

TRANSMUTING TRADITIONS:THATHRI AND OTHERS

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Abstract: This paper attempts to locate and historicize the activities of some women from the dominant Namboothiri community who fought on their own to achieve greater causes and staked claims to their natural rights during the early decades of twentieth century, without the support of the male reformers of the community.

To alter popular perceptions on civic and legal rights in any society is a laborious task as it entails multidimensional engagements with entrenched social institutions and conventions such as family, marriage, community and the state. Difficulties increase in the case of intransigent societies and social strata. In many cases, engagements and confrontations meant to bring about changes were resisted so much so that the persons involved had to lead lone battles not only against a host of formidable institutions but conceptual categories which would decide our thinking patterns. Such situations, predictably, were more intense and at times traumatic in the cases where the struggles were carried out by an individual or a handful of people without much power and patronage. But, such struggles too are important in shaping the perspectives on rights, as the collective and more prominent movements. For example, the emergence of consciousness of rights among the Namboothiris in Kerala. There were collective engagements which tended and worked to satisfy the patriarchal desires of the aspirant Namboothiri males. Many of these engagements were projected as pro-women ads aimed at the emancipation of women. However, a closer critical look at their structure and sensibility reveals that the desires which propelled the agendas of such collective engagements were purely patriarchal and the desired rights were those authorized by the stalwart patriarchs who acted and worked

as the patrons of the movement¹. Whenever activities on the part of women went beyond the official limiting conditions set by the stalwarts, such activities would be systematically described as aberrations and as a tendency which should not be encouraged².

In the present paper, attempts are made to locate and historicise the activities of some women from the dominant Namboothiri community who fought on their own to achieve greater causes and staked claims to their natural rights during the early decades of twentieth century, without the support of the male reformers of the community. Though they do not figure in the vividly documented and subsequently celebrated events/narratives such as widow marriages, marriage of the younger brothers of Namboothiri families and abandoning of Ghosha, etc., these women were also important in instilling the idea of rights among Namboothiri women. The demands raised and the activities carried out by these women were quotidian in that they pertained to daily chores and sustenance, but their overall outcome heavily impacted on the larger structures of the community and to a great extent the whole society. Of the latter category were the state, gender and *jati*, and more specifically the ways in which they had remained intertwined for centuries.

Smarthavicharam of Thathri

Let us take the spatial and temporal matrix within which the much written about chastity trial of Kuriyedathu Thathri to trace out the complex nature of state–*jati*–gender relations. This trial which took place in the year 1905 is considered here because of its relevance as an issue which reverberated down the entire length and breadth of present Kerala. No part or space of Kerala could remain outside the purview of this seismic and seeping event. Incidentally, it can also be treated as the first instance when Malabar, Cochin and Travancore shed their identities and came together as a single cultural unit. Sheeba K.M. who has studied the chastity trial of Thathri has presented the episode as follows: The incident had obviously created an uproar in all the circles of the community and shook it at its decadent roots. The effects this incident had can be gauged on the basis of the frequent presence it has found in writings of different leanings legal, aesthetic, male

¹ P.S. Manoj Kumar, 'Malayali Hindu Patriarchy: Gender and Jati' in Social Orbit, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2016, pp. 114- 41.

² Ibid., pp. 119-24.

chauvinistic/patriarchal, journalistic from the point of women's subjectivity and also from the way this woman got placed in myths and popular beliefs³.

To get the entire process in perspective, it is necessary to understand the cultural and cognitive contexts in which Thathri's "sins" were imagined, constructed, recorded and circulated. Such an attempt helps us understand the typical conditions in which a Namboothiri girl was brought up in the fag end of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries. The widely publicised trial and eventual ostracism of Thathri brought to the forefront the pathetic and insecure life that Namboothiri girls were forced to lead in their own houses. The sixty-five men who were accused of having had liaison with her included her own father, brother, brother-in-law and kinsmen. That the list consisted of consanguineous and contractual relations of hers was symptomatic of the extent to which moral and sexual decadence had eaten into the Namboothiri community. Thathri, who still remains in the public/popular imaginings of Malayalees all over the world as a seductive-sexual icon had her first sexual experience—rape—at an early age of around ten. She recollected it as a painful and fearful experience during her chastity trial. It is evident from the trial records that this rape, compulsion, threatening, blackmailing, etc., were used by her molesters to win her over in the future⁴.

