

**Magical Realism in Sarah Joseph's short story
'Inside Every Women Writer'**

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ABSTRACT-Sarah Joseph is a seminal Malayali writer acclaimed for her feministic views. Even from a young age she faced many obstacles in her fight to be an independent woman. She was married off before the age of 15 and her style of early verse which were love poems in praise of Krishna were applauded by veterans. But when she was disillusioned with these writings, she turned to serious topics which were at first not at all supported by the men in her life. She writes both short stories and novels which focus mainly on women-centric themes. This paper deals with her short story 'Inside Every Women Writer' which focuses on a women writer and her feeling of being caged in her own house. The writer feels her husband's hold on her stifling her creativity. This necessity to stand as a strong independent woman and write on topics of her interest are narrated within the story. The narrator shows some of the ideas and viewpoints solely through elements of magical realism. How she manages to culture a voice of her own and how a woman both as a person and as a writer is alienated becomes part of the story. The female psyche being subjected to multiple wounds of the unhappy male and his egoist nature and how an independent woman finds the will to leave it all behind and attain freedom as an individual is portrayed in the story. The paper focuses entirely on the use of magical realism in the story as an important literary device and looks at its implications.

KEYWORDS-Women writer, Feminism, Magical Realism, Symbolism, Patriarchy, Irony

INTRODUCTION-Sarah Joseph was born into a conservative Christian family in Thissur district of Kerala. She is a well-renowned writer, orator and activist who has had a major role in the women's movement in Kerala. She has received multiple awards for her novels and short stories. She won three awards- Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, Kendra Sahitya Academy Award and Vayalar Award for her ground-breaking novel *Alahayude Penmakkal*

(Daughters of God the Father). Other novels include *Thaikulam*, *Paapathara* which is considered as a milestone in feminist writing in Malayalam.

This paper aims to look at the literary device of Magic Realism in the short story 'Inside Every Women Writer'. The narrative is that of the protagonist's defying her husband Purushothaman's mandate to follow the stereotypes. She has very strong urge to voice her own ideas without a man standing in her way. She tries to break the naturalized rules of oppression and alienation which shackle her down. Sarah Joseph's belief is that one cannot think, act or dream expect in narratives but at the same time, it is quite evident that these narratives have been ideally programmed to cater to notions which normalize oppression and inequality towards women and it is within themselves to challenge these notions.

The story starts with the protagonist deciding to leave her husband after a series of fights. She sends a telegram to her Aunt Mabel telling her of the protagonist's imminent arrival. She also calls up her husband Purushothaman about her decision. He isn't too happy at her decision and reprimands her. The protagonist moves on to narrate how she is caged inside the house which crushes her under its walls. She talks about how her Aunt Mabel's house is the exact with no walls or any restrictions. The protagonist in her house has turned into a machine as she is engaged in her writing with a heavy heart and she functions without any emotion. She wishes for her mother's womb for her to bring out her words in great secrecy. But Purushothaman orders her around and argues her only to write the same old stuff which is hymns, songs and love poems. But her works are always mocked by the male writers during serious literary discussions. And whenever she is at home, she again feels that uneasy feeling. So finally, she plans to escape. He may question her responsibility towards her children and ask her to stay.

She again thinks of the freedom that Aunt Mabel's house will bring her. She would also visit meetings of contemporary writers while living in the city where Aunt Mabel lives. She would not say anything, but listen to all their endless literary discussions. But she can't stay long as she has the withering vegetables or the child about to cry and they always reminded her of the late hours. And whenever she invited them home, they only spoke to Purushothaman and are whatever she made for them and went away. But these things wouldn't happen if she was at Aunt Mabel's house. And as she packs up her things into a cloth bag, she wishes for a single friend to help her with the money. She did have a friend

Jayadevan who advised her to write a book. Though Aunt Mabel's house was a place ideal for the flowering of love, both the protagonist and Jayadevan agree on the notion that not all relationships should end up in love. What grew between them was merely a friendship of unconditional joy which was openly presented before Aunt Mabel but whenever she talked about his to Purushothaman, he would explode and make a scene asking her who these people were. And finally, when she is finally near the threshold, ready for her journey, she sees Purushothaman coming running in before she reached the threshold and trying to talk her out of leaving and tries to take her bag from her shoulder. But she has had enough and she evades his clutches and leaps over to the threshold. At the gate, she stops and looks back, seeing him standing lost in thought like someone has punished him. She moves on as she is quite helpless now. And as she walks her hair unloosed itself and touches the sky and her skirt whirls round and covers the earth.

