'UNNAMEABLE DISCONTENT'
Introduction: *Problematising Reform*

In the previous chapter, it was pointed out that by the 1930's the issue of re-forming women into 'Women' was being actively discussed in Keralam. Much of this discussion was directed against obstructive tradition, but by now the complexity of the discussion was certainly of a higher order. For instance, now, the question whether the domain of modern domesticity was really the space that offered greater mobility and power to women was increasingly raised. This implies that a process of questioning was initiated about the claims of what emerged as the 'modern' to have provided adequate conditions for women's self-realisation, within its own terms. The possibility of engagement with modern ideals of Womanhood or Manhood, domesticity, motherhood, Individuality, public life etc. seems to have grown stronger; one finds not only simple receptiveness\(^1\) to modern ideals of gender circulating in and through reformisms but also acceptance characterised by efforts to probe, reorganise and reimagine them.

The writings of Lalitambika Antharjanam (1909 - 1988) is relevant in this sense. In her work written over a period stretching from the 1930's to the 1980's we find a complex and comprehensive engagement with modern ideals of Individuality and gender. Born in a

\(^1\) To what extent and how this receptiveness may be characterised as 'simple' may be questioned. For, even when modern ideals of Womanhood, domesticity, motherhood etc. were more or less unproblematically accepted, that acceptance also involved a long engagement with what was perceived as 'tradition'. This aspect has been briefly dealt with in the first two chapters of the present work.
relatively less conservative *Illam*, she was educated at home, and came into contact with the politico-cultural milieu of early twentieth century Keralam at a relatively early age. An active supporter of Nambutiri reformism, she attended the Nair Conference at Mavelikka without the Antharjanam's cloak and the cadjan-umbrella in 1932; in 1934 her play *Vidhavavivaham* (Widow - Remarriage) was performed at Kulakkada; by the end of the thirties, she was known for her shortstories among which many were sharp critiques of traditional life. However, Nambutiri reformism was certainly not the horizon of Antharjanam's writings.

Like many of her female contemporaries, Antharjanam too expressed a certain

2. Antharjanam has spoken about the liberal education and modern ways of life in her childhood home. She had tutors for all subjects; she grew up wearing a blouse and skirt, a truly rare thing among Malayala Brahmins. The house was always full of poets and artists, and she recalls the debates between her father's brothers, who were disciples of Kerala Varma and Rajaraja Varma (whose differences regarding language and literature are well-known), and between one uncle who favoured the Congress and another who was loyal to the King. She mentions that all the Malayalam magazines, newspapers and books of those times reached her home, and that there was a separate reading-room. Quoted in K. Surendran, 'Antharjanathinte Kathalokam' in Antharjanam: *Oru Padhanam* (Antharjanam: A Study), Ramapuram: Antharjanam Shastyabdaoorthy Celebration Committee, 1969, pp.73-74.


4. ibid., p.15.

5. As mentioned in Chapter Two there are shortstories like *Itu Ashasymano*? (1935) and *Prasadam* (1939) which severely criticise the reform movement and the ideals of gender it propagated. The same period saw many of her strikingly critical reconstructions of Nambutiri life in *Illams* – for instance *Moodupadathil* (1939), *Kuttasammatam* (1940) etc.
unease with modern domesticity—even while admitting that she was within more-or-less an ideal domestic setting. A friend remembers her words to him:

"Some unnameable discontent, terrible desire, is constantly gnawing my heart. A feeling that god had entrusted me with some noble responsibility, that I had not yet fulfilled even the smallest part of it." 6

Commenting favourably on Antharjananam's abilities as a writer, he immediately observes: "But still, Lalitambika believes that a woman's creative skill lies in her fashioning of her children's desires and imagination." 7 Indeed, Antharjananam has frequently described her life's struggle as one to attain balance between domestic and public existences, between motherhood and career as a creative writer. 8 About herself, she wrote:

"She stubbornly strived to engage in domestic, social and literary duties all at the same time. All these were (equally vital) components of her existence. She could not refuse any of them." 9


7. ibid., pp.88-89.


9. 'Kathayalla, Oru'Kathu' (Not a Story, a Letter), ibid., pp.10-11.
Such effort, she claims, destroyed her health: "Before the prime of youth was over, before turning forty-five, to become useless..." From her autobiographical writings it is clear that the 'responsibility' she identified in grandiose terms as 'god-entrusted' and 'noble' was linked to a perception of 'social responsibility' to be fulfilled through the historically-contingent institution of modern literature, which, by this time, was already drawing its subjects. Thus drawn towards a different subject-position, yet not moving out of her chosen world of modern domesticity, she cannot but seek a re-evaluation and re-visioning of both. Her engagement with contemporarily-circulating ideals of Womanhood, Individuality and domesticity may be read as the effort to make nameable, what seemed 'unnameable'.

