

Textures of the Everyday: Ordinary Affects in Malayalam Memoirs

Parvathi M. S.

Sarah Joseph's *Aaru Nee* (2018) is an autobiographical text that consists of recollections of her childhood and familial networks. These recollections do not adhere to the conventions of chronology or linear development that characterise traditional autobiographies, focusing instead on the affective responses underlying her memories. As a result, this text qualifies as a memoir rather than as a traditional autobiography. Memoirs can be subsumed within the autobiographical practice of life writings, which are shorter than conventional autobiographies and are typified by the author's emphasis on specific experience(s). Memoirs, with their emphasis on the affective and the specific, can be considered as apposite sites for evaluating the mundane and the habitual. The authorial experience of the everyday is illuminated by the authorial subject's encounter with the 'textures' of the mundane — through the sensory experiences of touch, smell, vision, taste, and hearing. These sensory experiences of the everyday are animated by the conceptualisation of 'ordinary affects' by Kathleen Stewart. These affects are intertwined with the everyday, which articulates agential capacities and power structures. These power hierarchies determine how we experience our everyday, as they determine our locations and the ways in which we 'move' from one location to the other on the culture map. The paper builds on these arguments and examines how sensory experiences or affects intersect with the everyday in Sarah Joseph's memoir, *Aaru Nee*.

Memoir, as an autobiographical sub-genre, has been configured as inferior to conventional autobiographies, which are traditionally perceived as unmediated representations of the autobiographer, demonstrating certain degrees of authorial sincerity. Philip Lejeune defines a conventional autobiography as a text which is typified by an identity between the author, the narrator, and the protagonist (193). They subscribe to the normativities of chronology and linear development and are instantiations of individual genius. Critics such as Georges Gusdorf have contended that autobiographies can only emerge from societies with individualist ethos when compared to non-Christian landscapes that emphasise community (29). The individualism underlying the traditional autobiographical act illuminates its predominantly masculine tradition, which is characterised by universality and representativeness (Brodzki and Schenck 1). These characteristics that framed autobiographies as true and sincere mirrors of the authorial selves constrain women's access to the autobiographical act. This limited access to traditional autobiography resulted in women engaging with its 'lesser' forms, such as memoirs, which were not perceived as worthy of critical attention or canonisation. Sarah Joseph's choice of memoir as her autobiographical form can be regarded as an instance of resistance against foreclosing women's access to traditional autobiographies and normalising memoir as a popular autobiographical form.

The memoir is an accessible autobiographical form, characterised by a lesser degree of seriousness when compared to traditional autobiographies and by its popularity in the marketplace. Historically, these commercial life narratives were structured as inferior to autobiographies, which were considered sublime expressions of authorial genius. The methodological assumption framing weighty autobiographies as putatively written by those deemed capable of self-reflection, located memoirs, journals, and diaries in a lower order (Nussbaum 149). Women's life writings are excellent sources for unearthing the generative potential of socialities on account of their relational nature. Relationality is manifested in the positioning of women's autobiographical subjectivities in their socio-cultural networks, unlike the individualism of traditional, masculine self-narratives (Friedman 77). Relationality is a characteristic of women's life writings, in which the authorial self is represented in terms of the Other, i.e., the social relations of the subject. The privileging of the relational in women's

life narratives elevates interpersonal relationships and communal networks. This relationality is evident in Sarah Joseph's *Aaru Nee*, in which the connections between Sarah Joseph and her social relations animate her everyday life.

For a woman autobiographer, her subjectivity is configured in relation to her familial and social networks. These social networks are intertwined with the everyday, and their interconnection can be explained by the concept of sociality, which suggests that the mundane world of everyday life is constituted by "ceaseless intersubjective interaction" (Gardiner 209). Everyday life can be situated in either the public or private spheres as the subject engages in routine modes of work, travel, and leisure. Theorists such as Rita Felski have remarked that gendered collectivities like women tend to be more associated with the everyday than others (79). According to Henri Lefebvre, this cultural association intersects with the hegemony of Enlightenment principles and positivist philosophy (87). From the nineteenth century, these principles codified science into disciplines and positioned them at a distance from the everyday while devaluing the latter as trivial. This codification separated theoretical knowledge from everyday life; knowledge was increasingly rationalised, whereas everyday life was fashioned as the residues of codified disciplines. This devaluation also extended to the discursive association of the everyday with the private sphere, which was deemed as a feminine realm (Felski 78). As a result, everyday life, which is conventionally associated with women and the private sphere, became delegitimised under modernity. In the context of these discourses, the space-time of Sarah Joseph's *Aaru Nee* can be seen as contesting the devaluation of everyday life. The memoir, which highlights the socialities of Sarah Joseph, revolves around her everyday life. These socialities encompass the habitual and the mundane, moving between the public and the private and privileging her social networks.

