

From Pastoral Vistas to Urban Realities: Exploring the Transformative Journey through the Primordial Village Aathi in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* and Pallikaranai

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Abstract

Space in its purest form is a pristine canvas, a blank slate awaiting the brushstrokes of life. This research aims to analyze the process of how cityscapes have evolved from rural or pastoral environments and examine their significant influence on the physical and mental well-being of the people. Space is a profound repository, a vessel into which the essence of actions, movements, emotions, and sensations can be infused. It invites the human experience to inscribe its tales, thereby creating a complex tapestry of moments, memories, and significance. Space's vastness invites exploration and self-expression; it is a stage awaiting the magnificent performance of existence. Nevertheless, space is not a single entity. Like a chameleon, its interpretation is subjective and fluctuates depending on the viewer. The interpretation of a specific region might vary significantly from one individual to another. This article seeks to utilize Henri Lefebvre's seminal concept of representational space, or lived space, as a potent analytical tool for a comprehensive investigation of Sarah Joseph's literary work *Aathi* translated into English by Valson Thampu as *Gift in Green*. Furthermore, this study engages in a comparative analysis, drawing parallels between Sarah Joseph's evocative depiction of the asphyxiated fictional realm of Aathi and the tangible urban reality of Pallikaranai in Chennai, thus casting light on the intricate interplay between fiction and reality.

Keywords: Evolution of cityscapes, Representational space, Spatiality, Topophilia, Pallikaranai, Aathi, Environment, Pollution

1. Introduction

The Anthropocene is symbolised by environmental crisis, which include alarming narratives of extinction, deforestation, pollution, global warming, and toxicity. The term, originally proposed by ecologist Eugene Stoermer and atmospheric physicist Paul Crutzen, denotes a distinct geological epoch that will replace the Holocene process. The Anthropocene has witnessed the emergence of human agency as a substantial geophysical force, comparable in magnitude to natural forces, resulting in unprecedented and swift alterations to globally functioning ecosystems. Humanistic studies encounter conceptual and representational challenges while dealing with this worldwide crisis. Ecocriticism originated as a consequence of this advancement. Its inception was marked by the publication of two seminal works in the mid-1990s: *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and *The Environmental Imagination*, authored by Lawrence Buell. Central to ecocriticism is the examination of societal attitudes and behaviours toward nature and ecological phenomena, encompassing a broad spectrum of approaches, including "green studies," "ecopoetics," and "environmental literary criticism." Academicians further developed this field of study into the environmental humanities. The interdisciplinary field of environmental humanities examines the complex and diverse connections that exist between people and the natural world. As Arjun Appadurai argues, "If the future is defined by 'neoclassical economics' and contractual and risk management strategies it is drained of cultural context. The future is measured in probabilities, leaving no space for participation or imagination, nor for ways of knowing that do not fit the models. The environmental humanities work to foster hope" (Robin, 2017). It examines the intersections of humanistic disciplines, including literature, culture, history, philosophy, and religion, with ecological and environmental issues in an effort to comprehend and resolve these challenges. It integrates viewpoints from the fields of arts, humanities, and social sciences.

Globalisation has emerged as an all-encompassing concept in contemporary society, imposing a significant impact on our surroundings. The complex relationship between development and commerce functions as a fundamental structure in the field of international trade and commerce, influencing the policies and tactics of transnational corporations that seek to enhance production and consumption rates. While it signifies the transformation of national societies into global communities in political discourse, it signifies the emergence of global communities in ordinary conversation. In the present-day global landscape, the notion of development is intricately linked to markets and

consumerism. However, it skilfully obscures the plight, hopelessness, and displacement endured by average citizens entangled in the expansive development initiatives. Urbanisation and development are intrinsically intertwined in every society, as the former is dependent on the commercialisation, possession, and accessibility of land. The ecological crisis that currently confronts the 21st century can be traced back to a profound alienation from nature and the consequent disregard for its wisdom. During the current Anthropocene epoch, nature has been diminished from a sacrosanct "wellspring" of life to be revered to a mere "pawn" to be manipulated. Human activities that have never before occurred have caused ecological catastrophes of monumental scale. These include environmental pollution, which devastates ecosystems with toxic tendrils, biodiversity loss, population explosion, resource depletion, and the ominous accumulation of toxic, biological, and industrial waste. The consequences of these assaults will be felt by future generations. "Fragmentation and uniformity as assumed categories of progress and development destroy the living forces which arise from relationships within 'the web of life' and the diversity in the elements and patterns of these relationships" (Shiva, 1989).