Antharjanam's work differs from reformist propaganda literature in this respect. It is a meditation upon the strengths and weaknesses of modern ideals of gender; it works upon them so as to derive new power-equations, reimagine them so as to remedy their internal fissures and faults — and precisely through such activity, it strengthens them in the very process of questioning and re-evaluation.

10. ibid., p.10-11.

11. See, 'Kathakarriyude Marupadi', (A Woman Short-story Writer's Reply), Atmakathikku... op.cit., n.8, pp.54-55.

12. In 'Kathayalla...' (op.cit., n.8), she tries to find reasons for her apparently unreasonable attempts to balance domestic and public lives. She can, however, only fall back upon a rather sweeping theory about "Eastern Women" being more committed to the home and the family in comparison with their Western counterparts.
It may be finally mentioned that this reading of Antharjanam's writings does not explore its literary and aesthetic aspects. Nor is the effort to capture the social reality of the period as reflected in it. Of greater interest here is the possible ideal world that she hints at in her re-visioning of the order of gender which in fact, has little to do with 'social reality' in any narrow sense. One is attempting to place this body of work within the history of imagining gender and the Individual in modern Keralam, as an important historical event. That most of her writing falls under the domain of the 'literary' does not exclude it from such a reading. Here literature is treated neither as a form of communication somehow isolated from socio-cultural forces, nor as a reflection of 'social reality'; it is, more, space in which 'social reality' is negotiated and re-imagined. Participating in contemporary debates through short stories was characteristic of Antharjanam's style as author. But even otherwise one cannot but notice the remarkable persistence of certain themes over quite a long period of time -- from the '30s to the end of the '70s -- in her writing. Antharjanam's writing finds space in the present work as a noteworthy instance of reimagining gender and en-gendering, marking a time in which a complex and qualified receptiveness to modern

13 For instance, *Iru Ashasyamano?* (Is this Desirable?) (1935) was a reply to a derogatory article published in the *Yogakshemam* which claimed that it was men who wrote articles in the publication under female pseudonyms and not women themselves. See, Preface, *Irupatu Varshathinu Sesham* (After Twenty Years), Kottayam: SPSS, 1962. *Realism*, in the same volume, was a comment on new trends in Malayalam literature. Another piece was directed against T.K. Velu Pillai's proposed amendment to the existant Nair Bill which apparently permitted polygamy. It was titled *Bhedagaty Kondulla Bhedagaty* (Amendment with an Amendment), and appeared in the late '20s in the Women's Magazine *Shreemait*. Mentioned in *Atmakathaikk...*, op.cit., n.8, p.92.
gender-ideals became possible.

1. *Illusions*

The critique of the philosophy of the Individual is a perennial theme in Antharjanam's work. More specifically, it is the rational, competitive, self-sufficient, productive Individual in the exclusive sense, that is critiqued here. In these texts such Individuals pursue chosen life-projects, focusing mainly upon narrow personal trajectories, and in the process, refuse or ignore their social bonds. Their inward-looking seems to sever them from ties with others. In other words, they are negligent of what is made to figure as a more important responsibility -- the forging of harmonious, non-violent, tolerant, equitable social relationships. Two among several such characters, the separatist-feminist Bhanumaty Amma of *Udayathinu Nere* and the ascetic-devotee of *Deviyum Aradhakanum* may be mentioned here. These figures are similar in that they strive towards chosen goals through imposing iron discipline upon themselves. The former sets up a commune (from which she hopes to initiate resistance to male domination) in which inhabitants must conform to very strict rules of conduct; the latter, seeking to know Ultimate Truth, undergoes severe


austerities and cuts himself off completely from the world outside the temple. This is true even when the personal pursuit is one dedicated to the service of others --as in *Avivahita*.

Here the lady doctor chooses to implicate herself in only such relationships that would not impair her singularity, that would allow for certain well-defined distance with others, devotedly pursuing her profession. In all these texts, Individuals are ultimately made to see their efforts as fruitless labour and through such narration, a critique of such an ideal of the Individual is articulated.

Three important aspects may be identified in this critique. The most commonly-stressed aspect is the demonstration of the impossibility of the pursuits so steadfastly adhered to by such Individual-characters. It is as though one *must*, one *will*, get entangled in social bonds, at one point or another. In these texts, the moment in which helplessness before such enmeshing is revealed exposes the weakness of the self-sufficient, rational, calculating Individual.

In *Udayathimu Nere*, Bhanumaty Amma's harsh self-disciplining breaks down before bodily desire; in *Deviyum*... the ascetic realises the futility of his exertions upon noticing the sameness of the face of the idol, the object of his unflinching adoration and that


17. These texts however do not have a tragic quality. The fate that befalls these characters prompts rethinking about their sense of self-fulfilment. The Individual does not hold firm against the flow of events, she/he subjects herself/himself to reevaluation.
of the woman whom he had so staunchly resisted.  

