WOMAN AS WRITER IN KERALA

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Words create worlds – real and imagined. The present issue of Samyukta offers tales of women on women writers, their lives and their writings, of reality and of dreams, through a past and the present, unraveling the world of Kerala women. We are presenting these stories not so much for the fine pieces of literature they are, but as documents of their times; as gateways to a world which existed a century ago and continues recognizably into current times.

Wouldn't it have been better to rely on historical pieces or autobiographical narratives rather than stories, to document women's lives? Not at all, for stories are never 'mere' stories but precious records of their times which bring old times to life. Their meandering ways and glazed alleys let us virtually inhabit the bygone world and give us the feeling that they are as real as the streets of today. They are more valuable than histories for as Scott Herring writes, "history gives us the facts, sort of, but from literary works we can learn what the past smelled like, sounded like, and felt like, the forgotten gritty details of a lost era".

Relying on stories has yet another advantage as women in general and especially in Kerala, have guarded tongues and hardly speak fearlessly or uninhibitedly. Creators of fiction use their stories as camouflage to etch truth, pleasant or otherwise, in sharp detail. Open ended interpretations spare them the responsibility of blame or merit. The authors may talk of things closest to their hearts but make us think that they are just figments of imagination. The journey we make through these stories by women on women writers will, we hope, serve as a
truthful record of the life of women in this land for about a hundred years. The earliest story included in this volume 'Brainless Women', the first recorded short story by a woman in Kerala, came out in the year 1911. The latest ones in this collection were published in the early years of the twenty first century. Thus, it’s a journey down a century through the hearts and stories of women.

When Kalyanikkutty Amma, one of Kerala's earliest woman journalists asked Gandhiji about his views on gender equality, he asked, "Why should you, women in Kerala, talk of gender equality? I have heard of your matrilineal system. You are 'half men and half women'! You can even show your husband the door" (“When women make news?” n.pag.). True, Kerala Women, the women of the Nair community in particular, enjoyed a 'supposed' better status than women of elsewhere in the past. A good many of them were well versed in the scriptures and a few of them like Manorama Thampuratti, K. M. Kunjilekshmi Kettillamma, Thottakkaatt Ikkaavamma, Taravath Ammaluamma and others who lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are listed as writers in all the histories of Malayalam literature. Besides, some of the earliest works available in Malayalam like Sita Dukham, believed to be written in the early part of the eighteenth century, are surmised to be the works of women. Educated, self-reliant, perceptive and courageous, Kerala women even entered the fields of politics and journalism as early as the 1940s. Does this prove that women always enjoyed a privileged position in Kerala society and that for them the way to literature and public life was open, accommodative and encouraging? The other side of the picture which is and has always been true, emerges from the words of Arundhati Roy said in a conversation with David Barsamian as recently as 2001. When asked about the status of women in Kerala, she said– “Women from Kerala work throughout India and the world, earning money to send back home. And yet, they'll pay a dowry to get married, and they'll have the most bizarrely subservient relationship with their husbands. I grew up in a little village in Kerala. It was a nightmare for me. All I wanted to do was to escape, to get out, to never have to marry somebody there". How could literacy, education and supposed high status exist alongside such agony of existence? What makes Kerala the land where make-belief heaven and real hell co-exist? The 1970s celebrated the 'Kerala Model of Development' all around the world. The celebration turned the lime light
on to our little state which soon gathered attention for another phenomenon namely the 'Enigma of the Kerala Woman'. In her study 'The Enigma of the Kerala Woman: Does High Literacy Translate into High Status?' conducted in the year 2006, Swapna Mukhopadhay says in unambiguous terms, “Contrary to popular belief, women (in Kerala) do not enjoy the kind of ‘freedom’ that one would expect to go with high levels of human or gender development.” Why are the women of Kerala so powerless? How did and how do women here come to terms with their reality? Is woman’s reality in Kerala one and the same down the decades? In this issue of Samyukta, we attempt to discuss these questions by analyzing fifteen stories authored by women.