In *Critique of Everyday Life* and *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, Henri Lefebvre's methodological assumptions are informed by the dualistic paradigm of theoretical knowledge/everyday life, which frames the everyday as a signifier of social degradation under capitalism. However, Rita Felski identifies an ambivalent tendency in these assumptions by highlighting how everyday life "is connected to bodily and affective rhythms and hence retains a utopian impulse" (79). A focus on affective rhythms privileges the body and its relations to the Other while undertaking critical enquiries into the everyday. This affective methodology mediates a configuration of subjectivity which emphasises the intersubjective over reified, pervasive social structures. Within this conceptual framework, the centrality of the body enables an intensification of the sensory elements of the terrain and the prioritisation of its 'texture'. According to Claire Hemmings, "affect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions" (551). Thus, affect is an embodied mode of conceptualising subjectivity that subverts the privileging of disembodied, theoretical knowledge. The generative potential of everyday life can be examined by privileging what Kathleen Stewart terms as 'ordinary affects,' i.e., the affective modalities of mundane human experience. According to Stewart, ordinary affects are about "the need for a speculative and concrete attunement. It suggests that thought is not the kind of thing that flows inevitably from a given 'way of life', but rather something that takes off with the potential trajectories in which it finds itself in the middle" (128). Sarah Joseph's *Aaru Nee* animates these ordinary affects that emerge from the subject's interactions with her socialities.

The ordinary affects illuminate the dominant modes of socialities that determine the positioning of bodies: it is "not about one person's feelings becoming another's but bodies literally affecting one another and generating intensities" (Stewart 128). Studies have identified the manifestation of ordinary affects in material practices such as the affective encounters in coffee shops (Nautiyal 99), practices of care (Latimer 136), social media (Bucher 30), and violent revolutions (Lilleby 19). The examination of ordinary affects in

Sarah Joseph's *Aaru Nee* builds on these critical engagements. As an autobiographical sub-genre, memoir is emerging as a site of critical interest, with studies demonstrating its political potentialities through modalities of narrative strategies (Kim 27). There has also been significant critical interest in the aspect of liminality in memoirs (Malek 353). Studies have also centred the question of subjectivity, with a focus on the politics of identity formation (Forbes 473), biopolitical normativities (Brown 359), and gendered socialities (Taylor 705). The spatial and temporal settings of memoirs have also been critically identified through the Bakhtinian notion of chronotopes (Majumdar 158). There have also been critical engagements on the slippages between truth and fiction (Young 42) and on the intertwining of memoirs and testimonies (Whitlock 13). Several studies have also privileged the affective modalities in the subgenre, highlighting experiences such as pain and trauma (Gilmore 104) and grief (Ashton 22). In Malayalam, studies like *Writing the First Person* (2016) have focused on the affects in modes of life-writings, such as traditional autobiographies, and *Scripting Lives* (2009) has focused on non-traditional forms like letters and diaries. However, there has been limited critical attention in addressing the affective registers in memoirs published in Malayalam, and the paper proposes to address this research gap by analysing the affects in Sarah Joseph's *Aaru Nee*.

The author, Sarah Joseph (b. 1946), is a Malayali litterateur and a prominent feminist activist associated with the organisation Manushi. In spite of her prolific public presence, Sarah Joseph situates *Aaru Nee* in the private sphere: "Writing about one's public life is easy. But writing about one's private life is difficult on account of our inhibitions in writing about our private lives" (Joseph 7). In order to contest these inhibitions, Sarah Joseph authorises the private sphere as a site of self-representation in her life-writing and of "inner" lives, where "the everyday struggles and sorrows are acted out" (Joseph 7). She articulates her domestic setting with a statement made by the yesteryear activist and author, V. T. Bhattathirippad, who delegitimised women's autobiographies thus: "the biographies of 'aathemaar' who led mundane lives cannot go over half a page" (Joseph 7). In this life-writing, Sarah Joseph subverts this sentiment echoed by Bhattathirippad by inscribing herself as an *akathamma* or a domestic woman, privileging the mundane activities that underline her incursions into more esoteric worlds. Here, the everyday aligns with the habitual and the ordinary, encompassing domestic activities and public rituals associated with work, leisure, and travel. For instance, in her recollections of the playgrounds of her childhood, her memories traverse the boundaries of her domestic spaces to include her immediate neighbourhood and temple premises. She also recollects another favourite childhood pastime of hers, which includes occasional visits to the cinema hall, providing fodder for subsequent games in which she enacts scenes from movies along with her friends.

