THE REBEL AND THE REFORMER:
V.T. BHATTATHIRIPAD IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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DECLARATION

I do hereby declare that this written account entitled ***The Rebel and the Reformer: V.T. Bhattathiripad in Historical Perspective,*** is the record of research done by me under the supervision of **Dr. S.M. Mohamed Koya**, former Professor and Head, Department of History, University of Calicut, and it has not been previously submitted for the award of a degree, diploma, or other similar title of recognition.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this thesis, ***The Rebel and the Reformer: V.T. Bhattathiripad in Historical Perspective,*** submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of the University of Calicut is a bonafide record of genuine research done by **Manmathan. M.R.** under my supervision and no part of this has been submitted for any degree before.

Calicut University,
27.09.2007

Supervising Teacher

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PREFACE

E.H. Carr's warning against the pitfalls associated with the selection of facts while writing history is remarkably relevant in the context of the Nambūtiri reform movement; a cursory observation would reveal several jigsaw puzzles in the studies relating to it for their undue focus on certain events and on the role of certain selected individuals. Carr has reminded us that it is the historian who decides which one is a fact and which one is not; but this discretionary right of the historian may cause considerable damage to historical objectivity. The stress upon certain sensitive 'events' and on the role of some prominent leaders, a trend equally visible in academic studies and popular narratives, has been occasioned by the difficulty in, and the indifference to, tracing out new facts; and in the search for trees, we miss the wood. The Carlylean craze for hero worship misguided even serious researchers and persuaded many to minimize the movement to the handiwork of a few individuals. It promoted an undesirable tendency of ignoring the inherent dynamics of the movement. The fact that the movement as such revolved around certain basic issues, than on individuals, and the role of the individuals was mainly confined to the part they played in radicalizing, or even softening, the modes of social action is largely left unnoticed. In fact, groups were the units of the work force, which were formed around a particular agenda and ideology, and individuals were representatives of one or the other of these groupings.

If the study of individuals in history is to be made on this ideological premise, it becomes an intricate and embarrassing matter. Highlighting the role of individuals has been made difficult by the scarcity, or non-availability, of primary data in the form of diaries or letters; autobiographies are not reliable evidences unless they are approached with an awareness of the censured kind of images they reflect. More important is the difficulty in analyzing the impact of the role of non-objective or non-material forces in shaping the thought processes of individuals; there is no satisfactory tool in assessing the way emotions work to determine one's ideological position and the nature of his social interventions. In the context of several such factors working together in determining personal attitudes, no study on the role of individuals in history can claim to be perfectly objective. Nevertheless, individuals are by and large the products of their own

times and environment. The given material circumstances play a decisive role in directing their responses, positively or negatively. Hence a study of the context may reveal the individual and would help explain the forces behind his action. The person shares the ideology and programmes of the movement. Objective and serious history demands a study of the attitudes and ideological positions of the individual than a panegyric assessment of the person and his deeds. The strengths and weaknesses of the present study are justified in the context of these premises.

More importantly, the present study focuses on reinterpreting the current and established notions of the Nambūtiri movement and the role of VT in it. Paucity of academic studies, the poor utilization of primary sources and overdependence on the reformers' narration of their own deeds at their face value has been highly instrumental in reproducing the encomium all throughout. Most of the western studies on the caste reform movements of Kerala were concentrated on the Nāyar and Īzhava movements. In the case of the Nambūtiri movement, considerable share of primary sources is already lost; some of the remaining materials are in the custody of a few individuals and are not available for research purposes. The researcher has to rely heavily on the literature of the reform movement or on the memoirs of the reform leaders.

Most of the existing studies on the Nambūtiri movement are noted for their overemphasis on source materials of the late 1920s and a focus on the events from that period onwards. This has led to ignore the fact that the foundation of the movement had been laid earlier and the prominent areas of reform had already been identified; this factor greatly obscured the dynamics of the movement. Therefore scholars failed to take note of the greatly enlightening debates of the early '20s, such as of the early articles of VT. It is equally surprising to note that even the highly scholarly works have ignored the great radicals of this period like V.S. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Mūthiringōd Bhavatṛātan Nambūtiripād, Pāndam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri, K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, Pātiriśśēri Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, Kapḷingāṭ Sankaran Nambūtiri or C.K. Nambūtiri. V.S. was the most prominent leader of the movement after Kuṟūṟ till his death in 1924, Mūthiringōd was the true ideologue of the movement in the 1920s, Pāndam was the real spirit behind the *Nambūtiri Yuvajana Sangham*, Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād was the solid power behind the *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri,* Pātiriśśēri

was the brain behind the Nambūtiri Regulation, Kaṗingāṭ was instrumental in the whole process of enacting the Nambūtiri Bill and C.K. Nambūtiri gave silent and steady support to all the activities of the *Sabha*.

For a historical analysis of VT, the present study examines his entire writings in two segments; the first one being contemporaneous, is known as the 'literature of reform'; the other is the post-reform literature which includes both his responses to later developments and his reflective kind of literature on the reform process. The evidently contrasting perceptions traceable in the two categories of his writings may create considerable problems of interpretation; one would be embarrassed to meet many VTs in them. Panegyric literature has dismissed this fragmented personality as a natural antecedent to the unfortunate erosion of the great ideals envisioned by the reform movement, which had filled them with frustration and had forced them to retract from their radical and idealist positions. But the case of VT presents a different picture, there appears to be no break or retreat in his thought processes; his very radicalism was intended to reinstate his community to its old state of glory in conformity with the modern ideals; the failure of his mission and the indifference of his community to respond to his call forced him to keep aloof from his agenda for a while; but he was eager to make use of every opportunity to accomplish this end either on his own or in alliance with men of similar thinking. This assumption is confirmed by the numerous articles he had written in the post-independence years.

To draw a line of continuity between a person's active phase and his 'retired' life may not be reasonable or justifiable; not simply because personal opinions would not be static but also because advance in age may force an individual to find solace in tradition and spirituality. Equally important was the slow development of a 'return to tradition' among many social reformers who did not move from social action to political movements. VT's indifference to political nationalism in the 30s, his resignation from the Congress Party after independence and his later attack on party politics clearly revealed his apathy to all forms of politics. In an era of political culture, political passivity may lead to frustration and revivalist affiliation. But he could not retreat to a highly conservative position because of his past image as a humanist and as a fiery

radical. This exigency compelled him to exert great restraint in expounding his thoughts and ideals and his public interventions.

The present study contradicts greatly with VT's popular image created along the model of a radical reformer and a noble individual. He is held to be the embodiment of the spirit of the renaissance in Kerala. This public image attracted people towards him and they came to love him as one of the founders of modern Kerala. He was also known for his simplicity, idealism, radical position and for his alluring literary style. Like Gandhi, he is believed to have communicated his messages through his idealistic life. He could attract feminine sympathy for his pioneering role in the movement for gender equality. Above all, he is known for his rare and unique personal traits: for his hospitality and his inclination in maintaining personal friendships. Even in the midst of poverty he used to feed the hungry and the destitute. He had an array of friends from all sections of the society – from the fiery radical young men to the highly conservative patriarchs. However, the fact remains that this 'simple' image of VT does not fully agree with the larger questions of historical research.

The present study consists of five chapters. The first chapter, *Introduction,* deals with the current notions on the Nambūtiri movement and on VT, the basic theoretical concepts upon which the study is based and the areas the study intends to explore into. Chapter two, *Review of Literature,* is a survey of VT's works and of the important literature on him and the Nambūtiri reform movement. The third chapter, *The Nambūtiris: Tradition and Change,* briefly examines the social and cultural condition of the Nambūtiri community in the pre-reform days and the forces that had worked behind a slow transformation. The fourth chapter, *VT: The Rebel and the Reformer* which is the core chapter, analyzes VT in the context of the Nambūtiri movement and in the wider context of twentieth century Kerala society and tries to explore into the manifold dimensions of his social intervention. The last chapter, *From Dissent to Consent: The Ideology of VT,* examines the vision of VT and his attitude towards various issues of social and economic interest.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The socio-cultural awakening of modern Kerala has had its most salient expression in the rise of popular caste associations.[1] The role of these associations in modernizing and democratizing the feudal and caste-ridden social order of Kerala and in realigning the existing social relationships has generally been acclaimed.[2] Their role in community-building efforts has also been noticed.[3] The lower caste movements had their focus on attaining upward social mobility at the expense of the privileges of the dominant caste groups. The building up of monolithic castes by eliminating sub-caste groups was a prominent agenda which most of the movements achieved to a great extent.[4]

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1 "The word 'renaissance' is old and stereotyped with European overtones, but that expressive term may still be used to denote the vast transformation that was quietly coming over Kēraḷa in the 19th century". *Kerala through the Ages*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p.69.

2 See P.K. Gopalakrishnan, *Kēraḷathintē Sāmskārika Charitṛam*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1994, pp.525-26; A. Sreedharamenon, *Kēraḷasamskāram*, Kottayam, 1992, p.181. Social change in these times has generally been characterized as an essentially liberating experience that freed the individual from enervating feudal, casteist and familial norms.

3 Modern community has been perceived as a product of colonialism, specifically of colonial modernity. See M. Muralidharan, "Hindu Community Formation in Kerala: Processes and Structures under Colonial Modernity", *South Indian Studies*, 2, July-Dec.1996, p.251. The Census Report of 1931 remarked: "Most of them (i.e., the communities) have organized associations on caste or communal lines for the betterment of their social, economic, religious or political conditions. At present there is hardly any caste or community in the state without an association of its own for self-advancement in the social and political spheres". Cited in Lewis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Changes in Travancore, 1921-47*, New Delhi, 1994, p.60.

4 But Fuller notices the efforts of the NSS in this direction as partially successful. He writes: "Arguing that only as a united community could Nayars form a powerful political force in the state, the NSS has always campaigned for the abolition of subdivisions among the Nayars. It has not only encouraged intermarriage between subdivisions, but has asked Nayars to refuse to reveal their subdivision membership to census enumerators. Partly because of this campaign, the 1931 Travancore Census Report (c: 364, 367) stated that the NSS campaign to fuse the subdivisions had been a success, and that there were now only two subdivisions remaining. However, the author of the 1941 census report was more cautious, noting that the correctness of the remarks made ten years earlier "could not be vouched for" (Census 1941:131). His caution was wise, for although there were commentators such as the author of the Travancore State Manual who claimed that "even intermarriages are now quite common and meet with the full approval of the society" (Pillai 1940:858), the validity of this claim is highly dubious. Even today, in Central Travancore,

Communities sought to restructure themselves in accordance with the new concepts of modernity–rational and scientific outlook and the capitalist spirit. Attempts were made to refashion customs and traditions in tune with rational social behaviour.[5] Caste associations also alerted their respective communities of entrepreneurship as a tool of social mobility. Modern education was postulated as the medium for achieving the skills necessary for materializing all these objectives. If caste was the medium of association for the various Hindu communities, Christians and the Muslims united on religious, but of course on community, lines. The activities of all these movements were marked by their efforts to construct a respectable identity for their respective communities in the expanding public sphere. The 'construction of Hinduism',[6] which was the focal point of the early social reform movements of North India, was only a succeeding agenda for the 'reformers' of Kerala.

Among the various caste categories of Kerala, the Nambūtiris were rather slow in imbibing the 'caste cluster consciousness'[7] of the modern times and in realizing self-reform as the means for both revitalization and survival. As the

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intermarriages between subdivisions are very rare". C.J. Fuller, "Internal Structure of the Nayar Caste", *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 31:4, Winter 1975, p.304. Similarly, Shah refers to the extremely slow pace of the waning away of sub-caste differences through the medium of marriage-alliances across sub-caste groups all over India. A.M. Shah, "Caste, Marriage and the Intelligentsia" in *In Search of India's Renaissance*, Vol. II, Chandigarh, 1992, p.66.

5 The system of matriliny, which acted as the support-base of *sambandham*, was defined with modern patrilineal frameworks of interpretation, such as the 19th century anthropological theories from Europe and North America. Lewis Morgan, who marshalled the history of the evolution of the family, relegated matrilineal societies to the prehistory of patriliny. Cited in Praveena Kodoth, "Framing Custom, Directing Practices: Authority, Property and Matriliny under Colonial Law in Nineteenth Century Malabar", in Shail Mayaram et al, *Subaltern Studies XII*, Delhi, 2005, p. 190.

6 The Renaissance intellectuals focused mainly on relieving Indian religion of the features most attacked by Christian missionaries and to remodel Hindu religion in accordance with the Judeo-Christian conceptions of monotheism and anti-idolatry. This process of shaping Hindu religion according to a totally alien concept is termed as 'Construction of Hinduism'. For details see Gowri Viswanathan, "Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism" in Gavin Flood ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Oxford, 2003, pp.23-44.

7 Lucy Caroll, "Colonial Perceptions of Indian Society and the Emergence of Caste(s) Associations", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXVII, No.2, Feb. 1978, p.233.

topmost rung of the caste ladder, as the group which enjoyed various kinds of privileges, as the foremost land owning class, as the custodians of most of the temples and religious institutions, as the repositories of traditional knowledge and as a section less dependant on other people for their livelihood, the Nambūtiris preferred to remain socially and culturally exclusive and obstinate. But once the very system that had sustained them began to subside, it had its disastrous impact in domains both religious and secular; this situation impelled them to associate themselves on modern lines and to form the *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabha* in 1908. Late entry into the arena of caste politics and the persistent pressures from outside combined with the aspiration of some overenthusiastic youths for getting an upper hand in the contemporary socio-political domain caused to radicalize the entire programmes of the *Sabha* in a very short span of time. Among these radicals, V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād occupied a place of prominence and is treated as the one and only leader of the movement in most of the narratives.

V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, who is popularly known as V.T, was a firebrand radical of the 1920s and 30s. Although in the '20s his focus was mainly on communitarian issues, in the 30s he began to champion the cause of the entire (Hindu) people of Kerala and to concentrate on issues like temple-entry and Harijan welfare. He also led a crusade against religious superstitions and the priesthood and tried hard to secularize the Nambūtiri mind. He was highly motivated by the concept of an ideal community, to reconstruct the Nambūtiri identity as a role-model purging it of all those elements which had subjected it to popular criticism and ridicule. Some scholars maintain that he was the pioneer of feminist movement in Kerala.[8] He had an aura of humanism and selflessness, which endeared him to the people and also misled them into believing that he

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[8] K.C. Narayanan, "Avathārika" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Kottayam, 1997, pp. 17-18.

was the force behind every radical social change that took place during his time.[9] This overenthusiastic attitude led a few writers and certain interested groups to produce a plethora of hagiographic studies highly exaggerating V.T's role in the social development of Kerala. They were in fact indulging in a flagrant violation of the principle of historiography.

V.T. was a product of both modernity and the nationalist movement. His image as a secular, rationalist, radical, social activist; as an emancipator of women; as an unrelenting opponent of Brahmin priesthood and as a Gandhian helped in raising him to the position of one of the most prominent figures of modern Kerala, like Sri Nārāyaṇa Guru. His role in shaping the modern Hindu religion of Kerala also cannot be ignored since his attacks on priesthood and superstitions contributed much to instil a sense of rationalism in the realm of faith and rituals; and his campaign against distance-pollution roused the conscience of his community and helped to create a congenial atmosphere for temple-entry.

Modern science and reason had been decisive in shaping the personality and ideology of V.T. Despite being hailed from an aristocratic, patriarchal, priestly and feudal set up, he was imbued with a high sense of democratic, secular and rationalistic values which crossed communitarian boundaries. Of course, rationalist and scientific thinking had been a significant feature of the age and individuals and movements could not escape the impact. The Nambūtiri movement was highly influenced by the contours of the nationalist movement.

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[9] See the kind of eulogy popular even among historians: "...Because of these rare qualities, VT is loved and respected by all, and is warmly accepted as one of the veteran social reformers of Kerala, who fulfilled a unique historical mission for the social progress of the state in general , and of the Nambutiri community in particular". K.K. Kusuman, "V.T. Bhattathiripad and the Social Transformation of the Nambutiris", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. XIII, Nos.1-4, March-December, 1986, p.198. Or again: "VT was one of the foremost in rightly analyzing and identifying the reason and he prepared a comprehensive programme of action in bringing up that community from its overall ennui and stagnation". K.K. Kusuman, Address of the Sectional President, *South Indian History Congress Proceedings Volume*, 16th Session, Gulbarga University, 1996, p.80.

especially in its Gandhian phase. Hence the Nambūtiri reform in general, and the career and personality of V.T. in particular, have to be studied against the concepts of colonial modernity and nationalist ideology. The profiles of religious/caste reform enterprises should also be analyzed along with the point how they perceived the nationalist politics. Equally importantly, a life-history narrative should not degenerate into hagiography.

1:1. Engagement with modernity:

Colonial modernity, as it unfolded in India, was structured by local contexts and actively shaped by Indian intellectuals.[10] Different regions of India experienced colonialism differently, in accordance with the timing of colonial impact, variations of colonial policies and the specificities of regional societies.[11] These variations – temporal and spatial – influenced the region-specific formulations of colonial modernity.[12] As a result, social and community reform – itself a product of colonial modernity – came to incorporate differential responses to colonial critique of Indian society.

Modernity is expressed itself within the colonial societies in contradictory ways, with its rhetoric and practice at great variance.[13] Ranajit Guha explores in

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[10] Vakulabharanam Rajagopal, "Fashioning Modernity in Telugu: Viresalingam and His Interventionist Strategy", *Studies in History*, 21, 1, n.s. 2005, p.45.

[11] It is the Marxist notion of 'an incomplete transition to capitalism' under colonial domination.

[12] The term colonial modernity is vague in recent writing. It is never very clear whether it is a spatial term, that is, modernity occurring within the colony rather than the metropole; or a temporal term, that is, modernity experienced while under colonialism; or indeed some perversion of modernity occurring in the colonies. Dilip Menon writes that the specific contradiction between a rhetoric of universal modernity and a practice of accommodation with existing faultiness of power, tradition and custom is what characterizes colonial modernity in India. Dilip. M. Menon, "A Place Elsewhere: Lower Caste Malayalam Novels of the Nineteenth Century" in Stuarte Backburn and Vasudha Dalmia ed., *India's Literary History*, Delhi, 2004, pp.485-86.

[13] "The term modernity is used to refer to the profound process of cultural transformation which started with the introduction of printing and went on to develop the use of printing and subsequent communications media into a major way of organizing knowledge and culture". Rajan Gurukkal, "Development Experience of Colonial Keralam", in M.A. Oommen ed., *Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience*, Vol. I, New

detail how colonial rule was characterized less by a reforming urge than by a 'vast tolerance of pre-capitalist values and institutions in Indian society".[14] Indian experience of modernity was defective, and is still in a transitional stage; or is split between different arenas of experience, modern at work and pre-modern at home.[15] Generally 'modernity' is associated with European-ness and it is presented as the 'Other' in most of the reformist and nationalist discourses and narratives. There have also been some recent attempts to posit multiple or alternate modernities. While 'modernity' corresponding perfectly to classical theory might never exist anywhere, concepts of something like 'modernity' stood to influence people's economic endeavours, political projects and identity crafting. 'Modernity' is also taken to characterize the elements of rupture from tradition manifested in the colonial societies. In short, it addressed a troubled present in which questions of self, community and society had to be posed afresh.

Most of the exponents of social reform were convinced that India's salvation lay in embracing modernity. This created a problem. The institutions they wished to adopt were all products of European civilization and hence 'other'. For them, Indian civilization was plural, rural, socio-centric, spiritual, un-centralized, based on *dharma* rather than rights, on groups rather than individuals, whereas modernity had the opposite orientation. This raised the question of how modernity could be reconciled with tradition and the way of dealing with it if a conflict arises. Bhikku Parekh remarks that Indian leaders answered it in one of the three ways as can be called modernism, critical

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Delhi, 1999, p.96. Wood observes that this process of modernization was characterized by four major elements: communications, organization, education and self-reliance. *Ibid*, p.173. See Ananda E. Wood, *Knowledge Before Printing and After*. Delhi, 1985, pp.1-2.

[14] Ranajit Guha, "Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India", in *Subaltern Studies* Vol. VI, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994, p.213.

[15] Philippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Once upon a Time in the West? Narrating Modernity in Kerala, South India", in K.N. Ganesh ed., *Culture and Modernity: Historical Explorations*, University of Calicut, 2004, p. 40.

modernism or syncretism and critical traditionalism.[16] For the modernists, Hindu society provided no hope for the future and yet its salvation lay only in its radical reconstruction along modern or European lines. The critical modernists pleaded for a creative synthesis of the two civilizations, whereas the critical traditionalists preferred to mobilize indigenous resources, borrowing from Europe whatever was likely to supplement and enrich them. Panikkar observes that the religious tinge of the national consciousness was a direct legacy of the cultural regeneration, and the revivalist element integral to this process, represented by the socio-religious reform movements during the nineteenth century.[17]

Justifying cultural revival as the dynamics of anti-colonialism based on cultural nationalism, Ashis Nandy explained it as a reinstatement of the categories used by the victims, a stress on cultural traditions is a defiance of the modern idea of expertise, an idea which demands that even resistance be uncontaminated by the 'inferior' cognition or 'unripe' revolutionary consciousness of the oppressed. A stress on culture is a repudiation of the post-Renaissance European faith that only that dissent is true which is rational, sane, scientific, adult and expert – according to Europe's concepts of rationality, sanity, science, adulthood and expertise. When the religious reformers of the nineteenth century India spoke of protecting cultures, it seemed an obscurantist ploy. But unmixed modernism is no longer fashionable, not even in the modern world. In our times, Gandhi has been by far the most consistent and savage critic of modernity and its best-known cultural product: the modern west. Ultimately, the choice is between critical modernism and critical traditionalism. It is a choice between two frames of reference and two world views. No theory of oppression can make sense unless it is cast in native terms or categories, that is, in terms and

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[16] Bhikku Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 42

[17] K.N. Panikkar, "From Revolt to Agitation: Beginning of the National Movement", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 25, Nos. 9-10, Sep-Oct. 1997, pp.37-38. He explains the attempts at creating a modern culture as 'critically reshaping the traditional'.

categories used by the victims of our times. As a corollary, no native theory can be taken seriously unless it includes a sub-theory of oppression.[18]

Panikkar argues that the attempts to reinvigorate traditional institutions and to realize the potential of traditional culture that developed during the nineteenth century were responses to the challenges posed by the colonial culture and ideology. The initial expression of the struggle against colonial domination manifested itself in the realm of culture as a result of the fact that the principles on which the colonial state functioned were not more retrogressive than those of the pre-colonial state. All intrusions into the cultural realm were more intensely felt. Therefore a defense of indigenous culture developed almost simultaneously with the colonial conquest. Two features characterized this concern: the creation of an alternate cultural-ideological system and the regeneration of traditional institutions.[19] A more definite articulation of this trend, however, was in the ideas and activities of later movements generally characterized as conservative and revivalist. Panikkar argues that strongly native in tendency, they were clearly influenced by the need to defend indigenous culture against colonial cultural hegemony. In this specific historical sense, they were not necessarily retrogressive, for underlying these efforts was the concern with the revival of the cultural personality, distorted, if not destroyed, by colonial domination. More so because it formed an integral element in the formation of national consciousness. Some of these tendencies, however, were not able to transcend the limits of historical necessity and led to a sectarian and obscurantist outlook. This was possibly a consequence of the lack of integration between the cultural and political struggles, resulting in cultural backwardness, despite political advance.[20]

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[18] Ashis Nandy, "Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A Credo", in Fred Dallmyr & GN Devy ed., *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity*, New Delhi, 1998, pp.251-55.

[19] *Ibid*, p. 89.

[20] K.N. Panikkar, "Socio-Religious Reforms and the National Awakening" in Bipan Chandra ed., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989, pp. 89-90.

Partha Chatterjee points out that anti-colonial nationalism creates its own domain of sovereignty within colonial society.[21] It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains – the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the 'outside', of the economy and statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an 'inner' domain bearing the 'essential' marks of cultural identity. The greater one's success in imitating western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one's spiritual culture. This formula, Chatterjee thinks, is a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa.

The period of 'social reform', Chatterjee continues, was actually made up of two distinct phases. In the earlier phase, Indian reformers looked to the colonial authorities to bring about by state action the reform of traditional institutions and customs. In the latter phase, although the need for change was not disputed, there was a strong resistance to allowing the colonial state to intervene in matters affecting "national culture". The second phase was already the period of nationalism. The colonial state, in other words, is kept out of the 'inner domain' of national culture; but it is not as though this so-called spiritual domain is left unchanged. In fact, here nationalism launched its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not western. In this, its true and essential domain, the nation is already sovereign, even when the state is in the hands of the colonial power.[22]

Almost all the socio-religious movements of modern India, which were initially motivated by an intense impulse of modernism, soon began to dwindle into critical modernism once the immediate objectives were met or when

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[21] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, New Delhi, 1999, p.6.
[22] *Ibid.*

contradictions started to emerge over the polarities of tradition and change, finally to end up with a retreat into critical traditionalism. They had to face the apparent contradiction of colonialism as a liberating and modernizing agency and colonial culture as the 'other'. The succeeding history of the Bṛahmo Samāj is a case in point. Movements of later origin also have been strikingly cautious in their attitude to western ideals and attachment to modernity and generally are more lenient towards tradition and spirituality. But this skepticism appears to have haunted the movements of the lower caste flimsily since their cause of concerns were associated with real life and it outweighed issues of national interest or cultural self-defense.

Certainly, the generative force behind the series of social and cultural developments which went into the making of modern Kēraḷa was colonial modernity. The impact was felt strictly along region-wise and on caste/community-wise; at different points of time and in varying degrees; but was definitely mediated by the urge for progress among the upper castes and for social mobility among the lower castes. It was also a response of various social groups to colonial critique of the Indian society.

In the case of the Nambūtiris a stress on culture and caste-based values was always there since as a community steeped in tradition and ritualism, unbounded fascination towards modernity was understood to be self-annihilating; and more importantly it was seen to wear away traditional and cherished privileges. Even radicals like V.T. who had taken up "a very advanced social position, even going so far as to propose a classless society"[23] later began to drift away to a strictly orthodox position which transgressed even critical traditionalism. The slow development of a crisis among intellectuals towards modernity needs to be analyzed with reference to the very limitations of modernity under conditions of colonialism and which may lead us to the academic skepticism associated with

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[23] Genevieve Lemercinier, *Religion and Ideology in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1994, p. 215.

the so-called Indian Renaissance. Gyan Prakash gives us a very interesting estimate of the inadequacy of Indian modernity thus: "Navigating between the bank of Vedas and the bank of modern science and technology, but holding neither one nor the other fixed, India appears simultaneously as something altogether new and unmistakably old, at once undoubtedly modern and irreducibly Indian. Therein lies Indian modernity's pervasive presence and precarious existence".[24]

The notion of civil society was a corollary of modernity.[25] Civil society is distinct from communal existence because it is based, not on birth or status, but on voluntary associations and contractual relations between individuals.[26] The very ideological base of Indian nationalism was civil society: it represented the gradual and imperfect emergence of a civil society which had its roots in reason, science, secularism, liberalism and humanism. The Congress was a mirror of the emerging civil society. It represented the transition from the closed community to the open society: a transition from custom to law, from status to contract, from birth to merit, from privilege to justice, from hierarchy to equality, from

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[24] Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, New Delhi, 2000, p.14.

[25] The term 'civil society' came into use during the Enlightenment in Europe, preceding the Industrial Revolution. In 1767 the British thinker Adam Fergusson in his *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* used the term in the sense of civilized society, especially as it had evolved in the West. It was the same phenomenon which Ferdinand Toennies condemned as *gesellschaft* and Gandhi rejected it under the name of 'modern civilization'. Hegel and Marx distinguished civil from the military and made a distinction between the state (with its armed forces) and civil society. In angry rejection of modernity, the post-modernists, including the subalternists, extol the virtues of 'community' (*gemeinschaft*) as against 'society' (*gesellschaft*). One may detect a striking echo of Gandhi's critique of civil society in the subaltern glorification of community, ethnicity and territoriality. For details see Rajat Kanta Ray, *Nationalism, Modernity and Civil Society*, Presidential Address, Indian History Congress, 67th Session, Farook College, 2007.

[26] Conventionally, the concept of civil society was situated in three contexts. First, as associations that are posited between family and state. But family is increasingly recognized as a site of violence and hence it has also become a theater of interrogation by civil society activists. Second, as an agency which interrogated tyrannical states. But now it is recognized that even democratic states need to be constantly interrogated. Third, as the space between state and market, a product of the ongoing process of structural differentiation in society. T. K. Oommen, *Nation, Civil Society and Social Movements*, New Delhi, 2004, p.128.

communalism to individualism, from heredity to association: in short, from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*. It spoke the language of rights instead of privileges. But the infatuation with modernity and civil society was brought in for critical analysis under the leadership of Gandhi whose *Hind Swarāj* represents one of the sweeping critiques of civil society in which modern civilization is the term that corresponds to 'civil society'.[27] Gandhi rejected capitalism, democracy, scientific progress and secularism, in the act by which he rejected civil society. He rejected progress as the prevailing system was not seen to represent backwardness. By focussing on culture and cultural nationalism, he relegated related issues into the background; he did not consider seriously the point that kinship would reproduce patriarchy, religion would reproduce authority, and caste would reproduce hierarchy. Gandhi's *Hind Swarāj* conceived a radically different social constitution from the civil society that had formed the cradle of the Congress. And, as a staunch Gandhian, VT was greatly influenced by Gandhi's approach to modernity.