What is the rationale behind choosing stories about women writers, and not women in general? Because, writing sharpens the mind and when women writers weave stories around the likes of them, they are more likely to imbue their protagonists with a little more of their lived reality, their times, the responses they receive from the society and the like. Besides, the process of writing is interesting in itself and could be read to obtain an inkling of the colours that mix to produce creativity. These stories in which reality and fiction freely merge, present the lives of a group of intelligent, communicative women in a period of about hundred years. Michelangelo has said, “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.” Likewise, for writers, life's marble is full of stories. They decide on their piece, cut off the excesses, and with their craft make the story shine through. When a writer does this, a little of herself – which is always a part of all that she has seen and experienced – gets blended to it. This provides a story its absolute genetic uniqueness and makes a creation the very own of the writer as well as of her times. Even when the writing is about the life around or of things or events purely imaginative, it is the writer in her age who sees, imagines, creates and as such, her self will permeate her writing like a wafting fragrance. In an interview, Kamala Das said – “My characters – they are all strangers to me but they are like my close relatives, children to whom I have given birth. I could never distinguish between my personal life and the writer's life. I have written only about those things that touched me deeply.” The statement may appear contradictory at the surface level but it touches the soul of creation. What one creates bears the mark of what one has keenly felt and lived through. Stray incidents, sudden emotions or striking
pictures may act as the germ of stories. The perceptive minds of the writers receive these carbon pieces passionately, add to them the beauty of life and the charm of imagination and make them dazzle. 'The Wooden Dolls', Karoor Neelakanda Pillai's story, beautifully brings out how art reveals the artist. In the story, Nalini tells the Surveyor that she used to make and sell images of Krishna. Her carvings though dressed like Lord Krishna acquired the very form of her husband whom she once adored like the Lord. Later, when he fell from her grace, all her rage for him got reflected in the face of the dolls and people stopped buying her Krishnas. Frustrated, she began making figures of Parvati. She looked at herself and imagined Parvati. All her Parvatis turned likenesses of her. Whether a writer creates Krishna or Parvati, her soul puts its imprint on her works. In Chandrika Balan's story, 'The Artist's Father', the father of artist Aparna Menon says about his daughter's picture of Mahalakshmi seated on the red lotus, holding in her lap a Jesus Christ bleeding copiously from wounds inflicted on the cross. “If you look carefully at Jesus Christ, you will see the likeness of Mathews" – Mathews with whom she had a tempestuous relationship, Mathews whom she longed to marry.

The stories presented in this volume too carry traces of reality felt, seen, shared by the writers themselves and women in general, at the time they were written. Direct references to the writers' own selves will be missing in any story and it would be naive to equate the characters in the stories to their authors or to other people in real life, for the real undergoes a 'sea change into something rich and strange', in the hands of gifted writers which is what turns a mere Mathews into a Jesus Christ. As George Orwell said, when one reads any strongly individual piece of writing, one has the impression of seeing a face somewhere behind the page but it is not necessarily the actual face of the writer. However, at times, literature might get written as direct responses to particular real-life issues. Antharjanam's story 'Is it Desirable?' has a historical context. In the introduction to her collection of stories titled After Twenty Years (1956), in which this story was included, she says, “I saw an article in Yoga Kshemam which alleged that all the speeches made by Antharjanams as well as the works that came out in their names were works of men. The story 'Is it Desirable?' was published in the very next issue of Yoga Kshemam as an answer to that.” All the stories included in this volume may not be able to claim such immediacy. Yet, they too may have taken birth from
specks of truth. K. R. Meera's poignant story 'Memory's Vein' presents an old lady who in childhood was praised as the incarnation of goddess Saraswati but her talent was smothered by her unsympathetic husband and the stifling atmosphere of her domestic life. This sensitive character had her counterpart in real life, but she might also be just every other woman of her times, to the present-day reader. The measure of immediacy and truth may thus vary from story to story, yet they all document their times and the lives of women in those times.

If most of these stories were written in response to contemporary events, opinions or phobias, what picture of women's life do they present? What was life like, for the women of Kerala in the past hundred years? More than half these stories, refer to death – contemplated, symbolic or actual; suicide attempted or committed. In 'The Last Guest', and 'The Artist's Father', the protagonists commit suicide. The old woman in 'Memory's Vein', has attempted it unsuccessfully. In 'The Seer' and the 'Dolls', there is the description of the writers' last days and final exit. 'Her House', presents the house where she is no longer present. In 'The World Creates a Poet', the writer imagines her death – "When I go, these knots will remain. On this coarse hair, jasmines that decorated it long ago will cling on, blackened and sticky." Why such intense and widespread death-wish in these stories? Did these women intelligent, self-respecting and self-willed, find themselves out of place in the society? Most of the writers depicted in the stories have difficult relationships within their families. The family cares for the money they make but not for them. The son who momentarily displaces his gasping mother's oxygen mask so that he can get a speedy release from her to return to his wife (Dolls); the Professor son from abroad who is ready to let a film maker do whatever he would, with his mother's works, if he can pay the money he demands (The Seer); the husband who dreams of locking the servant girl in a tight embrace in the early morning hours (The Last Guest); Mr. Menon who sleeps with his wife's cousin openly soon after her death (The Artist's Father); the husband who makes place for his sister-in-law throwing out his departed wife's belongings soon after her death (Her House); the husband in 'The Memory's Vein' who could not spare a few minutes to listen to his wife's story –
“I saved to read it to my husband . . . but days passed after he came out of jail, before I said I had written a story . . . The girl looked in anticipation. The old lady’s face had clouded over. “