Sarah Joseph across her diverse works, she employs intricate tools such as eco-sensibility, ecofeminism, and ecocriticism to weave narratives that resonate with profound meaning. In her celebrated novel "The Gift in Green," myriad interpretations have unfurled, illuminating its thematic tapestry from multifaceted perspectives. Lekha Nath (2022), a distinguished Professor from Tribhuvan University in Nepal, delved into the depths of Joseph's novel through the lens of ecofeminism, unraveling its nuanced layers with scholarly insight. Likewise, in an article entitled "Orality and Indigenous Environmentalism in Sarah Joseph's Gift in Green," Darpana (2024) offered a compelling analysis, of the indices of indigenous environmental protection. Furthermore, themes such as eco-critical perspectives, green politics, and ekopoetic theory also permeate Joseph's work *Gift in Green*, adding rich dimensions to her exploration of humanity's relationship with the natural world. This article presents a comprehensive analysis of Sara Joseph's *Aathi*, translated into English as *Gift in Green* by Valson Thampu, using Henri Lefebvre's influential concept of representational space, also referred to as lived space. This paper also explores the "Aathi" hamlet, a fictitious locale conceived by Sarah Joseph, which is situated within the borders of Kerala and resembles a utopian society. It examines how this formerly pristine land, which once represented promise and optimism, is now entangled in globalisation's relentless grasp, stifling its utopian aspirations. Furthermore, this research endeavours to conduct a comparative analysis by establishing connections between Sarah Joseph's vivid depiction of the suffocating fictional realm of Aathi and the concrete urban environment of Pallikaranai in Chennai. It sheds light on the intricate connection that exists between fiction and reality.

2. Methodology

The realm of "users" and "inhabitants" is symbolised by space as it is directly perceived via the accompanying images and symbols. Spatiality has emerged as a key concept in the fields of literary and cultural studies, where the "spatial turn" offers a novel perspective on the conventional literary examinations of time and history.

The imaginative realm endeavours to reshape and appropriate this subservient space, which is initially encountered in a passive capacity. Symbolically, its objects are superimposed on the physical environment. As a result, representational spaces tend to evolve into relatively structured systems of non-verbal symbols and signs, although there are certain exceptions to this rule. An early English translation of Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974), a seminal piece in spatial theory, appeared in 1991. Since then, it has had a profound impact on scholarly investigations in numerous disciplines, such as architecture, social theory, urbanisation, and literary and cultural studies. He introduced the spatial triad— spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space—in this seminal work. In that representational space is defined as "[S]pace as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of "inhabitants" and "users," but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe. This is the dominated — and hence passively experienced — space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects" (Lefebvre, 1991).

3. Spatial Triad: An Overview

Space has consistently been a central theme in literary studies, having been analysed from a wide range of disciplinary and academic standpoints. As expounded upon by Robert Tally (2013) in his book *Spatiality*, the concept is defined as follows: literature immerses the reader in a conceptual realm through its depictions of locations, integrating allusions to the reader's actual world or facilitating comprehension of the author's imagined past, present, and future through the use of place descriptions.

Among the distinguished intellectuals in this field, philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre emerges as arguably the most influential persona in acknowledging the critical importance of space in our understanding and interaction with the world. Lefebvre's contributions are of inherent worth on account of his proposal for an all-encompassing framework to examine the abstract notion of space—which, in his opinion, is the domain in which we confront and interpret our daily lives. According to him, individuals do not merely occupy the spaces they occupy; rather, they actively design and construct them in a way that serves their interests, and do so repeatedly through their intentions (Lefebvre, 1991). From his perspective, space is an organic and living entity that is, by definition, inherently dynamic. Space is a social construct composed of three interdependent components, as described in his spatial triad: representation of space, or the conceived space; spatial practice, or the perceived space; and representational space, or the lived space. These components do not function independently; instead, they collaborate harmoniously to generate the complex structure of space. Inversely, space represents the social relations of production. Therefore, they constitute one another. This concept is alluded to by Lefebvre in his statement, "(Social) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre, 1991).