The present paper does not plan to go into the details of the chastity trial of Thathri as such⁵ by reconstructing the event or tracing its otherwise relevant aspects. The focus of this study, on the contrary, is the ways in which the procedures of chastity trial were structured, how the *jati* elements were latent in them, how the *jati* status was recognized and how its recognition was confirmed, communicated and executed. These questions are relevant while discussing the hierarchy, power, rights and obligations with respect to the interactions within the *jatis*. Along with these, attempts are also made to delineate how the chastity trial of Thathri had incorporated in it the modern notions of justice by providing opportunities for the victims to prove their innocence, the measures taken to curb malpractices and bribes

³ Sheeba K.M., 'Some Aspects of Women's Consciousness Among Namboodiris in Kerala in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', (Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation), Centre for Historical Studies, SSS, JNU, New Delhi, 1995.

⁴ *Smarthavicharam* records (henceforth SVR) Bundle No: 9.

⁵ *Smarthavicharam* records with respect to the trials of Thathrikkutty are kept in the Ernakulam Regional Archives and can be accessed through propel channel.

associated with such trials and the shift in the legal status of the convicted woman, especially after her ritualistic expulsion from the caste.

Rules regarding chastity trials insist the person who suspects the chastity of a Namboothiri woman should approach the king and beseech him to act according to the ingrained conventions. After formally receiving such a request, the king will invite four *Mimamsakas* (scholars in *Dharmashastras*) and a *Smartha* and send them to the house of the complainant. Along with these persons, the king would also send a *Purakoyma*, a Brahmin as the regal envoy. The duty of the *Mimamsakas* is to frame questions, which in turn are communicated to the envoy and the *Smartha*. During the course of the trial, the *Purakoyma* should keep silence and sit there, listening to the proceedings. If and when he finds the questions improper and inadequate, he would throw a shawl to the ground, thereupon the exercise is temporarily stopped and the questions reconstituted. The reporting of the proceedings of the trial is the duty of the *Smartha*. Once the faultless reporting is performed, the *Purakoyma* should go out of the hall. The *Smartha* is the one to pronounce whether the woman under trial is guilty along with the men who courted her. The king has the responsibility to house the woman in some part of the country and provide her with the means for subsistence. The king is also bound to excommunicate the men involved and to banish them from his country⁶.

How literally and rigorously the textual dictates were followed in a chastity trial are attested by the trial records of Thathri⁷. At the same time the records tell us much about more nuanced dimensions and depth of the dictates. When going through the records, the first thing that arrests our attention is the involvement of the state in the proceedings of the trial. The entire state machinery—the state exchequer⁸, state offices including the office of *Sarvadhikaryakkar*, tehsil office, police station and the bureaucracy, state buildings—

⁶ N.P. Unni, *Sankarasmriti* (Laghudharmaprakashika) (hereafter *Sankarasmriti*), Ashtamadhya (8th Chapter), pp. 119-122 and pp. 259-262.

⁷ SVR.