1:2. Reform Process – Historiographic Issues

Considerable suspicion still looms large over whether the leading lights of social and cultural change in the 19th and the 20th century Bengal had praised their age as a time of renaissance.[28] Sumit Sarkar has argued that the very construction of the so-called Bengal Renaissance raises serious historiographic issues.[29] For him:

1. Earlier works on the Bengal Renaissance tended to study individual reformers or reform movements in isolation.

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[27] There are social theorists who even identify Gandhi as the forerunner of post-modernism; that much before the discontents of modernity surfaced, Gandhi anticipated them and alerted all concerned. See *Ibid*, p.245.

[28] Sumit Sarkar, 'Renaissance and Kaliyuga: Time, Myth and History in Colonial Bengal' in *Writing Social History*, N. Delhi, 1997, p.199. In support of this Sarkar refers to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who reserved the term renaissance to the 15th and 16th centuries which for him marked the efflorescence of Hindu culture.

[29] Sumit Sarkar, *Bibliographic Survey of Social reform movements in the 18th and 19th centuries*, Delhi, 1975, p.20.

2. These earlier studies also tended towards hagiography.
3. Historians relied too much on accepting elite reformers at their own evaluation.
4. Older studies had not given due attention to vernacular sources.
5. Historians had overlooked the entire context within which the renaissance took place, i.e., the 'hegemony of colonialism'.

Barun De questioned the assumption that transition to bourgeois modernity had been accomplished in Bengal. Conditions of colonial despotism explicitly prohibited such a transition by preventing the true formation of a civil society.[30] Susobhan Sarkar, who first used the term Bengal Renaissance in his *Notes on Bengal Renaissance* (1946), noted in a later essay "Problems of Indian Historiography" that at least in 3 senses the Bengal Renaissance was limited in comparison to European Renaissance.[31]

1. The educated reformers failed to appreciate the exploitative role of colonialism
2. The gulf between the cultured *bhadralok* and the masses was never bridged
3. Bengal Renaissance betrayed an obsession with Hindu traditions that was to set a dangerous precedent for the emergence of Hindu Nationalism.

Denying such criticisms, Brian. A. Hatcher argued that Bankim and his contemporaries clearly viewed their time as one of momentous changes. These changes they interpreted using a variety of idioms: sometimes improvement, sometimes awakening, sometimes reformation. And even if the analogy to the European Renaissance was not explicitly invoked before the 20th century, it remains the case that these 19th century Bengali authors shared an important set of assumptions regarding the nature of the transformations they saw taking place in Bengal. At the core of such assumptions was the conviction that Bengal had

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[30] Barun De, "A Historiographical critique of Renaissance Analogues for 19th c India" in his edited work *Perspectives in Social Sciences*, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1977.

[31] Cited in Brian A Hatcher, "Great Men Waking: Paradigms in the Historiography of the Bengal Renaissance" in Sekhar Bandopadhyay ed., *Bengal Rethinking History-Essays in Historiography*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 148.

entered into a new age.[32] In support of this argument Hatcher points out the following normative features which run parallel to European Renaissance.

1. Propensity to constrain discussion within a limited corpus of sources, primarily in the English language
2. Preoccupation with the Emphasis on the central role of individual reformers as agents of change.
3. The notion of a benighted, pre-colonial India from which a rebirth or awakening was required.
4. Concern to link the Renaissance of Bengal to the dynamics of the nationalist movement
5. Concerns of the English educated middle classes
6. Fascination for charting what might be called developments in the realm of theology or spirituality. (First 3 being essential features)

Similar Historiographic issues persist over the 'renaissance' of Kerala as well. Hatcher's assumptions of the crucial role of the English-educated middle class and of individual reformers in the new awakening, the link between reform movements and the nationalist ideology and the incorporation of a rationalist spirit in both spiritual and material realms, all would make sense in drawing a parallel with European/Bengal renaissance. But certain other issues are equally important, especially when the Nambūtiri movement is taken into consideration. Sumit Sarkar's charge of an undue focus on individual reformers, of studies collapsing to the level of hagiography chiefly due to the tendency to accept elite reformers at their own evaluation, disregard to primary sources, and above all the tendency to ignore the colonial factor (as a stimulant or as a decisive factor in the course of the reform process) makes the prevailing studies, and the current notions created by them, greatly insufficient and hence academically irrelevant. Sarkar's attack on the tendency to minimize reform movements at the level of individual initiatives is explicitly applicable to the Nambūtiri movement. The

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[32] *Ibid*, pp. 135-36.

image of the Nambūtiri movement as the handiwork of V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād was mainly the creation of hagiographic literature.

1:3. Birth of the New Awakening

Charles Heimsath attributes the origin of social changes in modern India to the new economic environment including the technology of railways, ships, telegraphs as well as the growth of industry and markets; ideas about the worth of the individual and the evolution of societies propounded in missionary and government schools and universities; the privileges and opportunities newly afforded by the courts, legislatures and public administration.[33] The functions performed by the social reformers were to direct these social transformations having revolutionary force on individual lives and on the social status of groups. They screened and interpreted for the people at large the powerful innovations introduced over the past two centuries and charted a course for a transformed Indian society that would accommodate them. The reformers felt the jostling of environmental pressures and realized that they would lose control of their own lives and that the local or national society would be unpredictably or chaotically shaken up unless they offered new guidance.

J.T.F. Jordens argued that the reformers themselves had no doubts as to the main stimulants of this new spirit. The British administration, English education, and European literature brought to India a constellation of fresh ideas which constituted a challenge to the new intellectuals. Rationalism as the basis for ethical thinking, the idea of human progress and evolution, the possibility of 'scientifically' engineering social change, the concept of natural rights connected with individualism, were all alien to the traditional society. An equally strong influence was exerted by the ideas and the work of the Christian missionaries.[34] He goes on to argue that although some later nationalist writers tend to discount

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[33] Charles. H. Heimsath, "The Functions of Hindu Social Reformers – With Special Reference to Kerala", *The Indian Economic and Social History review*, Vol. XV, No. 1, 1978, p.38.

[34] J.T.F. Jordens: "Hindu Religious and Social Reform in British India" in Basham ed., *A Cultural History of India*, Delhi, 1975, p. 366.

this influence, the 19th century reformers themselves starting with Ram Mohan Roy, did not hesitate to give credit where it was due and acknowledged their indebtedness in no uncertain terms, even while vigorously opposing certain aspects of missionary activity.[35]

Jordons observes that it was among the English educated intelligentsia that several ideas of reform first arose. They were primarily trying to deal with a personal problem that affected their own lives very deeply: constant contact with Britishers and European ideas made them look upon some social and religious characteristics of their own society with horror and disgust. Social reform in this first stage was mostly prompted by the desire of these people to cope with the difficulties which they experienced themselves. There was not as yet any concern for the mass of the people, or any desire to transform the structure of society at large. What they wanted was to reshape their lives according to the new standards and values they were discovering. They sought to clarify their own ideas, and propagate them among their kindred intelligentsia. Thus this first stage was a time of propaganda rather than of organization, a time when the reformer was almost exclusively concerned with his own group, a time also when political concern was inchoative and when it was generally held that personal social reform needed to be passed upon the solid foundation of religious reform.[36]

Considering the causative role played by colonialism in the socio-cultural regeneration in the nineteenth century, Panikkar points out that it was occasioned by the colonial presence, but not created by it.[37] The British conquest and the consequent dissemination of colonial culture and ideology had led to an inevitable introspection about the strengths and weaknesses of indigenous culture and institutions. The response, indeed, was varied but the need to reform

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[35] *Ibid.*

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] K.N. Panikkar, "Socio-Religious Reforms and the National Awakening" in Bipan Chandra ed., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 82.

social and religious life was a commonly shared conviction. The social base of the new changes which was generally, but not altogether appropriately, been called the renaissance was the newly emerging middle class and the traditional as well as western educated intellectuals.

While analyzing the reformist persuasions, the context of the learning of the reformers, which was more wrapped up with the family and the mother, has not been taken seriously. Nita Kumar argued that the stimulus to reform-mindedness as an adult came equally from the reformer's experience and his intuitive interpretation of the home, as from his later intellectual appreciation of it as injustice and oppression in the light of certain teachings.[38] The experimental location of the child within a home conceptually structured on a certain philosophy aroused a mindset of reform. Thus, what are regarded as obstacles and inconsistencies in reformist thought must also be understood largely as the complexity of the encounter between experience and its plural theorization.

In the context of Kerala, the fast changing socio-economic milieu and the new value system introduced by the missionaries have been instrumental in bringing about the new caste movements. While some focus on the first factor, others treat the second as the prime mover. It is argued that religion as an external value system introduced by the western Christian missions gave birth to the new social outlook and accelerated the process of change.[39] The nineteenth century saw the coming of economic enterprises in Kēraḷa. Plantations and factories were set up, commercial activities on a large scale started, schools were opened, extensive public works began. English education, control over land and access to government office were the three variables affecting status and power of social groups. Nāyars, foreign Brahmins and the Christians benefited most from these changes. Since religious sanction was decisive in allowing or denying

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[38] Nita Kumar, "Language, Families and the Plural Meanings of the Nineteenth-century Intelligentsia", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 38:1, 2001, p.99.

[39] Gorge Mathew, *Communal Road to a Secular Kerala*, New Delhi, 1989, pp.37-44.

opportunities and avenues of social advancement, communities like the Īzhavas were greatly agitated over the prevailing norms of social ordering. The teachings and preachings of the Christian missionaries created a climate for cultural and social awakening. Values of liberal democratic humanism and a culture of individualism necessary for human creativity despite cultural rigidities had tremendous impact in heralding a new pattern of social outlook.

1:4. Social Reform Movements

"The cultural-ideological struggle represented by the socio-religious movements", writes K.N. Panikkar, "was an integral part of the evolving national consciousness".[40] This was so because, he adds, it was instrumental in bringing about the initial intellectual and cultural breakthrough which made a new vision of the future possible. Second, it was a part of the resistance against colonial cultural and ideological hegemony. Out of this dual struggle evolved the modern cultural situation: new men, new homes and a new society.

Kenneth. W. Jones defined the concept of socio-religious reform movements with reference to the three terms which the phrase contained.[41] For him the term 'socio' implies an attempt to reorder society in the areas of social behaviour, customs, structure or control. A movement may have sought to reshape any one of these components or a combination of them. All socio-religious movements demanded changes, ranging from the relatively limited approach of defensive and self-consciously orthodox groups to radicals who articulated a sweeping condemnation of the status quo. The term 'religious' refers to the type of authority used to legitimize a given ideology and its accompanying programme. This authority was based on scriptures that were no longer considered to be properly observed, on a reinterpretation of doctrines, or on scriptural sources

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[40] K.N. Panikkar, "Socio-Religious Reforms and the National Awakening" in Bipan Chandra ed., *India's Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989, p. 90.

[41] Kenneth W Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India*, New Delhi, 1994, p. 2.

arising from the codification of new religious leaders' message. Here the term 'movement' refers to an aggregate of individuals united by the message of a charismatic leader or the ideology derived from that message. Such a movement might be loosely organized, especially during the lifetime of its founder, but if it was to last beyond his death, his disciples need to create and sustain a formal organizational structure. In short, a Socio-Religious Reform Movement advocated modifications in social behaviour, justified such advocacy by one or another form of religious authority, and then built an organizational structure it maintained over time. At the same time, Charles Heimsath defined a social reformer as an advocate of alterations in social customs which would involve a break with the past and an individual who had convinced himself that 'the altered ways of thinking and behaving were positive values'.[42]

Jones identified two types in the category of socio-religious movements: transitional and acculturative. The first of these were pre-British in origin and pre-modern in their objectives and nature of functioning. The second group functioned within the colonial milieu and was led by individuals of cultural interaction. The leaders were English educated and were influenced by the specific culture of England. But the basis of such movements and many of their declared aims rested on the indigenous heritage of social and religious protest. In no way were acculturative movements totally new or without roots in the general high culture of South Asia and the specific cultures of a given region. Thus the difference between the two movements was primarily at their point of origin.[43]

Charles Heimsath observed that conscious social change in India took two forms– social reform and social struggle.[44] From the 19th century, movements supporting both forms had defined where the society wanted to go and the methods of getting there. Movements for social reform and social struggle joined

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[42] Charles. M. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social reform*, Bombay, 1965, p.4.
[43] Kenneth W Jones, *op.cit.*, p.4.
[44] Charles. H. Heimsath, "From Social Reform to Social Struggle", *Man and Development*, Vol. IV, No. 3, Sep. 1982, p.29.

in their adherence to the liberal democratic ideals of equality of opportunity for individuals and social groups and their freedom from oppression. In modern India social reform, which began in the early 19th century, preceded organized social struggle, which was a feature of the 20th century.

Movements of social protest and struggle more radical than social reform also were being organized during this time. Confrontations with the institutions upholding status quo by great number of deprived people large enough to create a threat became the chief means of bringing about desirable changes in social behaviour. While the educated middle classes might benefit from reform, low classes and backward castes saw no alternative to social protest and struggle for changing the oppressive features of the society. Such movements, according to Prof. M.S.A. Rao, were aimed at "middle level structural changes in the traditional distribution of power and in the system of differential allocation of resources, rights and privileges by attacking the monopoly of the upper classes and castes in different areas of life including religion".[45] The common bond among reformers all over India was their commitment to individual and collective freedom of opportunity, sometimes defined as personal fulfillment (e.g., female education), often as upward caste mobility (e.g., Īzhava advancement in Kerala), and also as national progress (which would include for example, ending untouchability). Heimsath argues that social changes had to precede the attainment of any of these ends, and when these changes resulted in altered personal laws, or customs or transformed relations among castes or communities, they were called social reforms.[46]

It is observed that although religious reformation was a major concern of these movements, none of them were exclusively religious in character.[47] Strongly humanist in inspiration, the idea of otherworldliness and salvation were

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[45] M.S.A. Rao, *Social Movements in India* Vol. I, New Delhi, 1979, p.13.

[46] Charles. H. Heimsath, "The Functions of Hindu Reformers – With Special Reference to Kerala", p.21.

[47] K.N. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

not a part of their agenda; instead their attention was focused on worldly existence. But given the interconnection between religious beliefs and social practices, religious reformation was a necessary pre-requisite for social reform. Religion was the dominant ideology of the times and it was not possible to undertake any social action without coming to grips with it. And despite being regional in scope and content and confined to a particular religion, their general perspectives were remarkably similar: they were regional and religious manifestation of a common consciousness.

Social theorists, who see all associational forms between family and the state as belonging to the area of civil society, include religious reform movements into this category.[48] These movements interrogated the 'evil' practices that came to be associated with Hinduism – the system of caste, the practice of untouchability, degraded status of women, and a host of superstitious practices. As civil society organizations, they contributed to positive social transformation through their agenda of equality, sought to be achieved through social reform and social development. Even caste movements have been a part of civil society; the 'general interest' is often the summation of interests of its different segments.

Since Ram Mohan Roy's time reformers in general were convinced that religion was the ideological mortar that held together the different aspects of human existence; but thorough transformations are necessary in belief and behaviour. So reformers and their followers considered spiritual revitalization the root of India's needs. But that was not a general rule. The Īzhavas, indeed, were inspired by Srī Nārāyaṇa Guru's religious leadership, and he in turn was spiritually nourished by Chaṭṭambi Swāmikaḷ; all untouchables gained strength from Gandhi's religion-based morality. But Īzhavas and other low and outcastes were discontented and were on the way up before those esteemed guides took up

[48] T.K. Oommen, *op.cit.*, pp.132-36.

their causes. And the Nāyars, Nambūtiris and hundreds of other castes and communities organized themselves under non-religious leadership and gained their ends through legal means and careful secular organizations alone.

Amiya. P. Sen studied the socio-religious reform movements in the context of cultural resistance, a reaction to the colonial rule, among the Hindu people and identified them as the expression of an urge to design a single, nationalized religion. "In nineteenth century India, the Hindus were quick to realize that 'reform' was not just about altering beliefs or practices, but invariably touched upon deeper questions of self-identity. Their growing familiarity with modern disciplines like history, anthropology, politics and the natural sciences enabled Hindus not only to compare the state of their own society and civilization with that of the West but also to develop a deep self-reflexivity about their own tradition...Hindu religious thinkers of modern India, rather than abide by the highly pluralistic nature of Hinduism, promoted the idea of a single, nationalized religion for all Hindus".[49] Although there was considerable disagreement among various reformers over the focal points of reform (like anti-idolatry, monotheistic faith, emancipation of women or reform of caste) or over the varied terminology used to describe the reformer community (like the 'Arya' as in the Arya Samāj, 'Brahman' as in the Brahma Samāj or 'Sanātan' as in the Sanātan Dharma Sabha) or over the modality of reform (whereas Vivekananda recommended restraint and caution, Periyār consciously identified himself with the 'destructionist method') or also whether people switched from one area of activity to another mostly under the pressure of altered circumstances, Sen argues that social and religious reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a few things in common. For one, they were very largely led by the new, western-educated, middle classes and hence failed to notice the entirely different nature of lower-class problems. Their class character would

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[49] Amiya. P. Sen ed., *Social and Religious Reform: the Hindus of British India*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 3-4.

explain why, barring a few exceptions, they were more on the side of structural adjustments than structural reorganization. These reform movements, irrespective of their ideology or interests, also adopted similar work methods. Interestingly, even those opposing reform itself were quick to seize upon these. The orthodox Dharmasabha of Bengal, which opposed the move to abolish sati, was the first to use the method of petitioning and counter-petitioning higher authorities.[50]

Panikkar notices two important intellectual criteria which influenced the reform movements: rationalism and religious universalism.[51] Social relevance of anything was judged by a rationalistic critique. It is difficult to match the uncompromising rationalism of the early Rajaram Mohan Roy or Akshay Kumar Dutt. This perspective not only enabled them to adopt a rational approach to tradition but also to evaluate the contemporary practices from the standpoint of social utility and to replace faith with rationality. In the *Brahmo Samāj*, it led to the repudiation of the infallibility of the Vedas, and in the Aligarh movement, to the reconciliation of the teachings of Islam with the needs of the modern age. A rational and secular outlook was very much evident in posing an alternative to prevalent social practices. If religion did not sanction desirable social change (like widow marriage or abolition of child marriage and polygamy), religion itself should be changed as it was made by man and what was laid down in scriptures need not necessarily be of contemporary relevance.

The reform movements were important for their social implications as well. They contributed to the liberation of the individual from conformity born out of fear and from uncritical submission to the exploitation of the priests. The dissemination of religious knowledge through translation of religious texts into vernacular languages and the rights granted to the laity to interpret scriptures represented an important initial breach in the stranglehold of misinterpreted

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[50] *Ibid*, pp. 4-6.
[51] See Panikkar, *Op. cit*, pp.85-86.

religious tenets. The simplification of rituals made worship a more intensely personal experience without the mediation of intermediaries. The individual was thus encouraged to exercise his freedom. The socially debilitating influence of the caste system which perpetuated social distinction was universally recognized as an area which called for urgent reform. It was morally and ethically abhorrent; more importantly, it militated against patriotic feelings and negated the growth of democratic ideas.

Revivalism acted as a natural adjunct to reform in India. Some of the movements had an agenda of religious revival right from the beginning while some others soon fell into a revivalist mood. Amiya Sen looks at the question of reform that may lead to revivalism from two different, but related, standpoints. At one level, it was used as a corrective to reformist excesses and the 'mischievous temperament' of professional reformers. This kind of thinking is commonly associated with the relatively more conservative elements within upper-class Hindu society who were not averse to change itself, but wary of bringing this about much too quickly or under the shadow of alien rulers. Secondly, it is seen to represent a reactionary spirit, aiming to undermine the very logic of social change through a thoughtless attachment to old and obsolete ideals. Sen assumes that the apologists of the British rule and those who attributed every progressive change to the western intellectual impact on India were among the earliest to attach a pejorative meaning to the term 'revival'. While some found 'traditionalist' to be a better term, others called the very term a misnomer since Hinduism, being far from dead, could not have been revived. She, however, holds that the revivalist must be separated from the reactionary. Under conditions peculiar to colonialism, rosy reformist moods could soon change into somber revival. Quoting Asok Sen,[52] who had argued that "both Brahmo reformation and Hindu Revival were reflexes of a middle class, first of hopes at its birth and then, moratorium at its adolescence", she concluded with

[52] Asok Sen, *Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and his elusive Milestones*, Calcutta, 1977, p.107.

the statement of Panikkar[53] that for colonized Indians it would be also important to remember that upholding the vitality of traditional culture was not cultural revivalism but cultural self-defense. [54]

Despite the elements of anti-colonialism and cultural self-defence involved in revivalism, it had its serious consequences. It obviously contributed to the assertion of an aggressive Hindu identity. Not only had 'modernistic' reform movements been entirely Hindu in composition; with a few exceptions, they too had operated with a conception of 'Muslim tyranny' or a 'medieval' dark age from which British rule with its accompanying alleged 'renaissance' or 'awakening' had been a deliverance. This was not a theory which could ever hope to appeal to Muslim intellectuals, while the attempts to purge Hindu religion and society of 'medieval' crudities and superstitions in the name of ancient standards and an emerging code of middle-class respectability also at times involved attacks on syncretist popular customs, like the worship in common of Hindu and Muslim holy men or shrines. As similar movements were developing at about the same time within Indian Islam too, the two communities tended to drift apart both at the level of the elite and of the peasant masses.

J.T.F. Jordens identified two important tendencies which had begun to occupy the Indian scene around 1880 and which had its impact on social reform movements: nationalism and political action.[55] From now on individuals and groups openly identified themselves with an Indian nation, a new concept in Indian history; and this elite group, consciously nationalist, conceived its function as being primarily one of political agitation and reform. This predominance of nationalism and politics now began to exert influence on the ideas of religious and social reform which had previously prevailed. Nationalism

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[53] K.N. Panikkar, "Historiographical and Conceptual Questions", in K. N. Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology and Hegemony: Intellectual and Social Consciousness in Modern India*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 69.

[54] Amiya. P. Sen, *op. cit.*, pp.33-36.

[55] J.T.F. Jordens, *op.cit.*, p.373.

itself developed two patterns, a religious and a secular one, and each school assigned a different place to social reform.

In the last two decades of the 19th century social reform was dominated by the nationalistic secularists. The revivalist extremists naturally opposed this approach vehemently, as being denationalizing and degrading because it was based on European ideas and inspired by European models. So an intense debate between the reformers and the nationalists ensued. However, most of the revivalists, except Tilak, were themselves very much committed to social reform in many spheres of life. "In their interchange with the reformers it became increasingly clear that, as far as the problem of reform was concerned, there was a very large area of argument between the two groups. The differences lay in inspiration, in motivation, and in the model of society they aspired to. The nationalists succeeded in demonstrating that a purely nationalistic notion and a Hindu model could be the inspiration for whatever reform the reformers envisaged. But they proved more than that: they showed that Hindu nationalism and an ideal Hindu society had a mass appeal that was absent in western type reform. These arguments were irresistible, and the reform movement as a whole changed its image and its model in the direction of revivalist Hindu nationalism, and veered towards a concern for the mass of the people."[56]

By the 1920s the Indian religious and social reform movement had lost its peculiar identity as an important and distinct phenomenon of Indian life. Many factors contributed to this. One of this was the appearance at the national stage of Gandhi, who was to dominate and often confuse it with his new ideas on politics religion and society. But it is extremely interesting to note that caste-based reform movements in Kerala gained their full vigour in the 1920s and in the special case of the Nambūtiris, its real efflorescence was in the '20s. In fact what differentiated the movement from others was the strong

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[56] *Ibid*, p. 377.

nationalist/Gandhian influence upon which the movement functioned. But neither nationalist nor Gandhian influence did not drain it of its reformist or casteist affiliations.

1:5. Caste Associations

By the turn of the 19th century caste associations superseded general religious and social reform movements in India. Though they came into being with the narrow aim of enhancing the social prestige and economic welfare of their respective castes, their concerted efforts at reforming their members in personal behaviour, marriage practices, religious or secular rituals, and their attempts at arranging educational opportunities for their community vicariously benefited society as a whole. However varied were the bundles of reforms prescribed for different groups they could stand very well alongside any general social reform association's programme. Although the national Social Conference deplored the restrictiveness of reforms under caste auspices the Conference President, Ranade, observed in 1897 that caste conferences were carrying on most of the work of the national body.[57]

Because of the determination of the caste associations to improve the immediate condition of their communities by whatever possible means, their reformers could not find time or energy to spare for concentrating on matters affecting society in general nor did they have the inclination to do so. Such controversies as whether social reform should or should not precede political reform, whether or not reformers should enlist the administrative support of the government, whether modifications sought in ritual behaviour had the sanction of the *śāstṛās* or not, all appeared to be too esoteric for them to interfere with the overcoming of caste bans on foreign travel, adopting new laws for marriage and divorce, fighting a census commissioner's varṇa designation, or breaking the

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[57] Charles. H. Heimsath, "The Functions of Hindu Social Reformers – With Special Reference to Kerala", p.23.

barrier to low caste admission to temples. If new laws might serve caste needs, it would seem irrelevant that the legislature and courts bore British seals of authority. If political campaigning could move caste representatives closer to the levels of power, then the budget and personnel of a caste association would be shifted from social to political work. The examination of caste-sponsored social reforms thus produces a refreshing sense of immediacy, of grass-roots action. Heimsath concludes that modern India's social changes have been largely group efforts –communities, not individuals, adopting *en masse* to changed economic and administrative conditions; furthermore, that caste reform, in Kerala and elsewhere, whether or not accompanied by religious reform, did not proceed according to a single formula.[58]

The Rudolphs interpreted caste associations as agents of 'modernity', a means by which the social entities of traditional Hindu India were being regarded as democratic pressure groups.[59] They remark: "Caste, however, provides channels of communication and bases of leadership and organization which enable those still submerged in the traditional society and culture to transcend the technical political illiteracy which would otherwise handicap their ability to participate in democratic politics. Caste has been able to perform this novel role by developing a new form for political activity, the caste association".[60] Perhaps the most significant aspect of the caste association in the contemporary era, however, is its capacity to organize the politically illiterate mass electorate, thus making possible in some measure the realization of its aspirations and educating large sections of it in the methods and values of political democracy. Their ideas were elaborated by Hardgrave in his investigation of the once lowly Nādāṛ community in Tamilnad. To Hardgrave,

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[58] *Ibid.*

[59] L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations" in Immanuel Wallerstein ed., *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*. New York, 1966, pp447-464.

[60] *Ibid*, p. 448-49.

the Nādāṛ caste associations were central to the process of social elevation and to the accumulation of political influence by caste leaders during the early decades of the twentieth century.[61]

Bailey and Srinivas have also noted the birth and proliferation of caste associations as a modern adaptation of traditional caste forms. Bailey identified the caste associations as playing a significant role in draining the catchment areas of 'caste categories' – which he defined as "aggregate of persons, usually of the same linguistic region, usually of the same traditional occupation and sometimes with the same caste name..." He observed that the associations "function as welfare and improvement associations and –notoriously in Kerala – as political interest groups".[62] Srinivas suggested that the origin of caste associations can be traced to Indian reactions to the recording and ranking of castes in government census reports at the end of the nineteenth century. What was intended as an exercise in the enumeration of a supposedly static hierarchy in practice "had the opposite effect of stimulating mobility, and also increased inter-caste rivalry."[63]

Taking a position closer to Srinivas, Lucy Caroll has argued that caste associations (with their 'caste cluster consciousness') were in fact the response of various caste groups to the British official perception of Indian society.[64] She argued that the reciprocal relationship between official views of Indian society and caste(s) organizations is eloquently illustrated in the founding of the Nādāṛ

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[61] Robert. L. Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad; The Political Culture of a Community in Change*, Berkeley, 1969 cited in Arnold, Jeffrey, Manor, "Caste associations in South India, A Comparative Analysis", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. XIII, No. 3, 1976, p. 353.

[62] Bailey, "Closed Social Stratification in India", *Archives europeenes de Sociologie*, VI: 1, 1963, pp. 107-8, cited in Arnold, Jeffrey & Manor, *op.cit.*, p. 353.

[63] M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Berkeley, 1966, pp. 94-100 cited in Arnold, Jeffrey & Manor, *op.cit.*, pp. 353-54.

[64] Lucy Caroll, "Colonial Perceptions of Indian Society and the Emergence of Caste(s) Associations", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXVII, No.2, Feb. 1978, pp.233-250.

