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| **Zacharia, Paul** |
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| Paul Zacharia, a short story writer, novelist, and essayist, introduced the notion of counter-modernity to Malayalam literature in the late 1960s. |
| Paul Zacharia, a short story writer, novelist, and essayist, introduced the notion of counter-modernity to Malayalam literature in the late 1960s. He rejected the self-definition of Western modernity and its Indian nationalist versions. Drawing upon the clarity of vernacular Biblical idioms and the intelligence of everyday rural life, Zacharia probed the fragile certainties of urban life, intellectual establishments, and religious orthodoxies. He acknowledged that “Jesus Christ, cinema, bars, friends, lovers, hens and dogs have given me stories.”  Zacharia was born in the village Urulikunnam, near Kottayam, and published his first story “Unni the Child” in 1964. *Zachariayude Kathakal*, the collection of his short stories written up to the year 2000, won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2006. Two of his novellas, *Praise the Lord* and *Enthondu Visesham Pilathose?*, have been translated into English. Two short story collections are also available in English: *Bhaskara Pattelar and Other Stories* and *Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories. Vidheyan (The Servile)*,a film that won best Malayalam film in 1993, was an adaptation of Zacharia’sstory“Bhaskara Pattelarum Ente Jeevithavum.” Zacharia has been active in print media and publishing; he was one of the founders of the Asianet television network.  For Zacharia, God is not dead. He is the virtual existence of contingency that sustains and disrupts all structures. God’s ridiculous apparitions—as a peeping Tom where ladies bathe, as an Egyptian belly dancer, or the mew of a cat—redeem the stories from the sense of ending and place them across the punch-lines of a laughter that erects strict equality between God and other beings.  What News, Pilate? takes the form of an extended correspondence between Pontius Pilate and Titus Antonius. Ruth, Pilate’s secretary during a letter-writing session, plays a game of pretence with old Pilate, exposing her pretty leg to him. As punishment, her sandals pinch her feet on her way to witness the resurrection of Christ. Her feet are redeemed only by the touch of Christ. Zacharia’s women characters are force fields for the secure and graceful descent of God; they are prismatic presences through which all speech has to pass to engender the interiorities of both men and women.  As a public intellectual, Zacharia challenged right wing Hindu nationalists, the business empires of the Church, the spiritualist industry, and political terror. He writes on contemporary issues for newspapers and periodicals in both English and Malayalam. He has travelled widely within India as well as to forty-three countries abroad, publishing travelogues on East Africa, the Lake District, England, Saudi Arabia, and China. His travelogues are imaginative ethnographies of expatriate Malayalees from all over the world. |
| Further reading:  (Zacharia, 1992)  (Zacharia, Reflections of a Hen in Her Last Hour and Other Stories)  (Zacharia, Praise the Lord and What News, Pilate?: Two Novellas , 2002) |