A second aspect is related to the role of social ties in giving the Individual a sense of independence and mobility. It reveals that what underlies such feeling is the strength and support given by social relations. Social and familial relations surrounding the Individual are what gives her/him the sense of being free, independent, or mobile, though this might not be immediately apparent: in Sahityakaran, for instance, the ambitious young writer who neglects his filial duties, does not notice that the support of familial ties was that which made his very dreaming possible. Only at the death of his mother does he realise this, and the sense of freedom disappears, and his commitment is directed towards his family, towards immediate social relationships.

Thirdly, such Individuality is seen to trap the person in an illusion of self-fulfilment and power. When this illusion fades, the person is left emptied of emotional resources to fall back upon. This appears in several of Antharjanam's texts, notably in Vishwaraopam and Varam, in which the ideal of the Domestic Woman as companion and guide of Man

18. Deivyum Aradhakanum, op.cit.,n.15, p.21. "He had run away from all that was true, calling it false. But life had to engulf him, for its own completeness”.


and as the disciplinarian engaged in fashioning her children's. In *Vishwaroopam* the 'fall' of a sparkling, successful Woman -- Madame Talat -- is narrated. Wife of a successful diplomat, close confidant of her husband, competent manager of his 'social contacts', she neglects to build relationships of caring and love, preferring to send her children off to boarding-schools. Only after her husband's death does she realise the ephemerality of her power, and sees that her neglect of immediate familial ties had left her all alone. In *Varam*,\(^\text{22}\) the protagonist is the efficient mother who devotes all her energies to 'develop' her children into perfect Individuals -- whose efforts backfire. Here too, the neglect of the effort to forge close relationships leaves the protagonist lonely and in pain. These figures provide sharp contrast with other heroines of Antharjanam's texts, especially women rooted in a more old-worldly socio-cultural milieu. The heroines of *Vyakulasanketam*\(^\text{23}\) or *Saphalyam*\(^\text{24}\) are aged mothers alienated from the modern ways of their highly-Individualistic children, who draw back into solitary lives and do experience pain, but do not collapse into anger or despair. If such disillusionment does not lead to pathetic withdrawal as in *Vishwaroopam* and *Varam*, it leads to other sorts of personal disaster. In *Udayathiru Nere*\(^\text{25}\) the pathetic plight of

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22. *ibid.*, above.


Radha, the poetess, once an admirer of Bhanumaty Amma, is equally significant. She rushes into burdening domesticity at the collapse of her ideal, completely losing mobility and ability of self-expression.

This critique may be read as a reaction to the confinement that seems the lot of the 'hard' Individual. In order to be free and to exercise power, the Individual is required to turn inwards and away from the web of his/her social ties. Antharjanam's writings stay well within Individualism in their focus on the Individual, so the inward-orientation is reinterpreted rather than rejected outright. In Manushyaputri,26 the Antharjanam who is the very paragon of charity is asked why she undertook such severe fasts. She replies that they were undertaken in order to know the the plight of those who did not have food. Subjecting oneself to rigours is reinterpreted as a means of knowing others, as the means of strengthening one-self through knowing and sharing the experience of others. This could also be read as a reaction to the tendency of familiar models of the order of gender to regard all spaces, irrespective of the domain in which they fall, as spaces in which the full-blooded Individual may be rooted. In the above-mentioned texts, characters who are highly-Individualistic are most often found to show preference for such spaces. Or they transform the particular space they occupy into a highly Individualising one. This is yet another sort of confinement which these characters take upon themselves as freedom. Thus in

Sahityakaran, the protagonist initially favours the institution of modern writing to the neglect of the home where he cannot aspire towards personal ambitions; in Avivahita, the institution of medical service is favoured over marriage by the protagonist, and so on. But in Varam, it is the home which is turned into a highly Individualising space. This may also be read as a reaction to such exclusive drawing of the energies of individuals towards 'goals', 'ambitions' or 'ideals' set by certain institutions, which, however, can only promise but not guarantee self-fulfilment. The logic of this confinement endows events with such significance that they acquire the power to bring about changes in the very course of life of the protagonists. In Vishwaroopam, a chance event, the death of her husband, brings Madame Talat's satisfied existence tumbling down; in Avivahita the doctor's unexpected adoption of an orphaned infant triggers off a series of experiences that finally upsets her sense of fulfilment. Such unease with confinement is also evident in Antharjanam's autobiographical writings mentioned in the previous section. In her fiction, the attempt to resolve the unease goes beyond a critique to the espousal of a more 'moderate' version of the