Mahājana Sangham in 1910.[65] She writes that "not infrequently, the classifications and categories into which the foreigners divided Indian society had important economic and political repercussions; the classifications were not mere academic speculations, and consequently the Indian response represented something more than idle strivings for social symbols".[66] "The colonial government's view of Indian society influenced not only the relationship between government and the bureaucratically defined groups, and the emergence of a caste-cluster consciousness to fit that official communal view; it also affected the inter-group relations among communal categories. Competition was stimulated along communal lines; the prizes were government patronage, jobs, and political appointments".[67]

In a review of Hardgrave's study, Washbrook argued that caste associations were the creation of a few individuals eager to promote their own interests in local and provincial government by using caste appeals. For the organizers the associations were "not exclusive but, perhaps, merely another way of building up a constituency in order to raise their bargaining power both with other politicians and the government... Caste is certainly invoked with monotonous regularity but the more it is examined the more it appears to be propaganda unconnected with social reality and understood in so many different senses that it loses any specific meaning".[68]

David Arnold, Robin Jeffrey and James Manor, in a comparative study of the caste movements of the three areas of Travancore, Mysore and Kongunad, remarked that Washbrook's observations were a corrective to those who, like the Rudolphs and Hardgrave, take caste associations at their face value, as embracing a large part of a relatively homogenous caste and expressing widely-

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[65] *Ibid*, p. 234.
[66] *Ibid*, p. 233.
[67] *Ibid*, p. 235.
[68] David Washbrook, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 3, July 1971, p. 282, cited in Arnold, Jeffrey & Manor, *op.cit.*, p. 354.

shared grievances and objectives. But he was too hasty. Even if a caste association had no more than a dozen members, who were concerned with their own and not their community's advancement, it might, nonetheless, express the embryonic ideas and aspirations of a far larger social group. It might, by its very existence, serve as a matrix in which previously distinct elements mix and solidify. It might be a response by part of a caste to complex economic and political forces invading the entire community.[69]

Arnold et al considered caste associations as a social adapter, improvised to connect two sets of social and political forms. It helped to reconcile the values of traditional society with those of the new order by continuing to use caste as the basis for social organization, but at the same time introducing new objectives – education and supra-local political power, for example – as the aims of that organization. It tried to relate the traditional geographical units – the marriage networks and petty chiefdoms – to the wider ones developed by the changing economy, by improved communications and tighter government control. The effective caste association thus constituted a stage on a continuum of development from the local *jāti* relationships and village dominant-caste politics towards class relations and the state level of political activity.[70]

The caste association can be considered as having two dimensions. Internally, it was designed, though unconsciously in many cases, to compensate for the differentiation which had been taking place with accelerating pace during the period of British rule in India. To combat occupational diversity and disparity of wealth within the community, the caste association stressed unity: it rediscovered (and if necessary, it invented) a common heritage: it exploited the grievances shared by the community. The caste association leaders did not however, come from the traditional caste authorities, but from the most enterprising of the misfits – the western educated, the lawyers, the urban

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[69] Arnold, Jeffrey & Manor, *op. cit.*, pp. 353-373.
[70] *Ibid*, p. 372.

businessmen, the retired government servants. These men were few in number; but they looked back over their shoulders hoping that the rest of their community supported them and would help the misfits to establish themselves more firmly in their non-traditional careers. Sometimes the gulf between the new elite and the majority of the community to which they claimed to belong was too great and there was no unifying grievance or sense of identity to unite the two. Nor did the caste unity achieved last very long. Once the first and second generation of the new elite felt more secure and had achieved their immediate social and political objectives, they tended to neglect their castemen and to identify to a greater extent along class lines or they split into rival factions.[71]

Externally the caste association tried to convince outsiders that behind the leaders stood a united community. Backed by the devices of modern political agitation – newspapers and printed tracts, conferences, petitions and deputations to the government – caste leaders lobbied for concessions from the state or provincial authorities. Caste lobbies were at their best and most successful in the first quarter of the twentieth century, partly because they were a novelty, partly because they flourished in political systems which dithered between autocracy and a limited kind of representative government. They were often useful to the administration as a short cut to popular representation without the dangers of universal suffrage and democratic control. The constitution of 1935 in Madras brushed aside the caste lobbies and the extension of the franchise then or subsequently prepared the way for the supremacy of the numerically or economically dominant communities. They suffered one of the two fates. One was for the association leaders to abandon the organization as a political vehicle, either letting it disappear completely or keeping it solely as a philanthropic

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[71] *Ibid.* D.L. Sheth observes that while caste had lost its significance as a ritual status group it survived as a 'community', seeking alliances with other similar communities with whom it shared political interest and consciousness. D.L. Sheth, "Caste and Secularisation Process in India", in Peter Donald de Souza ed., *Contemporary India – Transitions*, New Delhi, 2002, p. 249.

agency. The transition to universal suffrage was often a decisive factor in the cross-caste alliances and state-wide political machines made the old caste associations obsolete. The other fate was for the caste association to evolve into a caste party. This was only likely with a numerically large community which could survive in the age of universal suffrage and had a lingering sense of grievance or isolation to encourage it to do so. But even these parties, as events in Kerala have shown, are vulnerable to the massive force of class. They cannot for long defy that social reality.[72]

1:6. Kerala's Uniqueness

Heimsath identifies Kerala's social reform movements as having certain unique features. Unlike social reform in the British Indian provinces the movement began in nineteenth century Kerala among the low castes. The leaders of the society – Nambūtiri Brahmans, ruling Kşatriyas, Nāyars – failed to see Kerala as a "land of depravity"[73] or themselves as "deformed...bent in a hundred places"[74], moral stances that incited the social reform movement elsewhere. Among the educated leaders of southern Kerala there was not the helplessness and guilt which comes from witnessing great calamities like famine, war, and social disruption which one notices in the writings of other Indian reformers. Kerala was a secure land for the most part, and a sense of stability, even timelessness, militated against the anxieties that in other parts of India resulted in destructive rebellion – and also creative analysis of social and religious institutions. The absence in nineteenth century Kerala of strong commentary from Brahmins, the most intellectually advanced communities in British India, was another uniqueness. The Nambūtiris held back from modern education and followed their orthodox style of life cut off in their great estates.[75]

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[72] *Ibid*, p.373.

[73] It was Vidyasagar's description of mid-19th century Bengal, cited in Charles. H. Heimsath, "The Functions of Hindu Social Reformers – With Special Reference to Kerala", p. 24.

[74] It was the charge made by Ranade in 1897 against all the Indian people, cited in *ibid.*

[75] *Ibid*, p.24.

At the early stages of the all-India reform movements the 'evils' of society, mostly inflicted upon women –sati, the prohibition on remarriage of young widows, purdah, the custom of early marriage, and lack of educational opportunities for them –engaged the reformers' attention, and crusades for laws to protect (mostly high-caste) women and the founding of institutions to support and educate them defined the practical reform programmes. In Kerala, women's causes never caught on, for the obvious reason that society had been impregnated with mother-right cultural norms and thus women–except in Nambūtiri and some Muslim households–were already liberated. Sati, female infanticide, and the disfigurement of widows were never mentioned in foreign and local accounts of Kerala, and one may assume that these customs, which so enraged Indian social reformers, failed to emerge from the mother-right culture of Kerala. Widow remarriage, a highly charged issue throughout India, caused no ripples either, because most low caste and Nāyar widows freely remarried, as did high castes such as *Ambalavāsis*. Among the Nambūtiris mature marriage was the norm, not child marriage, and so widowhood could not claim major attention among their reformers. Infant marriages among all communities were rare.[76] Kerala's social evil was caste. Its social reform movements skipped the stage of individualistic and usually female-oriented reform and early in the nineteenth century confronted inequalities among Hindu castes, which were more glaring in Kerala than anywhere else in India.[77]

The mass movement of the Īzhavas and other castes in Kerala for radical social betterment was centered on breaking their reliance on rituals monopolized by the Brahmins. Reformed marriage rites and other domestic rituals, monogamy, marriage between sub- castes, inter-dining and above all education for girls and boys placed the SNDP Yōgam in the mainstream of social reform movements. Moving beyond reform to struggle for rights and for a higher ritual and economic status, the Yōgam and similar bodies raised the caste reform

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[76] *Ibid*, p.24, 25-6.
[77] *Ibid*, p.26.

movement to a popular struggle to transform power relations in the entire society.[78] Nor were their vision confined to mere casteist and sectarian; they were captivated by the much nobler ideals of secularism and humanism.[79]

Houtart and Lemercinier noticed that the objectives of different social movements in Kerala varied considerably according to their group composition, particularly whether they involved low-caste Hindus and outcastes, high-caste Hindus and non-Hindus. The first group laid stress on the abolition of the signs of social distance between the groups.[80] The second devoted its attention almost entirely to the transformation of family relationships, in particular the matrilineal inheritance of property. The third demanded a share in government employment.[81] And, these movements had three characteristics. First of all, these were all *caste movements* rather than class movements; in other words, what was at stake was primarily the status relationship between the groups and their internal organization as communities rather than their position in the relations of production. The two aspects, of course, were frequently combined, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish them completely, but the accent was definitely on the former.[82] The movements functioned on the basis of caste solidarity, whether the members involved were rich or poor. The second proposition concerns the *symbolic character* of the activity of these movements. Given the fact that the symbolic aspect of society[83] was all important, it was quite natural that the reaction against this social reality should take on a similar character. Subversive activity was required in the religious order – that is, it was necessary

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[78] Charles. H. Heimsath, "From Social Reform to Social Struggle", p. 33.

[79] Kesavan Veluthat, "Nambūtiriyum Manuşyanum", *Sāhityalōkam*, March-April 2003, pp.11, 19.

[80] Such as untouchability, restrictions on temple-entry, ban on wearing upper garments, etc.

[81] Francois Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier, "Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 11, June 1978, p.5.

[82] Most of the upper castes were either landlords or having various kinds of governmental and social privileges. They monopolized education, government service, and temple properties. Whereas lower castes were landless agriculturists or bonded labourers.

[83] They are the signs of social distance pointed out by Heimsath.

to break the existing rules of this order. Now the latter were for the most part expressed within the religious field. This is why the low-caste movements took on a religious aspect, especially among the Īzhavas. (This should not be accepted in full, symbolic aspect was not a common trait). Finally, the alliance between the various movements was generally motivated by *humanitarian objectives*, and not by social objectives capable of transforming the class structure. It was possible to unite in order to obtain the abolition of the pollution codes, considered as going against the person as an individual. But it became much more difficult to create alliances around other goals. For that matter, even these goals rarely went beyond symbolic claims, or the possibility of every group's enjoying the advantages of education and having access to public employment.[84]

We must also note that these movements played a very insignificant part in the anti-British nationalist opposition.[85] The outstanding enemies here were internal, and in any event the British colonist appeared to the depressed communities as an element favourable to their emancipation, since it was he who had been responsible for the abolition of slavery and for so many liberal reforms, which had already dissolved the cement uniting into a rigid structure the caste relations between social groups in Kerala.[86] For the upper castes too the British offered opportunities for emancipation, since educational progress and changes in marriage rules were largely dependent on their consent. In general, thus, the attitude of the caste associations towards the emerging nationalist movement was

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[84] *Ibid*, pp. 6-7. But it is argued that the caste-based mobilization contributed to increasing secularization of the social life in Kerala which undermined caste identity and consciousness. For instance, the Īzhavas under Srī Nārāyaṇa Guru banked heavily on rationalist and egalitarian world views in providing a radical critique of caste which had a remarkable impact on other castes including the Nāyars. D.D. Nambutiri, "Caste and Social Reform Movement in Kerala", in P.J. Cheriyan ed., *Kerala State Gazetteer*, Vol. II, Part II: Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.447.

[85] It is observed that their social role sharpened communal consciousness and communal tension in the twenties and thirties through their efforts to secure sectional advantages like share in the government posts, special representation in the legislative bodies, demand for special educational concessions etc. Loius Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in Travancore 1921-47*, New Delhi, 1994, p.60.

[86] *Ibid*, p. 7.

one of distrust and caution but by the 1920s isolated individuals began to traverse from caste platform to nationalist movement still retaining their caste affiliations, and utilizing the nationalist platform they tried to endorse their caste/class disabilities. Thus when Nāyars (like Kelappan who was active in NSS) upheld the tenancy issue, the Īzhavas (like TK Madhavan of SNDP) fought against pollution rules and for temple entry. In both cases anti-British ideology was strikingly mild. The Nambūtiris, whose proprietorship over the landed estates was a gift of the British government, heavily depended on the latter for their economic power and this factor contributed much to their detachment from nationalist politics. The apparent cultural revivalism of the nationalist movement perfectly conformed to the attitude of the Nambūtiris – to their cultural exclusiveness and aversion to modern developments – but that too could not abrogate their landed interests and get them attached to the nationalist politics.

In this context, the Nambūtiri movement was not a simple assertion of pre-modern collectivity. Devika observed that the modern Nambūtiri community, which was its goal, was distinct in many ways.[87] Its formation was clearly seen to depend on the destruction of pre-existing forms of knowledge and practices found characteristic of the older collectivities. It required its members to be subjects, participating in community-building processes, not simply born into it, or habituated to its practices and usage. It was further describable as a substantial entity with sets of features identified as 'characteristic of' or 'typical to'. It is not, as the pre-modern *jāti*, a set of hierarchically arranged groups interlinked through networks of sharings and obligations, arranged in hierarchy, with 'family resemblance' in practices, customs, everyday routines and life-style, often recognizable as a totality only from outside. Community reform required the breakdown of hierarchies between groups constituting the pre-modern collectivity, and active re-integration of the members of those very groups into

[87] J. Devika, "Engendering Individuals: The Project of Nambutiri Brahman Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-Aug.2004, p.81.

the modern community as individuals. Here the shaping of the individuals and the building of the modern community need not be regarded as opposing tendencies. One consequence of either tacitly accepting the common-sense notion of liberation or failing to scrutinize it closely is the reinforcement of the idea that the project of liberation is somehow 'pure', free of all interest, not entangled in power.

1:7. Formation of the Hindu identity

The reform movements are also intimately associated with the notion of the 'construction' of modern Hinduism. Nineteenth century Hindu reformers, seeking to rid their religion of the features most attacked by Christian missionaries, are believed to have been driven by a will to monotheism in their attempts to make Hindu religion correspond more rigorously to the Judaeo-Christian conceptions of a single, all powerful deity. This new Hinduism borrowed features from European modernity and rational religion: most importantly it relied on the concept of the nation-state in order to claim a national, all-India character. This presumption got relevance in the context of the position of some radical western scholars who saw Hinduism not as a single religion but rather as a group of amorphous Indian religions.[88] The formation of modern Hinduism, thus, involved Christian missionaries and Hindu revivalist organizations alike, which both contributed to the systematization of disparate traditions for their own purposes. In this context it has been observed that it is more appropriate to term the developments in post-1850 India not as renascent but as *resistant* Hinduism.[89]

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[88] "Hinduism...does not meet the fundamental requirements of a historical religion of being a coherent system; but its distinct religious entities do. They are indeed religions, while Hinduism is not". Heinrich von Stietencron, "Hinduism: On the Proper Use of a deceptive Term" in Gunther D. Sontheimer and Herman Kulke eds., *Hinduism Reconsidered*, Delhi, 1995, p. 20, cited in Gowri Viswanathan, "Colonialism and the Construction of Hinduism" in Gavin Flood ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*, Oxford, 2003, p. 27.

[89] Richard Fox Young, *Resistant Hinduism: Sanskrit Sources on Anti-Christian Apologetics in Early Nineteenth Century India*, Vienna, 1981, p.15 cited in Gowri Viswanathan, *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

It was in the arena of law that Hinduism received its most definitive colonial reworking. This is one of the most complicated and dense aspects of Britain's involvement with Indian traditions, yet it is also the most far-reaching, as the texts that constituted the basis of legal decisions achieved a canonical power as religious rather than legal texts. This had a great deal to do with the consolidation of patriarchal power over practices involving women, such as sati, pre-pubertal marriage, and conversion to other religions. Each of these had a significant role in the construction of Hinduism. If modern Hinduism's practice is theoretically based on law, it is to that law that one must turn to examine how it was yoked to the interests of both colonizers and the indigenous elite, even as it showed the wide gap between them.[90]

The process of the 'construction of Hinduism', both as a desperate resistance against colonialism and as a prospective nationalist programme, forcefully advocated by religious reform movements, was not active in modern Kerala since here the medium of association was not religion but caste; from the 1920s, however, the caste movements began to mend their way towards moulding a modern Hindu community, particularly through the discourse and agitation on pollution and temple-entry. This phenomenon was brought about by two major factors. First, the humanitarian ethic embedded in the Gandhian constructive programme and second, the menace posed by the debates on conversion of the lower castes among the caste-Hindus by threatening their social aura and privileged status. Though not referring to these socio-economic pressures and the attendant discursive processes, Muralidharan noticed that the temple-entry movement of the 1920s had the ironic effect of weakening *jāti* in its old form and of strengthening the Hindu community consciousness.[91] Many of the arguments against caste or at least the upper caste domination deployed during

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[90] Gowri Viswanathan, *op.cit.*, p.38.

[91] M. Muralidharan, "Hindu Community Formation in Kerala: Processes and Structures under Colonial Modernity", *South Indian Studies*, 2, July-Dec.1996, p.255.

the temple-entry movement, appealed not to a tailor-made humanism of the abstract type, but to *śāstraic* norms and to the common ownership of a religion. In the guise of reclaiming this heritage, a new heritage was created. This also appealed to inter-dining which broke many barriers which stood in the way of a common Hindu community. By the mid-1930s social reform discussions had required an idiom that could pose the problems of responsibility only within the framework of a religious group. The temple-entry proclamation points to the paradox of people making a community by threatening to abandon it.[92]

1:8. The Women question

Historians have generally noted the centrality of what is now commonly known as the Woman Question, and an enormous literature has since been built upon the subject by men and women speaking with different voices. This was not a question of 'what do women want?' but rather 'how can they be modernized'.[93] It became the central question in nineteenth century British India because the foreign rulers had focused their attention on this particular aspect of society. British writers condemned Indian religions, culture and society for their rules and customs regarding women. For them women's position could be used as an indicator of society's advancement: "Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among civilized people they are exalted".[94] The imperialist perception was carried further by the missionaries and pronounced Indian disunity a consequence of the low status of women. Having linked military strength with the status of women, the British concluded that domination of India was natural and inevitable.

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[92] *Ibid.* Muralidharan argued that the SNDP resolution 1936 deciding to renounce Hinduism for denying them the freedom of temple-entry and the immediate response of C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer to this threat through the Temple-Entry Proclamation in fact shared the premise that the Īzhavas were part of the Hindu community.

[93] Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India, Vol. IV: 2, Women in Modern India,* Delhi, 2000, p.12.

[94] James Mill, *The History of British India,* pp.309-10, cited in *ibid.* p.13.

Indians responded to the colonial challenge by reshaping the imported ideas and institutions to fit their social and cultural milieu. The ideology that emerged to redefine gender relations was an amalgam of new foreign ideas, indigenous concepts and the response of Indian men and women to the foreign presence in the midst.[95] But not all agreed that gender relations needed modification. Several Indians praised their own culture's treatment of women or concluded that females in Europe and in India suffered hardships. Those who accepted the idea that society's ills could be traced to the oppressed condition of women saw female education and female emancipation as the first steps towards progress. But both these groups- the traditionalists and the reformers – shared an ideology, later linked to the nationalist project, that separated the home from the world.

The 'women's question' was the central issue during the so-called Renaissance. Ram Mohan Roy's historical fame is largely built around his campaign against the practice of the immolation of widows and Vidyasagar's around his efforts to legalize widow remarriage and abolish *kulin* polygamy. What has perplexed historians is the rather sudden disappearance of such issues from the agenda of public debate toward the close of the century. From then onward, questions regarding the position of women in society did not arouse the same degree of public passion and acrimony as they did a few decades before; the overwhelming issues now were directly political ones – concerning the politics of nationalism.

Partha Chatterjee's remarkable thesis on the "nationalist resolution of the women's question" delineates how nationalism settled the so-called women's question within the framework of the nationalist ideology.[96] Nationalism did in fact provide an answer to the new social and cultural problems concerning the position of women in 'modern' society; this answer was posited not on an identity but on a difference with the perceived forms of cultural modernity in the

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[95] Geraldine Forbes, *op.cit.*, p.14.

[96] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, New Delhi, 1999, pp.117-121.

West.[97] Therefore, the relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the nineteenth century is to be explained not by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the 'women's question' in an inner domain of sovereignty, far removed from the arena of political contest with the colonial state. This inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of 'tradition'. In the world, imitation of and adaptation to Western norms was a necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity. The material domain was unimportant, since it was external and enforced but the spiritual, which lies within, is our true self. This completed the formulation of the nationalist project, an ideological justification for the selective appropriation of Western modernity. It was not a dismissal of modernity but an attempt to make modernity consistent with the nationalist project.

The home was the principal site for expressing the spiritual quality of the national culture, and women must take the main responsibility for protecting and nurturing this quality. No matter what the changes in the external conditions of life for women, they must not lose their essentially spiritual (that is, feminine) virtues; they must not, in other words, become essentially Westernized. It followed that the essential distinction between the social roles of men and women in terms of material and spiritual virtues must at all times be maintained. There would have to be a marked difference in the degree and manner of Westernization of women, as distinct from men, in the modern world of the nation. This was the central principle by which nationalism resolved the women's question in terms of its own historical project. The new woman defined

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[97] Chatterjee refers to it as 'preferred goals'. He discusses an Eastern type of nationalism, trying to reequip the nation culturally to transform it but not being able to imitate the alien culture for fear of losing its distinctive identity, thus being both imitative and hostile to its model. See Partha Chatterjee, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi, pp.233-49.

in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy. In fact, the social order connecting the home and the world in which nationalists placed the new woman was contrasted not only with that of modern Western society; it was explicitly distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition. Attainment by her own efforts of a superior national culture was the mark of woman's newly acquired freedom. Chatterjee argues that this was the central ideological strength of the nationalist resolution of the women's question.

Many later works on women, including on widows, were based on the assumption that the women's question disappeared from the agenda of public debate towards the close of the nineteenth century.[98] But Charu Gupta questions this assumption and attributes the notion to two reasons – due to a focus on Bengal and the influence of Partha Chatterjee.[99] She observes that the literature produced around widows in the early twentieth century far surpassed that of the previous century. In fact the 1920s and 30s in UP were marked by most extensive and intense public deliberations on women, including widows.

Sumit Sarkar has argued that the limitations of nationalist ideology in pushing forward a campaign for liberal and egalitarian social change cannot be seen as a retrogressive step from the earlier radical reformist phase.[100] Those limitations were in fact present in the earlier phase as well. The renaissance reformers, he shows, were highly selective in their acceptance of liberal ideas from Europe. Fundamental elements of social conservatism such as the maintenance of caste distinctions and patriarchal forms of authority in the

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[98] For instance, Anupama Roy writes: "The domestic was the space where the retrieval of the national culture took place. Women, in their specific roles as biological reproducers, became the natural symbols of the continuity of the national culture and identity. The apotheosis of the idealized Hindu woman was an integral part of this process of recovery and rejuvenation of a national tradition. Produced and reproduced through extensive writings laying down behavioural norms for women, the body of the idealized Hindu woman, came to symbolize the ultimate, and even the last resort of resistance to imperialism in the nationalist discourse". Anupama Roy, "The Domestic, Domesticity and Women Citizens in Late Colonial India", *Contemporary India*, Vol. 2, No. 3, July-Sept. 2003, pp. 129-130.

[99] Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community*, Delhi, 2001, pp.301-02.

[100] Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial Reason*, Calcutta, 1985, pp.71-76.

family, acceptance of the sanctity of *śāstra,* preference for symbolic rather than substantive changes in social practices – all these were conspicuous in the reform movements of the early and mid-nineteenth century. Sarkar also argued that reformers were concerned primarily with modifying relationships within their own families and sought only 'limited and controlled emancipation of their womenfolk'. Women themselves were not partners in the schemes created for their regeneration; more often they were portrayed as opposed to their own liberation.[101]

In the nineteenth century, the entire social reform campaign virtually began with Ram Mohan's efforts at abolishing sati and, thereafter, no single issue agitated the Hindu mind as much as that concerning man-woman relationship. In the early and mid-nineteenth centuries, young graduates in upper class families apparently took to educating their wives and other female members in the family in the belief that this would indeed reduce the cultural or educational differences between the two sexes and contribute to harmonious domestic life. Presumably, the problem of marital incompatibility between an educated adult (husband) and the usually illiterate, juvenile wife cut across ideological and social divides, and, over time, even conservatives were forced to acknowledge the greater need for female education. However, while there was wide agreement on the need to educate women, most men in fact appear to have taken education as a means to reinforce traditional, patriarchal[102] values such as allegiance to the family and respectful obedience to the husband.[103]

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[101] Sumit Sarkar, "The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture,* Bombay, 1994, p.106.

[102] Kumkum Sanghari uses the term patriarchy to denote systems of subordinating women – function simultaneously through coercion or the threat and practice of violence, through a wide social consensus drawn from the dispersed over many areas of social life and by obtaining in various ways, varying degrees of consent from women. Kumkum Sanghari, "Consent, Agency and Rhetorics of Incitement" in T.V. Sathyamoorthy ed., *Region, Religion, Caste, Gender and Culture in Contemporary India,* Vol. 3, New Delhi, 1996, p.467.

[103] Tanika Sarkar wrote: "If the household was the embryonic nation, then the woman was the true patriotic subject. The male body, having passed through the grind of western education,

To an extent, educated Hindu men liked the idea of educated women advocating their own cause. This seemed to fit in with claims repeatedly made at the time, that women in pre-Muslim India enjoyed the benefits of education and public freedom. Further, such initiatives when taken by themselves, could be seen to reflect man's noble intentions for the woman and used to silence European critics like Mill. Though it would appear that men were beginning to grant women, even if grudgingly, autonomous space and agency, in hindsight this was not the intention. Only a week after it applauded the efforts of Ramabai, the *Kēsari* categorically denied woman's right to intervene in the work of reform, which was man's prerogative.[104] Similarly, Vivekananda's warning to men to keep their hands off woman-related issues[105] may not so much mean allowing the woman to make the critical choices as the tendency to let matters drift until such time when she herself was fully capable of working out her own emancipation. This comes closer to the gradualist argument.

Another question to be critically debated in the third quarter of the nineteenth century concerned conjugality and man-woman relationships in day-to-day life. This touched on sensitive matters like the social and sexual fidelity of wife or the husband's conjugal rights over his wife.[106] Other issues that vitally

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office, routine, and forced urbanization, having been marked with the loss of traditional sports and martial activities, was supposedly remade in an attenuated, emasculated form of colonialism. The female body, on the other hand, was still pure and unmarked, loyal to the rule of the shastras alone. Tanika Sarkar, "The Hindu Wife and Hindu Nation: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal", *Studies in History*, 8:2, n.s, 1992, p.228.

[104] Cited in Amiya P Sen, *op. cit.*, p.40.

[105] Vivekananda, in the 1890s, cautioned his followers against excessive meddling with woman's issues. See, *ibid.*

[106] The enlightenment had recognized the family unit as the primordial sexual space, with procreation and child rearing as its principal tasks. With modernity ushering in the sharp distinction between the public and the private spheres, sexuality became relegated more and more to the private realm. Scientific and rational analyses stressed the differences between the bodies of women and men and placed particular emphasis on women's reproductive function in the eighteenth century. This highly gendered segregation in the development of capitalist societies was recognized into separate living spheres, with women's lives organized around two realms, the private realm where women are most in evidence (where 'natural' functions like sex and the bodily functions related to procreation take place, where the affective content of relationships is primary) and a public realm where men are most in

relate to the conjugal life of the Hindu, were also debated from time to time. A long standing issue of this kind was 'satitwa' (female chastity). Sen points out that Rammohan's campaign for the abolition of *sati* had itself glorified ascetic denial of the self and chaste widowhood. Men of a reformist disposition themselves took a serious view of sexual promiscuity developing in women and among widows in particular. *Satitwa* was sometimes also used to define and demarcate the Hindu woman as against her self-willed 'libertine' European counterpart. It was a virtue that more than compensated for her alleged lack of formal education or cultural finesse.[107]

1:9. Historical Biography

Among the many branches of Malayalam literature, that of historical biography is perhaps the most undeveloped one.[108] Until well into the twentieth century no appreciable effort was made in this field and no significant biography was produced in Malayalam before the second decade of that century. Even afterwards, historical biographies have been so extremely limited in number and so deficient in quality that this branch of writing is still in its infancy in Kerala. This dearth of contribution to this area and the poor quality of the available works could mainly be attributed to three factors.[109] First, prose literature in Malayalam is just a century old and prose writers were largely drawn towards creative writing utilizing historical themes than towards history and biography. Another reason is that Kerala's contribution to the list of Great Men– 'creative individuals' in Toynbean terms - is really very poor. Furthermore, even in the

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evidence, where 'cultural' (books, schools, art, music, science) is produced. Nineteenth century bourgeois feminity consisted of abstinence – from labour and sexuality – and reproduction. The function of the wife except in the working classes was to bear children, look after the house and keep her husband company. The social importance of the wife lay in her idleness and non-productivity was an indicator of social standing. See K.M. Sheeba, "From the Kitchen to the Stage and Back: Continuing Forms of Women's Exclusion in Keralam", *Journal of South Indian History*, pp.62-63.

[107] *Ibid*, p. 42.

[108] M.P. Sreekumaran Nair, "Historical Biography in Malayalam: An Analytical Survey", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. V, Part. III, 1978, pp. 529-31.

[109] *Ibid*, pp. 530-31.

case of locally significant historical figures, authentic source materials throwing light on their life and personality are oftentimes extremely meager. Their place in local history rests on tradition and popular belief and, therefore, the biographical historian's task has been made difficult by his dependence on unverifiable folk memory for his facts. Therefore, even the few works that belong to the category of historical biography are devoid of quality and critical perspective.