⁸ Cited by Sheeba K.M., 'Jati, Sexuality and the State: The Changing Lives of Namboodiri Women in Kerala in the Twentieth Century', (Unpublished Ph.D Thesis), Centre for Historical Studies, SSS, JNU, New Delhi, 2002, p. 88.

was used to investigate and finalize a petition regarding the chastity of a Brahmin woman. The nexus between the *jati* and the state was much deeper. To borrow the words of Sheeba K.M.:

...the trials had to have the sanction of the Raja. Not only this but the Raja provided the assistance of the officer *Purakoyma* and in the final stage, had to give his consent for the pronouncement of the verdict of *Swaroopam Chollal*. At rare instances when an *Illam* was found unable to meet expenses, the Raja was found to even sanction funds. The trials then were not closed community affairs but that which were designed to send larger signals into the society reflecting the superiority of the Namboothiris⁹

When the textual and procedural accounts pertaining to the chastity trial are verified, it can be easily understood that the king/state exercised a substantial and superior position in the matter of *jati*. Though the king had a ritually inferior status, it did not prevent him from intervening in the chaotic situation faced by the ritually superior Brahmins. The Brahmins were also content to submit to kingship in any of the matters pertaining to the *jati*. The situation speaks volumes in enlightening us about the dense and complex relation between *jati* and the state. Observing the nature and the procedures of intervention of the state in the situation of chastity trials, we can trace a five-fold exercising of authority of the state over the *jati* including Brahmins.

1. The diktats in the *Sankarasmriti* and the act on the part of Brahmins undoubtedly affirm the political superiority of the king/state. The *jati* status of the king was not a matter of concern. *Sankarasmriti* explicitly recommends to invoke the intervention of the king in the times of chaos and to find solution for the problem and mend it through the agency of the king¹⁰. During the times of peace too, king was the patron¹¹. Moreover the period from 1792

⁹Ibid

¹⁰*Sankarasmriti*, VII Chapter.

¹¹ The role of the King as the patron of the Brahmins is attested by the acts of the rituals associated with the temple for which the resources are met from state exchequer. See CF No. 294/ 1855- 68 File No: 355/1855 dtd 1855; File No: 2118/ 1865 dtd 1.12.1865; File No: 1007/1868 December 1868; No. 5205/ 1868 December 1868 kept in the Trivandrum Central Archives. In the letter written by the Diwan to the British Resident, it has been recorded as the expression of the Rajah of Travancore: "utmost possible exertions will be

bore witness to various social, political and economic transitions in Kerala. Some changes were drastic, rattling, profound and deep-rooted. The changes brought about by Marthanda Varma and Dharma Rajah in Travancore and by Sakthan Thampuran in Cochin were strong enough to shake the hitherto strong hold of Brahmin supremacy that existed in Travancore and Cochin¹². These political interventions along with the Mysorean interlude¹³ paved the way for the shifts in the relative political and social positioning of Brahmins and kings. Thus by the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of the next, there occurred a transition in which the social, political and economic dependency of the Brahmins on the state sharply increased. Though their dependency upon kings was an established fact¹⁴, the religious upper hand they maintained through their ritual status was

used to prevent all unnecessary or wasteful expenditure in connection with the approaching moorajeppe, ceremony as has done on the last occasion though His Highness feels that he cannot, under existing circumstances, discontinue any part of a ceremony performed by a succession of His Highness' predecessors. (File No: 5205/ 1868 December 1868)

¹² P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Keralam Samskarika Charithram*, Trivandrum: Bhasha Institute, 1976, pp. 343- 44; p.397.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 369. Also see N.M. Namboothiri, *Vellayude Charithram*, Sukapuram: Vallathole Vidyapeetam, 1998 for details on what the effects of Mysorean Interlude was on the existing socio- political and economic situations.

¹⁴ The Migration of Brahmins and upper *jati* people to Cochin and Travancore following the invasions of Mysore rulers and the insecurity brooded among the native Brahmins of Travancore and Cochin following the socio- political and economic curbing of the Brahmins by Marthanda Varma in Travancore and Shakthan Thampuran in Cochin necessitated this dependency.

illustrated by some scholars¹⁵ relying on the description of Samuel Mateer¹⁶. But, in reality the descriptions only reiterate the dependency of Brahmins, even for food, on the state. Mateer has cited the acts of the king of Travancore while welcoming *Azhvanchery Thamprakkal*¹⁷. *Azhvanchery Thamprakkal* was viewed as the chief of the Namboothiris, though he possessed no distinct jurisdiction over them¹⁸.

