

Intertwining Nature and Womanhood: An Ecofeminist Reading of Sara Joseph's Translated Novels

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Abstract: Ecofeminism has emerged as a vital literary and philosophical framework that explores the intersection between ecological concerns and feminist thought. It asserts that the oppression of women and the degradation of the natural environment are interconnected phenomena rooted in patriarchal structures. This research paper examines the ecofeminist sensibilities in the translated novels of Sara Joseph, one of the most influential voices in contemporary Malayalam literature. Known for her evocative portrayals of women's struggles and environmental crises, Joseph's works bridge the personal and the ecological, demonstrating how the fates of women and nature are intertwined. Through a close reading of her translated novels—*The Scent of the Other Side*, *Gift in Green*, *The Vigil*, and *Budhini*—this paper investigates how Joseph uses narrative, symbolism, and character development to highlight the shared exploitation of women and nature. By emphasizing the spiritual and physical connections between female characters and their surrounding landscapes, Joseph's works provide a powerful critique of modernity's destructive tendencies. Translation plays a key role in extending the reach of these ecofeminist themes to a global readership. This study ultimately argues that Joseph's novels offer a vision of harmony, resilience, and resistance, where reclaiming the dignity of women and restoring ecological balance are deeply interconnected.

Introduction - Literature has long served as a mirror reflecting human relationships with nature, society, and the self. In recent decades, the rise of ecological consciousness has led to the development of literary approaches such as ecofeminism, which links environmental degradation with gender oppression. Ecofeminism views the domination of women and the exploitation of nature as parallel processes rooted in patriarchal ideologies. By challenging the hierarchical binaries that separate culture from nature and male from female, ecofeminism seeks to create an integrated vision of equality and sustainability.

Sara Joseph, a celebrated Malayalam writer and activist, is a leading voice in the literary representation of these intertwined struggles. Her novels draw upon the cultural and environmental landscapes of Kerala, portraying women and nature as deeply interconnected. Through lyrical prose and symbolic imagery, Joseph exposes the systemic violence inflicted upon both women and ecosystems, while also celebrating their resilience.

This paper focuses specifically on Joseph's translated works, which have made her ecofeminist narratives accessible to readers beyond Kerala. Translation is crucial in this context, not merely as a linguistic act but as a cultural bridge that transmits local struggles to a global stage. By analyzing four key novels—*The Scent of the Other Side*, *Gift in Green*, *The Vigil*, and *Budhini*—this research

examines how Joseph intertwines nature and womanhood, presenting them as sites of resistance and renewal. The study also highlights the challenges and opportunities of translating ecofeminist literature, where cultural specificity and ecological imagery must be preserved for international audiences.

Ecofeminism: A Theoretical Perspective

Ecofeminism, a term first popularized by Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974, emerged as a movement that combines ecological awareness with feminist politics. It critiques the dualistic worldview that places men, culture, and reason above women, nature, and emotion. This hierarchical thinking has justified both the subjugation of women and the exploitation of the earth. Ecofeminists argue that patriarchal capitalism treats both women and nature as resources to be controlled, commodified, and consumed. The theoretical foundation of ecofeminism is diverse, encompassing spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions. Scholars such as Vandana Shiva emphasize the spiritual and material connections between women and nature, particularly in non-Western contexts where rural women often serve as custodians of ecological knowledge. In India, ecofeminism has been closely associated with grassroots movements such as Chipko, where women actively defended forests from deforestation.

In literary criticism, ecofeminism offers a lens to analyze

how texts represent the relationships between gender and ecology. It focuses on the symbolic associations of women with the natural world, while also critiquing the romanticization of these links. Ecofeminist readings seek to uncover narratives of resistance that challenge both environmental destruction and gender oppression. Sara Joseph's novels are ideal for such analysis, as they weave ecological imagery with feminist themes, presenting interconnected struggles that resonate across cultural boundaries.

Sara Joseph: Voice of Feminism and Ecology

Sara Joseph is widely recognized for her bold engagement with social justice issues, including gender equality, religious reform, and environmental sustainability. Her literary career spans several decades and includes novels, short stories, and essays that confront the complexities of Kerala's social fabric. Joseph's activism, particularly her involvement in the StreeVedi (Women's Forum) and other movements, deeply informs her writing.

Her narratives are characterized by their deep sensitivity to place and community. Kerala's lush landscapes—its rivers, forests, and coastal areas—are not merely backdrops but integral elements of her storytelling. In Joseph's works, nature is imbued with symbolic meaning, reflecting the inner lives of characters and the larger social tensions they navigate. Her women characters are often marginalized by patriarchy yet connected to the land in ways that empower them to resist and reclaim agency.

The translation of Joseph's works into English has played a crucial role in amplifying her voice. Translators like ValsonThampu and J. Devika have brought her novels to international audiences, ensuring that her ecofeminist vision reaches beyond linguistic boundaries. These translations retain the lyrical and political power of the originals, allowing readers worldwide to engage with Kerala's environmental and gender struggles.

Analysis of Translated Novels

The Scent of the Other Side: This novel explores themes of memory, identity, and ecological belonging. Joseph uses rich sensory imagery to depict the landscapes of Kerala, where rivers and forests mirror the emotional states of her characters. The narrative draws parallels between the exploitation of women and the degradation of the natural environment. For instance, women's bodies are often described using metaphors of land and water, emphasizing their shared vulnerability to patriarchal violence.