Even the available biographies in Malayalam are more of literary nature than historical. The reason is simple: the portraiture of personality is relatively easier with literary figures who are more articulate and self-expressive. The biographer's access to source materials in respect to them is also less difficult. It is therefore only natural that the best Malayalam biographies are those of literary men. Barring such biographies, what remains as historical biography is extremely small and even among them, those which made a substantial contribution to historical information as well as to biographical writing are again limited. With some rare exceptions, most authors have taken to biography as a kind of literary recreation and most of them are eulogists than biographers.

The subject of biography is the life of an individual, the account of an actual life. Biographies, by focusing on Individuals and their lives, become essays on individuality, personality and privacy. In fact, the purpose of the biography is to make the subject special, different and unique.[110] The biography has been particularly Anglo-American genre and is knitted into a changing history of private life in the West over the past three centuries or so. However, biographies place the subject in a curious relationship with the historical context–in that sense they are both similar to, yet different from, the novel. Both deal with interiority, though their relationship to the 'real' is very different from one another. While the detail and the depth of personal history are meant to illustrate

[110] G. Arunima, "Glimpses from a Writer's World: O. Chandu Menon, His Contemporaries and Their Times", *Studies in History*, 20:2, n.s, 2004, p. 189.

everything in a biography, a novel has a much more creative relationship with the context.[111]

Biographies also present an often untheorized problem for social historians–that of the relationship between the individual and the society. While social history has preferred to study the past in terms of wider and more general categories of class, caste, community, gender or race, the biography, exemplifies particular trajectory in history–that of an individual's life. Biographies do however point to changes in wider social contexts–in the family, community, locality or the state. The emergence of a public sphere accentuated private lives, and the privacy of a life was as much a part of a changing private experimental domain, and an attempt at understanding this change, as a response to negotiating an emergent public world. Changes in consumption patterns, urban geographies and employment structures had an impact on notions of privacy. Everything underwent a change, be it clothing, hairstyles, eating habits, or leisure activities. Arunima explains that biography, in that sense, is also a way of tracking the manifestation of the social in the self.[112]

Biography can be seen as a branch of history, because it depends on a selective ordering and interpretation of materials, written and oral, established through research and personal recollection. It can also be seen as a branch of imaginative literature in that it seeks to convey a sense of the individuality and significance of the subject through creative sympathetic insight.[113] It must be distinguished not only in terms of subject matter but also in terms of techniques and intention. Biography, as a history of a personal life, is thus precariously positioned at the intersection of history and literature. With its focus on the private and the personal, however differently interpreted, its story distinguishes the individual from the wider context. Yet, as a narrative it is at pains to

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[111] *Ibid.*
[112] *Ibid*, pp. 189-190.
[113] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 2, 1997, p. 222.

highlight its basis in truth as opposed to the functional world of the novel. In India, the earliest biographies seem to be either of political people or of literary/creative figures. Both these reflect a public persona rather than a private life.

It has been recognized that a biographer is not neutral but discloses aspects of his own personality in the presentation and interpretation of the biographee. This is much more the case with autobiography, indeed the manner may reveal as much about the subject as the matter. Though self-justification may provide the autobiographical impulse, so also may self-contempt, particularly when linked with some intellectual, religious or emotional crisis that precipitates change. Biographical and autobiographical writing can easily pass into fiction when rational inference or conjecture pass over into imaginative reconstruction or frank invention or when the biographical subject itself is wholly or partly imaginary.[114]

Contrasted with creative literature, historical biography is limited in number owing to a 'technical' reason. There is a fundamental difference between the two. While literary merit is a desirable quality in any work, it is only secondary in biography which is primarily historical. In creative writing, character delineation depends on the imaginative conception of the writer; the character, for example, in a novel or drama is the character of the author. The freedom of the creative writer is absent for the historical biographer. The subject of the biography is the real person; his personality is 'fixed' for the biographer. A biographer's primary loyalty is to truth based on an appeal to evidence: any deviation from it in the interest of literary effect would be a distortion, and to that extent the biography ceases to be authentic. Technically therefore,

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[114] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* Vol.2, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. Chicago, 1997, p. 222.

biographical writing is more difficult than creative writing; as Carlyle says, a well-written biography is as rare as a life well-lived.[115]

The desire to leave to posterity the record of an impressive life is a natural craving.[116] And this craving has been instrumental in highlighting the role of individuals in historical developments. In India, heroes are not only glorified in legends and narratives, but are also left to posterity through biographical sketches. Some of the prominent figures of the so-called Indian renaissance are fortunate in having been raised to the level of heroes through historical biographies. One commences of course with the role of Ram Mohan Roy, the so-called 'Father of Modern India'.[117] The elevation of a single figure like Ram Mohan to a place of such prominence reflects, among many things, something about the conception of history as biography that held sway in colonial schools. It is thus hardly surprising that from the second quarter of the nineteenth century anyone chronicling the course of cultural change in Bengal did so by concentrating on the work of exemplary individuals like Ram Mohan.

Apart from this normal paradigm, there was another tendency to see the historical narrative punctuated in terms of life-spans and active careers. Thus the departure of Ram Mohan in 1830 for England was a natural break in the timeline for hagiographers; the historical record must now await the advent of the next exemplary figure. A representative sample of this approach to the writing of history can be found in the essay on the Brahmo Samaj written by Keshub Chander Sen in 1865. Keshub announces his commitment to history as biography thus: "It is a truth which the world's history has well verified that great men represent certain great ideas, the realization of which constitutes the

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[115] M.P. Sreekumaran Nair, *op. cit*, p. 530.

[116] *The Encyclopedia Americana*, Vol. 3, Connecticut, 2002, p. 765.

[117] Satish Chandra Chakravarty ed., *The Father of Modern India*, Calcutta, 1935, cited in Brian. A. Hatcher, "Great Men Waking: Paradigms in the Historiography of the Bengal Renaissance" in Sekhar Bandopadhyay ed., *Bengal Rethinking History-Essays in Historiography*, New Delhi, 2001, p.138.

very destiny and mission of their existence".[118] These words are applied most immediately to Ram Mohan. He narrates the providential advent of Ram Mohan with special attention to his writings on Vedanta and his founding of the Brahmo Samaj. Keshub found the hands of God at work in Bengal's history when the leadership of the Samaj fell to Debendranath Tagore as soon as Rammohun left for England. Thus Keshub reminds us how God intervenes in history through the agency of those individuals Carlyle had dubbed 'Great Men'. And needles to say, history was to find in Keshub the inspired prophet who was destined to inherit the mantle of Debendranath. Tagore's epigram contained in *Charitṛa Pūja* perfectly conforms to this strand: "When Ram Mohan Roy was born, all of India was enveloped in blind darkness. Death wandered through the ether. Falsehood and death struggled to oppose him...In those days, the once vital Hinduism of the past ruled as mere ghost over the cremation ground. It had no life, no truth- only commandments and fear... (Ram Mohan) saw that there was still life within us. That life he worked to awaken".[119] The early fixation on a figure like Rammohun had, by century's end, developed into what Tagore was to call hero-worship, or *Charitṛa-Pūja*. Such biographical *pūja* continued unabated right into the early twentieth century.

The renaissance figures of modern Kerala are portrayed in a similar manner-along lines of 'great men walking'.[120] Often the reform movements of modern Kerala are identified with the biographies of great men like Sri Nārāyaṇa Guru, Mannath Padmanābhan and V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād. By limiting the history of a movement to certain 'eventful' or 'event-making' men,[121] these biographies expressed an obvious weakness for the subject person, and often ended up in an unmixed hero-worship. The narrative of a person's life does not fully highlight

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[118] "The Brahmo Samaj or Theism in India: Rammohun Roy", in Keshub Chander Sen, *The Brahmo Samaj: Discourses and Writings*, Calcutta, 1904, p.61, cited in Brian. A. Hatcher, *op.cit*, p. 139.

[119] Cited in Brian. A. Hatcher, *op. cit*, p.135.

[120] *Ibid*, p. 137.

[121] Sydney Hook, cited in M.P. Sreekumaran Nair, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

the age in which he/she lived nor does it necessarily unravel the ideologies and the dynamics of social processes. If a biography needs to enrich the existing corpus of historical literature, or to merit "a piece of historical research", it should not just highlight the significant milestones of the life of the individual, but should place the individual in the correct historical context alike. In other words, the context is as important as the individual. It alone would help intimate us of the motives that might have persuaded the person for his social involvement, the priorities that played in fixing or periodically re-fixing the targets, the individual interests that worked along with the humanitarian/ philanthropic ideals, the reactionary or negative trends they represented even while appearing as the champions of radicalism and reformism. It is an equally important point to note that it alone would help us to highlight on certain areas and issues on which they had kept a surprising silence.

1:10. The Nambūtiri Movement

Attempts to reform the Nambūtiri community did not start with VT, it had its beginnings much earlier; but his entry into the movement had contributed much to the radicalization of its programmes and methods. The Nambūtiri reformism had its focus on two issues- marriage reform and equitable partition of family property. Both these demands were in fact the two sides of the same coin. It was the absence of a share in ancestral property that had incapacitated the junior Nambūtiris to pursue endogamous marriages rather than the canonical injunctions against it. Endogamous marriages were also seen as the means to emancipate the *Antarjanams* from their pathetic life conditions. Later on the movement acquired tremendous proportions; it went beyond demanding endogamous marriages and the right of individual property -- it called for a realignment of the existing gender relations, and embarked on a crusade against the priest and the clergy. On the whole the movement imbibed the spirit of science and reason and repeatedly took recourse to the forces of modernity.

Notwithstanding the numerous studies on the so-called renaissance of Kerala, there is a real dearth of research on the Nambūtiri reform movement, though the *Sabha* was an integral part of the so-called renaissance. Apart from a few doctoral, MPhil and MA dissertations,[122] the movement has not been subjected to any in-depth study.[123] Even the academic studies suffer from the lack of a critical analysis and hence do not differ much from popular literature.[124] They are also disposed to overemphasize the role of a few individual reformers like V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, and by and large ignore the internal dynamics of the movement. There is a tendency to reduce the history of the movement to biography, almost closer to hagiography, to highlight the role of the individual reformers in the movement from their own perception, and to associate the reform measures indiscriminately with literary activity.[125] The most striking point in all these works is the element of hero-cult and the inclination to

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[122] A.C. Mohanavalli, *Social Changes among Namboothiris of Malabar in the 20th Century*, MA Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1979; K.S. Ramadevi, *Social Change Among the Nambutiris of Kerala*, PhD Thesis, University of Kerala, 1989; M. Sumathi, *Social Reform Movement Among the Namboothiris with Special Reference to Women*, M Phil Thesis, University of Calicut, 1993; V. Asha, *Modernization Among the Nambutiris in Kerala*, PhD Thesis, University of Kerala, 1994; I.V. Babu, *Social, political & cultural Result of Namboothiri Renaissance*. Ph.D thesis, University of Calicut, 1996; T.K. Anandi, *The Impact of Changing Land Relations and Social and Political Movements of Nambutiri Women*, PhD Thesis, University of Kerala, 1999; E.K. Swarnakumari, *Social Change in Malabar with Special Reference to Two Traditional Communities 1880-1933*, PhD Theses, University of Calicut, 2001.

[123] For instance, Anandi's work places the social changes among the Nambūtiri women in the context of the land reforms of the post-independence era; the emergence of the nuclear family and the fragmentation of landholdings coupled with the deprivation of the Nambūtiris brought about a situation in which emancipation of the Antarjanams became a necessary step for survival. The much glorified *Yōgakṣēmasabha* movement was strictly male-oriented and hence did not help emancipate women considerably.

[124] Even a renowned historian like Sreedhara Menon, in his study of the freedom movement of Kerala, carelessly wrote that the *Sabha* was founded in 1910-11 and that VT as the founder of the *Sangham*. See A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala and the Freedom Struggle*, Kottayam, 1997, p.61.

[125] See M. Prasad, *VT, MRB , Prēmji Ennivarudē Nāṭakangaḷudē Sāmūhyapṛasakti*, PhD Thesis, Dept of Malayalam, University of Calicut, 1993; T.K. Narayanan Nambutiri, *VT Kṛithikaḷ: Oru Paṭanam*, PhD Thesis, Dept of Malayalam, University of Calicut, 1995; V.C. Supriya, *Nambūtiri Pariṣkaraṇa Samrambhangaḷ Malayāḷa Sāhityathil*, PhD Thesis, Dept. of Malayalam, University of Calicut, 2002.

treat VT as the one and only leader of the movement. Similarly, the binary of colonialism and nationalism strikingly do not appear in many of these studies.

Many persons were misled to concoct history chiefly on the basis of the reminiscences of a few leaders who were personally associated with the movement and were gifted with charming literary style to impress the people and make them believe that they were the sustaining force behind the movement. Moreover, media publicity had pushed some leaders to the top and helped them to carve out an undue space in a social movement. Since in most cases a movement had produced its own hero who could steer it in the right course, in fair or foul weather, many mistook that VT, assisted by a group of able deputies, had in fact taken up the hero's role in the movement. VT's autobiographical writings, which started appearing in the late 1950s, have been a determining factor in creating a kind of hero-cult around him and in projecting him as the undisputed leader of the movement. This 'tendency to accept elite reformers at their own evaluation'[126] has become a vitiating factor to the objectivity of history since, while obliterating the basic dynamics of the movement, it helped encourage an undesirable tendency towards reductionism. This tendency attains harmful proportions in the popular narratives which highlight VT as the redeemer, who saved the community from the deplorable and inhuman condition of pre-reform days, and as the only leader who led the community towards modern and secular life. He is the harbinger of the new civil-society-consciousness among the Nambūtiris. All his radical engagements were seen as attempts at introducing this novel consciousness.

But, at the same time, VT is vehemently denounced from certain quarters, as the destroyer of the community from within.[127] This image has been the product of a brimming disillusionment brought about by the socio-economic changes in

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[126] Sumit Sarkar, *Bibliographic Survey of Social reform movements in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, p.20.

[127] T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Samudāyadṛōhi", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 27:22, Nov. 12-17, 1995, pp. 47-48.

the twentieth century which caused to marginalize the Nambūtiris in the emerging new civil society. What enraged the critics was the alleged decline of the community from its privileged pre-reform position to the destitute post-reform condition. In fact VT does not deserve the criticism that he had ruined the community through his radical and secular measures since the real objectives behind all his involvements appear to be influenced strictly by communitarian considerations.[128] He was just instilling an element of radicalism to the methods of the struggle; even this has been interpreted as a clever tactical measure to offset the late entry of the Nambūtiris to the realm of social reform, by a contemporary observer.[129] The fact that VT was just one among the many leaders of the movement or that there were many radicals in the movement with even more extreme views than VT or though renowned for his radical attitude, VT took an extremely orthodox stand with regard to communism and land reforms, or that it was the land reforms introduced by E.M.S. Nambūtiripad that brought about the downfall of the community has not been taken seriously.[130] Sub-caste divisions and nobility-status were determining factors among the Nambūtiris, which had been instrumental even in deciding excommunication from the caste, and which was used without any compunction against VT, but not against E.M.S. since he belonged to one of the eight noble *Illams*, and few dared to accuse anyone belonging to such noble houses because of their high status.

One of the important aspects of the caste-based reform movements of Kerala was their achievement-orientation and materialistic outlook. In the hierarchically ordained social system, movements of the lower castes had to clash inevitably

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[128] See M.R. Manmathan, "Beyond the Community and Beyond the Self: Ashram as Civil Society in Malabar", in Charles Diaz ed., *Kerala Spectrum: Aspects of Cultural Inheritance*, Indo-Portuguese Cultural Institute, Cochin, 2006, p.414-438.

[129] M. Ramavarma Tampan, "Nammudē Bandhukkaḷ", *UN*, 9:6, Kumbham 1103, p.353.

[130] Even this could be disputed. The land reforms affected only a few Nambūtiris; partition of illam property had reduced the size of the feudal estates before. Only the lethargic and the inactive had to bear the burden of the new changes.

with the privileged dominant groups in order to rise up in the social ladder. In Kerala, social movements were accompanied by economic struggles, of which the agitation of the tenants was the foremost. While the social struggles destroyed the privileged status of the Nambūtiris, the tenancy movements and the subsequent land reform measures ruined their economic power. The natural outcome was the downfall of the community from the position it had enjoyed previously. Although the discourse on the 'fall' had started earlier, and had forced the Nambūtiris to unite, this issue acquired tremendous proportions in the post-independence era. The new Nambūtiri movement portrays the Nambūtiris as the unfortunate and helpless victims of the new mass awakening, isolated by all others and even cheated out of their properties without providing them any reasonable compensation through the land reform measures.

Taking advantage of the relative backwardness of a few Nambūtiris (poor Nambūtiris were there at all times) and the popular sympathy created by the setback suffered by them owing to land reforms, there has been considerable attempts from certain sections both to denounce the movement as a catalyst of ruin and to extol it for its idealism of self-abnegation which gave it the image of a model movement.[131] The intense feeling of disillusionment was compensated to an extent through a sigh of relief in the supposed role it played in rescuing the Nambūtiris from facing the kind of opposition their counterparts had to face in the Tamil country.[132] There is a general belief that the Nambūtiris are straightforward and absolutely honest in their dealings with others; they are free from deceit. Many writers pinpoint that it is this innocence bordering on foolishness along with their steadfastness to values, lack of competence and competitive spirit; and their undue attachment to spiritual life that led to their marginalization in Kerala; whereas in other parts of India, the Brahmins made

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[131] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, Kottayam, 1989, pp. 224-29.

[132] M.R. Manmathan, "Charitṛam Oru Piriyan Kōṇiyāṇu" (Interview with Akkitham Achuthan Nambūtiri), *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 9: 34, August 25, 2006, p. 38.

headway in leading the modernization efforts, while keeping their social supremacy intact. This assessment of the Nambūtiris is marked by two judgements. One, the lower castes are unjust usurpers and two, the Nambūtiris are steadfast upholders of noble and humane (i.e., brahmanical) values. It is striking to note that apart from the first generation of Antarjanams who were active participants of the movement, and who later became activists of the communist party, the second generation onwards not only did not participate in active public life but became silent over the issue of emancipation. Even the stories of Lalitāmbika Antarjanam written in the post-reform days are marked by the negation of some of the basic tenets of the reform movement.[133]

1:11. The Construction of Identity

The true personality of V.T, as well as the real nature and impact of his intervention in the public sphere, has not been studied satisfactorily yet. From the 1920s, when he entered the public sphere, till his end in 1982, VT was active and enthusiastic but his life was marked by the different social roles he played in the course of this period. In the 1920s and early '30s VT was preoccupied with the *Sabha* movement. But in the '30s he began to keep away from it and associated himself with the constructive programme of Gandhian politics including the temple-entry movement. But it is striking to find that later he kept a distance from the active nationalist movement and championed Gandhian ethics in opposition to the Communist movement. In the post independent era he was preoccupied with literary activities and actively associated with the rationalist movement. On the whole the most active phase of his life was in the 1920s and '30s when he worked for the *Sabha*. A linear progression, comparable to that of E.M.S. Nambūtiripad, is strikingly absent in his career. Some people think that he was interested only in social and cultural activities and was not

[133] Lalitāmbika Antarjanam, "Bhāgathinu Śēṣam", *Abdurahmān Smāraka Grandham*, 1949, pp. 41-44; 'Puṇyavathi', *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, Aug. 25, 1985, pp. 20-23; and "Manuṣyaputri". For a review of this story see M. Leelavathi, "Manushyaputrikalkku Vendi", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 69:49, Feb.9, 1992.

interested in political pursuits and this was the reason why he came to be sidelined in the post-independence era, which was dominated by party politics. Some people also think that like all other Gandhians, VT too was victimized by the communists who were not only bent upon demolishing the Gandhian tradition in Kerala but also silencing a whole generation of Gandhian activists. Thus the career of VT is split up into active and passive phases both of which were seen to be historically constructive and progressive.

The image of VT as is presented in the works of contemporary writers and in the works of VT himself (such as in his autobiography) is different from the image that emerges from the study of his actual life. Many of the prevailing attributes attached to him is the result of the after-thought that came through an intellectual exercise of the post-reform days intended to show VT in a favourable light.[134] The serialized publication of his personal memoirs from the 1950s and his staunch anti-communist attitude have been instrumental both in raising him to the position of the one and only leader of the Nambūtiri movement and in posing him as a great exponent of the Gandhian-humanist values.[135] Political exigencies of the time coupled with the impression created through autobiographical representation, consciously or unconsciously detached VT from the real historical context to be placed in an altogether different situation.[136]

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[134] VT's greatness is held to equal those of Vidyasagar and Ranade. Perhaps he is greater than the other two because VT had to face stronger and more violent opposition here to accomplish the same deeds the other two did in their country. T.R. Raghavan, "Stṛīvimōchana Pṛasthānathintē Nētāvu", *Vivēkōdayam*, Vol. 10, No.27, 28, May 23, 1976.

[135] Mādamb pointed out that VT was almost forgotten by the people of Kerala. It was his memoirs and his association with the rationalist movement that retrieved his public image. Personal Conversation, Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, Kirālur, 12-09-2005.

[136] Borrowing from the thoughts of Hans-Georg Gadamer and paul Ricoeur, the theory of hermeneutics, the philosophical interpretation of texts, understands a person's identity to be 'a narrative construct', and it points to 'the continuous need for narrating experience in order to exist as a meaningful human subject, and the function of narrative interpretation in generating a continuity of identity, of self'. See A.P. Kerby, 'The Adequacy of Self-Narration: A hermeneutical Approach', *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 12:2, pp. 232-44, cited in Nathan Katz, 'The Historical traditions of the Jews of Kochi', *Studies in History*, 21:2 (ns), 2005, p. 142. For a discussion on the construction of the self-image through

VT's later image as a moral reformer, as a crusader against power politics and corruption, as an exponent of puritan life and as a staunch humanist, all of which greatly influenced the process of the construction of his past identity since they were handy for those who wanted to contain the belligerent left-wing politics.[137] The fact that such an image was an attribute attached with him, due mainly by reading him through his own eyes, was largely overlooked.[138] A perusal through the contemporary records, however, produces a different picture.[139]

All people in authority, Weber says, concoct myths about their own superiority and natural fitness to rule. These myths or inner justifications are necessary for their self-assurance and their sense of political propriety. Legitimations are the moral vocabularies of those who speak with the voice of authority. There is, though, an important difference between legitimations and legitimacy. Legitimations are the claims that dominant groups make about themselves—claims that they would naturally wish everyone else to accept. Legitimacy, on the other hand, refers to the condition in which such claims have in fact been accepted and endorsed by subordinate groups. That is, the grounds upon which obedience is claimed are accepted as valid by those who are

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autobiographical literature, with reference to VT, see G. Dileepan, "Ātmakathākhyānathintē Pṛatyayaśāstṛam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, Mar 16-22, 1997, pp. 6-9, 33-35.

[137] M.T. Vasudevan Nair described VT in his various capacities as a social reformer, literary man, freedom fighter, rationalist and as one who had deeply agonized over the declining Hindu dharma. See his "Śāsthāmkōvilē Śānthikkāran", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, p.254.

[138] It reminds us of a famous dictum: "History, after all, is not simply what happened. It is also a memory of how it was". Richard M Ketchum, "Memory as History", *American Heritage*, Nov.1991, p.148.

[139] Thapar's warning against the pitfalls associated with the indiscriminate use of sources is indeed applicable in the study of VT: "An event occurs, and it slowly becomes encrusted with narratives about what happened. Sometimes the claim is made that such narratives have been constructed on the basis of initial memories, or that the historiography reflects what are believed to be facets of memory. The historian cannot restrict the historical analyses only to the event and the way in which it is being viewed in the present. The intervening stages of the creation of narratives around the event, or an aftermath that ignores the event, have also to be investigated. The study becomes one of observing the processes by which the intervening stages are established and how these influence the eventual perception of the event". See Romila Thapar, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 1-2.

expected to do the obeying. Legitimations emanate from on high, but legitimacy is bestowed from below.[140] The play of both legitimation and legitimacy was crucial in making V.T. a great figure beyond the historical realities.

V.T's popularity rests on many factors, all of which combined in a complex way raised him to the heights of renown. Going through the pages of the *Yōgakṣēmam* or the *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri*, we find VT as not the only leader of the Nambūtiri movement in the 1920s although he had gained repute as a great orator and a firebrand radical. He began intervening in the important issues of the *Sabha* from the middle of the 1920s[141] and the resolution on "Nambūtiris and Unemployment" which he presented in the 8th Annual meeting of the *Sangham*[142] captured the attention of the community. But what made him truly popular was the staging of the drama "Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku" in the 22nd annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Edakkunni in December 1929. Although it was a group endeavour, V.T. gained repute as the author of the drama and was appointed as the organizing secretary of the *Sangham*. He was also authorized to stage the drama at all suitable places. The staging of the drama at his own *Illam* in the midst of the strong opposition from his *jyēṣtan* was a great victory for VT. In a meeting arranged to congratulate him, Mōzhikunnam praised VT as the *Nambūtiri Patel* and Mēzhathūr as the Bardoli of Kerala.[143] *The Yāchana Yātṛa* in 1931 raised his popularity. Though it was organized under the combined leadership of Pandam Vāsudevan Nambūtiri and VT, his eloquent speeches, which were published by *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri* every day, captured popular attention.

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[140] Frank Parkin, *Max Weber*, London, 2002, pp.77-78.

[141] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation", *YK*, 15:75, June 17, 1925; 15:76, June 20, 1925; 15:77, June 24, 1925; 15:79, July 1, 1925; 15:80, July 4, 1925 & 15:82, July 11, 1925.

[142] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtirimārum Tozhililāymayum", *YK*, 17:29, Jan 5, 1927; 17:31, Jan 12, 1927; for a response to it see Madaṛngali Sankaran Nambūtiri, *YK*, 17:33, Jan 19, 1927. Also see Premji's expression of the impact created by this resolution over his life, M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam*, November 1992.

[143] Mōzhikunnam's speech is reproduced as "Durāchāra Vilankhanam" in *UN*, 11:46, May 30, 1930.

K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripad, Mūthiringōd Bhavatṛātan Nambūtiripad, Pāndam, E.M.S. Nambūtiripad and VT were the prominent figures of this time.[144] Some of the later developments which made VT a celebrity were the episodes of the widow marriage in 1934, the inter-caste marriage in 1940 and the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* project; but all these were performed at a time when he had practically severed all his connections with the *Sabha* and was totally banished from his community. VT's greatest renown lies in his efforts at arousing the Antaṛjanams;[145] instigating and provoking the piteous and servile Antaṛjanams was in fact a great endeavour.

After the decline of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* colony in 1937, and till the revival of the *Sabha* in 1944 under the leadership of EMS, VT kept aloof from the public sphere. He enthusiastically cooperated with the Ōngallūṛ Sabha and it was around this time that Akkitham Achuthan Nambūtiri compared him with Kamal Pasha of Turkey.[146] In 1956 when he was 60, V.T. started writing his memoirs. It is interesting to note that E.M.S, his colleague in the movement in the late 1920s and early 1930s, became the first chief minister of united Kerala in 1957. The Russian travel experiences of E.M.S. coincided with V.T's earliest reminiscences.[147] V.T's 70th and 80th birthdays and his birth centenary were great

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[144] M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād later identified Mūthiringōd as the ideologue of the movement. He pointed out that E.M.S. was its life, Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād its head, Mūthiringōd its tongue and VT its hands. M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam", *UN*, 1:2, Edavam 1122 (May-June, 1947), p.64,

[145] O.M.C. wrote that while Kuṛūṛ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād inaugurated the general awakening, VT led the revolt in the harems. O.M.C. Narayanan Nambūtiripād, "Kuṛūṛ Uṇṇi Nambūtirippāṭṭilē Śatābdi", *Yōgakṣēmasabha Souvenir*, 1981, p.18.

[146] Akkitham, "V.T: Nambūtiri Samudāyathintē Kamālpāsha", *Maṅgaḷōdayam*, 23:11, Kumbham 1123 (Feb-March 1948). Earlier, C.S. Subrahmanian Potti was compared with Kamal Pasha in 1929. See Editorial, *UN* 10:4, Dhanu 1104, p.227. In a later interview, Akkitham revealed that this characterization was due to his inadequate historical awareness and does not hold good now. See M.R. Manmathan, "Charitṛam Oru Piriyan Kōṇiyāṇu", *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 9: 34, August 25, 2006, p. 38.

[147] See E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "Communism Keṭṭippadukkunnavarudē Kūdē", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 37:7, May 3, 1959; 37:8, May 10, 1959; 37:9, May 17, 1959; 37:12, June 7, 1959; 37:13, June 14, 1959; 37:20, Aug 2, 1959; 37:21, Aug 9, 1959. Around this time K.V.M. also began to publish his serialized autobiography. See K.V.M, "Ātmakatha", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 36:48, Feb. 15, 1959 (continued up to 37:28 Sep. 27, 1959).

events among social and literary circles of Kerala. With the celebration of these events, his fame rose to its zenith. Though men like E.M.S. participated in these celebrations, the prominent participants were all from the anti-left camp or from the group of the radical humanists or rationalists.[148] Certain very significant attributes were attached to his personality during this time. Thus he was elevated to a "philosopher-guide in the journey beyond Communism"[149] and a "saint, not a mere revolutionary".[150] Some of the biographical works on VT appeared around this time. Most of these works eulogized him and elevated him to a legend and a cult figure, but at the expense of historical accuracy.