In the memoir, Sarah Joseph inscribes her home as a site of remembrance — some of her earliest childhood experiences and familial relationships are anchored in this place. This anchoring is symbolised in her representation of the walls of the front veranda and courtyard of her childhood home, which bears the photographs of the household. Growing up during the 1950s, when family albums were not popular, these photograph-bearing walls served as the familial archive. Those walls house photographs of family members from the patriarchs to the youngest child and memorialise significant familial events such as convocations, betrothals, and marriages (Joseph 14). Moreover, it also serves as the signifier of the religious and political affiliations of the family, with its portraits of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi, and significant independence activists. Through her descriptions of the photographs of this intimate archive, Sarah Joseph moves between the public and the private. Although the portraits are located in the private sphere, which is the setting of her memoir, they incorporate incursions into the public, signifying structural political transformations or the more quotidian acts of accessing schools, colleges, or workplaces. For instance, one of her anecdotes about her family members' choice of her name is

juxtaposed with an unexpected encounter with an admirer in a public space. The memoir opens with Sarah's grandfather naming her after a Biblical character. However, instead of dwelling on this event, her recollection moves to a recent incident associated with the significance of her name. At a public bus stand, she runs into a fan who expresses his admiration for her writings, addressing her in a brotherly fashion as "saroppol" (Joseph 10). She employs this anecdote to express how his treatment of her in an affectionately respectful manner, like a family member, is heart-warming. The affective intensity generated by this incident approximates her feelings regarding the affectionate nicknames with which her friends and family used to address her as a child.

Her recollections of the mundane are animated by such interconnections that move between the public realm populated by her admirers and the private sphere occupied by her family members. This ambivalence in the spatialisation of the memoir illustrates the complication of the public/private binary in the everyday. Theorists such as Rita Felski have been critical of the articulation of the private sphere and everyday life, postulating instead that the quotidian is marked by an absence of boundaries in spatial differentiation (Felski 78). She articulates this cultural association with the traditional epistemological systems that position men in the incorporeal and women in the embodied and affective. This dualism also contributed to the exclusion of women from the public sphere, situating them in the sphere of domesticity. Feminist critics like Dorothy Smith and Rita Felski address the devaluation of the quotidian by refashioning an embodied theory of everyday life that does not restrict women to their reproductive and domestic roles. Instead, they conceptualise a cultural model that privileges women's involvement in the construction of social patterns and relationships (Smith 160). Within this embodied model, home is a privileged site, where "the temporality of everyday ... the spatial ordering of the everyday is anchored in a sense of home, and the characteristic mode of experiencing the everyday is that of habit" (Felski 81). However, this home is not isolated from the world; it is shaped by social codes, affective rhythms, and power structures. The habitual and the mundane are operationalised in a space where the private sphere has porous borders with the political public.

Everyday life demonstrates static and routinised properties, but theorists such as Dorothy Smith, Karel Kosik, and Rita Felski have emphasised its underlying dynamism and generative potential. Karel Kosik proposes the subversion of the "pseudo-concrete" bias of theoretical knowledge of the everyday, with its focus being limited to "the collection of phenomena that crowd the everyday environment and the routine atmosphere of human life" (2). Instead, Kosik seeks to enquire into the power asymmetries between institutions and their subjects. These theoretical enquiries build on Henri Lefebvre's privileging of the human body in *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1984). Here, Lefebvre privileges the human body, with its affective registers, as a site of resistance (208). The autonomic responses and desires of the body contest the hegemony of knowledge systems and sustain the latent cultural impulse for community and intimacy with the Other. As a result, everyday life manifests in the nodes of institutional and social relations and organisations. This sentiment is also reflected in Michel de Certeau's proposition about the creative potential of habitual activities, which are "social realizations, an opaque, stubborn life buried in everyday gestures ... the humanity that everyone lives unbeknownst to oneself" (137-138).