27. op.cit., n.19.
28. op.cit., n.16.
29. op.cit., n.21.
30. op.cit., n.20.
31. op.cit., n.16.
Antharjanam's short-stories which reconstruct life in Illams, are often critical of tradition as the obstacle to Individualistic aspirations. Many of these figure female characters who display signs of being Individuals, such as in their use of strategies to resist tradition-- the heroine of Moodupadathil \(^33\) struggles against her existence as the co-wife of an old man; the widow of Kuttasammalilam \(^34\) speaks in defence of her sexual transgression; the Tatri of Pratikaradevata `explains', \(^35\) and the heroine of Jeevitavum Maranavum \(^36\) turns hysterical rather than get meekly reintegrated into the Illam as a young widow. It might be true that the victim-status of the Antharjanam is pronounced in these texts compared to their rebellion. But the critique of tradition as a social ordering that makes victims, and not Individuals, out of women, remains intact. However, the alternative to this oppressive tradition is hardly the full-blooded Individual. Indeed, in Pavitramotiram, \(^37\) the

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32. This seems similar to the Gandhian version of Individualism which too is distanced from full-blooded Individualism. See, Dr.T.K.Ahmed Nizar, `Toward the Transmodern : A Note on Gandhian Individualism', Vision Vol.7(1), January 1998, pp.18-28.


34. ibid.


oppressiveness of tradition and the inability of full-blooded Individualism to deliver its promise, are placed side by side. Instead, the 'moderate' version of the Individual, which places premium upon the Individual's ability to relate to others, to establish amicable, tolerant and equitable relations between human beings, is put forth. Such relations are distinct from relations of rational give-and-take between individuals in full-blooded Individualism. Within full-blooded Individualism the former sort of relations appear to be those of unequal exchange. In *Avivahita*, the lady-doctor takes care to avoid them, perceiving an unequal exchange: "She saw that in the joint venture with men, the profits and losses were so divided that all the profits went to one party and the losses to the other".38 The criticism of the Reformer-reformed relationship articulated in texts like *Iru Ashasyamano*39 and *Prateekshak†*40 is followed by this different conception of ideal social relations. These are characterised by a kind of 'pure Giving' in which change in the other is effected through subjecting oneself to rigours, through self-sacrifice as in *Mulappalinte Manam*41 in which 'Amminhi Amma' prevents sectarian strife by thrusting herself between

38. op.cit., n.16, p.87.
the quarreling groups; in *Sahityakaran* in which the Mother 'gives' herself, whose loss finally changes her son; or in *Manushyaputri* through boundless charity which is also selfless. There is no reforming impulse identified in such acts; they are projected as acts of 'pure Giving' which, however, elicit change in, response from, the other. There is no expectation regarding return on the giver's part, but the other's response *does* come, and so does pleasure. Giving is not sacrifice in a negative sense; it is seen to bring pleasure.

This also links up with the redefinition of Love as an 'internal force' that binds individuals together. The metaphor most commonly used to depict the quality of Love in these writings is that of Mother's milk--pure, nourishing, life-giving, pleasurable, internally-generated, natural, and most importantly, beyond the terms of instrumental exchange. The metaphor used to conjure it up as a force is that of an unrestrictable flow or flood, that is ever-spreading, uninhibited --not regulated. Here there is an oblique critique of the all-too-familiar suggestion that Love may be deployed as an instrument for the specific purpose of fashioning Individuals, within a moral regulation and the narrow limits of an institution. Instead, Love figures here as a force that multiplies human relations based upon 'pure Giving' infinitely, and not confinable within any one institution or moral code. In *Mulappalinte Manam*, 'Amminhi Amma's Love exceeds all sectarian consideration, and

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42. op. cit., n.19.

spreads infinitely among all around her. Concluding her story the poet's beloved says:

"That is why I say: I am quite in favour of family-planning. But breast-milk must not dry up. Breast-milk that is Amrtam (the Nectar of Immorality). Breast-milk that is life-giving...Let it flow forth from our women's breasts on to the land, the nation, the entire Universe...." 44

The image of a flood of breast-milk erasing all strife will recur again in *Agnisakshi*. 45 In *Maralakal* the tendency to reach out to others is compared to the spider's instinct to weave cobwebs: irrepressible, working without any invitation. Love figures as the correlate to this in *Maralakal*: when Lilly Thomas is denied the opportunity to love, she takes the veil, describing her act as a smothering of oneself in cobwebs oneself, a suicidal feeding upon one's own blood. 47

This chain of reinterpretations adds up to a re-visioning of modern society itself: the advancing of a 'moderate' version of the Individual; social ties as ideally based upon 'pure Giving'; the projection of Love as the force that helps such bonds proliferate. Tradition is not treated *en masse* as the enemy of modernity here; indeed, some parts of tradition are seen to be more sensitive to 'moderate' Individual. The common strategy of seeking

44. From *Agnipushpangal*, Kottayam : SPSS, 1960, p.102.
elements of 'modern' within tradition was mentioned in previous chapters; here, other elements, equally perceived as such, which, however, go against the full-blooded Individual, are identified within tradition. The deployment of such strategy probably marks this as a political move—it seeks allies against an enemy/rival. And crucially, it sets the stage for a re-presentation of the order of gender itself from which new power-equations may be derived. In that sense too, this is a political move.