1:12. Scope of the Study

VT is well-known to every literate Malayāḷi, but he still remains an enigma to the layman and to the academician. For the layman he reigns as the legendary redeemer and reformer of the pitiful Nambūtiris, with his miraculous touch of radical and stubborn attitudes. He remains a paradox and a complex of apparently contradictory positions to an academician – despite being radical, he was extremely conservative in many spheres: despite being infatuated by Gandhism, he kept away from the Nationalist political agitation and held fast to the atheist-rationalist movement; despite being a philanthropist and a humanist, he strongly opposed Communism; despite being a radical social activist, he responded sensitively to many issues of religious and communitarian interests. The prevailing studies on him are greatly superficial for their stress on the hero-cult and their neglect of the historical context. The present study seeks justification from this premise; the absence of serious studies has been perpetuating the highly eulogistic and ahistorical impression of VT's personality and ideology.

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[148] It is interesting to note that E.M.S. always held high esteem and wrote in great terms about VT. In an article, "Nammudē Yuvajana Pṛasthānam", (*UN* 15:1, Sep. 29, 1933, p.9) E.M.S. wrote that VT was the true spirit behind the radicalization of the Sabha and it was he who brought it out from the highly narrow outlook of Kuṭūṭ and his followers. In many other occasions (See his *Ātmakatha*, pp.177-78) E.M.S. repeated his great impressions on VT.

[149] M.G.S. Narayanan, "VT: Communisathinappuṛathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṛayilē Māṛgadaṛśakan" in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT: Studies and Memoirs*, Mezhathur, 1997, p.76.

[150] Akkitham, "VT: Vipḷavakāriyo Ṛiṣiyo?" *Samāvaṛtanam*, Kottayam, 1978, pp. 67-72.

It is in the context of historical myth-making and of projecting personalities like V.T. as "deities and not actors circumscribed by history"[151] that we will have to analyze his historical role in the Nambūtiri movement in particular and in the renaissance of Kerala in general. The present study intends to be a biographical dissection. Only by viewing a person in the right perspective and in the correct historical context can we understand the forces and the interests that worked behind his attitudes. There is a conspicuous lack of consistency and steadiness in the personal and ideological developments of VT. It is a wonder how an avowed atheist, rationalist, humanist and social reformer of lofty ideals could turn out to be an exponent of Brahmanical interests.[152] His lack of interest in Congress politics compared to the enthusiasm evinced by him in social reform, his staunch opposition to Communism, his inclination to a liberal communal stand in relation to the Muslims, the clear revivalist ideology of his later life and his direct association with the RSS, all would reveal the working of his mind extremely well.[153]

The Nambūtiri movement differs drastically from other caste movements in that the second generation of its leaders (after Kurūr) is not accepted wholeheartedly by the community later. While Mannam was the undisputed leader of the Nāyar movement then and now and men like Srī Nārāyaṇa Guru, Mannam and Ayyankāḷi were recognized by their respective communities then and later, the Nambūtiris refused to accept any of their leaders (VT,

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[151] J. Devika, "En-gendering Individuals: the Project of Nambutiri Brahmin Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-August 2004, p. 81.

[152] We have similar parallels; an avowed radical like Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar presented his self as a case of Brahman identity. See Nita Kumar, "Language, Families and the Plural Meanings of the Nineteenth-century Intelligentsia", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 38:1, 2001, p.97.

[153] Marx has categorically stated the nuances of identity-crafting in his *The German Ideology* fairly well: "Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. – real, active men as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these, up to the furthest forms. Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process". Cited in David MClellan, *Ideology*, Delhi, 1998, pp.14-15.

Mūthiringōd, EMS or Pāndam) wholeheartedly. The Īzhavas later recognized even the contributions of the 'heretic' Sahōdaran Ayyappan by the close of the 1920s.[154]

The reconstruction of both the historical time and VT's life has been considerably helped by a variety of anecdotes taken from the biographies of his contemporaries. These anecdotes are useful principally for two reasons. One, some of them are on inter-personal relationships. Second, these are illustrative of certain events of the time, and therefore are of historical value. In the unavailability of private papers these are useful in illustrating his life. Moreover, these also reveal significantly how they perceived him.

The present work, as a historical biography, thus intends to explore the life of VT in both its public and private domains. It tries to analyze objectively the apparent dichotomy perceived in his personal reminiscences and public life. It also tries to reveal his ardent personal and communitarian interests that lurked beneath the surface of strong humanitarian and philanthropic ideals. It also explores the way in which the nationalist/Gandhian ideology worked in him both as a stimulating as well as restraining factor. Though modern science and reason had greatly influenced his thinking process and helped him in understanding the existing social reality, the limitations of colonial modernity coupled with the dynamics of socio-political forces drove him to a conservative position on many important issues like land reform. The class factor also has not been analyzed yet; though English educated, VT could not readily got enrolled into the 'middle class club' and this significant factor instilled in him a sense of deprivation which led to his falling back on to a kind of feudal nostalgia that bordered on revivalism.[155] The existing studies on VT attribute his conservatism to the moral

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[154] M.S.A. Rao, "Changing Moral Values in the Context of Social-Cultural Movements" in Adrian C. Mayer ed., *Culture and Morality*, Delhi, 1981, p.199.

[155] Even the middle class in Kerala suffered many structural drawbacks. "Compared to the middle class in the western countries, the Kerala middle class is only proletariat. Despite all its tall talk about progressivism, it is basically of peasant stock, not urban, and essentially

decay of the post-independent era and to the increase of the vices of corruption and violence in public life.[156]

The present study also attempts to reanalyze the existing notion that VT was a life-long radical activist.[157] Barring the two decades of the Nambūtiri movement when he was active and vigilant, he had by and large kept aloof and in later life he was preoccupied with personal and family affairs. His inability to adjust with the left-wing politics (many of his earlier colleagues became communists) and his deplorable economic condition, following his excommunication and collapse of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, had all been determining factors in enforcing his social exclusiveness, but even more important is the fact that with the completion of the reform movement he seems to have exhausted his agenda and was disinclined to look out for new pastures because he might have considered himself a spent force and so resolved to wind up his public career. His left-wing critics denounced him for ending up his public career so early and abruptly because they thought that this was due to his blind faith in Gandhian ideals and his anti-communist predilections.[158]

But neither his non-noble origin nor his economic deprivation determined his ideological position considerably. Despite being a humanist and a philanthropist, VT was not a socialist. He held fast to Gandhian concept of Trusteeship and continuously took a stand in favour of the landlords. Though

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conservative not radical. As the upper class ceased to be an enemy, and social reforms no longer an issue and political power secured, the role of the middle class as a revolutionary force is over. It is rather now concerned with consolidation and conservation of its position, power and prestige". R. Ramakrishnan Nair, *The Middle Class in Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1974, p.2.

[156] Though Nambūtiris were not a homogenous community segregated by ritual hierarchy and economic power, class interest arising out of caste consciousness could not be ruled out on the basis of the theory of the plurality of the elites; for it was precisely these elites that formed the dominant class. See B.N. Ganguli, "Conceptualizing the Indian Middle Class" in K.S. Krishnaswamy et al ed., *Society and Change*, Bombay, 1977, p.29.

[157] It is observed that till his end VT had kept his radical bent of mind and his friendship and alliance with young men even in his old age stand testimony to this fact. See C.P. Sreedharan, preface to V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *VTyudē Jīvitasmaraṇakaḷ*, Kottayam, 1983, p11.

[158] I.C.P. Nambūtiri, "VTyudē Karmakāṇdam", *Deśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, pp.33-37, reproduced in Pālakkīzh Nārayaṇan ed., *VT: Oru Itihāsam*, Kottayam, 1996, pp. 132-133.

many believe that VT was a renouncer and was the upholder of the mantra "Agnēya Idam Na Ma Ma", in fact he was not free from the middle class life ideals. His quarrel with his *jyēştan* in the name of property, his refusal to allot his two daughters of the *sambandham* marriage their share of his property, and his staunch opposition to communism evidently betray his ideological predilections.

The present study does not follow the paradigm of post-modern history which is now popular in the garb of 'community history'. The post-modernist model – pre-modern, popular, non-western, homogenized and totally free of internal power structures – do not satisfactorily analyze the contours of the Nambūtiri movement and the social behaviour of its leaders; rather a class analysis would help explain the internal dynamics of the movement and the inclination of the Nambūtiris towards the civil society and communism. In fact, the post-modernist concern with the politics of identity has great relevance in the study of the modernization of the Nambūtiri community and of VT's role in it but that would not invalidate an analysis along the politics of class and class struggle. Hence we cannot rule out discourses in history to retrieve it from what Lyotard called the abstract world of modern, professionalized, 'scientific' discourses that perpetually seek legitimation through argument and debate and to put it in a pre-modern fluid, free, popular universe of narrativization in the form of story-telling.[159]

The course of the research has been one of disappointment as far as the collection of primary data was concerned. The private writings of VT in the form of diaries and letters could not be utilized for the present study, not because they do not exist but because they are not available for reference. Most of the private papers of VT are in the custody of his son who seemed reluctant to cooperate with the research. Paucity of private information on his life, by way of letters,

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[159] Cited in Sumit Sarkar, "Post-modernism and the Writing of History", *Studies in History*, 15, 2, n.s, 1999, p.302. Pre-modern narrative for Lyotard becomes a way of consuming the past, as contrasted to its 'storage, hoarding and capitalization in science and scientific thought – an 'accumulation' inseparable from questions of power and domination.

diaries etc., may pose serious limitations in the proper evaluation of his person and ideology. Hence, the present attempt is based on a deductive reasoning; his works and his life are analyzed from the broader perspective of the dynamics of the Nambūtiri movement. In addition, a study of the changes of the times would help to understand the phenomenon that had influenced in shaping his person and ideology.

1:13. Hypotheses

1. To locate VT in the historical context. Existing literature on VT narrates his social role in terms of strong humanitarian and modernization tendencies with a total disregard of his personal and communitarian interests. The general attitude of the Nambūtiri radicals towards either the Nationalist Movement or the tenancy movement or even towards the question of distance pollution, including temple-entry, would evidently prove the 'defensive' nature of the movement throughout its course.

2. To trace the historic role played by V.T. in the modernization and radicalization of the Nambūtiri community. No other community in Kerala had undergone such a drastic and swift change to become the active partners and participants of the rising new civil society. Despite their late entry into the public sphere, the Nambūtiris had been able to compensate it through their ultra-radicalism which is evidenced by the fact that many hard core communists, including E.M.S. Nambūtiripad, grew up from among them.

3. To identify the crisis that was slowly developing among many Nambūtiris towards their approach to modernity in the 1930s and 40s, from the example of V.T. Patriarchal and communitarian interests had been strong among the Nambūtiri radicals in the reform days but they were obscured and not sufficiently traced out. The gender bias of many of the radicals began to surface once the male agenda was fulfilled. More striking is the fact that many of them withdrew to the shells of orthodoxy once the main demands of the movement

was achieved. Radicalism for many of them, except a few who were attracted to Communist politics, was just a means to an end and not a life-ideal.

4. To distinguish between the active and passive phases of VT's life. From a firebrand radical, VT gradually turned into a moral reformer and an exponent of the status quo in the post reform days. Most of his writings in the post-independence period are marked by their 'Nambūtiri-ness' or a liberal Hindu ideology coupled with a revivalist mood.

5. To trace out the ideal that inspired VT in moulding both his radicalism and his ideological position. VT appears to be instigated by a temptation to refashion the Nambūtiris as a model community purging it of features and traits which had subjected it to popular ridicule and retarded its progress in the new social order. He also wanted to recapture the dominant position the Nambūtiris had held for centuries through a revitalization movement. His social interventions were directed towards this end in view.

6. To spot out the 'Other' in VT. His memoirs reveal fairly well that VT had tried to assert his identity as a Gandhian in opposition to Communism, as a Hindu/Nambūtiri in contrast to other religious communities especially Muslims, as a Caste-Hindu in relation to lower castes and as a male in relation to women.[160] In personal contacts he retained a strong sense of intimacy and friendship and a sense of equality, but in social relationships he maintained a vague sense of 'Nambūtiriness' and caste pride.[161] He deliberately tried to uphold some of the Nambūtiri ideals, like vegetarianism and hospitality for instance, which were not just innocent inheritance of tradition or simple acts of a humane way of life, as is illustrated by his later writings and political affiliations.

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[160] Of late Devika has argued that the feminist thought in Kerala had its beginning not with VT but with Laḷitāmbika Antarjanam. See J. Devika, "Agnisākṣi Vīndum Vāyikkumbōḷ", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam*, Feb. 2006, p.57; *En-gendering Individuals: The Language of Reforming Early Twentieth Century Kerala*, Hyderabad, 2007, Ch. IV.

[161] J. Devika, "En-gendering Individuals: the Project of Nambutiri Brahmin Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-August 2004, p.86.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The major sources on the present study consist of primary and secondary data, available both in Malayāḷam and English, and are found in the form of various kinds of literature related to the reform movement, as well as on the persons associated with it, and other contemporary records of contextual value. The 'literature of reform' includes contemporary newspapers, journals and weeklies, pamphlets, stories and drama. Government acts, census reports, autobiographies, etc constitute a major segment of research data. Secondary materials consist of biographies, articles written on both Nambūtiri reform and on VT and research works on the topic.

Articles, speeches and reports published in the two organs of the Nambūtiri *Yōgakṣēma Sabha* (hereafter *Sabha*) namely *Yōgakṣēmam* (hereafter *YK*) and *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri* (hereafter *UN*) are important categories of contemporary evidence on the reform movement. The weekly journal *YK* started its publication from Tṛiśśūṛ in the year 1909[1] as the mouthpiece of the *Sabha*. It took up issues affecting the Nambūtiris particularly those relating to English education, marriage reform and protection of *janmi* rights. Formulation of an organizational structure and a common ideology, forged through the unity of the community and the defense of privileges had been its major concerns. *YK* played a very significant role in the entire programme of the *Sabha* since journalistic agitation was an important method of reform.

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[1] 1086 ME. See C.K. Nambūtiri, *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayuḍē Mumbum Pimbum*. Tṛiśśūṛ, 1963, p.32; "Prasthāvana", *YK* Silver Jubilee Issue, 1944. From 1908, when the *Sabha* was founded, and till the launching of *YK*, discourses on and reports of the proceedings of the *Sabha* were published in *Mangaḷōdayam*. Mangaḷōdayam Press was owned by Dēśamaṅgalam Mana and the monthly *Mangaḷōdayam* (which was the original organ of the *Sabha*) had been published under K.V.M from this press. At the initiative of Kuṛūṛ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād, A.K.T.K.M. Cheriya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād and Apphan Tampuran, the press was transferred to Tṛiśśūṛ after purchasing the *Kerala Kalpadṛumam press* and forming the new *Mangaḷōdayam Company*. (Later it merged into the *Yōgakṣēmam Company* but the press continued with the same name). Kapḷiṅgāṭ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri was the then director of the Press and Chenkuḷath Kunjirāma Menon, popularly known as M.R.K.C, the manager. For details see A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit.*, p.58; Mathramkot Aśōkan, *op.cit.*, p.33.

UN started its publication as a monthly in 1919 as the mouthpiece of the *Nambūtiri Yuvajana Saṅgham* (hereafter *Saṅgham*), the youth organization of the Nambūtiris.[2] In June 1929 it was converted into a weekly,[3] and started working independently. It gave vent to the voice of the radical Nambūtiri young men and thoroughly and radically analyzed the reform process through its editorials. But the *UN* wholeheartedly supported the conservative position of the community in its early period, especially in relation to the Vaikam Satyagraha and the tenancy movement. However, it championed class interests of the *Kaniṣṭans* and the Antarjanams within the community. When the struggle between the patriarchs and the radicals reached its climax, *UN* appeared as the mouthpiece of the *Kaniṣṭans* strongly endorsing radical reform and secular ethos.[4] During the *Yāchana Yātṛa* in 1931, it was published as a daily for a few days. Its publication came to an end in 1933 when the reform movement itself faced a crisis. It was revived with the Ōngallūṛ reorganization but could not last for more than three years.

Almost all the contemporary journals and magazines, other than that of the Nambūtiris, had also responded to Nambūtiri reformism and had given their suggestions on the reform process. As the Nambūtiri movement was a defensive response, the debates and discussions in other journals would help understand its contours. Of these the most important were *Sahōdaran* and *Mitavādi* which were radical organs associated with the Īzhava movement. Similarly, the discussions in the *Service* and *Vivēkōdayam*, the mouthpieces of the N.S.S. and S.N.D.P. respectively, had influenced the Nambūtiris considerably.

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[2] Vēndrakkāt Śaṅkaranārāyaṇan Nambūtiri was its first Editor and after his death in 1924 K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād became the new Editor. E.M.S. worked as its editor for some time; when he set out to participate in the CDM in 1932, OMC Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād became its editor. (*YK*, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, p.7).

[3] See Editorial, *UN*, 1: 8, Medam 1104, pp.449-454.

[4] E.M.S. attests that despite its central focus being on reforming the Nambūtiris, the *UN* was very vigilant over the contemporary socio-political developments. It supported the reform movements of other communities and the political movements of the period. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "Uṇṇi Nambūtiri Vārika", *Dēśābhimāni Sunday Supplement*, April 13, 1997, p.2. E.M.S. also states that he got the first lessons of political journalism from the *UN*, particularly under VT who was its sub-editor.

The new print culture and the emerging public sphere had been instrumental in bringing the Nambūtiris towards modernity and reformism. Newspapers like *Malayāḷa Manōrama, Swarāt,*[5] *Dēśābhimāni, Kēraḷakaumudi, Kēraḷapatrika, Manōrama, Kēralasanchāri*, etc were active in nurturing a civic sense among the educated people of Kerala. By the beginning of the twentieth century the royal ceremony of *Muṛajapam* had begun to create uproar among the public since the patronage given to the Nambūtiris in the name of tradition and custom was seen as a naked protection of privilege and an unpardonable drain on the exchequer.[6] Many journals voiced their anger against this anti-democratic practice and this new journalistic agitation promoted the civil society consciousness. The *Mātṛubhūmi* also was in the forefront in opposing the privileged position of the Nambūtiris, both from the points of view of nationalism and the tenancy issue. Three English newspapers from Calicut namely *West Coast Spectator, West Coast Reformer* and *Champion* also took up the position of the new middle class in opposition to the aristocratic Nambūtiris.[7]

2:A. WORKS OF VT

VT's writings constitute the first category of primary sources.[8] Earliest of these writings, which appeared in the *YK*, are a few articles on issues like tenancy agitation and Nambūtiri family regulation.[9] He stopped writing articles by 1927 and began to concentrate on other literary forms of which short stories were the first to appear.[10] In 1929 he wrote his famous farce *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku* which made him exceptionally popular. Subsequently he

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5 It was published by A.K. Pilla from Kollam to propagate Congress ideals.

6 The expected expenditure of the Muṛajapam of 1906 was 4.5 lakhs. See Paravur S. Govinda Pilla, "Muṛajapam", *Rasikaranjini*, 4:5, Dhanu 1081 (Dec-Jan. 1906), p.293.

7 For a glimpse of the contemporary newspapers see K.P. Kesava Menon, *Kazhinha Kālam*, Calicut, 1987, pp.139-42; V.R. Menon, *Mātṛubhūmiyudē Charitṛam*, Calicut 1973, p.48.

8 They are now collected into a single volume with the title *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ* and published by D.C. Books, Kottayam in 1997.

9 These articles are however not included in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*.

10 The five short stories which were published in *Pāśupatam*, and which highlighted the sorrows of Nambūtiri women, were collected and republished as Rajanīraṅgam in 1928. In the preface of the book VT stated that the stories were aimed at bringing the Antaṛjanams out of their harems and at bringing about a reform in the existing marriage system. VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, Rajanīraṅgam, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1956; See also *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 51-92.

concentrated on speeches and some of them were published in abstract form in both the *YK* and the *UN*.[11] As source materials, VT's works are notable for the explicitly clear condition of authorship;[12] all his works were responses to specific social issues or conditions.

After the Ōngallūṟ revitalization in 1944, VT wrote a few more stories which were published in the *UN*. These were collected and republished as *Pōmvazhi* in 1948.[13] He had written a drama named *Karińchanta* which was neither published nor preserved. It dealt with the difficulties involved in the marriage of the Antaṟjanams, due to the custom of heavy dowry, and the consequent 'sale' of girls by their fathers to non-Nambūtiri (Kannada or Tamil) Brahmins. The most famous literary pieces of VT are his memoirs which started appearing by the close of the 1950s and consist of three collections namely *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum, Dakṣiṇāyanam* and *Kaṛmavipākam*.[14] He also wrote a number of articles on politics and culture of the post-independence period as well as on certain issues of communitarian and societal interest which were published under four collections.[15]

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[11] Some of them are also included in the *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*.

[12] Robert Darnton is of the opinion that 'despite the proliferation of biographies of great writers, the basic conditions of authorship remain obscure'. Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History*, London, 1990, p.125 cited in K.N. Panikkar, " Creating a New Cultural Taste: Reading a Nineteenth-century Malayāḷam Novel", in R. Champakalakshmi & S. Gopal ed., *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar*, New Delhi, 1996, p.97.

[13] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Pōmvazhi*, Tṛiśśūṟ, 1948. See also *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 93-107. But in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ* the date of its first publication is given as 1930. VT Vasudevan, who collected and edited the works (for D.C. Books), appears to conceal VT's association with the Ōngallūṟ Sabha as is understood from his profile of VT in the work. The date of VT's unpublished drama *Karinchanta*, which is reported to have been lost, also is given incorrectly as 1932; in fact it was written around 1940.

[14] The articles included in the collection *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum* appeared first in *Māṯṛubhūmi weekly* from May 1959 onwards and was collected and published in 1970. The articles of *Dakṣiṇāyanam* were serially published in *Kalākaumudi Weekly* from January 1981. Some of the articles of *Kaṛmavipākam* appeared in *Māṯṛubhūmi Weekly*. All the three collections were published together into a single volume as *Kaṛmavipākam* in 1988. See also *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 123-338.

[15] *Sathyamennathu Ivide Manuṣyanakunnu*, 1961; *Vedivaṭṭam*, 1980; *Kālathintē Sākṣi*, 1981; and *Entē Maṇṇu*, 1982.

2:A:1. Early Articles

VT's articles on the reform movement appeared from 1924. These articles clearly defined his early interests and were instrumental in raising him to a prominent position in the community both as an activist and an ideologue. By upholding the most serious problems that had haunted the community, such as the tenancy issue and marriage reform, VT emerged as a prominent activist of the *Sabha*. Modern science, reason and humanism influenced greatly his articles of this period.

The earliest of his available articles is a report on the fourth annual meeting of the library at Mēzhathōl in which he himself made a speech.[16] The second one is a translation of an English article published in *The Hindu*.[17] His first serious article was an evaluation of the tenancy problem[18] in which he lamented over the huge losses suffered by the *janmis* because of the corruption and the mismanagement of the *kāryasthans* (managers) and expressed great concern over the tenancy bill going to be passed in the Madras Legislature which was meant to provide legal protection to the tenants. He suggested that creating awareness among the *janmis* of the gravity of the problem was the only solution to this great menace. At the same time he condemned those Nambūtiris, who did not educate their children, for lack of education led to the encroachment of the *taṛawād* property by the tenants.

VT also wrote a few articles on marriage customs on the basis of the enquiries conducted by him to evaluate the viability of a marriage reform in his community.[19] He wrote that the urge for *swajātivivāham* was very strong among Nambūtiri young men but the major obstacles were the scriptural injunctions

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[16] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Mēzhathōḷ Agnihōtṛi Smāraka Vāyanasālayudē Chathurtha Vāṛṣikayōgam", *YK*, 14:73, 1924 June 14.

[17] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Vaṛnasṛamadhaṛmam", *YK*, 15:52, 1925 March 25.

[18] V.T. Tṛitāla, "Chila Kudiyānmārude Kṛūrakṛityangaḷ", *YK*, 15:54, 1925 April 1.

[19] V.T. Tṛiśśūṛ, "Thayyāṛuṇḍu", *YK*, 15:59, 1925 April 22; VT, "Munnūṛu Kaniṣṭanmāṛ Thayyāṛ", *YK*, 15:65, May 13, 1925.

against both *parivēdanam* and partition of *Illam* property and the unwillingness of fathers to give daughters in marriage to *kaniṣṭans*. It is interesting to note that his *sambandham* just four or five months before did not hinder VT from actively involving himself in the *swajātivivāham* discourse. He may be either trying to overcome the disgrace caused to him by his *sambandham* through an involvement in the marriage reform agitation or may be continuing his sincere efforts for a change of the system though he was not able to fulfill it in his personal life in spite of his strenuous efforts.[20]

VT's serious involvement in the reform movement started with his engagement in the debates on the Nambūtiri family regulation.[21] In a series of six articles, VT emphasized the need of a regulation on solid grounds. For him, the regulation would not only end the sufferings of the *Kaniṣṭans* and the Antaŗjanam*s*, but also bring about an order in the family life and would help conserve the property of the community. He drew the attention of the community towards the prevailing inhuman kind of social and family relationships and the cruel treatment meted out to girls and widows.[22] He found *sambandham* as obstructing the progress of the community and alerted them that the craving for 'santati' is both natural and human just like for 'sampath'; but among the Nambūtiris this tendency was absolutely absent.[23] The community could prosper only through *swajātivivāham* and it was the only way to proliferate the community and to instill vigour and industry.[24] He lambasted *sambandham* since it ran counter to the *smŗiti* scriptures, it made the *Apphans*

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[20] See *VTyudē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaḷ*, pp. 284-287.

[21] VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation (Committee Report-um Karadu Regulation-um)", *YK*, 15:75, 1925 June 17; 15:76, 1925 June 20; 15:77, 1925 June 24; 15:79, 1925 July 1; 15:80, 1925 July 4; 15:81, 1925 July 8.

[22] *Ibid*, II, 15:76, 1925 June 20.

[23] *Ibid*, III, 15:77, 1925 June 24. Throughout its course, the Nambūtiri movement expressed serious concern over the threat to property and the dwindling population of the community and VT too shared this concern. Also See "Malayāḷa Brāhmaṇarudē Adhunikāvastha", *Bhāṣāpōṣiṇi*, 9:10, Edavam 1080 (May-June 1905), pp.312-316.

[24] *Ibid.*

and the Antarjanams refugees within the community, and it nourished immorality and vices among all.[25] He strongly pleaded for a family regulation with provisions for both *parivēdanam* and *bhāgam* since they alone could check the ruin of property since the autocracy of the *kāraṇavan* has been the crucial factor in bringing about the ruin of the community. Though *Āḷōhari bhāgam* would be disadvantageous to the *kaniṣṭans*, they were ready to accept it for the sake of community interests.[26] He called upon the Nambūtiris to realize the trends of the times and to devote themselves to education and to labour.[27]

By intervening in the measures of presenting the Nambūtiri family regulation in the three legislatures of Kerala, VT made certain important directions for their enactment.[28] As regards the opposition of the conservatives, he observed it was absurd to argue that it was improper to discuss the laws of the Nambūtiris in a western model legislature; it was unavoidable in the present day situation. People would approve it once the assembly ratified it. The tone of this article is evidently like that of a command from a leader who had a clear understanding of the nature and rules of the proceedings of the assembly.

Intervening in the deliberations of the Select Committee, which was constituted to collect evidence from various sections of the community, VT argued that the sittings of the committee arranged at 8 different locations were quite unnecessary.[29] Most of the Nambūtiris, due to their lack of education and worldly experience, were unaware of the social and political developments of their own day. They have been leading lethargic and comfortable lives utilizing immense properties that their predecessors had earned for them. Hence their opinion is worthless for those who are going to step into an uncertain future: it is

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[25] *Ibid*, IV, 15:79, 1925 July 1.
[26] *Ibid*, V, 15:80, 1925 July 4.
[27] *Ibid*, VI, 15:81, 1925 July 8.
[28] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kudumba Regulation-tē Karadu", *YK*, 16:44, February 24 1926.
[29] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Select Committee-yudē Anvēṣaṇam", *YK*, 16:77, June 30 1926.

sheer cowardice to heed them. By analyzing the prevailing situation, VT observed that in any community or in any family, property and progeny counted the most. There was a time when both were in plenty in the community; the Nambūtiris alienated their property by leading extravagant lives. Opponents argued that majority of the Nambūtiris were against the Regulation and hence the *Sabha* did not have the true representation of the community. But it is indiscreet to argue that those who refrained from the *Sabha* in fact opposed the Regulation and hence were against it. Thus, by intervening in the Family Regulation issue explicitly from a communitarian point of view, VT tried to mobilize opinion in its favour. VT's involvement was thus crucial in winning the hegemonic struggle against the conservatives and in turn helped to assert his position in the community.

V.T. intervened once again in the issue of the Family Regulation[30] and made an impassioned demand to his fellowmen to dedicate themselves to the cause of family reform. He asked them not to propagate scandals or misunderstandings; to be kind- hearted and to uphold truth and nonviolence. He reminded them to be led by the ideal "Satyam Vada, Dharmam Chara". According to V.T, the bill aimed not at the destruction but at the revival of dharmic principles. As the upholders of dharma, they should present themselves as a model community by making every Nambūtiri an ideal human being. They should convince their opponents that marriage reform would harm neither Hinduism nor *varṇāśrama dharma*. The draft bill would not make either *parivēdanam* or *Adhivēdanam* issues of contention; in fact it was people who had little faith in custom or dharma in their personal life who were in the forefront to instill fear in the minds of the elders against the Regulation.