2. The king/ state monopolised the authority to intervene in the matters relating to *jati*. While the *jati* elders were permitted to take all decisions pertaining to the *jati* rules (be it an addition, annulling or departure from the existing rules) their decisions had to be ratified by the king/state. There is an important occasion within the course of the chastity trial of Thathri which illustrates this relation. On the 22nd May of 1905, the king of Cochin convened a formal meeting of the elders and prominent persons among the Namboothiri Brahmins at Trichur. The meeting decided to summon and try the accused men in the

¹⁵“The charitable institutions which serve out a scanty fare just enough to prevent the Brahmins from starving are maintained in respect to the sacerdotal character and in the spirit of fostering talent and morality” –A. Sankariah, *Report on the Census of Native Cochin*, Madras: Graves, Cookson & Co., 1877, p.32.

¹⁶Susan Bayly, *The New Cambridge History of India, IV. 3: Jati, society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p.77-78.

¹⁷Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, London: John Snow & Co., 1871, pp. 168, 170, 181- 82.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 167-168. Those acts on the part of the King of Travancore can in no way be seen as acts by king rendered upon a Brahmin, for *Azhvanchery Thamprakkal* being a Brahmin. It was rendered

by the King as the office of *Azhvanchery Thamprakkal* was much honoured. The prostration and felling to feet of *Azhvanchery Thamprakkal* by the King had a very different meaning for the fact that the Rajahs of Travancore never fell on the feet of the Brahmins whomever they met.

chastity trial of Thathri¹⁹. The proceedings clearly recognize the authority of the king over the Brahmins and the elders. Prominent members recognized the fact that the king had the right to order them²⁰. Furthermore, the proceedings of the meeting is a document which substantiates the full authority of the *jati* council to decide on the matters pertaining to the *jati*. The decision to conduct the *Purushavicharam* was taken according to the sanction given for the same by the *jati* council. When the king/state felt it necessary to take advice on specific matters pertaining to the entire *jati* and social relations, they summoned the Brahmins and did so.

3. The aforesaid decision to conduct *Purushavicharam*, taken at the Trichur council of Brahmins, clearly indicates the unbound authority of the king/state to intervene in the customs, traditions and even the texts which are generally considered eternal and thus immutable. It also shows that the king enjoyed the power to direct the *jati* council/elders to revise, reformulate, delete or add norms to the texts or practices, provided the *jati* elders/council declared the same permissible. This could also be seen as a clever strategy on the part of the state to shield its decisions which would have incurred the wrath of the dominant sections in the society. The point is that there have been notable occasions in history when the *jati* elders/ councils acted according to the demands of the state.

4. Though the elements of intervention and some sort of compulsion could be traced from the dominating king/state when *jati* sanctions were sought for the smooth conduct of state matters, it could be noted that utmost attention and neutrality was maintained when it came to matters relating to problems within the *jati* and of the persons within the *jati*. This neutrality and attention, within the scope of legality and norms of the age, could be traced in the chastity trial procedures. The positive involvement of the *Purakoyma*—a Brahmin conversant with the procedures of chastity trials and having the right to dissent with the process if and when necessary—clearly indicates the use of jurisdictional power and neutrality of the state. On certain occasions, in the matters in which the king decided to

¹⁹A. Sankariah, *op. cit.*, p.34.