Some of the most prominent ordinary affects in the memoir emerge from her childhood memories of food, in which distinct aromas and tastes intertwine to represent the flavours of her past. For instance, she recollects how the most common breakfast of her childhood, which is rice gruel and dal curry, is an "enticing feast" as the gruel is cooked from "sweet-smelling, freshly harvested rice" (Joseph 30). The privileging of affective rhythms of smell and taste is repeated in her description of another significant dish of her childhood, which is a curry made from fish hatchlings. Her affective recollections are entangled with some of the familial rituals of her childhood home. As a child, she used to live in a joint family

which comprised her parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Every weekend, the act of preparing lunch becomes an elaborate ritual that involves the concerted efforts of all of the female members of the family. During such cooking sessions, Sarah's aunt is entrusted with the responsibility of preparing the main curry and delegating smaller tasks like preparing curry powders to the younger girls in the family. Sarah's recollections of those weekends generate positive affects as they involve her proximity to her beloved family members. Moreover, these positive affects are entwined with sensory memories of smell and taste as her recollections animate the textures of those weekends:

My aunt used to prepare fish curry. Its preparation was an elaborate ritual. We should prepare the ingredients like chilli paste, coriander paste, chopped ginger and shallots, coconut milk at the required intervals. All of the pastes should have a smooth butter-like texture that comes only from squashing them in stone mortars ... after adding the ingredients to the curry by hand, my aunt would smell her palms. On seeing her face light up, we can understand that the ingredients were mixed properly and that the curry would taste good ... the first time I was entrusted with the duty of preparing the chilli paste, I was crying all day long as my hands stung from grinding the chillies on the mortar ... once the preparation is complete, enticing aroma of the curry pervades the household. (Joseph 32-33)

The act of cooking in the household is gendered, but it is also a communal act that involves the active participation of a handful of its members in preparing its ingredients, demonstrating routinised characteristics. The emphasis on the affective, apropos the act of cooking in her childhood home, is replaced by the quantitative in order to cook large portions of food to feed the phalanx of family members and manual labourers attached to the rural settings of her conjugal house (Joseph 34). If the act of cooking in her childhood home is an affective experience animated by her bodily affects of smell and taste, it transforms into a burdensome chore at her marital household. Her husband's familial household consists of a large joint family and a significant number of manual labourers working and living on the land. As a result, the act of cooking is always informed by a sense of urgency regarding the large quantities of food that are expected to be prepared and the need to provide food for everyone in the family. The emphasis is no longer on the taste or smell of the food; instead, it is on the quantity of prepared food. However, this does not mean that her recollections from the period were not informed by positive affects. The taste and smell of cooking are soon replaced by other sensory experiences. Her husband's household emerges as an arboreal haven as the house stands in the middle of a large compound that is surrounded by trees. Here, the produce of jackfruit trees is "as sweet as honey," so sweet that she rues that she has never tasted anything sweeter than those fruits (Joseph 34). The affects underlying those memories are so intense that she proceeded to compose a short story named "Kathorthirikku" in order to memorialise this tree (Joseph 34-35).

Sarah Joseph's memories of her childhood are embedded in the performative nature of her gender identity. Most of her upbringing aligns with the cultural codes determining bourgeois femininity during the 1950s. These codes pervade her everyday life, fashioning her body right from the day she was given her first piece of clothing as an infant, which is known as "*pillakkacha*" (Joseph 14). This act of covering up symbolises the infant's introduction to the domain of cultural codes that determine her gendering. These gendered normativities manifest in the form of the most innocuous habits and patterns of her schooldays, such as her hairstyles and sartorial choices. Her body is embedded in the ancient codes of familial honour and respectability, which results in the proscription of any activity that is deemed as an aberrance, or "*othappu*" (Joseph 41). As a schoolchild, her hair is tied into tight pigtailed that tame her hair until she comes back from school. Her mother insists on the rigid maintenance of her hairstyle, preventing her from untying them in her absence (Joseph 27). These sombre hairstyles are not mere signifiers of respectable

femininity, but they operationalise a practical purpose of disciplining her body. The extra care that she takes in maintaining her hairstyle also manifests as a biopolitical mechanism of self-disciplining as she is foreclosed from physically intensive activities like running or fighting that are deemed un-ladylike.