– are all indicative of troubled relationships. The society too does not take too kindly towards the writers. The writer in 'The Letter from a Writer' describes a woman writer's plight thus, “Shards will wound your heart; courage may fail you; at times, desperation may even drive you to give up on life.” Unhappy relationships inside and outside home may be one of the reasons which make the writers contemplate a speedy release from this world. Writing is an extremely personal form of art. The writers through their words, put on display intimate aspects of themselves. When they are dissatisfied with their lives, with themselves, when they want to end their miserable existence and yearn for a new beginning, they kill themselves symbolically in their writing, to let themselves live their real lives. That which can never reach the mark, that which leaves them dejected and depressed, is terminated. The rest in them goes on, braving the world, challenging the times.

An alternate and more interesting reading of suicide would be to consider it as an act of ultimate aggression both on oneself and on those left behind; the annihilation of the self to throw a violent attack on the adversary. The writer ascribes her weaknesses and impotency to her counterpart in the story who is made to commit suicide. This violent act wipes out the weak one so that the stronger self – that part of herself which the writer is happy to posses, alone remains. Thus suicide becomes a ritualistic cleansing and a celebration of the stronger self just as it is the extinction and obliteration of the enemy who is exposed and put to shame and anguish.

Not all the writers in the stories choose to end their lives but they are in general, stressed out and lonesome. That they do not open up or relieve their feelings makes them feel stifled. Educated and respected, they fear the society would laugh at them if they disclose their deplorable plight. In 'The Last Guest', after Anasuya Devi commits suicide Prof. Mehta tells the Police Inspector, “She could have been free of the marriage. There was no need for her to continue life with that beast but she respected her family’s reputation. She could not bring herself to taint that.” In 'The Seer' too, the narrator understands that novelist Durga Devi was
desperately trying to come to terms with some unspeakable suffering. Of one of their meetings, he says, “After a few steps forward, I looked back. She had turned again to the waves in the lake.” On the other hand, if a woman was likely to speak out, she was closely watched and prevented from doing so. ‘The World Creates a Poet’ describes a family in which the members lived like stray islands but presented a very different picture in public – “In any feast or festival where people gathered, her father frequently looked out for her. Her mother tried to be beside her always. If she were to leave their vicinity and blurted out secrets of the home to others, they would not be able to hold their heads high.” Women, out of their own volition or out of compulsion, protect their dignity and family reputation standing guard over their bitter experiences and never allowing even the light of their shadows to fall on the outside world. They remain, like effigies on burnt-out fields, with their mouths tightly zipped. That this is no fiction but reality is corroborated by Swapna Mukhopadhyay in her study ‘The Enigma of Kerala Women: Does High Literacy Necessarily Translate into high Status?’ Comparing Kerala women with the less educated and less sophisticated women of Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka, she says that Kerala women refuse to divulge unpleasant truths about their family lives. The study says, “Unlike in U.P. or Karnataka, the survey in Kerala drew a blank on direct questions on domestic violence. Most women refused to answer these questions. This is understandable, because compared to the relatively unlettered rural women in the U.P. who may accept minor incidences of violence as routine, or those in the Karnataka sample who may not have been ‘Sanskritized’ enough to question them, the literate women sampled in the Mental Health Survey in Kerala would be less willing to openly confess to violence within her home, or a threat to such violence if she goes against societal norms.” The women tell their woes to the waves and the winds or find relief in eternal silence. The Kerala society is highly conservative and holds on steadfastly to an outdated notion of family system which women and even men find disappointing but is hard for both to discard or destroy. Sarah Joseph says, “Years ago, we should have realized that the existing family structure is patriarchal and hence disappointing to women (and men). Women may not speak openly about this – as they are afraid, shy, ignorant, and reluctant to stray away from the accepted norms. Yet, it will remain the anguish of their souls.”
The women not only sacrifice their dreams but even force themselves to reiterate and second opinions which are contrary to their likes and beliefs – this is also a subtle act of violence inflicted on the self. In 'Memory's Vein', the old lady while remembering how her husband saw her for the first time at a meeting in which she had read out her poem to Vallathol – the great poet, says,

“That he should have approved of the girl who had read out her poem at the conference, apparently led to a great commotion here. True! What's all this song and dance of writing for? As Mother used to say, if you are a woman, you cook meals and give birth.”