As Smith (1983) postulates the concepts are overly restrictive, presupposing a division between "the spatial" and "the social," which, in the

field of geography, grounded in the concept of space, has been largely dismissed as a "spatial separatist" perspective (as cited in. Martin and Miller,2003). The idea that processes could be "non-spatial" is met with the same skepticism as the notion of "non-historical" processes. As Massey (1994) states, space is "one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualize the world."

Each social structure engenders a unique spatiality that comprises not only the physical space itself but also the approach taken to organise that space and how it is imagined. Therefore, spatiality comprises the socially constructed dimension of space, the cognitive or cerebral aspect of space, and the tangible physical environment. Edward Soja, a renowned urban theorist who was profoundly impacted by the ideas of Henri Lefebvre, emphasises the complexity of this viewpoint. According to Soja, "Lefebvre has been more influential than any other scholar in opening up and exploring the limitless dimensions of our social spatiality" (Soja, 1996).

In accordance with Lefebvre's triangle, "perceived space," which is alternatively referred to as "spatial practice," comprises the routine tasks associated with devising routes between different locations. It generates and duplicates its prerequisites through a circular process. A minimum level of capability and coherence is necessary to guarantee the routine functioning of society. Doreen Massey, a social scientist and geographer, asserts that space is alive and has emphasised the significance of energizing physical space as a fundamental element of our everyday existence. "Space is created out of the vast intricacies, the incredible complexities, of the interlocking and the non-interlocking, and the networks of relations at every scale from local to global" (Massey,1994.).

The perception of space is often a reflection of the dominant social groups' ideologies; it includes both the conceptual designs and physical implementations of space architects. According to Lefebvre (1991), it is "the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers [...] all of whom identify what is 'lived' and what is 'perceived' with what is 'conceived' proposes an alternative viewpoint: "Conceived space is tied to those relations of production [and reproduction] and to the 'order' which those relationships impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes..." (quoted in Martin & Miller, 2003).

The notion of lived or representational space as proposed by Lefebvre encompasses complex strata of symbolism. The way in which space is perceived and experienced by its occupants or consumers is referred to as "lived spaces" or representational spaces. By virtue of its interconnected symbols and images, it visually represents the physical environment that individuals occupy and utilize on a daily basis. Inhabitants strive to modify and adapt to this space in accordance with their daily lives. Lived space is inherently a domain of collaboration, as it is characterised by the active participation of individuals. Havik corroborates the claim made by Lefebvre that lived space is fundamentally the product of society. The author establishes a correlation between the process of interpreting a text and the social construction of space. As each reader individually interprets a text, she argues that in Lefebvre's theory, each user has a unique experience of living space, which endows it with an intrinsically fluid character that is susceptible to modification. (quoted in YUNCU,2022).

4. Gift in Green

The novel presents the events surrounding Aathi, an island engulfed in its pristine natural splendour, isolated from the rest of the world. Kumaran, who previously departed from Aathi in search of improved circumstances, reappears many years later motivated by the allure of significant financial gain. His objective is to transform Aathi into a modern paradise. The novel primarily explores the tensions that emerge among the occupants of the island as they confront impending threats such as pollution, diseases, forced migration, and forced displacements. Their distinctive strategies of opposition to this invading change occupy the foreground. The indigenous population of Aathi rebels against the development forces that deceitfully seize control of the land and the government upon their arrival in the region. This astute strategy demotes the indigenous cultivators, who were previously dignified and self-reliant, to the position of underpaid labourers. The novel underscores the consequences of environmental degradation, ecological catastrophes, intrusions of various kinds, and the potential for collective action to combat human rights violations.

5. Understanding Gift in Green through Lefebvre's Representational Space

Throughout the entirety of our being, from the moment of our birth until the last breath of our lives, we are perpetually situated within a specific spatial context. We arise and rest in space, and the domain of space is also where our aspirations materialise. As a result, an exhaustive philosophical investigation into the nature of humanity inevitably necessitates a complex scrutiny of the baffling nature of space. Deliberating on the fundamental nature of the human species or the complexities of human existence would be impossible without recognising the profound impact that the ever-present domain of space exerts.

