year old lady suffers from severe stomachache and bleeding. When she is in conversation with the gynaecologist and psychiatrist she lets her thoughts loose. From her narration we understand the fact that outwardly her marital life is complete and inside it is not without problems. The unshared maladies are still there. Ammini is a representative of the women caught inside the barred windows of modernization. The wastes of modernization are thrown into our homes and women get throttled in that. Relations between the members of the family and especially the mother-child relationship is primary in this discussion. The desolation of a woman who is isolated at a particular stage of her life is portrayed here. A woman spends her entire life for the welfare of the family and even that at the cost of her emotions, wishes and desires. A similar instance of the sacrifice of one's own self for the family could be seen in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. Deshpande's Jaya, an aspiring writer, sabotages her own career for safeguarding the interests of the family. When children leave the lap of the mother in search of others' gardens she becomes cut off from the family. She is not allowed to pursue herself here. Instead she shuns her identity to cope with the societal and familial expectations and her silence becomes fatal. In the case of Ammini and her husband, sex becomes a waste thrown into their courtyard by the big market outside. Thus her husband gets ousted from her secrets.

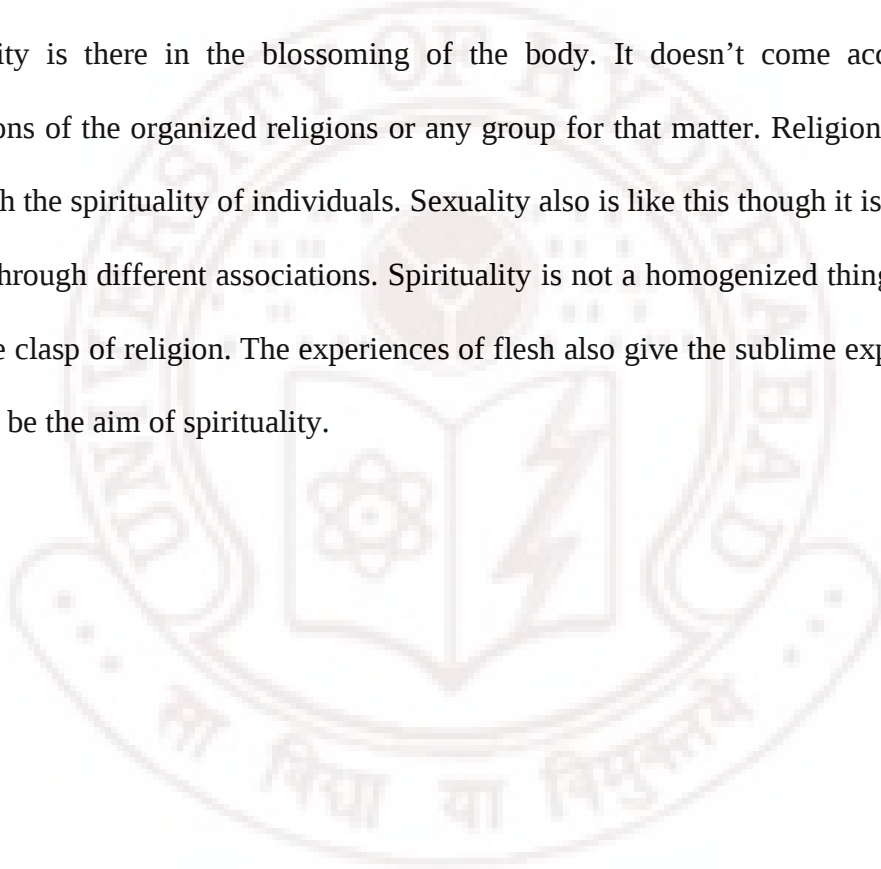
Walker's much discussed novel, *Meridian*, is a good example for the involvement of body in experiencing the prowess of spirit. Meridian's body is an active participant in all her

experiences, physical and spiritual. The belief system of each member of the family is different. There is a mention of the experience of Meridian's grandmother on the mound of the Indian sacred serpent burial ground. After this experience she renounces the organized religion which cancels out the physical experiences and prefers walking naked in the sun. The decision of the grandmother to stay away from the institutionalized religion is her rebellion against the new religion which is so keen on the abolition of any kind of physical activity except procreation. To Foucault, sexuality is an especially dense transfer point for relations of power. As it could be seen in the works of Sarah Joseph and Alice Walker, the more we negate the body the more we think about it. As Foucault says the Catholic Church and the state seek control over people's sexuality to have complete authority over their life. When the authority makes you feel guilty over your sexual overtures they are succeeding in having complete control over the people.

Similarly, Sarah Joseph's *Coffee House* explores the sexuality of women from the perception of different people. When a man talks about the sexuality of a woman and a woman narrates it by herself it is dissimilar. All the men in the story begin their discussion with the separation of Prameela and Vipindas because Vipindas is unable to find a companion in Prameela even after having sex a number of times. Girls who undo their dress on their own are promiscuous and those who wait for the man to unbutton the dress are chaste. The argument begins here. As Prameela says she "doesn't know the smell, colour, tune and rhythm" (Joseph, 1998 48) (*Translation mine*) of her sexuality. Because she doesn't have any voice in the activities which are ultimately done to her. According to the men it is impossible to replant the sexuality of women from her mind to her body. Also, the disdain for lesbians is narrated here beautifully. As it is said here the men are getting

expelled here from the “coffee, conversations, kisses, deep slumber and the uterus” of women (51). The issue of nakedness itself gets subsided here.

The discussion of spirituality in the writings of Walker is well wrought in the book called *Christianity on Trial*. The writer takes the instance of Celie and Shug to present the idea of spirituality here. As he says “God is neither male nor female, black nor white, but rather a Spirit which lives inside of her and in all of nature” (Chapman, 1996 154). Spirituality is there in the blossoming of the body. It doesn't come according to the instructions of the organized religions or any group for that matter. Religion has very little to do with the spirituality of individuals. Sexuality also is like this though it is a construction created through different associations. Spirituality is not a homogenized thing which comes under the clasp of religion. The experiences of flesh also give the sublime experience which is said to be the aim of spirituality.



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