II. *Woman the Giver*

Perhaps what is most interesting about this re-vision of ideal society (which draws upon a 'moderate' Individualism and conceives social relations as ideally based upon a sort of unconditional 'Giving' to the other by each) is that it serves as a base for a new projection of the order of gender implying new power-equations between the sexes. It may be remembered that the more familiar version of the order of gender (discussed in Chapter One) conceived of the Man-Woman relationship as a complementary sexual exchange. However, as was mentioned in Chapter Two, such complementarity seemed actually possible only in an indefinite future, and requiring a non-reciprocal relation of power between Reformer-Man and the objects of reform. The revised order of gender in Antharjanam's writings rejects instrumental exchange as constituting the basic nature of relations between the sexes. Instead, these relations are seen to be based upon unconditional
'Giving' by Woman unto Man (indeed, it is rather difficult to find a projection of the reverse relationship in these texts, i.e., of unconditional 'Giving' by Man unto Woman. Perhaps this is all the more the reason to identify in these writings the articulation of a sexual politics). This is well-expressed in several of Antharjanam's texts in which the mother-child relationship is made to stand in the place of the Man-Woman relationship, for instance, in *Pancharayumma*, *Nakshatram*, *Kulabharadevatayude Tirumumbil* and *Ormayude Appurathu*. Coupled with the projection of Woman as Giver is the assertion of sexual difference and the uniqueness of Woman. Through this double move, the project of reforming women by Men is made to appear superfluous.

Perhaps this point can be made clearer by reading three texts-- *Pancharayumma, Itu Ashasyamana* and *Realism*-- together. While the first of these is a meditation on the Man-Woman relationship, the other two have a revelatory turn in which the folly of Reformism and the falseness of Man's sense of control over Woman, and a certain 'true nature' of Woman, and the Man-Woman relationship, seem revealed in the end. In

49. ibid., above.
51. op.cit., n.48.
52. *From Agnipushpangal, op.cit., n.44.*
Pancharayumma, the male infant's efforts to raise himself up on his own is made to evoke the image of a life-force pushing its way ahead in a trajectory of Progress which appears risky and ever-changing:

"Experiment, Experiment. Life's progress is through unceasing experimentation. No failure is failure there. No victory complete. From one point on to another. And from there, to yet another. Human life is but a chain of such movements... He first laughed in the ecstasy of success. But then, bawled aloud, in the fear of failure." 54

His activity takes place under the loving eye of his Mother, and this is what marks her:

"That beloved form, the source of all solace, who prides in his activities, who is considerate of his failings, in whom each movement of his evoked a smile." 55

However, in Itu Ashasyamano? and Realism, the scene seems the reverse, initially. Here the male characters are fully immersed in Man's world--that of reformist activity in Itu Ashasyamano? and the literary institution in Realism--and further, they are completely convinced of the superiority of these worlds and confident of their power over women. But the wives, in both these texts, strongly share the qualities of the Mother of Pancharayumma: both are 'sources of solace', who pride in the activity of their husbands, who have an

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53. ibid., above.

54. From Kilivattiloode, op.cit., n.48, p.15.
overwhelming concern for them, and are considerate of their failings. But while the male infant of Pancharayumma takes to its Mother as its chief source of solace and pleasure naturally and unhesitatingly, the male characters of Itu Ashasyamano? and Realism have to be made to overcome their arrogance to recognise this in their wives. The plots of these latter texts are constructed to this 'end' -- 'end' in the sense of the ending of the text, and in the sense of being a goal, an aim. In Itu Ashasyamano? the wife proves herself to be his equal in intellectual combat, yet prepares to renounce victory, announcing that she was asserting the dignity of Antharjanams and not competing with him. In Realism the wife shakes her husband awake into the realisation that his fear was unreal, a result of his mistaken idea that she was something that could be exchanged between men, a passive object of male desire, either as Chaste Wife or Prostitute. In both texts, Woman asserts her uniqueness and non-dependence upon Man. Both texts end in Man's recognition of this difference, which prompts his willing submission to her, and a scene of harmony is conjured up in the 'end'. Pancharayumma too ends in a scene of blissful communion: "Clinging on to that bosom filled with Amrtam, he could remember only one thing: life is a river of milk. And he, but a sugary kiss that melts in it."\textsuperscript{56} It is the reforming imperative (in Itu Ashasyamano?) or a false sense of possession on the part of Man (in Realism) that stands in
\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{55.} ibid., above.
\textsuperscript{56.} ibid., p.16.
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the way of such blissful communion. For this to be possible, Woman must reveal her difference, her non-dependence upon Man, so that she may establish herself beyond Man's control as Re-former or Possessor.