Space, in its purest form, is a pristine canvas—a blank slate awaiting the brushstrokes of life. Beyond being a mere backdrop for events, space is a profound repository, a vessel to be imbued with the essence of actions, movements, emotions, and sensations. It invites the human experience to inscribe its stories, creating a complex tapestry of moments, memories, and meaning. The openness of space beckons for exploration and expression, a stage awaiting the grand performance of existence. However, space is not a monolithic entity. Its meaning changes depending on who observes it, resembling a chameleon. An individual's perception of the significance of a particular place may vary considerably. Upon analysing Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*, one is confronted with a multitude of characters whose interactions with the lush island of Aathi carry substantial and unique significance. As postulated by Asha Susan Jacob (2017) in one of her articles "The individual's affiliation to land is determined by his locus within certain sets of cultural parameters that structure his society". A place also creates social identities as Smith (1999) considers the place to be essential to any lived form of identity:

It may only be meaningful to consider identity, and therefore also difference, with reference to particular places at particular times. Place matters if we want to understand the way social identities are formed, reproduced, and marked off from one another. Where identities are

made is likely to have a bearing on which markers of difference—class, gender, and ‘race’ and so on—are salient, and which are veiled (quoted in Martin & Miller, 2003).

Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* presents a complex web of individuals whose existences are intricately intertwined with the verdant terrain of the island of Aathi. Each character in the work offers their own interpretation and symbolic representation of the island's beauty. By employing Henry Lefebvre's notion of "lived space" to the characters in *Gift in Green*, one can discern that a solitary space can transform into distinct entities, each possessing unique importance for its occupants.

Dinakaran embodies a profound adherence to virtue within the cultural fabric of Aathi. He assumes the role of an unwavering defender of Aathi's principles and an ardent proponent of the island's conservation. Dinakaran perceives Aathi as more than a mundane geographical feature; it assumes the fundamental nature of his being. The land instils vitality into his day-to-day activities, and he holds it in high regard as a benevolent mother and an unwavering saviour. The dialogue between Kumaran and Prakashan, who aspires to emulate him, reveals that "To betray Aathi-betraying your own mother could not be worse" (Joseph,2011) exemplifies this profound bond with Aathi and serves as a moving testament to the island's lasting impact. Dinakaran's mental vitality exhibited a parallel decline to that of Aathi, akin to a poignant reflection in a placid pond. Finally, as a sacrificial offering for the preservation of Aathi, he sacrificed his life; this deed evoked faint reverberations within his own sacred space. Dinakaran became entangled in a labyrinth of unease, precipitated by the tragic destiny of Aathi, and the anguish in his heart knew no limits. During periods of profound despondency, he sought comfort through conversations with Noor Muhammed, the narrator: "You encouraged and strengthened us with the story of the water covenant in the wilderness. But what have we made of it? Our sacred lake of pure water, where is it now" (Joseph,2011), conveying the gravity of his fundamental concerns. This space is intrinsically linked to Dinakaran's life and sustenance, functioning as the very essence of his being.

By shifting our analytical perspective to another character in the novel, Markose, we find that he perceives that specific place as possessing the maternal qualities of a mother. Through his perspective, Aathi serves as a means of communication with this maternal entity, manifesting itself in the dynamic fabric of nature. The island undergoes a dual transformation, serving as a protector for Markose and a source of inspiration for his poetic expressions. Markose perceives the stream's currents and wind patterns as a nurturing lullaby and a gentle embrace from his maternal figure, respectively, which provide solace to his spirit. Space assumes the role of a devoted guardian and a tender custodian of Markose's emotions, transforming Aathi's wilderness into his sanctuary. Within this poetically charged environment, the island surpasses its corporeal form and assumes the role of a refuge where Markose can liberate and unburden his emotions. As Markose reflected, memories of his mother awoke within him. His mother had continued to summon him back as he traversed distant lands on paths scorching enough to cause blisters on his feet, with the wind wafting past his ears, "Enough, Marko! Now come back home..." (Joseph, 2011).