On another occasion, while affirming the need for the Family Regulation, VT clarified his position on *sambandham* by making a correct assessment of it in

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[30] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kudumba Regulation-Ūṛjitha Pariśramangal", *YK*, 17:19, Nov 24, 1926.

the context of the wider interests of the community.[31] He assured that there was nothing in the bill to proliferate *sambandham* at the cost of *swajātivivāham*. By treating *swajāti* and *vijāti* married men as equals in respect of the inheritance of the share of the partitioned joint property, it was feared that the Bill would subvert the declared objective of universalizing *swajātivivāham*. Since the Bill provided the right to make a will, there was nothing to worry about the loss of property to non-Nambūtiri children by *sambandham*. After all, the Bill just envisaged at introducing a kind of regulation in order to suit the new circumstances. The fact that *sambandham* men and *swajāti*-married men were provided for maintenance once they start living separately did not mean that they were equal in every respect: *swajāti* married men did not have such a provision earlier; and there was acrimony and litigation. There would be no need of such things in future. And *sambandham* men had a slight disadvantage too. Their children were entitled to receive only 75% of the self-earned property of their fathers and no share from the Illam. May be for being *sambandham*-married, V.T. evinced a slight sympathy and humanitarianism towards *vijāti* wives; but he strongly supported a bill with concrete provisions for maintenance capable of discouraging *sambandham* in the future.

Clarifying his views on the question of inheritance, V.T. analyzed the two existing complaints against the Bill.[32] Firstly, half of the personal earnings of a person had to be given to his *sambandham* wife and children; and secondly, when a family faced extinction due to the absence of heirs, the property would be bequeathed to the *vijāti* successors if the last existing person had a *sambandham* wife. VT explained that though the complaint did have some basis, it could not stand scrutiny. As the Nāyaṛ Regulation had already granted the right to a father's *sambandham* children to inherit half of his self-earned

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[31] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Bill: Oru Swathantṛa Nirūpaṇam- I", *YK*, 17:50, Mar. 23, 1927.

[32] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Bill: Oru Swathantṛa Nirūpaṇam - II", *YK*, 17:52, Mar. 30, 1927.

property, the provision was nothing new. Humanitarian considerations also justified it. But it was reasonable to ask why such a clause was included while the Bill itself was introduced to check the erosion of property. VT argued that at least in the future there would be no loss of property if *kaniṣṭans* were allowed to marry from within the community and the right of individual share guaranteed by a Bill. In fact it was a matter of relief that half the property could still be retained by the community. No one would aspire for *sambandham* since other communities were far ahead of the Nambūtiris in opposing the practice. Therefore the practice could not continue for long and *swajāti* marriage was not going to suffer.

Reviewing an opinion of Mūthiringōd that *gāṛhastyam* is better than *bṛahmacharyam*,[33] VT stated that the Nambūtiris should feel ashamed of the unique but humiliating practice that they follow.[34] It was both against scriptures and the grand Hindu tradition. The model followed by Hindus elsewhere was celibacy in adolescence, *gāṛhastyam* in the youth and *vānapṛastham* at an advanced age. Here, the Nambūtiris followed a totally unnatural practice. By advising *vānapṛastham* for the *kaniṣṭans*, with a view to bring down lust and sensuality, the Nambūtiris were in fact encouraging the strange custom of *sambandham*. It was really a pity that the community of the Nambūtiris was going to disappear from the earth due to a mistaken appropriation of *varnasramam* and the vulgar practice of *sambandham*. VT denounced *bṛahmacharyam*, which had been breeding adultery, and exhorted the young Nambūtiris to lead a decent life by marrying from within the community. The community would prosper only if they refused to be misled by such outmoded indigestible concepts like *dharmam* and *āchāram* (ethics and custom).

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[33] See *YK*, 17:51, Mar 26, 1927.

[34] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Bṛahmacharyavum Swajāthi Vivāhavum", *YK*, 17:57, Apr. 20, 1927.

Another important issue that seriously haunted the Nambūtiris in the 1920s was the religious endowment bill which aimed at controlling the religious institutions such as temples and *maṭams* traditionally managed by the Nambūtiris. The extension of government control over these institutions was in fact an expression of the expanding civic sense and an attempt on the part of the underprivileged groups to acquire material gains through an entry into immensely wealthy establishments. But for the Nambūtiris it was a clear erosion of privilege. In Cochin, the regulation was meant to control the mismanagement of the property of the *maṭams* by the unscrupulous *saṇyāsis* and to utilize them for the education of the Nambūtiri boys. The conservatives strongly opposed this move on the ground that the property of religious institutions should not be spent for non-religious purposes, especially for the propagation of English education. In an article written in 1925[35] VT enthusiastically supported the reformers and argued for the reallocation of the resources for the new education. He linked the bill with the welfare of both the community and the country. He said that framing of laws was imperative for the utilization of the wealth destined for specific purposes, for the prosperity of the country and the community and to maintain dharma.

VT gained great renown for his resolution on unemployment presented in the 19th annual meeting of the *Sabha* in January 1927.[36] He argued that social reform could not make headway unless it was not preceded by the necessary

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[35] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Matha Dharmasthāpana Regulation", *YK*, 16:25, Dec.16, 1925.

[36] V.T. later wrote an article highlighting his main arguments. See VT Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Yuvajanaṅgaḷum Thozhilillāymayum", *YK*, 17:31, Jan. 12, 1927. For a positive response to VT's article see K. Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, "Yuvajanaṅgaḷum Pṛavarthiyum", *UN*, 8:7, Meenam 1102, pp.392-401. In an anecdote, Premji later revealed that VT's speech at the Kumāranallur Sabha in 1927 on 'Nambūtiris and Unemployment' influenced him greatly and instilled in him a passion to earn his daily bread by the sweat of his brow. Though Premji presents it from his personal experience and from the point of view of an abstract ideal directed to make the Nambūtiris alert and active in the new era, from a communitarian point of view it contained very important messages; while other communities were advancing on this ideal, the Nambūtiris were going to suffer in the future. (M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam*, November 1992).

economic reform. Many Nambūtiris wanted to marry from within the community but were not able to support an independent family because they did not have an independent source of income. Exceptions apart, Nambūtiris are generally not much wealthy. But even the rich did not have the practical sense to utilize their wealth for the common good of the community. On the contrary, others who are not as well off as the Nambūtiris live more comfortably and independently than them. While the N.S.S. runs 8 high schools, the one Nambūtiri School is breathing its last. While men of other communities acquire property through self-effort, Nambūtiris squander their hereditary property. At least in the future they must earn money by entering into a vocation and start living decently. The depressed are prospering while the privileged go down day by day. Christians and Muslims, as they do not have the hangover of nobility and pride, prosper in an unprecedented manner. The Nambūtiris will prosper only if they are prepared to do any job offered to them and go anywhere in the world to earn a living. The only alternative to ruin is to be active and working.

In a notification published subsequently, VT announced the proposal of drawing up a scheme by an expert committee, which had been selected earlier, to work out the programme for an economic revival.[37] He advised that the attention of the Nambūtiris should turn towards such economic activities as agriculture, industry and trade. As Nambūtiris are generally landowners, their major source of income is from land; and as they do not involve themselves directly in cultivation, there is always a drain of a major share of the produce of the land. Due to unjust government laws, even the existing property is in danger. Therefore they cannot escape from directly cultivating their own lands; having plenty of land and a large number of unemployed people, they should turn to agriculture. An industrial school can also be started to process agricultural products and to produce essential domestic goods. As work is done indoors, the

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[37] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Vijnāpanam: Nambūtirimārum Thozhilillāymayum", *YK*, 17:60, Apr. 30, 1927.

rich and the poor (*Kuchēlan* and *Kubēran*) can participate in it. Industriousness is the secret behind Japan's and Germany's success. In areas where there is a cluster of Nambūtiri houses, small warehouses can be started as cooperative societies for purchasing essential goods and for selling agricultural products like paddy and coconuts. Thus trade with a small margin of profit would be mutually helpful and employment-generating. The notification invited suggestions and recommendations for being incorporated into the scheme.

2:A:2. Rajanirangam

Five stories are included in this collection of short stories first published in 1928.[38] They were originally written in *Pāśupatam* in order to strengthen the radical position against the conservatives and the *Sudarśanam* party. To counter conservative opposition, the reform programme needed radical measures and exploration into new arenas. It was realized that the deep and widespread discontent among the Antarjanams against the prevailing customs could be utilized to uproot the old order. In all the five stories women emerge as central characters[39] and are portrayed as personifications of qualities like simplicity and innocence; and as the unfortunate victims of the existing feudal and patriarchal values. These stories also had an undercurrent of premarital love, including sexual relations, which in the prevailing circumstances was not only not possible but even strict taboo. By portraying women as capable of, and even longing for, passionate love, by envisaging warmth and attachment as the real foundation for marital choice, and by presenting custom as the chief obstacle against this necessary transformation, VT not only sowed the seeds of a transition to modernity among the Antarjanams but also helped to demolish the feudal-

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[38] For the present study, the stories included in the *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ* are taken for reference.

[39] It is observed that these stories depicted women on equal terms with men. K. Kaṇṇan, "Ādyan Kūlikaḷudē Kazhuthakaḷi", *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 147:3, Dec.15, 2000, p.19.

patriarchal bastion of conservatism.[40] But it is to be noted that he deliberately avoided blaming the elders or the community and laid the fault on custom and tradition. Except in that respect, the stories were realistic representations of contemporary social system.[41] It is also important to note that the stories had marriage reform as their only goal; a goal which would perfectly conform to the modern concepts of conjugal alliance and nuclear family and to the male interests of the *Apphan* Nambūtiris. In the preface to the first edition of *Rājanirangam*, V.T. wrote:

"...Though it is a fashion today to present a Nambutiri to the general public as a buffoon who plays the role of the half-witted 'Sūri Nambūtiri', I have never seen any author depict in any of his work the pathetic face of an Antarjanam who lives all her life behind her veil. It is the awareness of this novel feature that has impelled me to write these stories about them. My object is not to attain fame as a writer. I want the undesirable marriage system among Nambutiris to be thoroughly reformed and I believe that publication of books of this sort would help in accomplishing this end..."[42]

A contemporary appraisal described the stories as rare pieces of literature meant to introduce marriage reforms. It declared love marriage as the only probable kind of alliance in the future.[43] Another estimate of the stories observed that they contained two messages.[44] One, it was high time that *swajātivivāham*, based on the affection of the couples, be introduced; and two, old education system had to be replaced by the modern one. It laid the hope that education, especially among women, would help to bring about the kind of marriage that *Rājanīrańgam* envisaged. Kēśavadēv remarked that for the first time these stories unveiled before him the inner domain of the Nambūtiri *illams*. He was

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[40] VT's stories were pioneering attempts to represent human lives as realistic characters. Those days, short story had not advanced beyond conveying moral lessons to the readers. M. Achuthan, *Cheṛukatha: Innalē, Innu*, Kottayam, 1985, p.117.

[41] M. Achuthan, "Cheṛukatha: Malayāḷam" in K.M. George. ed., *Bhāratiya Sāhitya Charitṛam* Vol.II, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1983, p.101.

[42] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Rajanīrańgam*, Trissur, 1928.

[43] Kāvil Avinjikkāt Bhavadāsan Nambūtiri, "Rajanīrańgam", *UN*, 11:8, Aug 2, 1929.

[44] P.K. Sreedharan Nambūtiri, Koṭṭakkal, "Rajanīrańgam- Oru Nirūpaṇam", *VK* 20:21, Dec.4, 1929.

surprised to see that Nambūtiri women too had a life and could love and kiss their lovers. He was cheered by the note of radicalism expressed in the stories which were capable of ravaging long-cherished customs.[45] MRB wrote later that the stories embarrassed not just the traditionalists but, surprisingly, even many of the liberals.[46]

Viṣukkēṭṭam. VT's first story, *Viṣukkēṭṭam,* gained fame for its pioneering attempt to present an Antaṛjanam as a character in a literary work.[47] This is a story of an orphaned Nambūtiri girl who had lost her father and brothers in the 'Māppiḷa Rebellion'. She had attained marital age and was under the protection of her *Apphans*. VT seems to convey the message that since *Apphans* entered into *sambandham*, they were increasingly alienated from family affairs. In this context the hero, who is assumed to tell the story himself, comes to her rescue and extends her hopes of a bright future. He is an urbane man and a representative of modern culture. Their love affair crosses all boundaries of custom and develops towards physical intimacy. The conservatives among the Nambūtiris were taken back by the ultra-modern-radical content of the story and the messages it transmitted. First of all, it placed love as the foremost of human emotions. Secondly, it attacked custom. The creation of a situation of pre-marital love and physical intimacy was a serious sin according to custom. Thirdly, it informed women that man-woman relationship had great spiritual and material

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[45] P. Kesavadev, "Rajanīraṅgam–Oraswadanam", *UN* 1932. Added in *VTyudē Kathakaḷ*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1999, p.9.

[46] M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttandinuḷḷil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangaḷ", *Māṯṛubhūmi Special*, 1936.

[47] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.55-58. A few years back, in Kumāran Āśān's *Duravastha*, an Antaṛjanam had appeared as a heroine though in a different context. Āśān wanted to portray the horror of the 1921 rebellion through the life picture of an orphaned Antaṛjanam who was rescued by a Pulaya young man and later on married her. Āśān hints at the pitious condition of Nambūtiri women through his heroine for whom life in a Pulaya house was heaven-like even in destitution. See Kumāran Āśān, *Duravastha*, Trivandrum, 1969. (22nd Edition). The first short story of the Nambūtiri reform literature, by E.K.P.C. Vidwān, was on marriage reform but an Antaṛjanam did not appear as a character. See, E.K.P.C. Vidwān, "Ithoru Kathayalla", *UN*, 8:6, Makaram 1102, pp.289-306; 8:7, Kumbham 1102, pp.353-367; and 8:8, Meenam 1102, pp.401-406.

dimensions beyond the limited scope of procreation. Fourthly, by portraying the hero as a representative of the new culture, the story emphasized modernism as the future ideal. Fifthly, it hinted at the disorderly and destitute life of the *Illam* as a product of the anarchic life-style of the *Apphans*. By narrating the story in the context of the Malabar Rebellion, the author reminded the community of the challenges before it (which had been hastening the 'fall') and hinted at the need for reform to bring about a revitalization.

Athikatinam. The story[48] has '*sapatnīmalsaram*' as its theme. Since the *grihasthan* is weak in character, the first wife emerges as a shrew and schemer. The husband is innocent and incapable of controlling his wife. His third wife (and the latest) finds herself in a pathetic situation. She does not get the loving gaze of her husband but has to face the wrath of the first wife. The second wife had fled from the house unable to tolerate the hardships and cruelties meted out to her. This necessitated some very expensive expiatory rites (of about four to five thousand rupees). Unable to resist, the third wife commits suicide. Summing up the thoughts of the husband, the author remarks that he would be happy getting another chance for a new *vēḷi* with the scope for a handsome dowry. The story narrates the inhuman life condition within the *illams* and points at this factor as having caused to ruin the community. It condemns polygamy and calls for the reform of the prevailing marriage system as it was hindering the progress of the community. Here too the *gṛihastan* is portrayed as an innocent but helpless fellow who succumbed to the evils of the existing custom. The story was an impassioned appeal to all Nambūtiris to save the Antaṛjanams for the resurgence of the community.

Swapnamō Māyayō Manmathibhṛānthiyō? In this story[49] the author is a city dweller. A friend comes to meet him at night. He narrates the story of his foiled

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[48] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.59-62.

[49] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.63-73. Whereas the title of the story originally was this, in the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ* it is given as "Māyayō Manmathibhṛānthiyō?"

affair with the daughter of his teacher. He wanted to marry her but the existing custom incapacitated him to do so. He later resisted all the pressures on him for a *sambandham* mainly because he was strongly opposed to this practice of 'hybridization'. One day, at the railway station, he happened to meet the girl he loved in a very pathetic condition and she dies in his arms. A letter found in her bundle describes her experiences both as an Antaṛjanam and as a wife, the alienation and persecution she had to suffer especially after the death of her husband. She wants to escape from this suffocating atmosphere and was forced to flee from her house. She compares the relatively free life of women of other communities with the slavish life of the Antaṛjanam*s*. The story ends with a message from her letter addressed to all the Antaṛjanams. They are urged to gain the freedom of choosing a right partner in life. The story sets the freedom of the Antaṛjanam*s* in the context of marriage reform. This story presents marriage as the ideal wherein lies the salvation of women and the emerging new urban culture as the harbinger of emancipation.

Eṅkil. The story[50] describes the love affair of an adolescent couple. The boy departs for English education after *samāvaṛtanam* and returns only after completing his studies. Returning home he meets the girl again and they spent one night together.[51] The story contains the message of the importance of the new education and modern culture. The female characters of the story are innocent and modest and are apprehensive of the advancing culture, but are not opposed to it. By depicting the Antaṛjanam*s* as they really were, VT wanted to impress upon them that their innocence would lead them into difficult situation and even to self-annihilation unless they become alert and their liberation lay in an urgent marriage reform.

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[50] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.79-87.

[51] C.K. Nambūtiri writes that VT's story was based on his personal experience. He had such a true alliance with his uncle's daughter. See C.K. Nambūtiri, "Chila Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam,* Vol. 14, No. 5-6, May-June 1982, pp.23-24.

Hip Hip Hurray. The context of the story[52] is a *vāram* at a temple and the conversations that took place among the participants while away their time. The hero accidentally reaches there on the day. He happens to see large numbers of orthodox Nambūtiris engaged in sumptuous feasts and anti-reform discussions. They condemned *Kaniṣṭavivāham* as debauchery and habits like new hair-style and cigarette smoking as wantonness. That night one of the prominent elders who ridiculed the reformers for their alleged lustfulness was caught red handed in the act of adultery. The next day he is paraded through the streets with his head shaved and his body painted. The story in fact described the frivolous and reactionary life of the elders of the community and showed how they were being ridiculed in the new age. It exposed their subterfuge and their claims as the exponents of culture and moral values while being hypocratic indeed.

2:A:3. Pōmvazhi

A collection of four stories with this title appeared in 1948.[53] Three of these stories were written immediately after the Ōngallūṛ Sabha and stressed the need of a social and economic revival in the community. One of these stories, which has its theme as marriage reform, was written earlier and was published in the *UN* in 1929. Thus if the earlier stories stressed marriage reform, the remaining three stories bring new problems to the fore. The condition of the community in the post-reform period was vitiated by the fragmentation of *illam* property and the negative impact of the tenancy reforms; yet most of the Nambūtiris continued to be lethargic and hence destitute. The burden of dowry continued to make marriage of girls extremely difficult and led to the sale of girls in the guise of marriage to non-Nambūtiri Brahmins outside Kerala. One of these stories deals with the question of dowry and narrates how it impeded the marriage prospects of girls. Thus these stories present a new VT who is eager and involved in rebuilding the community along the modern concept of

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[52] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.88-92.
[53] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Pōmvazhi*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1124 (1948).

entrepreneurship. There is also a tendency to identify an external enemy for the 'fall' of the community in the form of the *kāryasthan*. These were certainly not new developments since discouragement of dowry, rebuilding of the community and the search for an external villain, all had its roots in his early articles of the 20s but did not get a place of prominence because the solution for other issues like *Kaniṣṭavivāham* and family regulation had to be found. As a person who had been engaged in the reform measures of a particular community, VT was not fully able to refrain from sectarian agenda even in the new circumstances. A strong prick of conscience also might have persuaded him to strongly plead for the interests of the community. In the preface of the first edition of *Pōmvazhi,* K.P.G. remarked that V.T's claim of having absorbed the Ōngallūṛ appeal far greater than anyone else is substantiated in these stories.[54] It has also been stated that behind all his vicissitudes VT had a strong concern for the progress of the community.[55]

In the complete works of VT, the chronological order and the social context of these stories are purposefully distorted; the publication date given is 1930 though in fact it was published in 1948.[56] This may be due to many reasons. In the 1940s VT was a comrade of the leftists[57] for it served his interests of assisting his community; but it sharply contrasted with his later image as a belligerent force to leftist politics. He is assumed to have come out of communitarian politics as early as the 1930s and had gained repute as a staunch Gandhian. By allying with the communists after Ōngallūṛ, for community interests, VT was declaring that community reform was his main agenda. This would affect his identity as a pure Gandhian and a profound secularist. Other attributes attached to the stories by some eulogists such as that VT was putting

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[54] K.P.G, "Avathārika" in V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Pōmvazhi*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1124 (1948), p.iv.

[55] *Ibid*, p.i.

[56] See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.7. More important is that while introducing the stories of this collection, the details of its first publication is deliberately obscured. *Ibid*, p.53.

[57] Akkitham confirms VT's association with the communists in the 1940s. see Akkitham, "VT: Nambūtiri Samudāyathintē Kamāl Pāsha", *Mangaḷōdayam*, 23:11, Kumbham 1123(1947), p.505.

forward the concepts of women's liberation and gender equality, by calling upon them to work along with men, does not find any support in any of the four stories of this collection.[58]

Sakşālkāram. The story was first published in Uṇṇi Nambūtiri[59] as "*Sukhajaḷamṛiti Bhītiṛvita Kāntāpti Rōgā:*" and was republished in the collection *Pōmvazhi*, under the same title. The hero of the story meets his childhood playmate (a Nambūtiri girl) unexpectedly at the railway station while he was feeling desperate over the failure in his attempts at *swajātivivāham* because of customary restrictions and opposition from his elder brother. The girl along with her grandmother was on their way back home from Guruvāyūr. The girl had revealed her grandmother her desire to go by train and the old lady had acceded to her request. Those days Nambūtiri women were not supposed to travel by train. When the train came, the girl was so confused that in her bewilderment she could not enter the train. Night had fallen and she had to stay with the hero at the lodge where he was staying alone. The story ends with their reaching the lodge at night. Like many other stories, this too emphasized the role of love in marriage and the desirability of adopting modern life style. In content and style it is in line with the stories of *Rājanīrańgam*.

Uttharam Kiṭṭātha Chōdyam. This story[60] is very important in that apart from being the author and the hero, VT presents himself as a historical character and reveals his opinions about various issues of community interest. One night when he was returning home he came across a woman who introduced herself as an Antaṛjanam, belonging to a family of three daughters. The *illam* became

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[58] M. P. Veerendrakumar, "Kālapravāhamāyi Niḷa Ozhukikkondēyirikkunnu", *Māṭṛubhūmi Weekly*, 83:29, Sep.18-24, 2005, p.44. He wrote: "The book *Pōmvazhi* written by VT in 1942 was really an echo of the principle of gender equality. Through this book he puts forward the idea that, like men, women too should start working to earn their livelihood. Actually, the underlying idea of this work is women's emancipation".

[59] *UN*, 10:8, Medam 1104, pp. 494-504. It is renamed as 'Sākshālkāram' in the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.74-78. As the story was written in 1929, it could not be included in the collection *Rajanīrańgam*. But the spirit is the same and hence it stands different from other stories of the collection *Pōmvazhi*.

[60] *UN*, 1:4, Karkidakam 1122, (June-July 1947), pp. 210-220; *I Tyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.93-98.

pauperized with the marriage of her two elder sisters. Unable to find the means to get her married, the father sells her and she reaches a brothel at Mangalore. Here too, the father is presented as a piteous victim of the prevailing system. The story reveals that even in 1947 the condition of Nambūtiri women was far from satisfactory and their marriage was still a serious problem due to the practice of dowry. By highlighting the pathetic existence of an Antarjanam who had not only been denied the security and solace of married life but also had to end it up in a brothel, VT was condemning the existing marriage system of the Nambūtiris. But his programme for the uplift of women was still limited to marriage reform. But he refuses to develop a programme for women's emancipation to save them from their plight and to enable them to have an independent standing. And this is particularly significant in the context of the founding of the *Tozhil Kēndṛam* (Work Centre) at Lakkidi around this time. His memoirs are silent about this period and the issues related to the *Kēndṛam*. His presentation of himself as the hero, as the emancipator of the Antarjanam*s* and as a Nambūtiri, who is capable of understanding the problems of others, should be understood as an attempt to assert his identity in the context of the revival of the *Sabha* under E.M.S, in which he was relegated to second line in leadership. The story in another way hints at the limitations of VT's gender perceptions. His drama, written around this time, named *Karińchanta* which highlighted the very same issue of the sale of Antarjanam*s* in the name of marriage, was reported to have been staged once, but has not been heard of thereafter.[61]

Manakkalē Kāryasthan. The story[62] deals with the burning question of dowry and the sale of Antarjanam*s* but places the issue in the context of Nāyar-Nambūtiri relationship. The story starts with the death of a Nambūtiri who had no male heirs but only 4 or 5 daughters. *kāryasthan* Krishnan Nāyar, who prospered through the generosity of the kind-hearted Nambūtiri as a member of the *illam*, and is now the only man to depend on. But he is very cunning and

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[61] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, Kottayam, 1989, pp.175-76.
[62] *UN* 1:6, Kanni 1123 (Sep-Oct. 1948), *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*. pp.99-104.

devoid of all good qualities. In the environment of the *illam*, where lethargy and magnanimity coexisted, the manager became all-powerful. During his lifetime the Nambūtiri was very active in the reform movement and was an ideal person. All the attempts of the Nambūtiri for getting his daughters married were torpedoed by Krishnan Nāyaṛ who had his hidden designs. After the Nambūtiri's death he took the eldest daughter away, while she was pregnant, informing others that a marriage is fixed for her at a distant place. The girl sets out for the 'marriage' with a few strange people while the mother and sisters watched hopefully for her happy return. In fact Krishnan Nāyaṛ sells her to agents at Mangalore. Here VT explicitly accounts for the Nāyaṛ factor in the 'fall' of the Nambūtiris and focuses on the issue from both communitarian and humanitarian standpoints. The feeling of the 'other' attached to the Nāyaṛs was an important factor of the Nambūtiri movement and in the case of VT it continued to work with force even after the heyday of the movement.[63]

Chūṇdippalaka. The story[64] is a testimony to the spirit of the Ōngallūṛ Sabha in which E.M.S. had called upon the Nambūtiris to enter into any vocation including agriculture and trade. The speech of E.M.S plunged VT in disgrace due to his community's ignominious role in the past as *janmis* and the custodians of custom. He examines the present economic deprivation in the context of the reform movement. Demand for *swajātivivāham* and partition of joint property had led to the formation of nuclear families leading to both proliferation of the community and fragmentation of holdings bringing about destitution. Such a situation had made the still prevailing feudal economy obsolete and impracticable for it was not possible any more for anyone to subsist on the rent received from his tenants. So he decides to evict the tenants from his land and to cultivate it himself. While subsisting on rent was becoming difficult, the collection of rent had been extremely painstaking. Thus VT finds that the prosperity of the community depends on an economic revolution based on the

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[63] VT continued to villainize the *kāryasthans*. See "Vedivaṭṭam" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p. 450.

[64] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.105-107.

new entrepreneurial and capitalist spirit. Though VT later alleged that the call of E.M.S. for making the Nambūtiris human beings was a play to convert them into communists,[65] in the 1940s he had shown tremendous interest in the Ōngallūṟ spirit just because it conformed to both his personal and community interests.

2:A:4. Other Stories

VT has written three more stories. One of these stories "*Jyēṣṭanum Kaniṣṭanum*" was actually written in 1931[66] and deals with the pangs of the partition of the illam property. Another story "*Thuppantē Katha–Thantēyum*"[67] is said to be written in 1930 and is not very important from the social point of view. The backdrop of the story is the aftermath of reform wherein the hero (i.e., the author himself) stands with a new *swajāti* wife and a portion of the partitioned property and ponders over the next step to be taken. He is in confusion – whether to lead a contended family life or to enter into new areas of public sphere. He does not take any decision. The story also refers to the indignities he had to face in his childhood and sees his present situation of comparatively better material prosperity as a compensation for his earlier deprivation. If this is the message, it has certain important implications. Serious criticism has been leveled against VT for his high stress on material interests in personal life.[68] The third story "*Abhayārthi*"[69] appears symbolic and does not seem to have any social value.

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[65] "Nambūtirimārudē Kūlippaṇi Saptāham", *Mātṛubhūmi Daily*, 4-11-1970, reproduced in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, p.236. It is also observed that VT nurtured a kind of vendetta towards E.M.S. and the Marxist Party. When asked why he does not answer VT's criticisms, E.M.S. is reportedly replied that VT was his guru and he had every right to question him. See Kizhāttūr Aniyan, "VT Bhaṭṭathiripād", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 13:35, March 14, 1982, p.10.

[66] *UN*, Oct. 10 & 16, 1931; *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 108-115.

[67] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.120-122. The date and medium of publication of the story could not be traced out. Since VT had been married and had received the share of his property around this time, the date assigned may be correct.

[68] K.S. Radhakrishnan, "V.T: Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement*, Dec. 16 & 23, 2001; Madhavikutty, "Mādhavikutty Vārasyāṛudē Pēramakaḷ Ezhuthunnu", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 82:43, Dec. 26, 2004, p. 4.