– this from a woman who in her ripe old age, when even her memory had deserted her, kept searching for the red note book in which she used to write stories. Forcing oneself to voice and vehemently support opinions contradictory to one’s own interests and beliefs puts intense pressure on oneself, topples the balance of mind and pushes one to the verge of insanity.

Other than such self-inflicted aggression, are the women subjected to physical violence? Only in one of the fifteen stories selected, is there even an attempt at physical violence.

“See how she stands up to you and talks back? Had it been your father, it would have been a sight to see. Bones would have been thrashed to bits,' muttered the old lady. He only needed that prodding to swing his hand to slap her. But Pappy dodged the blow and it fell instead on the coffee pot she carried, which crashed to the floor.” (Is This Desirable?)

However, if we adopt the accepted definition of violence as any experience which is hurtful or severely disturbing and which has lasting negative effects on a person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviour, the other stories are more intensely violent. Violence of a subtle nature, acts which tarnish and wipe out the self-respect of women, are represented in several stories.

A few instances of verbal violence are quoted below.

“Whenever a woman begins to work to earn money, she loses her femininity and her unique eminence. I want no such woman for wife.” (Brainless Women)
...not one among the Antharjanams have it in them to write, or to lecture, unless men provide them with a script to learn by heart..." (Is This Desirable?)

“We (the men) lifted you up. And you obliged, scraping the skies. But we could drop you back... , beware!” (Is This Desirable?)

“Ha,ha,ha...it has come, it has come. I was wondering why she wasn't uttering love, love... Man, and love - write these two words and it is poetry for women.” (Some Tricks of the Writing Trade: Unavailable in Workshops)

“The postcard held only a few lines of diatribe about one of her stories from a male, disgruntled with jealousy.” (Charu's Story)

“I like women who behave like women.” (The World Creates a Poet)

“Critic Appukuttan's essay had come out in the weekly criticising writer Durga Devi right and left, far more than the novelist's work...That was no review. It was a conscious personal indictment.” (The Seer)

Several such instances could be quoted. Responses of this kind from the society may have prevented women from taking up writing as a profession. Women hardly chose to be called writers even though they regularly slipped into writing. “We women may confess in public even what the medicine men claim to be private ailments; but few amongst us would have the courage to make public their literary disease” (Letter from a Writer). That this happened in a state noted for literacy and education is astonishing. Education and reformation gifted the people of Kerala a sense of modernity and knowledge about 'the ideal' but the Kerala society, patriarchal to the core, held tight the reins of control and provided the women with only seeming freedom and enlightenment. The Namboothiri reforms which made the lives of Antharjanams less miserable outwardly, repressed them yet more emotionally. The story 'Is This Desirable?' beautifully depicts the humiliation women were subjected to, for the privilege of being allowed to step out of their homes and to learn reading and writing. Men allowed women to do this not out of their conviction that women had equal rights to such privileges but because they wanted to project themselves as progressive or modern. Back at home, the women were more strongly repressed as the 'forward'
men wanted to keep their women 'in place'. Namboothiri men took away the ritualistic umbrella from their women but held the object close to their own hearts along with all that it stood for. This mindset replicated in the other communities as well, gave rise to Kerala style modernity – with conflicting insides and outside – where women got educated but remained meek and subjective, and men worked for the freedom of all women outside their own houses.