The difference between the above projection of the order of gender and that model in which it is constituted by complementary sexual exchange is obvious in the critique of the Domestic Woman to be found in these writings. In *Vishwaroopam* and *Varam* the Women-protagonists' worlds are completely dependent upon those of their husbands or sons. The power enjoyed by the efficient wife or the disciplining mother gets eclipsed once the husband dies or the sons turn rebellious. In comparison, the aged mothers of texts like *Vyakulasanketam* and others who are 'Givers' (in the sense specified before) do not experience such terrible fall when neglected or rejected by their sons, even when experiencing disappointment and pain. While in the first case, Women's worlds are dependent upon Men's, it is not so in the second. These mothers withdraw from the alienating modern worlds of their sons into niches of their own without anger or malice against them. Women, being Givers, are not seen to enter into instrumentalist exchange with Man; indeed, it is no coincidence, that Antharjanam uses the metaphor of breast-milk for the

57. From *Vishwaroopam*, op.cit., n.49.
capacity to reach out and build love-relations. For, giving the breast is something that resists instrumentalist exchange under ideal conditions. In texts like *Itu Ashasyamano*, *Realism, Pancharayumma* and others, considerable stress is placed upon male response to ‘Giving’, but there is absolutely no calculation regarding what should come in return-- male response gets translated at the personal level to a simple recognition of Woman's difference, her role as Giver. Nothing more seems expected.

Perhaps what is more interesting here is the grounding of Woman's difference which situates her beyond the project of Reform. In sharp contrast to the familiar proposals regarding the actualisation of Womanhood, here, education, training, acquiring of skills etc. have nothing to do with being Woman-as-Giver. The interrogation of Domestic Woman seems to pay off-- what is marginalised in the construction of Domestic Woman is given new significance. Thus the Body-- rather, the bodily processes seem to be more important.

60. See, for instance, the image of the unceasing flow of breast-milk conjured up in *Mulappalinte Manam*. From *Agnipushpangal*, op.cit., n.44. Also in *Agnisakshi* (1976), Thrissur : Current Books, 1990, p.151.

61. Indeed, the specificity of Antharjanam’s reworking of Womanliness and Motherhood could well be illustrated by comparing it with the poetry of Balamani Amma, her contemporary, whose work has also focused upon the experience of Motherhood. The critic Tayattu Sankaran has observed that Balamani Amma’s conception of the child differs significantly from earlier notions of the child held in Malayalee society in that while the latter celebrate the child as a source of joy, the former conceives it as the nucleus of the future-human being entrusted to the Mother. (Tayattu Sankaran, ‘Bharateeyata’ from *Balamani Amma : Shashtypoorthy Smaranika*, Kozhikode : Balamani Amma Shashtypoorthy Celebrations Committee, 1969, pp.65-66). Indeed, many of Balamani Amma’s poems are reflections provoked in such an experience of Motherhood (See, for instance, ‘Ammayum Makanum’, ‘Matruchunbanam’, ‘Pichchaveppu’, ‘Mazhavellathil’ etc. from *Soponam*, Kozhikode : Mathrubhumi, 1985); in these, domestic duties and the husband are very much a presence. (See ‘Prabhathathil’, (..continued))
than education or training in domestic management in becoming Woman in this projection.

Gestation, for instance, gets reinterpreted as a process of 'Giving':

"She could still remember the first movements which tickled her very soul. Those priceless days, hope-filled months of holding dearer than one's own soul, something hidden from sight, known only by touch; giving blood from one's own blood; soul from one's own soul; desires from one's own desires. That load was no load. That fatigue, no fatigue. And then, the great pain.....Only if one goes as far as the gates of death may one receive the new life." 62

This, however, is not the same as the feminist celebration of "Writing the Body" 63 -- it is not the plurality or irreducibility of the Body that is being evoked here. Rather it is the Mother's body that is celebrated, re-evaluated, reconstructed as the source of Woman's originality. Giving birth becomes a moment in which the most terrible pain is transformed into great joy and tremendous strength (Vayalvakkil), 64 a process with powers to effect mental transformation, changing anger and violence into love and willingness to 'Give' (Kochunkatil Oru Ila) 65; giving birth inspires 'Giving' (Mulappalinte Manam) 66 and

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'Adukkalay' etc., ibid.). In contrast, Antharjanam's reflections upon Motherhood focus not so much upon 'bringing up' as on the experience of pleasure in the relation itself, in fact, seemingly more indebted to the conception of the child which Tayattu refers to as the earlier one.