NARRATIVES THROUGH MAGICAL ELEMENTS-One of the most frequently used literary device in this short story is Magic Realism. Irony is also a major part of the story. The name of the husband being Purushothaman is an ironic choice of a name as it means an 'Ideal male'. Symbolism is another literary device found in this story. But the point of focus is the literary device with the most importance which holds the story together at times. Magic Realism is a genre in which ordinary events and situations blend with magical elements and portray them as real normal happenings. Both the magical and the real are presented in a straightforward stream of thought.

Aunt Mabel is a imaginary character in the story. Aunt Mabel and her house is an imaginary made up place, a so called happy place in the protagonist's mind. Her safe haven from all her oppression. The walls of the corridor crept towards her and crushes her. She can't breathe and she beats her arms in vain against the walls which looked possessed and were crushing her. Another time, while returning back home, she tried to open the door and the iron grilles bent and turned into molten wax and crushed her. And another day, the vessels piled up under the water tap stood up and spoke. They gave birth to stinking heaps of rubbish and moved around the kitchen and the dining room. These all have magical elements which are superimposed within natural happenings. Aunt Mabel's house has no walls. It is built of thin, beautiful, mysterious screens. It has no grilles or bolts. Instead she finds nerves, throbbing veins and arteries there. The house is alive and supports her and is much like the

heart which is necessary for her writing to stay alive. The house's backdrop is the vast and beautiful ocean which can be interpreted as the never-ending freedom for the protagonist while at the house. For the protagonist every minute of her life in Purushothaman's house is torture. Even in the brief intervals of relief that she has, Purushothaman's undergarments fly up to fall on her face, neck and chest smothering her with its unbearable smell.

The pancholoha ring on her leg is symbolic of her shackles. The ring has stayed the same size from her birth onwards and this has led to the ring being enclosed into the flesh. The ring has fused and run all over leg laying eggs and making new smaller rings. And most times it causes unbearable pain to the protagonist.

The protagonist sees some poet-friends sitting and endlessly engaged in literary discussions. The protagonist sees them as angels with golden wings. They are invited home by the protagonist, but they only speak to Purushothaman while the protagonist is inside the kitchen making food and tea for them. And whenever she completed all her tasks and came to voice her ideas. They would have started to leave. Thanking her for the good food, they flew away betting their coloured wings. In the final confrontation between the protagonist and Purushothaman, she evades his clutches and fake promises and crosses the threshold and walks away. She looks back and sees him deep in thought. And as she moves on and starts walking with absolute freedom, her hands touch the horizon and come back. A wind blows the strands of her hair and the folds of her clothes free. Her hair unlooses itself, soars by itself and touched the sky, and her skirt whirls round in a wide, wide circle and covers the earth. This final image is a metaphor for how when she loosens her hair and let it loose and write, it should cover the whole world with love. All these are instances of magical elements in the story which gives it a certain beauty to it.

CONFLICTING ENVIRONMENTS- Sarah Joseph's protagonist talks about two contrasting houses, one with the walls, which close in her and crush and suffocate her. The other is the one without any walls, but made up of thin, beautiful mysterious screens and throbbing veins and arteries. While Purushothaman's house punish her for going out and weight her down making her stagger and fall and speak and do things like a machine, Aunt Mabel's house has a backdrop of an infinitely vast and open seascape. She also has a room of her own with three windows that open out to the horizon, where she can read and write. This reminds us of Virginia Woolf's remark that a woman in order to be a writer should have a

room of her own and money of her own. The protagonist here is also on a quest for both of these things. The protagonist could never take part in writer's discussion till the end because of the panchaloha ring in her ankle. It has enveloped into her flesh and laid eggs in her flesh, giving birth to a wilderness of little rings. Whenever they went to literary discussions, Purushothaman kept glancing at his watch time to time and start yawning by six o'clock and nudged and prodded her to leave without being seen. But Aunt Mabel would always ask her about her performance in the debate.

CONCLUSION-Sarah Joseph describes two different worlds, one of oppression and one of infinite freedom. The protagonist's decision to be an independent woman is born out of her need to write about serious things and her urge to be a full-time writer. The man in her life is a major barrier to this and she chooses to abandon him instead of sacrificing her passion for a family life. The narrative superimposes both the real and the fantastical in a singular stream of thought. Even the final image of the protagonist's liberation is illustrated by a magical image which stays with the reader long after the end of the story. This image shows her feministic view point clearly and it adds to the beauty of the story which is melancholic at times without trying to make the reader sympathetic but instead portrays how a woman can rise above all the negativity thrown towards them by sheer willpower only.

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