The affective register of fear works as a deterrent that encodes her body in disciplinary regimes, generating respectable behaviour. The dynamics of fear emerging from this memoir can be illuminated by Sara Ahmed's discussion of fear in her book titled *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004). In the book, Ahmed dismantles the conception of the political domain as a rational realm that is devoid of emotions. Instead, she delves into the intertwining of the political and the emotional, detailing how contemporary politics is shaped by emotions and bodily affects. In her everyday life, fear "works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space. In this way, emotions work to align bodily space with social space" (Ahmed 69). Fear structures her movement and behaviour in accordance with the masculine presence in her social spaces. The prospect of dishonour weighs so heavy on her quotidian activities that the prospect of encountering catcallers engenders unreasonable fears in her as she dreads her mother's rebuke. She fears that her mother might misconstrue these instances of harassment as a sign of desire on her part, whose disciplinary regime is situated in commonsensical idioms like "there's no smoke without fire" (Joseph 28). Such colloquial idioms reify the practices of gendering and its connections to power asymmetries that deprive women of their agential capacities. In these instances, Sarah is subjected to verbal harassment, which generates affects of fear and dread. However, the affects underlying her recollections are mediated by the fear of her mother's disapprobation. Rather than dreading such instances of harassment on account of shame, they inculcate a sense of helplessness in Sarah as she does not want to be perceived as dishonourable. Here, the hegemony of respectable femininity categorises girls into the chaste/dishonourable woman dualism. Incidents of harassment evoke an unrelenting need for reasserting her purity rather than generating feelings of shame or humiliation. The disciplinary norms that fashion her gendering also manifest in strict surveillance about the way she "dressed, talked, or even slept" (Joseph 22). This surveillance is also accompanied by codes of religious morality circulated by Sunday schools that proscribe her from befriending or even talking to her male classmates. This religious conditioning enables Sarah to perceive interactions with men as sinful, and as a result, she socialises with only women as she grows up, a fact which she, in retrospect, deems as "unnatural" (Joseph 22). This socialisation in religious morality encodes her body as a haven of sinful desires as she is trained to perceive her body as her biggest enemy, who is eager to entrap her in disreputable situations on account of her desires. As a result, she is advised from an early age to develop a hostile relationship with her body. Moreover, her virginity is constructed as her biggest asset at an age when she does not understand its signification except for the commonsensical knowledge that "it is something that it expected to be protected" (Joseph 28). As a result, she is fashioned into perceiving a girl's pre-marital existence as a "tightrope walk" in which her "purity" should be maintained, although she is not provided with any information about understanding how her body works (Joseph 41).

In the memoir, religious principles are not merely biopolitical strategies for regulating the bodies and habits of young women like Sarah. Instead, she cultivates a deep affective resonance with Christianity and the teachings of Christ. The intensity of her affective responses to the Christian principles of justice, resilience, and surrender generates deep feelings of shame in her as she falls short of operationalising them in everyday life. She elevates the principles of pain and sorrow underlying Christianity as embodied modes of growing closer to God. Her ideo-affective response to Christianity is also mediated by her empathy for her mother, who lived through intense poverty as a child while remaining faithful. She underlines the need for intensifying her faith not merely through prayers but through reconfiguring her body and exploring its generative potential. Unlike the bodily affect

of fear, her religious faith engenders positive affects that prepare her for a more spiritual mode of living. The biopolitical mechanisms for bodily refashioning are not merely contingent on fear or on the positive affects underlying faith; they also manifest in her family's aversion towards aestheticisation. The construction of vanity as a sin mediates the sartorial preferences in Sarah's family, in which the women choose to wear outfits in dull, sombre colours. Their choice of muted colours also generates disdain for women who wear flamboyant clothes and heavy jewellery. The women in her family perceive that aestheticising their bodies entails projecting their bodies as desirable, which mediates their decision to choose modest clothing. Until marriage, the girls in the family are expected to wear half-sarees, which have to be replaced with sarees as soon as they are married off, on the insistence of their conjugal families. Having grown up with a preference for sombre clothes, she is expected to switch to flashy colours and flamboyant outfits in alignment with the women's choices in her husband's family. Sarah recollects her bodily discomfort as she dons the elaborate outfit for church on Sundays after her marriage: "when we went to the church, I had to wear a saree. I had to 'tie' a lot of ornaments on me. These aspects made my church visits into tiring outings. I was especially irritated by the necklace named *ilakkathali* that choked my neck with its thin, hairline chains" (Joseph 19). However, after completing her education and entering the workforce, she demonstrates more agency in her clothing choices — her outfits are no longer determined by the tastes of her childhood or conjugal families but by their affordability. As she grows comfortable in her career as a college teacher, she indulges in expensive clothes and jewellery in accordance with the changes in her taste over the years. However, this taste for fancy outfits is transient as she develops consciousness of the history and principles of feminism after she assumes active membership in Manushi, a feminist organisation. This awareness mediates another shift in her tastes as she perceives expensive clothes as wasteful expenses and shifts back to her preference for cheaper outfits.