[69] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.116-119.

Jyēṣṭanum Kaniṣṭanum. This story is about a very crucial issue that had worried the reformers intensely–the partition of Illam property and the assertion of the independence and individuality of the *Kaniṣṭans*. It is certain that VT was narrating his personal experience though he gives the names of the characters differently.[70] In a discussion with his eldest brother, VT criticizes the dictatorial powers of the *mūss*, justifies his demand for *swajātivivāham*, separate family and partition of joint property and presents the *mūss*, along with his wife, as the greatest obstacle in the attainment of this goal. He presents the father, mother and even the grandmother as exponents of change, while selfish interest guided the *mūss* to oppose all moves towards the democratization of relationships within the family. For the *mūss,* the reform movement was exclusively motivated by greed. Still, VT does not like him to be portrayed as engaged in impinging into others' rights but as just claiming his rights and that too for supporting his parents and other family members.

2:A:5. Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku

The composition and the staging of the drama *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku* [71] (hereafter *AA*) played a crucial role in accelerating the process of change in the Nambūtiri community. We do not find any literary work having introduced such a basic change in the minds of people capable of bringing about a revolutionary impact.[72] It played an equally important role in the construction of the public image of V.T. and contributed much to his rise to prominence in the *Sabha*. The subject matter of the drama differs from his earlier works in that it incorporated in it a wide range of issues both communitarian and secular.

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[70] In an article V.T. Vasudevan narrates the incident of VT's quarrels with his eldest brother over the question of the partition of the illam property which perfectly matches with VT's description in the story. See V.T. Vasudevan, "VT Ezhuthān Maṛanna Ātmakatha," *Samakālīna Malayāḷam,* March 2004, pp.14-18.

[71] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku,* Tṛiśśūṛ, 1930; *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.339-394.

[72] Hence N.V. argues that it should be acorded a respectable place in world literature. N.V. Krishna Variyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam" in Palakkizh Nārāyaṇan, *VT: Oru Itihāsam,* Trichur, 1996, p. 28.

Despite marriage reform being the central theme of the work, with *swajātivivāham* and love marriage as the focal points, the drama subjected other important concerns of the time such as the realignment of inter-caste relationships, the absurdity of distance pollution, the approach towards the nationalist movement, the need of English education, the emancipation of Antarjanams, etc, etc. It clearly aimed at a refashioning of the community along modern ideals and a realignment of community relationships in the light of changing social equilibrium and ongoing criticism against the Nambūtiris on account of their orthodoxy.

In an article, VT explains the circumstances which induced him to write the drama and how it came to be a milestone in his life.[73] He links its origin with the passivity in the *Sabha* caused by the rejection of the bill and examines it in the context of the ideological struggle between the moderates and the radicals. He admits that its creation owed much to the usual night discussions at the *Yōgakṣēmam* lodge. This admission is perfectly in line with the statement of E.M.S. that the drama as such was the result of a group endeavour, led by VT.[74] The fourth act, which was written first, was immediately published[75] and the

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[73] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.248-56. VT's statement that it was originally planned as a novel but had to be rewritten as a drama creates certain inconsistencies in the context of two important evidences. Rāmavarma Thampān has written that when he came to read *Rajanīraṅgam* he urged, or even commanded, VT to write a farce. See "Oru Prahasanābhinayam", *UN*, 11:31, Jan. 24, 1930. Even earlier, *UN* had written a four column editorial hinting at the need of, and the possible benefits of, the staging of a drama in order to educate and arouse the illiterate Antarjanams. It optimistically stated that a grand transformation would ensue once a favourable attitude is created among them. Foreseeing the drama to be named as "Tēthīswayamvaram", it gave the outlines of the story thus: as usual, the marriage of a girl, without her consent, is fixed with an old Nambūtiri. Seeing an aged Nambūtiri as her bridegroom at the time of the wedding, the bride thrashes him and escapes from the spot. See *UN*, 11:5, July 12, 1929.

[74] See E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "Nāṭakam Uruthirinjathu Vedivaṭṭathil Ninnu", *Dēśābhimāni Sunday Supplement*, Dec.25, 2004, p.3. Premji also writes on the same lines. See M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmji: VTyudē Sṛiṣṭi", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, p.39. K.C. Nārāyaṇan gives evidences to support this view and calls it as a sort of 'group-farming'. See K.C. Nārāyaṇan, "Nāṭakakalayum Navōthānavum", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, Mēzhathūr, 1997, p.201.

[75] *UN*, 11:13, Chingam 21, 1105 (Sep.6, 1929) with the title "Thēthiyum Mādhavanum–Vērvād". The name of the author is given as TV.

seventh act subsequently[76] but well before the first performance of the drama. The farce played a strategic role both in bringing about a radical turn in the movement and in elevating him to the front rank leadership of the *Sabha*.

In the preface written to the third edition of the drama in 1957,[77] K. Kēḷappan compared it to an atom bomb of 'those days'. Presenting VT as an exceptional personality and his drama as a revolutionary move, Kēḷappan tried to impress upon the readers that it liberated a community from sheer ignorance and exclusiveness. VT led the transformation of the community from depression and decay towards modernity, but it was his drama that played the crucial role in this transformation. Kēḷappan identified the outdated system of Vedic education and the primitive practice of *Adhivēdanam* as the two customs which had to be immediately replaced; and it was praiseworthy that VT had focused on these two areas. It is no wonder that VT, who considered social reform as his mission, upheld these issues in a situation when the Nambūtiris, who ought to have led the society and the country, suppressed other communities arresting their progress. Kēḷappan justified the new edition of the drama on account of its historical value and as a tribute to the great social reformer of Kerala, VT. But it is extremely important to note that Kēḷappan introduced VT as the one and only leader of the Nambūtiri movement at a time when E.M.S. emerged as the first chief minister of united Kerala.

In a very positive contemporary evaluation of the drama staged at Edakkunni, Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇa Mārār wrote that he returned after watching it with a great sense of satisfaction.[78] He hoped that the 22nd annual meeting, due to the staging of the drama, would bring about within a year a sudden transformation equivalent to that which had been achieved over the last ten years. What else is not impossible for those young men who dared to question the futility of Vedic

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[76] *YK*, 20: 23, Dec. 11, 1929.
[77] K. Kēḷappan, "Avathārika", *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku*, Calicut, 1957.
[78] Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇa Mārār, "Abhinandanam", *UN* 11:27, Dec. 27, 1929.

education and to present a live picture of the beast-like life of the women in the harem? The drama in fact tore the hearts of the orthodox. It was a paradox that the Nambūtiris of those noble *illams* who hitherto employed other non-noble Nambūtiris to walk in front of their marriage processions with sword in hand, have to act the same degrading role in the drama and it is not surprising that Mūthiringōd, who presided over the *Akhila Kēraḷa Nambūtiri Yōgam* which is formed to eradicate sub-caste hierarchies, himself played such a role in it.

Another contemporary review applauded the drama for the revolutionary changes it brought about within the community and compared it with a bombshell.[79] The reviewer treats it as an 'absolute farce' dealing with worldly matters alone. He praises it for its character formation, stage arrangement, sarcasm and the skill in portraying the harem of an *illam*. The appraisal concluded with the statement that the farce is capable of transforming the very foundations of the Nambūtiri community.

AA is generally treated as the first 'social farce'[80] and as the pioneering venture in the progressive theatre movement in Kerala.[81] It also came to be accepted as the first propagandist drama. In relation to both the theme and

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[79] M.B.N, "Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku – Oru Sāmudāyika Pṛahasanam", *Mangaḷōdayam*, 17:9, Medam 1105, pp.660-663. MBN writes: "If the worth of literature is assessed by the valuable transformation it produces in a nation or in a society, this social satire too has been highly successful in producing sweeping changes in the Nambūtiri community leading to its radical social transformation. The massive quakes that have been rocking the community for the last four months testify the explosive power of this satire in bringing about valuable social changes. In short, this satire is not only a powerful weapon of social change but also a top-ranking work of literature", p.663.

[80] Mahesh Mangalāt, "Arangintē Prasakthi" in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, p.206; Chembur Sukumāran Nair, "Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku: 75 Varṣathinu Śeṣam", *Sāhityalōkam*, 31:2, Mar-April 2002, p.100. Mathramkod Aśōkan calls VT as the originator of the branch of propagandist dramas in Malayāḷam. See his *VT Ethiṛpilūdē*, p.39. Though not enacted, a farce named *Antapurapṛēmam* by Sundar Raj, with *Adhivēdanam* as the theme, has been published in the *UN*. The farce ends with the abduction of the bride by his English-educated lover with the help of his friends. See *UN*, 10:1, Kanni 1104, pp.98-111.

[81] V.M Ramachandran, "The Modern Malayāḷam Theatre – A Brief Survey" in P.J.Cherian ed., *Essays on the Cultural Formation of Kerala*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, pp.143, 45.

presentation, it utilized the methods of realism and was in fact an attempt at an in-depth analysis of the community through self-criticism. VT himself wrote that it aimed at burning down what was created by, and what had been imposed on, the Nambūtiris in the process of the formation of a communitarian divide in the society.[82] But the drama missed a dramatic touch since it unilaterally declared the victory of the progressive side.[83] It also suffered many drawbacks if looked at from a literary point of view. It failed to stand the test of time because it was highly propaganda-oriented and hence came to have a low level of artistic value. As it focused on the contemporary and strictly communitarian issues, it could not last as a literary piece in the post-reform age. But all these defects do not detract the value of this play. Malayāḷam drama was in its infancy then; and a better drama than AA would be an unrealizable dream in those days. The strength of the play lies in its revolutionary fervour and the changes that it was able to introduce in the community. Today, however, it has only historical value than as a piece of literature.

VT dedicated the work to the Antaṛjanams with a note "In the tender hands of the virgins".[84] It has been observed that the drama was created with the avowed purpose of conversing with women; its practical ideal was to promote discourses within the harems.[85] It was envisaged as a vehicle to enter into dialogue with this section which was not just silent but being silenced too. Thus it was meant to provide the dumb a say and to raise them to subjectivity.[86]

It is difficult to summarize the drama without the risk of oversimplification. The main narrative revolves around the love affair of Mādhavan and Tēthi. Mādhavan departs to Madras for studies and in the meanwhile Tēthi's marriage

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[82] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.251.
[83] Chembur Sukumāran Nair, op. cit., p.103.
[84] "Kanyakamārudē Karapallavangaḷil". See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.341.
[85] K.C. Nārāyaṇan, "Nātakakalayum Navōthānavum", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, Mēzhathūr, 1997, p.201-202.
[86] *Ibid.*

is fixed with an aged Nambūtiri. Though Tēthi's father had great regard for Mādhavan, the fear of committing the sin of *Parivēdanam* discouraged him from giving his daughter in marriage to him. Mādhavan completed his course of study and with the help of his friends decided to foil the marriage through a court injunction. Finally Tēthi was married to Mādhavan and in a meeting of the *Nambūtiri Yuvajana Sańgham* arranged to congratulate the couples, Mādhavan tore out her *ghōṣa* to liberate her from seclusion.

VT's drama subjected issues such as marriage customs, education system, pollution rules, superstitions and emancipation of women for discussion. Of these the focal point is *Adhivēdanam* which is prevented through a court order. By obviating a customary practice with the help of a court injunction VT gave a clear message to the Nambūtiris to seek the help of the new legal system to get the wrongs redressed. It is important that the drama, while presenting the complex issues that the community faced, suggested the remedies as well.[87] It does not focus simply on a single issue, or issues of related interest, but analyzed the condition of the community as a whole[88] in the context of the 'fall' for which customs and practices were mainly responsible. Act 8 described the erosion of influence over the servants in the *illams*; the non-cooperation of the servile castes to fulfill the customary ritual responsibilities had been a cause of concern of the *Sabha* from its beginning. Act 9 is about the high dependency of the *illams* on the servant class for daily life; it pointed also at the tendency of the servants to grab whatever was possible and available from the *illams*. The poverty of the *illams* also became a cause of concern. For the elders solace lay in *Adhivēdanam* and in the money through dowry. The gross alienation that the *Apphans* had to face in an *illam* is portrayed in the 11th Act. The drama was highly influenced by the model of *Indulēkha* as is understood from this act

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[87] Usha Nambūtiripād, "Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku: Chila Bhāṣābhēda Chintakaḷ", *Dēśābhimāni Sunday Supplement*, Sep. 26, 1999.

[88] M. Prasad, *VT, MRB, Prēmji Ennivarudē Nāṭakangaḷudē Sāmūhyapṛasakti*. PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 1993, p.88.

which, like the 18th chapter of *Indulēkha*, brought in for discussion contemporary issues of communitarian and social interest including freedom of women, female education, matrilineal system, *sambandham*, *swajātivivāham*, *ghōṣa system*, *bhāgam*, Nambūtiri bill, etc. But it does not create a feeling of detachment from the main narrative like in the case of *Indulēkha*.[89] Nevertheless, the last and 16th act did appear extremely monotonous to the reader since it dealt with felicitation speeches to the newly wed couple and lengthy messages of friends from all over the world. But the dramatist would be relieved of serious blame considering the fact that the drama was truly propaganda-oriented and was intended to convey direct messages to the illiterate and ignorant Antarjanam*s*. In fact the most striking feature of the drama is the absence of a villain. Even Karkidāṅkunnath Acchan, who is portrayed as the negative character, is a weakling, and is presented as a victim of custom.[90] This might have been a strategy, intended not to estrange even the worst conservatives and arch enemies of the movement.[91]

Though VT later on submitted the work to the Antarjanams, in fact women's issue was not the primary or central theme of the drama. It aimed at eliminating the existing marriage system which in its turn would liberate the Antarjanam*s*. Therefore the repeated references to the drama as a manifesto of female emancipation did not have real foundation. In VT's drama Tēthi is a meek and gentle character having neither the initiative of action nor a say in her own future. This may be justified as a realistic description of the character in the social context, but the final act of the drama clearly exposed VT's concept of the place of women in society. It laid strict boundaries on feminine freedom.

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[89] In the case of *Indulēkha*, Arunima noted that an engagement with the questions of westernization/Anglicization, rationality vs Hindu faith and the relevance of the Indian National Congress problematized the inclusion of the chapter and provided the novel with an interesting didactic twist. G. Arunima, "Writing Culture: Of Modernity and the Malayalam Novel", *Studies in History*, 13:2, n.s., 1997, p.276.

[90] T.K. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *VT Kṛithikaḷ: Oru Paṭanam*, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 1995, p.218.

[91] Kāṭṭumādam Nārāyaṇan, *Malayāḷa Nāṭaka Prasthānam*, Tṛiśśūr, 1980, pp.135-36.

The drama utilized a colloquial form of conversation[92] with a clear stress on communitarian dialect.[93] Before VT's experiment, two streams of dramatic forms prevailed in Kerala. One was the stream of musical-drama with themes from *purāṇic* stories and the other of social themes, like the dramatization of *Indulēkha*. VT, who came from British Malabar, did not have sufficient experience in the realm of dramatics since Malabar did not have an independent dramatic tradition as in the case of Travancore, where because of the early drive made in the improvement of literacy and education, literature including drama had made great progress. People of Malabar were familiar only with the dramatic tradition that prevailed in Travancore-Cochin through the periodic visits of professional drama troops from there.[94]

2:A:6. Autobiography

VT's autobiography consists of three parts namely *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum, Dakṣiṇāyanam and Kaṛmavipākam* and they appeared in the form of articles in popular magazines from 1959 to 1981. It can be said that they present us only the landmarks in his life. But the first part of the memoirs, *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum,* is an exception as it describes his life and career till his entry in the public sphere in an unbroken manner, and surpasses all his other works in the tremendous emotional impact it produced on the readers. The earliest of the articles included in this volume had appeared in the fag end of the 1950s and the volume in its final form was published in 1970.[95] VT's biography stands different from most other ones in that the element of intense emotion is very much visible in it.[96]

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[92] Kāṭṭumādam Nārāyaṇan, Malayāḷa Nāṭaka *Pṛasthānam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1980, p.76.

[93] It is referred to as colloquial language by Usha Nambūtiripād, *op. cit.*

[94] Kāṭṭumādam, *op.cit*, pp.128-29.

[95] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum*, Kottayam, 1970. N.V. Krishna Variyar has written that these articles were written for being published in *Mātṛubhūmi weekly* and upon his strong persuasion. See N.V. Krishna Variyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *VT: Oru Itihāsam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, p.30. It received the Kerala Sahitya Academy award for the best literary wok of the year 1972 and is regarded as the most touching biography ever

As autobiography is a reproduction of one's own past experiences from the present context through personal reasoning; they may be treated as a totally different text far separated from the real facts. Experiences are reproduced in totally different contexts and in different ideological premises, and so the presentation may contradict with the real experiences.[97] Though autobiography can be the most sincere representation of one's self-identity, and hence the most conceivable form of a faithful portrayal of one's personal experience, it is quite uncommon because it is the "life of a man that happens to have been written by himself and is therefore unfinished".[98] It is natural that the autobiographer would feel disturbed over describing his undesirable deeds which would force him to conceal certain facts or to distort some others. Therefore, an autobiographer will not have that kind of independence as of a biographer [99] and only those experiences which the writer think others to know alone are presented in the narration and that too through a rereading of the real facts.

The autobiographies of prominent men are generally the representations of their public life as if having had played a causative role in historic events or as having witnessed some historic developments.[100] They will be very cautious in presenting their memories.[101] Equally important is the burden of accumulated

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appeared in Malayāḷam. It was selected as a textbook for the degree classes for language students of the Calicut University in 1978. It ran into five editions by 2007.

[96] It has been noticed that autobiography has two streams – intellectual and emotional. While the autobiography of E.M.S. belonged to the first category, that of VT falls into the second. K.M. George, *Jīva Charitṛa Sāhityam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, p.292.

[97] G. Dileepan, "Ātmakathākhyānathintē Pṛatyayaśāstṛam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, Mar 16-22, 1997, p. 6.

[98] Paul Murray Kendall, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. II, p.1009. A rare exception to this general rule is the autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi.

[99] Vijayalayam Vijayakrishnan, "*Ātmakathā Sāhityam Malayāḷathil*", Kottayam, 1982, p.7.

[100] Sharmila, "Ātmakathā Paṭanangaḷkku Oru Puthiya agenda", *Pacchakkuthira*, May 2006, p.15.

[101] Writing on how memories of historic figures contribute to reproduce the past, Richard M Ketchum noted different kinds of memories. What is more commonly remembered is the unusual or the colourful which he termed "Serendipitous Memory". A piece of information that comes in out of the blue, totally unsuspected and unsought for, is called "Unsolicited Memory". What is consciously created and is highly censured is "Manufactured Memory". See Richard M Ketchum, "Memory as History", *American Heritage*, Nov.1991, pp.142-48.

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ideas created about the author over the years weighing heavily against an objective evaluation of the work. The more renowned the author, the heavier is the burden of the accumulated ideas.[102] The self and public images created through his autobiographies have idolized VT to a very high degree and this has determined the nature of studies on him to a great extent.

Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum

In a rare piece of personal reminiscences of literary excellence, VT projected himself before the literary world not only as a gifted writer but also as a cult figure. The work starting with his childhood experiences ends with his attaining of adulthood. The work is noted for its thorough evaluation of the customs and practices of the Nambūtiri community which necessitated the creation of a radical movement. The denunciation of tradition might have been an attempt on VT's part to legitimize his reform measures; what enraged him was the conservative outlook of a section of the community who impeded the introduction of beneficial changes that were in tune with the changing times, leaving the community far behind the others in economic potential and political mileage. Hence his wrath was not directed against the community as such but against the patriarchs and the *Vaidikans* who intercepted a social regeneration.[103] He was greatly embarrassed to see other communities march ahead of the Nambūtiris.[104] Thus VT in his memoirs justified reform as a means to reestablish Nambūtiri dominance in Kerala, the growing incompatibility of customs and practices with the emerging new social order had been accelerating the decline; in fact reform was a measure to acquire a sufficient space, not to speak of a leading role, for the Nambūtiris in the new civil society.

In this work VT places himself against the declining space of the Nambūtiris in the social and political life. The feudal social order was collapsing and the

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[102] J. Devika, "Agnisākṣi Vīndum Vāyikkumbōḷ", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam*, Feb.2006, p.56.
[103] See "*Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum*" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.131-34.
[104] *Ibid*, p.128.

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Nambūtiris were slowly sinking.[105] This era saw the emergence of capitalism and nationalism in India and since the Nambūtiris were thoroughly incapable of adapting to these new trends, they could not adjust themselves with the contemporary reality and were slowly being marginalized. The customs and the traditions of the Nambūtiri community were evidently undemocratic and patriarchal, and the majority of the community, the *Apphans* and the Antaŗjanam*s*, were being greatly discriminated. In the preface of the work VT sets himself against the dual reality of being an *Apphan* and a Nambūtiri. He compares the glorious past of the Nambūtiris with their present state of deprivation without condemning either the community or tradition but just their exclusiveness and isolation.[106] Though VT's criticism of customs of the community was extremely mild, compared to his literature of the reform days, it is surprising to find that even this moderate criticism enraged the hardcore exponents of culture and tradition.[107] What he wanted to expose was the lethargy of the community and what he wanted to instill in them was energy, enthusiasm and the spirit of enterprise, for these were lacking in them even in the 1960s and 70s when he had embarked on writing his memoirs.

Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum is replete with references to VT's indignation at the personal, family and communal problems he had to face in his early life. Being born in a poor family he was neither able to enjoy the pleasures of boyhood nor to get proper education. His birth as an *Apphan* Nambūtiri was yet another misfortune. He could not aspire for the freedom, status or privileges of a *mūss*;

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[105] Robin Jeffrey's observation on the decline of the Nairs in the wake of the development of the capitalist social order seems equally applicable to the Nambūtiri community. See Robin Jeffrey, *Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore, 1847-1908*, New Delhi, 1994.

[106] *VTyudē Samporna Kritikal*, pp.127-130. In the preface of the first edition of *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum*, (pp.7-14), VT lambasted the conservatives of the community. The replacement of the preface in later editions is indicative of the changing strands of VT or may be a reflection of VT's reaction to the negative impact the work created within the community.

[107] T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Samudāyadṛōhi", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, Nov.12, 1995, pp.47-48.

he had to be underling all his life. At a very early age he had to work as a temple priest due to monetary difficulties at home; which deprived him of the opportunities of further studies. In personal life too he had to cope with many shortcomings; he was black and unattractive. Despite being a destitute and a radical, VT also had to face the general ill-feeling and hatred against the Nambūtiris, for their privileged position, their exclusiveness and the utter disdain with which they treated the lower castes. VT portrayed the interiors of the *illams* as the most suited places for breeding lethargy and superstition. By putting custom, superstition, and landlordism as the chief factors behind the 'fall' of the community, VT tried to justify the reform movement in which he was an active partner. Moreover, he wanted to impress upon the community the consequences of indolence and the urgent need of putting an end to it.

Though VT is glorified as the saviour of the suffering Antaṛjanam*s*, his autobiography does not provide any instance of his direct encounter with the sufferings of women either at home or in the community.[108] He does not refer to the sufferings of the Antaṛjanam*s* in any of the chapters except the first one. In fact VT seems to be more concerned about the plight of the *Apphans*, for he writes in detail about the deprivation of physical and spiritual needs from his own experience. But he does not refer to a single experience of a woman, either from his family or from outside, that had struck him and had provoked him to take up the gender issue on a revolutionary footing.[109] Thus, not only his contemporary writings but even his reminiscences are strong declarations of a male agenda of reform.

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[108] The only instance is the life-story of his step-mother but this he does in a different context, while explaining his attitude against the Communists. See his "Sakhāvuṇṇi", in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.313-14.

[109] And this is striking because both M.R.B. and Premji have revealed that what provoked them to sympathize with the women question was the sufferings of women of their own *illam*.

Dakşiṇāyanam

The second part of VT's memoirs, *Dakşiṇāyanam*,[110] narrates his entry into the public sphere and his first experiences with the southern regions of Kerala, especially Thiruvananthapuram and Tṛiśśūṛ where he spent many eventful years learning the art of public life. Distressed by his poor economic condition, but imbued with a burning desire to study and to procure a prosperous career, he first went to Thiruvananthapuram during the time of the *Muṛajapam* ceremony in 1918.[111] VT's description about his southern experience is important in two respects. First, he could participate in a ceremony which was increasingly being opposed by the public and the media. Secondly he could feel the pulse of the people of the state of Travancore where educational and social advancement had created a totally different social milieu. He must have had the opportunity to study the SNDP movement directly and to assess the material progress it had brought about to the people of the area. Though VT does not acknowledge the impact the urban environment had on his views of social reform, it is highly probable that his stay at the capital city might have acquainted him with the changing tempo of the times. The greatest issue of anti-Brahmanical agitation in Travancore was the *Muṛajapam* which was seen as a caste privilege and hence a drain to the exchequer. The growing civic consciousness combined with the struggle for civic rights and social equality made the Nambūtiris a target of criticism and ridicule. This popular wrath had its reflection on the *YKS* movement forcing the Nambūtiri young men later to condemn the Nambūtiri representation in the *Muṛajapam*. The pamphlets circulated by the NYJS at Thiruvananthapuram were the testimony to this concern. VT's description of *Muṛajapam* did not question the Nambūtiri participation in it but just criticized

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[110] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.203-56.
[111] *Ibid*, pp.205-28.

some of their disgusting practices and their unconcern for neatness during the ceremony.[112] In fact he agreed with the Travancore government in the due recognition it gave to the Nambūtiris and indirectly justified the prevailing custom that came to the help of a large number of impoverished Nambūtiris by providing them food and educational facilities.

Returning from Thiruvananthapuram VT wandered with a burning desire for education and career advancement. When the Nambūtiri School was started at Tṛiśśūṛ, he joined in it as a student in the first batch. This was the time of the rise of Gandhian nationalism and VT along with his two friends went to Ahmedabad to participate in the session of the Indian National Congress in 1921. Dismissal from the school for this act of indiscipline happened to be a turning point in VT's life.[113] VT criticized the school authorities, especially, *Dēśamangalam* Nambūtiripād, for the punishment but he ended up the episode referring to Nambūtiripād's speech which nearly convinced him that the crucial decision was the most appropriate one in the circumstances as was a measure meant to protect community interests; the starting of the school itself had estranged the conservatives, the pardoning of a violation like this would only strengthen their opposition. Of course VT's narration perfectly conforms to his highly pragmatic attitude – in issues of extreme controversy VT always tended to take a middle of the path position. In the school issue VT started with an attack on custom and nobility but ended up with the realizing of the reality.

A new era in VT's life started with his appointment as the proof reader at the *Mangaḷōdayam* press at Tṛiśśūṛ.[114] He described it as a turning point since it brought him into a new realm of activity and into the new civil society where

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[112] He in turn criticizes the Travancore government for patronizing the Nambūtiris and for inducing them to participate in an obnoxious ceremony. See *ibid*, p.220.
[113] *Ibid*, pp.225-31.
[114] *Ibid*, pp.232-35.

Brahmins and non-brahmins coexisted. VT's narration betrayed his strong passion for a profession and the material advancement sought to be gained through it. His entry into the reform movement was just a sequel to this; to put it in other words, for him social reform was another facet of personal advancement. According to VT, the social reality of his time was not really heartening. A caste-ridden society in which social organizations were completely based on castes and the leadership of society was in the hands of caste leaders, the lower castes as the suppressed section of society fought for the establishment of their rights. In a nutshell all castes were inimical to the Nambūtiris; in this bleak situation, he was greatly disgusted with the narrow, sectarian outlook of casteism and wanted to transcend its boundaries.[115]

VT also revealed that his stay at Tṛiśśūṛ helped him to build up both his personality and ideology.[116] There he came into contact with many important personalities in various spheres of the public life. Elsewhere he has written of individuals like K.V.M, M.R.K.C, Nālappāṭṭ, Kēḷappan, Vaḷḷathōḷ, etc who helped him to mould his personality.[117] M.R.K.C. was a strong feudal proponent and an ardent enemy of the nationalist movement; despite being a supporter of reform, KVM was not a radical nor was he an atheist, he was also a sympathizer of the Nambūtiri interests.[118] The translation of *Le Miserable* by Nālappāṭṭ was a tremendous impact on the young generation of Nambūtiris including VT. The greatest impact on VT was from Kēḷappan, who was not just a Gandhian but had

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[115] C.A. Kittuṇṇi, "Proof Reader Thirumēni" in *Kaththunna Thirikaḷ*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1955, pp.27-28. But his other recollections definitely betray his notion of otherness, especially towards the Nāyars.

[116] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.236-47.

[117] See "Chakṛavālangal", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.399-430; "Ōṛmakaḷudē Naṛunilāvil", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.245-247.

[118] Not only did he actively support and take part in the reform movement but also act as the editor of Vasumati, the organ of the Janmis. K.V.M, *Ātmakatha*, pp.163-64.

retained considerable leniency towards tradition and orthodoxy.[119] These personal contacts had caused to create in VT a personality and ideology which in many respects was a complex of conflicting factors and it is not surprising that he took a relatively negative attitude to many important issues in his later life.