The stories tell us things have not changed considerably even in the twenty first century. Society permits the women to go this far and no further. Harsh censure and mean libel are directed towards women who attempt to cross the borders. Women can get educated and go for work not for their sake but for the sake of their children or to make money for the family. Education or talent in a woman is not appreciated in itself but for what use it can be put to. Kalyani Amma in 'Brainless Women' asks her husband to pardon her writing regularly in the magazines for she wrote only to meet the needs of the family - "I did that because there was no other recourse for the support of our children and ourselves." In 'Her House', 'The Seer' and 'The Dolls' there is reference to the money women make through writing. In the article 'Re-forming Women in Malayalee Modernity: A Historical Overview', J. Devika and Avanti Mukherjee trace the origin of this attitude – "...historically, literacy for women in Kerala came with notions of social development that consisted of not merely the functional ability to read and write, but also how that functionality had to be used for the good of the family and society, and also the state....The atmosphere was inundated by ideological messages propagating 'enlightened domesticity' for women: not for the development of the self per se, but for the good of society.” Interestingly, women too argued on both the sides, when in the early years of the twentieth century, debates raged around the issue of women's education. Sarada, the second women's magazine in Kerala, published a debate on the issue of women's education in 1904-1905. In that context, V. Narayani Amma argued, “(Women's) education, if it is to be useful to others, would require the women to obtain government jobs. If she simply sits at home, it will benefit just her.” In the second issue of Sarada after this article got published, K. Padmavathy Amma wrote a strong reply which is pointed as well as taunting. Before going on to list the advantages of educating home makers, she asks, “Why should one specify that a woman's education benefits
just her? If one takes medicine, will that cure another's disease?" (Sarada,
1905 (midhunam)). In spite of such forceful and pointed retorts, the notion
of the utility of women's education thrived.

If women write for the pleasure or honour of it, the Kerala society
tests their endurance by flinging unwarranted malice at them. A
prominent Malayali writer has remarked, “Women who are utterly
disappointed in their family lives are the ones who create 'Pennezhuthu'
(Woman-writing)”. He also pointed out that women are unimaginative
and uninspired. This negativism is not a new trend in Kerala, but down
the decades, women have been criticised and shot at on imaginary
charges. When Lalitambika Antharjanam published her story, 'Realism',
a highly resourceful writer imagined that the story was about him. He
sharply and unreservedly criticised Antharjanam who was baffled at
the allegation. What she wrote in the introduction, when this story was
published in the collection After Twenty Years, clearly expresses the
anguish she suffered – “At least a few readers might remember the
tempestuous uproar caused by the publication of my story 'Realism'. A
well-known Malayalam writer believed that the story was about him
and wrote a reply story (it was included as the first story in one of his
major collections). Does he now feel sorry about the manner in which he
expressed his opposition to the idea presented in my story? Who knows?
Let me make this clear even though it is a little late now – at the time this
story was written, its author was a naive person who knew the world
only through newspapers and journals. She was not familiar enough
with any of the poets or novelists to write about them personally. It was
the time when Malayalam fiction has just started moving from realism to
romanticism. I felt like presenting in a story, the flipside of a few stories
and poems I read in those days, with a touch of humour. Simply because
it did not point to any one in particular, I sent it for publication. True,
likenesses may happen unawares in story lines which spring from real
life. Did it so happen here? Did this story merit so malicious an attack?
Trusting the judgement of the readers, after twenty years, I am once again
bringing the story to light.”

That the stories present the lived reality of the lives of women in
Kerala is vindicated by the fact that scientific studies of the state also
mention the very same issues depicted in these stories. The women of
Kerala are greeted with subtle violence everyday. Swapna Mukhopadhyaya says in her report, “It needs to be emphasized here that it is not just evidence on actual perpetrated violence that one should be looking at. Even if there is a credible threat of such violence that is endemic to the society, a threat that may not even be carried out in a majority of cases, but which keeps women 'in place', and which acts as a powerful deterrent dissuading women from crossing the socially ordained boundaries of 'good womanhood', it is evidence that should tell us that something is not quite right with women's status. A community that tacitly tolerates systemic violence against women, or covertly supports a credible threat of such violence, cannot at the same time, boast of ascribing a high status to those at the receiving end.” Women of Kerala are allowed to get educated but the society has strict notions on how that education should be utilized. The women may have it in them to be fine writers but the society will tell them what to write and how. And, if they cross the borders, they are made to eat the fruits of their sin. This is what is established by the unkind censure mentioned earlier. Kerala society provides women education, employment and good health but it considers 'self-esteem' unnecessary in women.

This is partly because Kerala women do not consider freedom their right but regard it a privilege graciously granted to them. If a woman wants to attend a seminar or a workshop on Sundays, she'll happily force out tears to get permission from her husband. Gita Hiranyan in her story 'Some Tricks of the Writing Trade' presents such a situation with her characteristic humour.

"But," the husband said, "All I have is a lone Sunday. I am not going to let you ruin that holiday with your story-writing."