Sarah's agency in aspects such as clothing demonstrates that the everyday is not overdetermined by social structures in which the subjects are interpellated. Instead, her agential capacities illuminate the tactics with which subjects resist or negotiate overarching systems. Her interest in dancing can be perceived as an instance of subversion in which she contests her mother's prescriptions about entrenching her body in respectability and bourgeois femininity. Although Sarah's habits used to be in alignment with her mother's normative rules, she feels that her creative drive, which is intertwined with her body and its desires, is being constrained. This sense of repression engenders slippages between her mother's hegemonic parenting style and Sarah's artistic spirit, which "considers the sky as her limit" (Joseph 43). Before these slippages manifest into an active rebellion, she negotiates her discontent by choosing to learn dance as she configures it as an "experience marked by boundless imagination, freedom, and ecstasy" (Joseph 44). Towards this end, Sarah successfully convinces her mother to grant her permission to participate in dance programmes at the school. Apart from dancing, she also finds solace in her fantasies of an ideal man in order to sublimate her desires before marriage. However, after her marriage, Sarah understands that it is pregnancy that generates an experience approximating to the sublime on account of the intense affects underscoring it — pain, anxiety, uncertainty, and happiness.

Sarah Joseph's memories of the everyday habits and practices of her past are localised and rooted in the concrete. These experiences are not autonomous but are embedded in hegemonic discourses and practices of gendering. The discourses of gender demonstrate that the everyday is culturally localised in the domestic, although its practices problematise the distinction between the public and the private. The cultural association of women with the private sphere results in their entwining with everyday activities (Felski 79). This cultural intersection is demonstrated in Henri Lefebvre's *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1984): "everyday life weighs heaviest on women ... they are the subjects of everyday

life and its victims” (73). Sarah Joseph’s choice of locating her memoir in the domestic resists Lefebvre’s conceptualisation of women as victims of everyday life. Instead, she co-opts the everyday for its generative potential as a site of meaningful relationships and agential capacities. Here, Sarah is a situated, embodied subject whose ordinary affects demonstrate the mediatedness of social relations and align with Dorothy Smith’s conception of gendered subjectivity (Smith 160). Dorothy Smith privileges a new theoretical framework of everyday life that animates quotidian practices maintained by specific social subjects who produce the everyday. Smith contends that mainstream discourses present a historical view that is contingent on linear historical progression. This view regards the world as a structured totality, subsequently trivialising everyday concerns. As a result, it develops an “extralocal” perspective, which removes its subjects from their particular locations and relationships and presents them as abstractions (Smith 2).

This extralocal viewpoint alienates embodied subjects like women, whose abstraction deprives them of their agency. In order to counter this abstracted perception of social actors, Dorothy Smith presents a model of enquiry that privileges women’s social contexts, especially those concerning the domain of everyday life and the relationships in it. Thus, instead of adopting a theoretical framework that regards the world as an overarching structure, the critical focus is shifted to actual practices operationalised by embodied subjects (Smith 174). It also dismantles hegemonic discourses that align with the material interests of the elite groups. This shift in focus engenders an understanding of the manipulation of quotidian activities in order to subvert generative political aspirations. Dorothy Smith terms this privileging of the quotidian as an antidote to the ‘extralocal’ distancing of contemporary epistemological assumptions, in which subjects are limited to object positions in knowledge systems. Instead, she seeks to establish networks of embodied narratives in which actual social conditions are represented and circulated. Here, Sarah Joseph is an embodied subject who experiences her everyday spaces through the affective rhythms of the body. Her experiences of her home intersect with her bodily and emotional experiences as a daughter. This intersection is, however, amplified in her memories of motherhood; instead of constructing a Grand Narrative of the factual details of her children’s birth and education, she chooses to dwell on the more intimate everyday experiences. For instance, she reminisces about visiting cinema halls with her little children, which would have come across as a “war-like” episode from an external gaze (Joseph 46). She remembers fondly about how her daughter’s participation in Manushi mediated her introduction to political awareness and assisted her in breaking out of her shell. She also seeks comfort in the routinised practices and rituals that involve her family members. For instance, she shares her excitement about her son’s daily phone calls and about his habit of rearranging and beautifying their familial household every time he visits his parents. Although she notes that these changes are evanescent, she waits for her son to engage in another round of redecoration during his next visit. Here, her memories are localised and materialised in her homeplace, producing continuities between past and present. These repetitive habits assume the modalities of rituals, which, according to Rita Felski, mediate a connection with the past and with her ancestry and tradition as it locates the individual in an imagined community that transcends historical time (Felski 83). Moreover, Felski also underscores how everyday rituals maintain personal autonomy and the “distinctive qualities of a threatened way of life” (Felski 83).