²⁰The word used by the Brahmins to denote the note from King is *kalpana* which means order. They acknowledge the right of the King to deliver orders upon them- which itself is an act acknowledging

the superiority. Letter of consent from *Smarthan* for trial of ordeal at Sucheendram Temple.

keep himself away from the council, neither he nor his representatives attended it. On such occasions, the reports of *jati* councils and the decisions taken by the elders were called for. There was such an instance associated with the chastity trial of Thathri. After the trial and excommunication there was a system of giving *Pampu*²¹ for those who pleaded before the *Smarth* by making donations at his temple²² and after performing certain rituals. In this case, after the formal excommunication Moothamana Bhattathiri issued *Pamputo* Sucheendram Temple favouring two members of Mallissery Mana (Parameshwaran Namboothiri and Madhavan Namboothiri) at Guruvayur. The interesting fact was that there was a communication sent by Diwan Vencata Rao to the Resident on 12th June 1827 which reads as follows:

A Nambudiri named Trivickraman came to me sometime ago and showed an order under the signature of certain legislatives Nambudiris, directing him to take his oath by ordeal in the Pagoda at Soochindram to prove that he is innocent of the crime he is accorded of having committed in the house of another Nambudiri. I informed him of the positive prohibition that exists in the country with regard to oath by ordeal.... I beg you will be pleased to write to the Deewan of Cochin to direct the Namboory inhabitants of that country to change their mode of proving the innocence of the persons accused of any crime by adopting some other measures instead of ordering them to take their oath by ordeal.²³

There was also a communiqué from the Minister of Consultation in 1844 referring to the Ghee ordeal which states that “the Governor in Council observes with satisfaction that the Rajah of Travancore has characterized the Ghee Ordeal as an improper and uncivilized practice, and that His Highness has disclaimed all further intention of preparing its revival.”²⁴ It was after all these decisions on the part of the State of Travancore and the communication to the King of Cochin, that the *Smarthan* Moothamana Bhattathiri issued

²¹SVR Bundle No: 3- Explanation .led by *Smarthan* Moothamana Bhattathiri on 1081 Dhanu 16th.

²²SVR Bundle No: 3- Explanation .led by Pazhayatha Somayaji of Brahmaswam Madom and others on 1081 Vrischikam 22nd.

²³File No C. 15887/ 1826, dated 12th June 1827- Memorandum from the Diwan of Travancore; Central Archives, Trivandrum

²⁴File No C. 15887/ 1826- Ghee Ordeal- Correspondence; Political Department- No.225 dated 6th July 1844; Central Archives, Trivandrum

Pampu to Parameshwaran Namboothiri and Madhavan Namboothiri. Thus it could be seen that the *Pampu* was issued for an ordeal which did not exist at the time of its issuance. That was a clear case of cheating for two reasons: (1) A *Pampu*- as an order given to a person who was found guilty—had the status of an order to keep the existing orders of the *Smarthavicharam* in abeyance till the person in question proves his innocence at the Sucheendram temple. While issuing the *Pampu*, Moothamana Bhattathiri was fully aware of the fact that this *Pampu* was of nouse as the Royal Government of Travancore had already banned the custom. Thus by issuing *Pampu*, Moothamana Bhattathiri was letting the excommunicated Parameshwaran Namboothiri and Madhavan Namboothiri enjoy a bail period. (2) Moothamana Bhattathiri was not involved in the trial of Thathri; neither did he try to obtain sanction from the King to issue *Pampu*²⁵.

This created dissatisfaction and enraged the Namboothiris of Thrissivaperur (Trichur) Yogam and they filed a petition before the king²⁶. The king, however, decided to keep out of such a council and asked the members to decide and intimate the decision taken²⁷. The decision to boycott Moothamana Bhattathiri and his family and others who associated with him in the act of issuing *Pampu* was taken in a *jati* council of the elders and other prominent members, with the consent of, but in absence of, the king or his representative. This event demonstrates the nature and level of autonomy the king/state had given to the *jati* councils.

5. Lastly, but most importantly, it needs to be understood that though the king/ state stood as the arbitrator during disputes and the patron in peace, he dictated nothing despite the fact that the king/state owned everything. This is explicitly pronounced on occasions when such expressions of possession were called for. Take, for example, how the king had addressed the *Smarthan*. In the first official letter sent to him asking him to conduct

²⁵SVR Bundle No: 3- Explanation. led by *Smarthan* Moothamana Bhattathiri on 1081 Dhanu 16th.