The island assumes the role of a benevolent healer in the moving story of Kayal Geethanjali's daughter, which has a profound therapeutic effect on her fragile spirit. As recommended by her Guru, Geethanjali initiated this sanctuary with the intention of aiding her daughter's recuperation from the psychological and physical traumas that had previously tormented her. Within this serene sanctuary, Aathi manifested herself as a compassionate healer, providing solace to Kayal's troubled spirit through the delicate caresses of her zephyrs, the refreshing embrace of her meandering streams, and the magnificent display of her verdant, lush landscapes. Kayal discovered her way back to wellness by means of Aathi's mystic enchantment; she emerged triumphant from the abysses of her traumatic past and embraced life with gusto. Kayal's spirit was reignited in Aathi's healing embrace, and she experienced unbridled delight in playing in the rain. This act of transcendence permeated the entire island, even though Aathi's moving lamentations served as an evocative memorial to the deprivation of her prosperity. As Geethanjali states "With the cool fingers of water, Aathi touched her mind... I heard the water talking to her... it was Aathi that restored Kayal to me. I now know that water is a synonym for peace. Peace is healing and healing peace" (Joseph, 2011).

In the intricate tapestry of this island's influence, the characters like Shailaja, and Noor Muhammed and Kunjimathu each forged their unique emotional connection. This captivating location filled Shailaja with unmitigated pride; it was a prized boon in which she revelled. As she traverses this revered territory, an immense sense of appreciation fills her heart, and she sincerely believes that she is fortuitously entwined with its embrace. However, Noor Muhammed was profoundly enthralled by the picturesque beauty of the island, which inspired him to pursue his storytelling desire. His remarkable capacity to perceive profound meaning and aesthetic appeal in even the most minute creatures inhabiting the island fostered feelings of adoration and affection within his being. The individual's creative inspiration was ignited by the island's grandeur, which fostered within him a profound affinity for the enchanting environment that surrounded him.

As for Kunjimathu, the island is not merely a sanctuary; it is her final refuge. She sought solace in the hospitable embrace of Aathi, her island sanctuary after Kumaran betrayed her. Aathi transforms into her sanctuary, confidante, guardian, and most cherished companion. She is empowered to traverse the solitary path of her life as each breath she inhales in this sacred space bestows upon her an infinite supply of vitality. The island assumes the role of a compassionate guardian, a reliable confidant, and a sanctuary for her, providing her with a place to relieve her burdens and derive strength from its serene ambience.

Kumaran, in sharp juxtaposition to the aforementioned characters, regards Aathi as a mere commodity—an instrument to be utilised in his ceaseless quest for financial gain. He considers the island to be a mere puppet, manipulating its strings for his own egocentric benefit. Kumaran orchestrates a metamorphosis for Aathi, devoid of authentic affection, by removing her natural attire and adorning her with an unsuitable and foreign garment. Despite having been born and brought up in that particular region, he does not possess any intrinsic ties to Aathi. Kumaran views Aathi as a mere commodity, a tool utilised to advance his unrelenting quest for prosperity. Kumaran's perspective is significantly altered upon attaining millionaire status: it is filtered through the lens of monetary worth. Furthermore, the land of Aathi, the

very soil from which he emerged, is evaluated according to its profit potential, as he ruthlessly assesses each facet in his unrelenting quest for monetary advantage. In an interview, he explicitly declares, "I am an entrepreneur. I see only entrepreneurial prospects everywhere and everything" (Joseph, 2011). He was averse to the tranquillity that Aathi provided.

Water life? Kumaran despised water. The thing had no form or shape. In a pot, it resembles a pot. Trapped in a pond, it tamely takes on the shape of the pond. What is this water you're talking about? Does it have any identity? Will it ever be something in itself? The thought of it makes me sick. (Joseph, 2011)

In each of these situations, we encounter a singular space—Aathi—but the experience varies from individual to individual. According to Markose, "In truth, they were not identical, but only as identical as human faces were: all faces, but each distinct from every other. Or, like the days: all alike, but each day unique and different from the rest. Or, like the sun: the same forever, but different each day from the sun of another day" (Joseph, 2011).