As Kathleen Stewart remarks apropos ordinary affects: “everyday life is a life lived on the level of surging affects, impacts suffered or barely avoided. It takes everything we have. But it also spawns a series of little somethings dreamed up in the course of things” (9). The mundanity of everyday life that is exemplified in quotidian activities and habits organises reality and mediates intersubjectivity. In pre-modern cultures, the ordinariness underlying everyday living used to be perceived as a continuum that encompasses habitual activities, arcane bits of knowledge, and interpersonal relationships. However, with the emergence of

modernity, everyday life is subjected to modes of structural differentiation that rupture the intertwining of the quotidian and the epistemological. Theoretical knowledge, which is formerly placed in everyday life, is discursively insulated and rationalised. These processes of specialisation delegitimise the quotidian even as epistemological pursuits are privileged. In order to address the devaluation of the habitual, cultural theorists elevate the body in analysing the totality of human experience, privileging affective registers. However, in spite of the privileging of the body, Lefebvre frames everyday life as a signifier of social degradation mediated by capitalism. The articulation of the quotidian and social degradation neglects the order of gender structuring the former, which, in turn, fashions it as a site of agency and resistance. The generative potential of everyday life can be examined by privileging what Kathleen Stewart terms as ordinary affects, i.e., the affective modalities of mundane human experience. A focus on ordinary affects mediates a configuration of subjectivity which emphasises interpersonal relationships rather than overarching social structures. This emphasis facilitates enquiries into women's life writings as their autobiographical selves are framed in intersubjective modes, privileging sociocultural networks.

Sarah Joseph's memoir articulates the affective and the everyday in order to demonstrate the geographies of her past, which are structured by power relations, sociocultural networks, and bodily impulses. In this book, everyday life is not a homogeneous, predictable terrain; it encompasses a diverse range of activities, attitudes, and forms of behaviour and is intertwined with the habitual and the ordinary. This intertwining complicates the cultural association of everyday life with domestic spaces as it is operationalised in the interstices of the public and the private. For Sarah Joseph, her domestic spaces are sites of some of her earliest childhood experiences and familial relationships. It is the site of domestic rituals of that connects her to her family members. However, the domestic is not reified or insulated; instead, it is fashioned by social codes, affective rhythms, and power structures. Some of the affects recollected in the memoir are positive, bearing sensual associations with smell and taste. However, it is also a site of power relations in which her body and mind are conditioned into the reified norms and practices of gendering through affective registers of fear. Her religious faith also generates ambivalent affective responses from her as her devotion to Christian principles engenders shame on account of her inability to attain the lofty ideals underlying it. However, the everyday is not merely a site of overarching power structures as it anticipates agential potentialities in Sarah in the form of dancing and clothing. Moreover, she also recognises the rootedness of motherhood in the everyday without devaluing it; instead, she privileges her bodily registers underscoring pregnancy and elevates the generative potential in its ordinary affects. Sarah Joseph's memories of the everyday habits and practices of her past are embedded in concrete reality. These memories illuminate a dynamic conception of the everyday that encompasses power relations, agential potential, and intersubjectivity.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. London: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. Print.
- Ashton, Hilarie. "Shaping the Body of Grief: Converging the Personal, Academic, and Visual in Memoir to Create a Broader Way of Mourning." *South Atlantic Review* 82.1 (2017): 22–36. JSTOR. Web. 17 January 2024.
- Brodzki, Bella and Celeste Schenck. *Life/Lines. Theorizing Women's Autobiography*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1988. Print.