²⁶SVR Bundle No: 3- Copy of the petition filed by Thrissivaperoor Vadhyan Namboothiri and others dtd 1081 Dhanu 8th.

²⁷SVR Bundle No: 3- Correspondence from *Kottaram Sarvadhikaryakkar* dtd 1081 Dhanu 14th.

the chastity trial of Thathri, the *Smarthan* was addressed as *Nammude Pattachomayarkk*²⁸. Though these factors were latent in the expression and exercise of the deliverance of the power, the autonomy of the *jati*—through the agency of the elders of *jati* or *jati* councils—to consider the matters of dispute or settling of chaos was preserved. Though the king worked to mend everything regarding the *jati*, he chose to remain more a witness than an actor.

It also needs to be considered that in certain aspects with respect to the rights of woman in question—Thathri—the state transgressed the diktats of the *Sankarasmriti* norms. As can be read in the orders issued, the government clearly altered her social status from that of a ‘degenerate woman’ as prescribed by the *Sankarasmriti* to that of an ‘independent woman’. The recognition of the new status by the state was crucial and telling. In a letter from *Sarvadhikariakar* to the sub-magistrate, Chalakkudy, it is unambiguously stated that:

... the woman after the *Swaroopam Chollal* is at full liberty to act as she likes, to that government has no authority or justification whatever to consider that she is one who is under any restraint. She is a woman who has got full liberty of her person and property and the only reason for the requisition and necessary precautions should be taken to see that in as much as she has confessed to her immoral intercourse with so many persons of various positions in life, there may perchance be persons who moved by violent passions may be tempted to do her harm. So, all that we want to do is to render her such help as everyone is justified in expecting from the government when the safety of one’s person and property is apprehended. You will therefore see that the police or anybody else do not consider her to be one who is under any restraint or who has lost her liberty of action. She may freely

²⁸ SVR Bundle 7- File No: 141B. *Nammude* used in this letter is not to be taken as a token of intimacy or dearness. The nature of the letter is highly official and the letter is highly precise and matter of fact. In the letter, nothing more than what the *Smarthan* should do, is stated. The tone of the letter is highly commanding and gives the full weight of a communication from a power center to the subordinate. Because of these reasons, it could be rightly assessed that the King/ State was expressing its power of possession over the person to appoint him to the post of *Smarthan*.

move about whenever she likes and there is no need for anybody to escort her or to do any such thing²⁹.

The Case of Uma Antarjanam

The life of Uma Antarjanam is germane to the present study as another example of a woman who had taken the agency of her personal life and challenged the established social norms and conventions. She lived as she willed, married and converted from another faith when the occasion demanded, litigated for property and travelled to faraway places in ways that were impossible even in the wildest dreams of a Brahmin woman of the time³⁰. Seen from a large perspective, Uma Antarjanam was creating history by challenging the caste codes, violating the rule of obedience, demanding and possessing her share from the husband's family, travelling to and settling at Wardha, coming back and entering into a relation with a man positioned in the outer circles of *jati* system and even being willing to get married to him, embracing the faith of Islam and getting married to a Muslim, reverting to Hinduism at Lahore through Arya Samaj, getting sucked into the vortex of communal riots and so on.

Uma Antarjanam's remarriage, notably, is different from that of Nangema, the widowed sister of V.T. Bhattathirippad's wife³¹. Though the latter too had expressed her desire to get married again in a conversation with her sister, it was in turn conveyed to the men. As a result the agency of decision and execution was shifted to men, keeping the woman as a passive consent giver. In contradistinction, Uma's life was entirely controlled by her own decisions. Even when she approached V.T. Bhattathirippad seeking help for her marriage, she was asking him to stand along with her and to help her realize the decision. Uma's unprecedented resolution and predicament sheds light on to the nature and content of the Namboothiri reformation and the patriarchal aspects latent in the programmes and mentor attitudes subscribed to by the reformers. Both the traditionalists and the reformers shared

²⁹SVR Bundle No: 6- Letter from *Sarvadhikaryakkar* to the Sub Magistrate, Chalakkudy dtd 1905 July 14th.