Sunanda did not respond. Why bother? Why worry about a permission that could easily be won with just the proper blend of coquetry and tears?

In the story of Zuhara 'The Story Doesn't Go on', KuttyMalu realizing that she may not get eligible suitors if she becomes a writer and a liberated lady, gives up her dream of writing and decides to get married and to be the traditional coy new bride. In 'A Day in the Life of a Little Darling's Mama', the protagonist attempts, like all ordinary Kerala
women, to achieve the impossible task of successfully playing many roles at the same time – a full-time homemaker, mother, office employee and writer. She feels guilty about leaving her little son in the crèche to write. She's afraid to tell even her friends that she had come to the library in search of the peace and calm to write. Social scientists point out that literacy had adverse effects on the women of Kerala. There is resigned acceptance of male domination as the norm among the women of the state. A study on the mental health of women in Kerala points out that “Kerala women strongly favour orthodox gender ideology, even more so than Kerala men. It is possible to hypothesize then, that the potential accorded to women by high literacy may have been utilized, not so much in questioning norms of male superiority, but in internalizing the message and consolidating it in their lives.” (Qtd. in Mukherjee, 2006)

What dreams of writing do the women writers harbour? They dream of open houses made of beautiful, picturesque panels; houses that do not have walls or grills or locks but have only arteries, a pulsating network of them. They wish for homes that will not throw soiled spreads on their thoughts or drop grinding stones on the dreams taking shape in their minds. They wish to be like their men counterparts who sit on the handrails of bridges that span the river in the evenings and to engage in endless literary discussions; to sit through meetings which will evaluate their writings to the very end, without having to worry about the dinner to be cooked or the dishes to be washed. Kerala considers all these to be the rightful privileges only of men writers. When Govindan Nair in 'Brainless Women' decides to write a novel, he tells his wife - “Be sure that the children don't cry. When I sit down to write, I want perfect silence. I might have to lose sleep at night. Ask the milkman to give an extra measure of milk over and above the daily quantity, every evening.” His wife however writes, obeying everyone of his orders, doing all the household chores and with no extra milk. The situation is a replication of that in real life. In his article 'The Story of How I Became a Writer' Karoor Neelakanda Pillai speaks of his early days as a budding writer. He says, “I had no responsibilities, absolutely nothing to bother me and had plenty of leisure. For years, I lived alone with a calm and peaceful mind and with lots of time. Those days, I did not spend time day-dreaming but read voraciously.” Karoor's experience is in sharp contrast to that of
Lalitambika Antharjanam who said that she used to rock the cradle with her left hand while writing with the right.

Women writers of Kerala dream of having a birthing room to give birth to their characters in peace – to nurture them, to follow them, to be them. Writing is a highly complex activity which requires the writer to enter into the hearts and souls of all the animate and inanimate things she deals with. The activity transports the writer to a realm where the body, the mind and the soul develop fuzzy borders and flow into each other and all that they contemplate, thus transcending the rigid separation between the self and the non-self. Gustave Flaubert was revealing this mystery of creation when he thus confided to his friend while writing *Madame Bovary*, “It is a delicious thing to write, to be no longer yourself but to move in an entire universe of your own creating. Today, for instance, as a man and woman, both lover and mistress, I rode into a forest of an autumn afternoon under the yellow leaves, and I was also the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words my people uttered, even the red sun that made them close their love-drowned eyes.” (Qtd. in Margulies) For the majority of women writers, such privilege of lingering in the lands of imagination for extended periods remain an elusive dream.

Sarah Joseph says, “*Pennezhuthu* realizes that a healthy society requires the man and the woman to enter into a relationship in which they feel and express mutual respect, acceptance and sexual desire, on equal terms. The writings by women expressing such ideals point to their wishful thinking.” When this happens, the women will no longer find the walls of their houses closing around them like smothering iron grills. The houses will not throw soiled spreads on their thoughts or drop grinding stones on the visions taking shape in their minds. The women will swing their arms and walk freely. Their hands will touch horizons and return. Breeze with wings will shake out the strands of their hair and the tips of their clothes. Their hair will come undone and stroke the skies and their skirts will swirl to cover the earth....

References


M. SARASWATHI BAI

'Brainless Women' is considered the first Malayalam short story that got published in a woman's name. No other information is available on its author, M. Saraswathi Bai. The story was first published in April 1911, in Bhashaposhini, Book XV, Volume 8-9.