62. In Kulabharadovayude Tirumumbil from Kilivathiloode, op.cit., n.48, p.16.


64. From Kilivathiloode, op.cit., n.48.

vice-versa (Avivahita)\(^{67}\); it becomes a means of recreating oneself, freeing oneself of the failings or lacks of this life (Karuththavavinte Narum Chandrika)\(^{68}\). Motherhood becomes a basis upon which the collectivity of Woman may be imagined. In Snehayachaki\(^{69}\) it is identified as strong enough a basis upon which communication becomes possible between the coarse, uncouth, old beggar-woman and the young wife of a rich man; so also in Churanna Mula\(^{70}\) in which the Kurathi Kali's maternity strengthens the bonds between her and her childless mistress. Reevaluation of maternal bodily processes sometimes happens indirectly, as in Antharjanam's description of the process of creative writing in the Preface to Agnisakshi\(^{71}\) in which she makes it resemble the maternal-bodily processes of gestation and childbirth on the one hand, and the process of bodily transformation of blood into breast-milk on the other, rather than view it as a cerebral process. At work here is a grounding of Womanhood that appears less vulnerable to construction and conformation to norms, based on something that seems 'natural', not 'cultural'. What happens is a cultural reinscription of

\(^{66}\) (..continued)

66. From Agnipushpangal, op.cit., n.44.


68. From Kanneerinte Punchiri, Kottayam : SPSS, 1959.

69. From Irupatu Varshathinu Shesham, op.cit., n.39.

70. From Kanneerinte Punchiri, op.cit., n.68.

71. op.cit., n.60.
bodily processes, a reinterpretation that wears the appearance of a dis-cover'y.\textsuperscript{72}

The claim that this writing has strong feminist strains in it could be relevant in this sense -- in that it contains a political interpretation on behalf of Woman. The scene of harmony between Man and Woman is always established in there writings through Man's acceptance and approval of Woman's difference from him (and thereby through the abandonment of Reforming emphasising the necessity of unequal relations). This is far from the extension of the sexual exchange into the public domain, as was proposed in the previous chapter. As elaborated in \textit{Mulappalinte Manam},\textsuperscript{73} here, Woman's role in the public domain stems from her Motherhood-as-Giving, and not from her attributed capacity to discipline. In this sense this projection of the order of gender remains unique as an oppositional reworking of the order of gender which draws upon what was marginalised in earlier versions. This does not destroy the scheme in itself, but through questioning it, extends its life.

\textsuperscript{72} This makes it possible, in a sense, to characterise these meditations as phenomenological, since they eschew rational analysis, seeking to 'bring to light' bodily experience.

\textsuperscript{73} From \textit{Agnipushpangal}, op.cit., n.44.
III. *Paradox of Self-Fulfilment*

Perhaps *Agnisakshi*, Antharjanam's only novel, exhibits in equal measure the strengths and the limitations of her engagement with the ideas of Individuality and gender. Its strength is best evidenced by the fact that her re-vision does work as an effective instrument for reinterpreting the past of 'Malayalee Women' in the twentieth century. In *Agnisakshi*, Antharjanam gives an account of the historical experience of upper-caste Malayalee women of the twentieth century, seeking to link women of different generations through bonds of understanding, reworking of their past made into History, re-presented to them. Needless to say, such a History reaffirms the group, 'Malayalee Women'. Antharjanam herself describes this work as a sort of 'Her-story':

"(I will be satisfied) .....if this serves to help women of the younger generation to understand their mothers and grandmothers; (if it will help) .....members of the older generation to conduct a self-examination; and others, to bring together and study the tears and dreams of a past time."74

The different trajectories taken by women in early twentieth century Keralam in their search for self-fulfilment are unravelled through two central characters, Devaki Manamballi and Thankam Nair. The pursuit of different trajectories by these women breaks up an original unity, an intimate friendship, characterised by a complete openness to each other, a

close knowledge of each other's internal lives. It makes impossible the keeping of a promise to maintain this unity through sharing their children -- that is, the dream of building a bond between women, not restricted by the boundaries of family-units. Devaki and Thankam finally come to occupy spaces which they had not originally desired; all the same, they are isolated from each other, pursuing their respective personal goals. Such confinement causes dissatisfaction, often interrupting their absorption in pursuit of personal goals. Chance events disturb the normal flow of lives. Thankam takes to life as the wife of a well-placed official and the mother of a son, a life she herself recognises as a comfortable one:

"I was beginning a new life. My son's arrival. Husband's promotion. New duties in life. Immersed in all this. (I)... didn't feel time go by. I was happy, contented. Then there was no time to think of old relationships."73

Yet, chance events provoke unease. Thankam admits that the events in the world outside, in which the struggle against foreign rule was heightening, had little impact upon her:"... All this had on me only the effect of a detective novel."76 But, witnessing the scene of a nationalist demonstration being brutally broken up by the British police (from the balcony of her safe, secure home, an apartment, not only strictly limited but also raised high up from the ground), she is plagued with guilt:

75. ibid., p.92.
76. ibid.
"How weak I am! How wretched! Why did I not run down into that crowd, why did I not say, 'I am also an Indian. I am also with you... Take me with you, sister.'"77

Recognising the woman leading the demonstration to be Devaki, Thankam enquires about her whereabouts, only to realise that their spaces were not only separate but in opposition to each other. Such reflection comes forcefully only in old age, when she experiences an intense desire for reunion.

As for Devaki, her long career is marked by restless wandering from one role to another—she becomes first a social reformer, then a political activist and later, a Gandhian social worker. A series of events ending in the collapse of sexual discipline and mutual trust in her _ashram_ shocks her out of the life and beliefs of a social activist into ever-more severe isolation as a ascetic. This, however, prompts self-reflection and re-evaluation of her beliefs:

"Even the word 'desire' used to draw her into a fury. But did she manage to hate the creative urge inherent in all living beings? She looked around the _ashram_ with a sigh: disciples, daughters; _Mataji_, Mother. Yes, all of Woman's dearest wishes must anchor at this shore in order to be fulfilled. She desired to cover the entire living world in a kiss, to call aloud, "My children!". But no one wants Mother; they want a _Guru_, a _Yogini_..."78

It is obvious at this point that this History of 'Malayalee Womanhood'—found implicated in the wider project of Individual self-fulfilment—of the twentieth century is a critical one. Through the critical component it distances itself from the commonplace view

77. _ibid._, p.97.
of this period as an 'era of Liberation' for women. In fact, the discontents of such a project are highlighted here. As discussed in the previous sections, full-blooded Individualism has been a perennial target of criticism in Antharjanam's writings. Here too, this helps her reading of the past: the entry of women into the public domain, and their taking up of the modern domestic role—both which appeared as part of modernity here are seen to have led women into the space of the 'hard'-Individual, isolating them from each other. This is seen to have denied them real self-fulfilment, even amidst social recognition and personal happiness. Also, it is seen to have obstructed the formation of a collectivity of Women based upon bonds of sharing. The imagining of this collectivity is never explicit but remains an abiding presence throughout. It seems highly informed by Antharjanam's conception of Motherhood as elaborated in texts like *Mulappalinie Manam*. Thankam and Devaki are seen to belong to it in equal measure, as 'Mothers', hinting at a vision of Motherhood that does not shun public life, and of public life that cannot shun Motherhood but rather derives its basic driving-force from it:

"Devaki Manamballi has no escape from Thankam Nair. We are the two faces of an era. The new generation has two mothers, will you not accept our children?"79

(..continued)
78. ibid., pp.132-33.
79. ibid., p.99.
Yet, at this very point, the limitations of this re-vision are also evident. The commingling of spaces which the two protagonists seek to effect, the recreation of a wholeness hitherto prevented seems, however, quite impossible. For, it seems to be obtained through an *exchange*. In other words, though a commingling is sought, what happens is only an *exchange*. Thankam brings to Devaki her son, and Devaki presents Thankam's granddaughter with her *Tali*, the symbol of her self-control, steadfastness and dedicatedness --the two exchange what they consider the most valuable achievements of their lives. This exchange is celebrated as the moment of *communion*, which seems to imply the effacement of boundaries through the use of the metaphor of mother's milk-as-flow:

"It was as if breast-milk was flowing from all of Nature's body -- the end of *tapas* -- a new era, was being born."80

Thus, even as the vision of the commingling of spaces remains, it seems actualised by the mere act of mutual exchange. The tension is obvious: Individuality is by no means unseated.

It could thus be well claimed that it is possible to find an interrogation of Individuality and gender in Antharjanam's writings but not its overcoming. But even the significance of this interrogation has been weakly perceived. It has been far more common

80. ibid., p.151.
to read her as a champion of the 'freedom of Antharjanams' or stress the celebration of Motherhood in her writings. Perhaps one reason for this tendency is the failure to pay attention to the critical component in her writing directed at the ideals of individuality and gender commonly in circulation in Keralam in the '30's. This requires a historical reading, a re-evaluation of Antharjanam's work as an 'event' in the history of imagining the Individual in modern Keralam.81