



## Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side

By Sara Joseph

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### Othappu: The Scent of the Other Side By Sara Joseph

The third in a trilogy of novels—the other two being *Aalahayude Pennmakkal* (1999) which won a Central Sahitya Akademi Award, and *Maatathi* (2001)—*Othappu* is set in the Kerala Christian community, which splits broadly into Roman Catholics, Syrian Christians, and Charismatics who emphasize free worship and faith-healing.

*Othappu* (2003), the winner of two State-level awards, raises important issues revolving around a self-consciously religious society: the role of piety, spirituality, family, sexuality, and the freedom of the individual or the lack of it. Peppered and layered with Biblical quotations and allusions, and carrying echoes and subtexts that parallel events in the New Testament, the novel gives us rare glimpses of Malayali Christian society. Literally meaning outrage or scandal directly linked with breaking sexual codes of behavior, *Othappu* is a crucial text chiefly because the socio-psychological implications of convent-life, and its contradictions and conflicts, have rarely been discussed in Indian fiction; nor has female subjectivity in the Malayali Christian culturescape been made available in English before. As Sara Joseph tunnels into the lives of her characters, the conclusion shows people up for who they really are, and what they are prepared to bear, in support of their actions. *Othappu* (2003), the winner of two State-level awards, raises important issues revolving around a self-consciously religious society: the role of piety, spirituality, family, sexuality, and the freedom of the individual or the lack of it. Peppered and layered with Biblical quotations and allusions, and carrying echoes and subtexts that parallel events in the New Testament, the novel gives us rare glimpses of Malayali Christian society. Literally meaning outrage or scandal directly linked with breaking sexual codes of behavior, *Othappu* is a crucial text chiefly because the socio-psychological implications of convent-life, and its contradictions and conflicts, have rarely been discussed in Indian fiction; nor has female subjectivity in the Malayali Christian culturescape been made available in English before. As Sara Joseph tunnels into the lives of her characters, the conclusion shows people up for who they really are, and what they are prepared to bear, in support of their actions.

The current edition includes an insightful introduction by Jancy James, a discussion of the many meanings of *Othappu* by Paul Zacharia and an interview with the author. The novel will appeal to students and scholars of Indian literature in general and Malayalam literature in particular, comparative literature, gender studies, cultural studies, as well as general readers.

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### Editorial Review

#### About the Author

**Sara Joseph**, a leading literary figure, has been instrumental in founding the later twentieth century feminist movement in Kerala. Her published works include *Aalahayude Pennmakkal* (1999), winner of the Central Sahitya Akademi Award for Malayalam literature and *Maatathi* (2001). **Valson Thampu** (translator) is a priest of the Church of North India and Principal of St Stephen's College, Delhi. He has to his credit more than 400 articles on politics and socio-cultural issues and ten publications on spirituality and religion.

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