³⁰For a description for eventful and interesting life of Uma, see V.T. Bhattathirippad, *VTyude Sampooranna Kruthikal*, Kottayam: DC Books, 2010.pp.299.

³¹P.S. Manoj kumar, *op. cit.*

and valorised the same patriarchal mentality where every decision upon women and their sexuality were to be sanctioned and presided over by the male members of the community.

To sum up, the life of Uma was repeatedly demanding change in the patriarchal attitudes towards women. She sought to convert the role of women from the status of objects to subjects. Her deeds, in effect, were endowing agency on women. Her break from the families by receiving a share in the property and getting it recorded in the department of registration, thus making it official, itself was something which created change in the Namboothiri community. The very agreement which authorized her rights over landed properties denied her the right over her male child and made her daughter loose her right to access to her father and paternal kin show the intensity of patriarchal mentalities which existed among the Namboothiri families in the life and times of Uma Antarjanam.

The Case of Madhavi Antarjanam

Madhavi Antarjanam was married to Govindan Namboothiri of Malika Illam situated at Peruvanna Amsamin Kozhikkod. Govindan Namboothiri, in tune with the tradition among Namboothiris of the time, got married again and abandoned Madhavi. Thereupon, she filed a petition before the sub-divisional magistrate on 30th June 1932, praying the court to direct her husband to make provisions for her sustenance. When the court summoned Govindan Namboothiri, he submitted before the court that he married another woman only for the sake of begetting children. He also agreed before the court to provide the provisions for the subsistence of Madhavi. She agreed to this settlement and the petition was disposed of³². But the agreement was violated by Govindan Namboothiri. In the new situation, she again approached the court for orders sanctioning maintenance.³³ The case was taken for hearing on 29th July 1932. The court on that day pronounced its judgement directing Govindan to make a monthly payment of an amount of Rupees Four to Madhavi as maintenance amount.³⁴

³²*Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Vol.10, Issue 16, 11th July 1932.

³³*Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Vol.10, Issue 18, 25th July 1932.

³⁴*Mathrubhumi Weekly*, Vol.10, Issue 25, 12th September 1932.

The case filed by Madhavi seeking orders for maintenance from her husband was the first of its kind in Malabar among Namboothiris. The attempt on the part of an elite woman to seek justice in her marital relationship through court was a bold move in that era. She surpassed the families involved and the caste stalwarts to solve the injustice she met with in the marital relationship and sought the intervention of the state to solve her problem. This very act shifted the position of marriage and marital relationship, which were hitherto the matters of family and caste to those pertaining to state. Madhavi's approaching the court for solving marital issues and its favourable outcome gave an assurance to the destitute women abandoned by husbands regarding their sustenance and security.

Thus it should be understood that the 'reformation' among the Namboothiris and the transformation among them were not processes instigated merely through the initiatives of the Yogakshema Sabha, *Unninamboothiri* and the influential stalwarts of the movement like V. T. Bhattathirippad, MRB, Muthiringott or the people who worked with them. There were active engagements on the part of women in transforming their everyday life situations and to find remedies for the regular problems they met. These engagements, notably, were beyond the framework of the agendas set by the stalwarts of the mainstream movement. Women like Thathri, Uma and Madhavi and many others like them, who engaged Brahmanical patriarchy from the plains of everyday lives, were challenging its *pativrata* norms in various dimensions and were attempting to disintegrate the highly patriarchal spaces, thus claiming the spaces which could accommodate them too. The attempts which have been cited above, about which discussions are made and those attempts similar to these, by the women as agents, which are snubbed into forgetfulness and swept out from the historical discourses are to be revisited to know more about the unsung heroines in the realms of social reformations.

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