The translation retains the poetic quality of the original Malayalam text, making its ecofeminist symbolism accessible to non-Malayalam readers. Through its portrayal of intertwined human and ecological suffering, the novel calls for a holistic understanding of justice that encompasses both gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Gift in Green: Perhaps Joseph's most explicitly ecofeminist work, *Gift in Green* centers on Aathi, an idyllic island

community where people live in harmony with their natural surroundings. The novel depicts a symbiotic relationship between humans and water bodies, presenting a vision of sustainable living rooted in spiritual reverence for nature. However, this harmony is disrupted by external capitalist forces seeking to commercialize the land.

The degradation of Aathi's environment is mirrored in the subjugation of its women, whose voices are silenced by both patriarchy and development projects. Characters like Ponmani emerge as symbols of resistance, fighting to protect their ecological and cultural heritage. The translation effectively conveys the spiritual dimensions of the narrative, highlighting the urgency of ecological activism and the inseparability of women's liberation from environmental preservation.

The Vigil: In *The Vigil*, Joseph explores the psychological dimensions of ecofeminism. The novel portrays women grappling with personal trauma against the backdrop of environmental crises. Nature serves as both a source of healing and a reminder of destruction. The narrative suggests that reconnecting with the natural world is essential for individual and collective renewal.

The translated version captures the symbolic associations between landscapes and women's inner lives, emphasizing themes of resilience and transformation. Through its nuanced portrayal of ecological and emotional interconnections, *The Vigil* expands the scope of ecofeminist literature.

Budhini: *Budhini* is based on the true story of a tribal woman exploited during the inauguration of a major dam project in Jharkhand. The novel critiques development narratives that prioritize industrial progress over indigenous rights and ecological balance. Budhini's personal suffering mirrors the destruction of her community's environment, illustrating the double oppression of marginalized women and vulnerable ecosystems.

The translation brings this local story to a global audience, highlighting the universal relevance of Joseph's critique. By intertwining the fate of Budhini with that of her natural surroundings, the novel exemplifies ecofeminism's central insight: the liberation of women and the protection of the earth are inseparable.

Symbolism and Ecofeminist Imagery: Sara Joseph's novels are rich in symbolism, using ecological imagery to represent women's experiences. Rivers, forests, and water bodies often serve as metaphors for female subjectivity. In *Gift in Green*, water symbolizes both life and resistance, while its pollution reflects the corruption of social systems. Similarly, the earth is depicted as nurturing yet vulnerable, paralleling the roles imposed on women in patriarchal societies.

These symbolic associations are not merely aesthetic devices but political statements. By linking women's bodies to ecological spaces, Joseph challenges readers to recognize the interconnectedness of all forms of

oppression. The translations retain these symbolic layers, ensuring that their political resonance is not lost in cross-cultural transmission.

Translation as Cultural Mediation: Translation plays a vital role in transmitting ecofeminist literature across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In the case of Sara Joseph's novels, translation allows local ecological and feminist struggles to enter global conversations. However, this process involves challenges, particularly in preserving cultural specificity.

Kerala's landscapes, rituals, and idioms are deeply embedded in Joseph's narratives. Translators must navigate these elements carefully to maintain authenticity while ensuring accessibility for international readers. For example, ecological metaphors rooted in local traditions may require contextual explanations. Successful translations strike a balance between fidelity to the original and adaptation for new audiences.

Through translation, Joseph's works contribute to a global ecofeminist canon. They foster cross-cultural solidarity by revealing the universal dynamics of gender and environmental oppression, while also highlighting the particularities of Kerala's socio-ecological context.

Interconnectedness of Women and Nature: At the heart of Joseph's ecofeminist vision is the idea of interconnectedness. Her novels portray women and nature not as passive victims but as active agents of renewal. Characters who form deep bonds with their natural surroundings often emerge as leaders of resistance movements. This interconnectedness is spiritual as well as material, suggesting that ecological harmony is essential for human well-being.

For instance, in *Gift in Green*, the community's reverence for water reflects an ethical worldview that values sustainability over exploitation. Similarly, *Budhini*'s struggle against developmental projects symbolizes the fight for both gender justice and ecological balance. By intertwining the fates of women and nature, Joseph challenges readers to envision alternative futures grounded in care and reciprocity.

Conclusion: Sara Joseph's translated novels offer profound insights into the intertwined struggles of women and the environment. Through her evocative storytelling, she exposes the shared roots of gender oppression and

ecological degradation, while also celebrating the resilience of marginalized communities. Works like *The Scent of the Other Side*, *Gift in Green*, *The Vigil*, and *Budhini* demonstrate how literature can serve as a site of resistance, challenging dominant narratives of progress and development.

Translation plays a crucial role in extending the reach of Joseph's ecofeminist vision. By making her works accessible to global audiences, translators enable cross-cultural dialogues about sustainability and justice. These translations preserve the poetic and political power of Joseph's narratives, ensuring that their message resonates across linguistic boundaries.

In an era marked by climate crises and gender inequalities, Joseph's novels remind us that the liberation of women and the protection of the earth are inseparable. Her ecofeminist vision offers both a critique of destructive systems and a hope for renewal. By intertwining nature and womanhood, Joseph's works inspire readers to imagine a world where harmony, equality, and sustainability are central values.

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