- Brown, Megan C. "Learning to Live Again: Contemporary US Memoir as Biopolitical Self-Care Guide." *Biography* 36.2 (2013): 359–75. JSTOR. Web. 16 January 2024.
- Bucher, Taina. "The algorithmic imaginary: Exploring the ordinary affects of Facebook algorithms." *The Social Power of Algorithms*. Ed. David Beer. London: Routledge, 2019. 30-44. Print.
- De Certeau, Michel. *Culture in the Plural*. Trans. Tom Conley. London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.
- Felski, Rita. *Doing Time: Feminist Theory and Postmodern Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2000. Print.
- Forbes, Shannon. "Performative Identity Formation in Frank McCourt's 'Angela's Ashes: A Memoir.'" *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37.3 (2007): 473–96. JSTOR. Web. 18 January 2024.
- Friedman, Susan. "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice." *Women, Autobiography, Theory*. Eds. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. 72-81. Print.
- Gardiner, Michael E. *Critiques of Everyday Life*. London: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Gilmore, Leigh. "Covering Pain: Pain Memoirs and Sequential Reading as an Ethical Practice." *Biography* 38.1 (2015): 104–17. JSTOR. Web. 17 January 2024.
- Gusdorf, Georges. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography." *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Eds. J. Olney. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980. 28-48. Print.
- Hemmings, Clare. "Invoking Affect." *Cultural Studies* 19.5 (2005): 548-567. JSTOR. Web. 26 November 2021.
- Joseph, Sarah. *Aaru Nee*. Kottayam: DC Books, 2018. Print.
- Kim, Sue J. "Cambodian American Memoirs and the Politics of Narrative Strategies." *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, 9.1-2 (2017): 27-49. JSTOR. Web. 16 January 2024.
- Kingston, Maxine Hong. *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*. New York: Vintage Books, 1989. Print.
- Kosik, Karel. *Dialectics of the Concrete: A Study on Problems of Man and the World*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1976. Print.
- Kumar, Udaya. *Writing the First Person: Literature, History and Autobiography in Modern Kerala*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2016. Print.
- Latimer, Joanna. "Afterword: Materialities, Care, 'Ordinary Affects' Power and Politics." *Materialities of Care: Encountering Health and Illness Through Artefacts and Architecture* (2018): 136-147. JSTOR. Web. 02 February 2024.
- Lefebvre, Henri, *Everyday Life in the Modern World*. New York: Transaction, 1984. Print.
- . *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume I*. Trans. J. Moore. London: Verso, 1991. Print.
- Lejeune, Philip. "The Autobiographical Contract." *French Literary Theory Today: A Reader*. Ed. Tzvetan Todorov. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 192-222. Print.
- Lilleby, Sabrina. "Extraordinary Happenings and Ordinary Affects." *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Enquiry* (2017): 19. *capaciousjournal.com*. Web. 23 January 2024.

- Majumdar, Sudeshna. "Re-Imagining the Lost Idyll: A Study in Chronotopes of Post-Partition Bangla Memoirs." *Indian Literature* 62.6 (2018): 158-66. JSTOR. Web. 19 January 2024.
- Malek, Amy. "Memoir as Iranian Exile Cultural Production: A Case Study of Marjane Satrapi's 'Persepolis' Series." *Iranian Studies* 39.3 (2006): 353-80. JSTOR. Web. 8 February 2024.
- Nautiyal, Jaishikha. "Aesthetic and Affective Experiences in Coffee Shops: A Deweyan Engagement with Ordinary Affects in Ordinary Spaces." *Education and Culture* 32.2 (2016): 99-118. Print.
- Nussbaum, Felicity A. "Eighteenth-Century Women's Autobiographical Commonplaces." *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. Shari Benstock. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988. 147-172. Print.
- Sedgwick, Eve K. *Touching, Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003. Print.
- Smith, Dorothy E. *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling*. London: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- Sreekumar, Sharmila. *Scripting Lives: Narratives of Dominant Women in Kerala*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009. Print.
- Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, Print.
- Taylor, Judith. "Imperfect Intimacies: The Problem of Women's Sociality in Contemporary North American Feminist Memoir." *Gender and Society* 22.6 (2008): 705-27. JSTOR. Web. 23 January 2024.
- Whitlock, Gillian. "Consuming Passions: Reconciliation in Women's Intellectual Memoir." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 23.1 (2004): 13-28. JSTOR. Web. 19 January 2024.
- Young, Kevin. "Blood Nation: Half-Breeds, Maids, Porterhouses, and the Fake Memoir." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 89.2 (2013): 42-57. JSTOR. Web. 22 January 2024.

Parvathi M. S.
Independent Researcher
Kollam, Kerala
msparvathi1994@gmail.com

© Parvathi M. S. 2024