6. Comparative elements found in Pallikaranai and Aathi

Wetlands are ecological settings distinguished by the perpetual or seasonal saturation of soil with water. They manifest in diverse configurations, including bogs, fens, marshes, swamps, moist meadows, and wetland woodlands. These ecosystems are of great ecological importance because of their critical functions in carbon sequestration over extended periods, regulation of water cycles, and potential to alleviate the impacts of climate change. By transferring, settling, filtering, and recharging the mingled elements of soil and water, wetlands perform rituals of purification that William Neiring metaphorically compares to "the kidneys of the landscape" (Howarth, 1999). As the globe transforms into concrete jungles, these wetlands are being utilised to dispose of municipal waste and facilitate the development process. As stated by Umberto Eco (1998), reading fiction is tantamount to engaging in a game that enables one to comprehend the vastness of events that have transpired, are transpiring, or will transpire in the world. In this context, it is possible to draw parallels and establish connections between the fictional realm of Aathi and the tangible urban reality of Pallikaranai.

Situated along the Coromandel Coast, specifically 20 kilometres to the south of the city centre, Pallikaranai Wetland is a freshwater wetland in the Indian city of Chennai. It encompasses a land area of 50 square kilometres and is bounded by the IT Corridor (Rajiv Gandhi Salai, previously referred to as Old Mahabalipuram Road,) and numerous residential areas, including Perungudi, Siruseri, Pallikaranai, Madipakkam, Velachery, and Taramani. The Pallikaranai Marshland stands out as a crucial wetland in India, boasting a natural and distinctive hydrology. It serves as a habitat for a myriad of plant and animal species. However, this invaluable ecosystem faces numerous threats primarily stemming from the rapidly evolving urban landscape in Chennai. The perilous situation is exacerbated by a lack of awareness regarding the ecological significance of natural wetlands. Historically, a substantial part of south Chennai comprised the floodplain encompassing the Pallikaranai Marsh, smaller satellite wetlands, extensive pasture lands, and patches of dry forests (Care Earth Trust, 2014). By acting as a natural carbon sink and facilitating the absorption of rainfall, this wetland effectively mitigated the occurrence of floods. The initial human intervention in this system was marked by the construction of the Buckingham Canal. Furthermore, the existence of a freshwater aquifer running parallel to the coast significantly contributed to the city's southward expansion. A fundamental factor that catalysed degradation was the misclassification of the marsh as pasture land, coupled with the absence of a State Land Use Policy. Comparable to the fictitious Aathi in *Gift in Green* by Sarah Joseph, Pallikaranai is perilously close to extinction.

An initial similarity that can be discerned between Pallikaranai and the fictitious realm of Aathi is the encroachment that has occurred upon both of these territories. Aathi was encroached upon and disposed of in a landfill by Kumaran and his followers for their own material benefit; "Over the waterbody choked to death by the earth dumped on it, the skeletons of diverse mansions had risen" (Joseph, 2011). In contrast, IT sectors and certain governmental organisations encroached upon Pallikaranai. According to the Survey of India topographic sheets (1972) and aerial photographs (Corona) from 1965, the marsh's original extent was approximately 5500 ha; this estimate has since been reduced to approximately 600 ha (Surya, 2016).

The second parallel pertains to the extensive destruction inflicted upon plant and animal life. Pallikaranai, which was once teeming with over 108 species of diverse flora and fauna, is now home to approximately 38 species. Based on data from the CPREEC, the area is inhabited by an assortment of vertebrate life, reptiles, (21 species), naturally occurring plants (61 species), fish (46 species), birds (106 species), butterflies (7 species), and exotic floating vegetation (water lettuce and water hyacinth), which are currently less widespread and highly localised (Surya, 2016). In Aathi, an analogous scene unfolded, wherein the land was encircled by an abundance of verdant species.

The crabs in the mangrove forest were green in colour. Crabs of that colour were not to be seen anywhere else in Aathi. Not only were the crabs, the frogs, the butterflies, the grasshoppers and snakes green in colour but even the wind that blew in that forest seemed green. For that reason, the forest was affectionately called the 'Greenforest'... One day when, in the light of the setting sun, the forest glittered like a green glass bangle lined on the inside with strands of gold. (Joseph, 2011)

We bore witness to the devastation of this forest. The water bodies likewise vanished: "One after the other, the water paths had dried up and disappeared, leaving behind only slushy pools and treacherous pits" (Joseph, 2011).

An additional analogy that may be established pertains to the disposal of waste materials and untreated effluent water. The Perungudi dump yard gathers refuse from the entirety of Chennai in the Pallikaranai marshland, while untreated sewage water from numerous factories also enters the marshland. Slum-generated wastes are discharged directly into the wetland, resulting in the contamination of water bodies. Sixty per cent of the approximately 3500 tons of waste generated in Chennai is deposited into Pallikaranai marsh (Surya, 2016). Likewise,

Kumaran deposited urban waste in Aathi, resulting in a transformation of the region into one that reeks of rotten eggs, as Sarah Joseph (2011) remarked “Aathi used to brim with the fragrance of freshness”. The presence of untreated effluent in both locations has significantly contributed to a decline in water quality.

Pallikaranai bears witness to a parallel storyline, in which several corporate entities stake claims on the land while frequently operating clandestinely to elude government surveillance, much like how Kumaran, unknowingly, facilitated the destructive fire that engulfed Aathi. The wetland's restoration in Pallikaranai is being addressed by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the government, in a manner analogous to the spirited demonstrations in *Gift in Green* for the revival of Aathi. During the early stages, the inhabitants of Pallikaranai become entangled in the corporate network, influenced by the allure of wealth and power. This parallels Kumaran's tragic manipulation of susceptible minds in Aathi's story, in which Prakashan and his companions capitulated to a malevolent melody.

7. Conclusion

The enduring example of swamps, which have consistently functioned as the archetypal embodiment of wilderness in the literary works of authors originating from various historical and cultural contexts, demonstrates the profound ability of literary texts to shape our geographical imagination. A comprehensive examination of the ideologies, socio-cultural milieu, linguistic motifs, and aesthetic depictions linked to these marshy terrains reveals a range of sentiments – from deep-seated alienation and detachment from the land to ardent and topophilic sentiments of attachment. This article explores the areas where urbanisation and townships have considerably altered formerly serene and paradisiacal environments. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights into the ways in which different individuals ascribe distinct meanings to a specific space. Furthermore, it highlights the significant intersection of spatiality theory in both fictional narratives and real-world situations, emphasizing the crucial importance of literature in contemporary times. By exploring the intricate relationship between physical environments and human experiences, spatiality theory unveils layers of meaning in narratives, echoing the intricate layers of life itself. In doing so, it invites us to perceive the world through a multifaceted lens, enriching our understanding of both fictional realms and the complexities of reality. Literature, which is frequently compared to nature itself being reflected in, offers an unfiltered depiction of the actualities that transpire in our physical environment. The analysis additionally demonstrates the transformation of rural areas from pristine to busy urban environments. The fictional Aathi in this narrative embodies a non-materialistic ethos, embracing a harmonious existence within nature and rejecting the exploitation of natural resources for personal gain. For a conservationist, adopting a wetland ethic entail delving into the intricate tapestry of the wetland's biodiversity and rich history. It is, in essence, an ethical stance grounded in profound knowledge of the wetland, transcending the pursuit of fleeting economic advantages or narrow-minded conservation strategies fixated solely on safeguarding individual species. Beyond imparting ecological insights, an ecocritical approach to the wetland ethic unveils the intricate ways in which societies shape their cultural and material connections with these vibrant, abundant, and enigmatic landscapes. By bringing to the forefront the discourse surrounding these marshlands, often shrouded in cultural and material spaces, it sheds light on the nuanced debates that remain partially concealed within these dynamic ecosystems.

These transformations consistently disrupt the fragile ecological balance of a location, reflecting the parallel shift illustrated in Sarah Joseph's imagined realm of Aathi and that of Pallikaranai. Therefore, it can be inferred that a singular spatial domain, with its intricate fabric, accommodates a multitude of interpretations for distinct individuals. In conclusion, it is evident that the realm of fiction accurately reflects the complexities of the tangible world. The research provides compelling evidence that literature is, at its essence, a profound reflection of the experiences encountered in the physical world and a profound depiction of life.

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