In *Dakşiṇāyanam*, VT's description of the 'drama behind the staging of the drama' is evidently supported by both contemporary reports in the *YK* and the personal memoirs of his associates.[120] But he seems to unduly focus on his personal role in the event. C.S. Subrahmanian Pōtti's comment that a gifted person like VT should not be consigned within the four walls of the *Mangaḷōdayam* Press and should be given a prominent executive assignment in the *Sabha* had definitely led to his appointment as the Organizing Secretary of the *Saṅgham* and was an approval of his ability and intellect.

Kaṛmavipākam

The third part of the autobiography of VT, called *Kaṛmavipākam*, is exceptionally important in that it deals with some of the milestones of his life which made him both a popular and a problem figure. It also indicates his ideological position with regard to important social, economic and family interests. A vague sense of *Nambūtiriness* coupled with strong conservative tendencies distinguish the articles of this collection from the rest. It is equally important to note that VT does not mention anything at all on those incidents in his life which ended in failure, like those of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* project, or those involvements in which he had only a secondary or marginal role, like those of the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha or the Ōngallūṛ Sabha.

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[119] In the preface to his biography of Madhavan Nair, Mūssad recollects that it was V.T. who had urged him to write a biography of Kēḷappan earlier. C.K. Mūssad, *K. Madhavan Nair*, Calicut, 1987, p.iii.

[120] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.248-56.

VT's description of the staging of the drama at his own *illam* was marked by the heightening of his self-esteem and the bolstering of his authority within the family and the community.[121] His elder brother was a strong conservative and had opposed the presentation of the drama at the illam; the narrative indicates that VT had won the hegemonic struggle against his brother. The assertion of the *Kaniṣṭans* against the *Jyēṣṭans*, in matters of equality of rights and claim on property, was the focal point of the Nambūtiri movement and it is well attested by VT's description of his tussle with his brother.[122] It is interesting to note that VT's decision to stage the drama at his house was opposed only by his elder brother, all of the rest including the entire female members of the family supported him. VT's presentation of the attitude of the women in his family to his programme is important in that it considerably differs from the reform rhetoric of passivity attached to the Antaŗjanams and the way he is portrayed as their redeemer.

VT's description of the *Yāchana Yātŗa* is particularly significant in that it attempts to establish his supremacy over the reform movement and in relation to Pāndam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri.[123] VT and Pāndam were the co-leaders of the *Yātŗa* but VT claimed him as the brain behind the idea and chief factor behind its success. I.C.P. Nambūtiri, who reported the major developments during the *Yātŗa,* gave particular importance to the speeches of VT; in the contemporary documents VT acquires special prominence.[124] The absence of autobiographical writings from the part of Pāndam and the fact that the reports in the *UN* were drafted by ICP–VT's brother-in-law–creates considerable difficulties in deciding individual roles and leadership questions in the *Yātŗa.*

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[121] "Naṭyavum Vēṇda, Nāṭakavum Vēṇda" in *VTyudē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaḷ*, pp.259-269.
[122] His story "Jyēṣtanum Kaniṣtanum" also deals with the same theme.
[123] V.T, "Kaŗmakṣetŗavum Karukkaḷum Thēdi" in *VTyudē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaḷ*, pp.272-277.
[124] *VTyudē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaḷ*, pp.583-96.

The article in *Kaṛmavipākam* about VT's *sambandham*, divorce and remarriage is a very significant anecdote on account of many factors.[125] VT described his *sambandham* as something that happened by chance or as a trick played upon him by his brother to destroy his morale as an activist. He unwillingly accepted it just because of his sympathy towards the woman involved in it. He justified his divorce and remarriage in a similar vein: since *swajātivivāham* and discouragement of *sambandham* were the main objectives of the reform programme he, as a leader of the movement, had the moral responsibility to lead others by becoming a model to them. He also justified it from the point of view of his obligation to his family. But these arguments were in fact nullified by a few other pieces of recollection. In a few notes on the same episode, not treated seriously by anyone till now, VT gives an different impression of the developments: he says that he had taken prior decision for the remarriage well before he had sought the permission of his *sambandham* wife.[126] In the marriage issue VT was not only unable to justify himself but appears to be convinced of the fact that his explanation was unsatisfactory. VT's attempt to assert his self-image, lost irredeemably by his marriage experiment, with reference to the inherent and unforeseen character of human behaviour, and with the pressures of the situation, in fact reveals his helplessness and inability to justify the episode.[127]

VT's entry in the public sphere coincided with the rise of Gandhian nationalism and the launching of the constructive programme. In an effort to adapt to the changing times and to declare his solidarity with the nationalist movement, VT too readily absorbed these new trends. An article in the collection describes his deliberate attempt to break the existing pollution rules by

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[125] V.T, "Oru Vālmiki Kayaṛivannenkil" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.282-291.

[126] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *VT. Oru Yugapuruṣan*, Calicut, 1992, pp.98-108. Nambūtiri reproduces 3 notes of VT on the remarriage issue which is not included in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*.

[127] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.283.

bringing two Īzhava friends home and having dinner with them.[128] In the early 1930s it was an extremely revolutionary measure and we get a few similar anecdotes in the memoirs of some of his other contemporaries.[129] But it is worth considering that VT justifies the act as an expression of true Brāhmaṇyam and he portrays his father as a typical Brahmin not just for supporting this but many other similar revolutionary measures.[130]

A landmark in VT's life and career was his bold venture to accomplish the first widow marriage in the Nambūtiri community which he narrates in an article in a triumphant mood.[131] The narration reveals that the woman involved in the event, his sister-in-law, was not the usual passive type of widow and that it was her determination that decided the matter. There is no question of denying the supporting hand of VT or the radical position he had been taking on the issue for some time. Given the fact that all the narratives on the event praised M.R.B. for his boldness in marrying a widow and VT for creating the situation, VT's disclosure of the bold decision of the widow on the question of her future life, which has been generally ignored, is a testimony to the role of the Antaṛjanam*s* in the movement and a negation of the portrayal of them as mere objects of reform. At the end of the narration, in an attempt to glorify himself, VT attempted to draw a parallel between the widow marriage and the many noble deeds of Pākkanāṛ and Agnihōtṛi.

As a radical social activist, VT gained repute for the first *anulōma* inter-caste marriage conducted by him in his community – between his sister and P.R. Rāghava Paṇikkeṛ. The incident gave him the epithet of a hardcore secularist. Though it has been described as a great and unique event, VT's narration reveals

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[128] V.T, "Bṛahmālayam Thuṛakkappeṭṭu" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 292-294.
[129] Mannath Padmanabhan, *Entē Jīvita Smaraṇakaḷ*, Kottayam, 1964, pp.113-115.
[130] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.292-94. Having heard that the guests were Īzhavas, his father did not denounce VT but rather supported him by saying that for a Brahman all guests are Brahmans.
[131] V.T, "Oru Vidhavayudē Jīvitam Thaḷiraṇiyunnu" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.295-300.

that he took the proposal rather casually at the beginning and he decided to carry on it when he found it as an opportunity to enhance his reputation as a revolutionary and a secularist.[132] VT's private acquiescence of his opposition to *marumakkathāyam* and Panikker's revelation of his quarrels with VT over many issues betrayed the real intentions behind this 'historic' marriage.[133] VT also admitted that he seriously considered this marriage proposal at the time when he was leading an absolutely impoverished and completely insular life consequent to the downfall of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* experiment. In fact it is probable that the scope for a dowry-less marriage must have allured him to think of breaking tradition.

VT declared his manifesto of anti-communism in a lengthy article and explained the grounds of his opposition to the politics of dogmatism.[134] He presented his views through an anecdote of one of his brothers whom he refers to as 'Sakhāvuṇṇi'. In his childhood his brother appeared to be an idiot interested in nothing but food. As he grew up he came in contact with the communists and later became a fulltime party worker. He became a typical party agent and maintained extreme secrecy and a studied indifference in all matters except party work like a perfect underground activist of the 1940s and 50s. He learned his lessons from party textbooks and party-classes and spoke in the dogmatic language unintelligible and indigestible to others. For him the only science was Marxism. There were only two classes in the world: Marxists and the Bourgeoisie. Indian independence was not real; Nehru would become a Chiang Kai-shek in the future; art was not for art's sake, it was for life; writers like Nālappāṭṭ, Vaḷḷathōḷ, Akkitham, Kēśavadēv, Uṟūb, Idaśśēri, all were capitalist agents; sacrifice was feebleness, humility foolishness and human emotions

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[132] V.T, "Miśṛavivāha Pṛasthānathinu Oru Mukhavura", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.307-311.

[133] V.T's Diary, courtesy, V.T. Vasudevan; P.R. Raghava Panikkar, *Ātmakatha*, unpublished Document, Courtesy, P. R. Aravindan.

[134] V.T, "Sakhāvuṇṇi" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.312-321.

expressions of class interests. Soviet Union was the model society where there was perfect equality and social contentment. After having given such a picture of 'Sakhāvuṇṇi', VT went on to make clear that he did not but question him for several reasons. First, he (VT) was not a political activist. Secondly he (VT) did not have much time to read large number of books. Thirdly, discussions with a man like 'Sakhāvuṇṇi' would have its consequences on VT's personal and family life. Fourthly, he was busy with his family matters. VT makes an estimate of 'Sakhāvuṇṇi' as follows. His ideas were not formed out of human love; in him there was no relationship between the brain and the heart; he was devoid of sympathy for others; he was least worried of those who suffered from poverty or disease; he believed that helping the poor would only create more and more poor people – these were natural in a bourgeois system. It was futile to make piece-meal repairs for the machine was damaged: it should be restructured. Poverty, hunger, pain, death, all were the products of capitalism. (He would rather talk about corruption or of the shortage of doctors in hospitals to a woman suffering from the pangs of child-birth). When asked he would suggest the remedies: 1) liberate India from British Commonwealth and Anglo-American domination and 2) make India an ally of the Socialist-democratic nations through adopting socialism. This kind of dogmatism VT saw as a syndrome which needed treatment and could be cured easily by an *Āyuṛvēdic* bath or by assigning him some work that would enable him to earn his daily bread.

Even more emphatic is VT's description of the story of Uma, an Antaṛjanam-turned-Muslim,[135] which though not a part of his autobiography[136] is claimed to be so because, as he says, he was born and brought up on the banks of

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[135] V.T, "Umādē Ēthatthē Annam" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 322-330.

[136] In a letter of utmost disgust over VT's presentation of the life story of Uma, her daughter-in-law wrote from Delhi on 20-3-1972 that it was quite unnecessary for him to present the anecdote totally unconnected with his life. See *ibid*, pp.328-330. Unable to answer the criticism, V.T. apologized for the agony created by his article but refused to comment on whether it was necessary or not. See, *Ibid*, pp.330.

the Bhāratappuzha where the event had taken place.[137] Uma was married into a reputed Nambūtiri *illam* but the alliance did not last long because of the defects of the Nambūtiri marriage system (due to *Adhivēdanam* and *Sāpatnyam*) and the blemishes in her own character. At her natal home Uma went astray and was given to immoral traffic. To rescue her, she was sent to Wardha. On returning, she again fell into bad company and at last married a Muslim after being converted to Islam. The news of her conversion came as a great shock to VT and in fact he turned turbulent when he saw Uma's daughter in Muslim attire. He writes that though many Hindus had been converted to Islam during the invasion of Tipu, none of them had renounced Hindu tradition nor did they accept Muslim dress. Years later he got an opportunity to combat with Aidon, the Muslim husband of Uma. In the midst of the debate, when Aidon told him that his wife (he pronounced her as an ass) is unfit for cooking beef, VT fell in fury and frantically abused him. Uma's relation with Aidon too did not last long. She was later reconverted and got married to a Punjabi Brahmin. The article conveys the message of VT's displeasure with Islam and his concern for the sanctity of marriage. His statement that a Nambūtiri woman cannot remarry, since law does not allow her divorce,[138] strikingly runs counter to the exalted image of VT as the emancipator of women; rather it reveals VT's incapacity to rise above communitarian outlook.

The last article of *Kaṛmavipākam* is VT's epitaph to his deceased son.[139] Though VT's wife gave birth to eight children, only two sons survived. The death of the eldest son at the age of eighteen was a great shock to VT and to his family. The grief generated by the event gave birth to an excellent piece of literary creation. Vijayakumāran, his son, had expressed his talents in various

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[137] Also see *ibid*, p.322.
[138] *Ibid*, p.324.
[139] V.T, "Pithāvintē Tēngalukaḷ" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.331-338.

faculties and was attracted to left wing politics. This had been a cause of friction between the two.[140] VT had great expectations about his son and was considerably disturbed by his negligence in studies and his unconcern for professional placements.[141] Of course VT's epitaph to his son does not reveal such issues but it is full of remorse over his inability to take care of his son well in his destitute life and over his ruthless treatment of him for even trivial offenses. The callous treatment meted out to his son, the high expectations that he had laid on him, the apparent denial to accept the individuality of his son and the differences between the two over certain basic issues, all would remind us of the dictum 'modern at work and pre-modern at home'.[142]

2:A:7. VT's Later Articles

VT's articles, written in the post-reform days, though were unrelated to the reform issues, reveal a continuity of the reform discourse in that they reflect his preoccupation with community matters and his open discontentment over the deprivation of the Nambūtiri community. More important is the element of nostalgia and the revivalist tone perceptible in them. All the four collections of his later articles are included in VT's complete works[143] and reveal to us a VT, far different from the person familiar to us as a firebrand radical and a perpetual agitator. These articles present VT as extremely disgruntled over the condition of the Nambūtiris and ever anxious about resettling them again at the apex of the society in the new era politics. The brimming discontentment in him had been expressed in his attack on all symbols of modernism and mass politics.

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[140] V.T. Vasudevan, "Ōṛmayudē Kanalukaḷ", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit*, p.251.

[141] V.T's Diary dated 27-1-1957. Courtesy, VT Vasudevan.

[142] See Philippo Osella and Caroline Osella, "Once upon a Time in the West? Narrating Modernity in Kerala, South India", in K.N. Ganesh ed., *Culture and Modernity: Historical Explorations*, University of Calicut, 2004, p. 40.

[143] In the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, they are included under three heads "Chakṛavāḷaṅgaḷ" (pp.397-430), "Vedivaṭṭam" (pp.431-493) and "Sathyamennathu Ividē Manuṣyanakunnu" (pp. 494-541).

Chakṛavāḷaṅgaḷ

This collection deals with VT's impressions of a few persons who had influenced him and helped him to mould his personality and outlook, most of whom were right-wing politicians or writers and who had kept a strong sense of tradition along with social liberalism. It explains why he had later drifted away from the seemingly radical position of the reform days. It is important to note that VT does not 'remember' his contemporaries who were more popular than himself or were equal to him.[144] Thus he refused to comment on either Mūthiringōd or Pāndam or E.M.S. or Kāṇippayūṟ. Equally important is the fact that he limits his comments to a few upper caste Hindus (except MC Joseph) in whom he perceived a kind of *Nambūtiriness* or a right wing political identity. One would also be surprised to see the absence of comments on any women associated with the movement despite his image as a renowned feminist.

In the first article "Entē Ādyathē Ārādhanā Pāthraṅgaḷ", VT speaks about three persons – Koduṅgallūr Kunjukuṭṭan Tampurān, Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād and Mahatma Gandhi – who influenced him greatly in his life and career. When he first met Kunjukuṭṭan Tampurān, the huge size of his body and the thread which was hanging over his chest attracted him the most. When he blessed VT that he would become as renowned as Pākkanāṟ and Agnihōtṟi, it seemed to him that God had sent his message to him.[145] VT acknowledges Kuṟūṟ as the foremost and pioneering leader of the Nambūtiri movement and praises his role in the rejuvenation of the community as next to that of Śṛi Śaṅkaracharya. He

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[144] Pierre Mackerey provides the following formula for the interpretation of ideology: "What is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation 'what it refuses to say', although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work *cannot* say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence". Pierre Mackerey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, (trans), London, 1978, p.87 cited in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak", in Cary Nelson & Lawrence Gossberg eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana and Chicago, 1988, p286.

[145] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p. 399.

identifies Kuṟūṟ's reformist role in two areas: in alerting the *Apphans* against their idle life with *sambandham* and free food at *Bṛahmaswam Maṭam*; and against the priesthood who took a strong attitude against English education. VT glorifies the great contributions of Kuṟūṟ to the Nambūtiris, in reviving *Janmitham* and *Brāhmaṇyam*, both of which had degenerated due to their unconcern for dharma and people's welfare.[146] The third (and the last) important person was Mahatma Gandhi, who persuaded him to analyze himself and search within for the light of truth and to do his duty quietly and peacefully.[147]

The second article "Ennē Ākarṣicha Pusthakam" deals with the impact of Nālappāṭṭ Nārāyaṇa Mēnōn's translation of Victor Hugo's *Le Miserable* on his personality and ideology. He writes that the book had instilled in him a great taste for literature which later helped to mould him as a writer. VT says that the work reminded him of the necessity of holding steadfast to truth even in turmoil and conflict. What made VT sympathize with Jean Val Jean was his refugee-life which resembled the lives of the Nambūtiri *Apphans*. But more important is the spirit of righteousness reflected in the work: it was designed to ward off people from the temptations of material life and to lead them to morality and good deeds. But it is surprising to note that VT does not hint at the work as having instilled in him either humanism or sympathy towards the suffering people.[148]

The third article "Nālappāṭṭ–Oru Ulpathiṣṇu"[149] portrays VT's hearty relationship with the poet. VT identifies Nālappāṭṭ as a rebel and as the source of encouragement behind all his revolutionary acts including efforts at *ghōṣa* elimination, inter-dining, widow marriage and inter-caste marriage. He had taught VT of the greatness of human love; and the fallacy of rituals in life. Not

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[146] *Ibid*, pp.400-401.
[147] *Ibid*, p.401.
[148] For a discussion over the kind of impact the work created among other men of the period see P. Suresh, *Pāvangaḷudē Swādhīnam Malayāḷa Kathā Sāhityathil,* Mphil Dissertation, Calicut University, 1992.
[149] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 405-408.

only did Nālappāṭṭ professed reform but put them in practice at home. But it is also interesting to note that VT saw in Nālappāṭṭ a thread-less Nambūtiri and in the womenfolk of the house Cherutāli-less Antarjanams.[150] VT has been blamed for seeing *Nambūtiri-ness* in everything good and desirable.[151] Equally important is the observation of VT that Nālappāṭṭ was neither a member of a caste association nor of a political organization and that he was not in the habit of imposing his views on others. Still, for VT he was a revolutionary next to none. In fact VT was superimposing his concept of a reformer and a revolutionary on a person dear to him.

The fourth article "Vaḷḷathōḷkkambam"[152] makes an estimate of the role of the poet Vaḷḷathōḷ in history and in VT's personal life. VT writes that Vaḷḷathōḷ's poems had a great influence on him and was just like a 'mantra' to him during the days of reform. VT acknowledges the contributions of Vaḷḷathōḷ in the nationalist movement in Kerala and in ushering in a renaissance. Nevertheless, he observes that Vaḷḷathōḷ is remembered for his translation of the Rig Veda, which VT had studied for some time in his younger days in a very superficial manner.

The fifth article, "Irupathām Nūttāndilē Socrates",[153] is VT's appreciation of Kēsari Bālakṛiṣna Piḷḷa. VT identifies the lonely field of historical research furrowed by Kēsari and highlights his role in revolutionizing the existing historical consciousness. Though Kēsari had put forward his bold historical

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[150] N.P. Dāmōdaran noticed that there were certain elements in Nālappāṭṭ which would persuade people to keep a distance from him. (But he does not make it clear). See his "Nhān Kaṇda Nālappādan", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 38: 37, 27 Nov. 1960, pp.18, 46.

[151] K.S. Radhakrishnan, "VT: Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement*, Dec. 16, 2001. Ramakrishna Chatterjee has pointed to the development of a phenomenon which he called 'caste in class' by which he refers to a tendency among the upper echelons of various castes to associate in social and familial matters. It is indicative of breaking the boundaries of traditional caste identities and loyalties. Ramakrishna Chatterjee, "Caste in Itself, Caste and Class, or Caste in Class", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 3, 1999, p.1761. VT too may have been influenced by this modern trend.

[152] *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 409-411.

[153] *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 412-416.

findings on many aspects of the society and culture of Kerala, VT selects as example his reinterpretation of the story of Sīta and her sons the most notable. And though Kēsari had repudiated the existence of God unequivocally, VT found in him a saint-like personality with a peculiar spiritual halo (and VT was a self-declared rationalist).

In a note of obituary VT fondly remembers K.V.M. but blames himself for having such a long time to understand the true worth of this great Guru.[154] VT was the assistant proof reader under K.V.M. at *Mangaḷōdayam* press and he had immense opportunities for lengthy conversations with him. VT recollects that as a young man he had presented his writings to K.V.M and he had gone through them and had made the necessary corrections. Thus in official duties and in reform attempts K.V.M. had acted as his mentor. But as found elsewhere in his writings, VT's adulation of K.V.M. has strands of spirituality and revivalism in it. VT studies K.V.M's reformist measures in the context of the nationalist movement but from a religious point of view. His personality also is measured in terms of the *savaṛṇa* symbols like sacred thread and *kuduma.*

VT's reminiscence of M.R.B[155] begins with a note of admiration for the latter's decision to marry a widow. VT understands that it was nothing but pure human love that persuaded M.R.B. to take such a radical decision for which he had to face great hardships both from his family and community; he was an outcast in the community for a long period. VT also notices that while many contemporary radicals had started going back to tradition and orthodoxy, M.R.B. boldly refused to succumb to conservative pressures. But VT's estimate of M.R.B is noted for a number of striking omissions. There is no reference to his alliance with left-wing and of his involvement in the *Ulbudhakēralam* project. Despite the fact that the project itself was meant to resettle radical refugees like him, VT refused to comment either on the colony or on his association with it.

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[154] "Śiṣyantē Tilōdakam" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp. 416-418.
[155] "MRB" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp. 419-421.

In his appraisal of the role of M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād (Prēmji) in the reform movement,[156] VT focuses on his activities as a writer, as an actor and as a social activist. M.P. played a leading role in making the drama *AA* a great success and was a member of the *Yāchana Yātṛa*. His decision to marry a Nambūtiri widow was an expression of his bold and humane disposition. VT also acknowledges his contributions in the field of literature and the left movement. The fact that M.P. was VT's assistant at the *Mangaḷōdayam* press and had been always friendly and obedient to him may have been the reason why he wrote in more glowing terms about him than about M.R.B. M.P had also strongly defended VT at the Pērāmaṅgalam meeting of the *Sabha*.

Despite his being a rationalist and agnostic, VT does not support M.C. Joseph for his ardent rationalistic stand.[157] For him rationalism is a dogma just like Marxism both of which have failed because of their incapacity to link ideology with ethical values. What is known as revolution is nothing but the balance sheet of gains and losses; but people are unable to understand it. The great obituary to M.C should be through a restructuring of the very concept of rationalism. Rationalism is the entry-point to the vast space provided by science; it should not abhor temples and churches. The article openly rejected VT's earlier stand of radical rationalism and made a call for the spiritual union of ethical men. In an earlier article VT had hinted at the growing indifference to rational thought and had suggested its value as a necessary tool in fighting out superstitions.[158]

VT remembers Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād as his mentor in the reform movement.[159] VT treats him as the great force behind the *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri* and its revolutionary role in the movement. He was unhappy over the absence of Kuṭṭan

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[156] "Premji Enna Pṛiyaṅkaran" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 422-424.
[157] "MC" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 429-430.
[158] VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Entē Yuktivādam", *Vivēkōdayam Special*, May 23, 1976.
[159] "KN Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād", *UN*, I:7, Thulam 1123 (1948), *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.623-625.

Nambūtiripād in the proceedings of the *Sabha* in the early years of the Ōngallūṛ revitalization movement but found him at Pāzhūr as the president of the *Sabha* with a bold statement exhorting the Nambūtiris to grow bigger in accordance with the changing circumstances. VT supported him and hoped that his association with the new *Sabha* would help in its fight against *janmitham* and in the infusion of the spirit of industrialism as a measure to rejuvenate the community.

Vedivaṭṭam

As a collection of very important articles dealing with the culture and tradition of Kerala, *Vedivaṭṭam*[160] has been acclaimed by Akkitham as the product of a ṛiṣi-like person's spiritual and philosophical intuition.[161] These articles are marked by a kind of cultural nationalism characterized by a strong mood of revivalism.[162] A deep sense of frustration over the political and economic developments of Kerala has been explicitly reflected in these notes in the garb of criticism against power politics and corruption. VT glorifies all those symbols of culture, like the temples,[163] festivals and the caste system against which he had fought with a crusading spirit. VT may be greatly disturbed by the political developments of the post-independence era, in which the Nambūtiris were not able to gain a significant space, and by the destitution of the Nambūtiris in relation to others in the economic front. The metamorphosis of the social reformer to a moral reformer reveals nothing but this disillusionment. In fact

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[160] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 431-493.

[161] Akkitham, "Oru Vīral Puruṣantē Charitṛam", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.70.

[162] To a certain extent, they resemble Gandhi's ideas on modernism as contained in his *Hind Swaraj*. See M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*", 1994, pp.54-57.

[163] "The Brahmans acquired economic and social dominance and consequently political powers through their control over the economic functions of the temple. The temple was the institutional manifestation of their superior religious merit and ritual status in the society. It supplied the required ideology for the legitimization and perpetuation of the consequent socio-economic order. The concentration of economic, social and political powers in the Brahman caste-council made it coterminus with the temple-centred settlement". Rajan Gurukkal, "The Social Milieu of the Kerala temple: A Functional Analysis c.800-1200 A.D.", *Studies in History*, Vol. II, No.1, 1980, p.5.

VT's later articles as a whole throws much suspicion over the real intentions behind his reform attempts; he was concerned with the conversion of the Nambūtiris into a model community and was meant to place them again at the apex of the social order. More important is the fact that these articles neatly make VT's earlier intellectual and social position almost irrelevant.

In an article VT strongly urges people to learn and propagate Sanskrit. He refutes the charges of adversaries that the study of Sanskrit is worthless in the new age and makes a forceful plea bordering on to revivalism.[164] By lambasting the symbols of progress and modernism, VT glorifies the qualities of ancient Hindu culture and norms and the role of Sanskrit as the vehicle in propagating it. He equates history with the *puranas* and praises Brahmanism for its eternal and pristine values. He justifies his social role as a reformer in the context of the 'fall' of the community and the culture it represented; but the 'defects' were later developments and hence needed to be eradicated; that does not reduce the quality and merit of a culture and the language which functioned as its vehicle.

In another article VT analyses the cordiality and friendship that existed between Rāma and Hanuman in the Ramayana.[165] He finds it to be an ideal friendship that was beyond all material and selfish considerations. It was strictly dhārmic and was hence extremely rare. Apart from whole-heartedly recognizing the personal relationships as contained in the Ramayana, which stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing and fast emerging modern norms, VT asserts the concept of the *Rāmarājya* as the ideal and the alternative model. Hanuman is acceptable to him because he had acknowledged the superiority of Rāma and had willingly submitted to his dictates. In fact the tone of VT is not different from his earlier articles because here too he looks at ancient ideals as the model for the present.

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[164] "Bhāṣayum Samskāravum" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 432-435.
[165] "Rāmāyaṇathilē Souhārda Bandhangaḷ" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 436-439.

In another article evaluating the impact of the visual art of drama on the life of the people and giving guidelines for its conception and presentation, VT makes an assessment of himself and of his relation to others as a dramatist and a social critic.[166] VT criticizes the new generation dramas as having no roots in culture and incapable of making any significant impact. He exemplifies Cheṛukād's *Thaṛavāditham* and focuses on the kind of immorality portrayed in it. Apart from the lack of seriousness on the part of the professionals, the low level of technology also reduces the quality of village dramas. He suggests that quality could be raised by recasting selected masterpieces of literature into drama by able playwrights. These plays should be emotionally and intellectually appealing so that the spectators are compelled to think and persuaded to act. Although outwardly VT is disturbed by the low quality of the dramas and is concerned with making it more attractive and social-oriented, the fact is that he takes a strong attitude against the left-wing stage performances which oppose tradition and feudal norms. VT was agitated by the attack on nobility and the move to foist an Embṛāntiri the charge of an illicit pregnancy of a Kṣatṛiya woman. In the guise of protecting or sympathizing with the aggrieved, VT is implicitly compromising with the feudal and upper caste values.

In an article "Nammudē Āchārānuṣṭānaṅgaḷ",[167] VT analyses the utility and efficacy of customs in social life and argues in favour of their conservation. He holds that only those customs having value and utility, come to stay and it is obvious they exist because of social consent. He defined custom as codified and routine practices sanctioned by the society and argued that since man is a social being, good of the individual depended on holding fast to custom. But custom should be redefined when it becomes a hindrance to the progress of the individual. VT interprets the 64 *anāchārās* of Kerala as customs introduced by the Nambūtiri conquerors to safeguard the nationality and individuality of the

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[166] "Nāttinpuṛathē Nāṭakavēdi" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 440-443.
[167] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 444-447.

getting more popular in recent times and people, irrespective of caste and religion, have been celebrating them in the true popular spirit. One wonders why VT gets so much worried over this imagined 'decline' of festivals.

In a note of extreme despair over the emerging new social order, VT glorifies the old order in an extremely irrational way.[172] After praising the land and culture of Kerala in no uncertain terms, VT proceeds to justify the old political and social systems of the land. After stating that nothing would grow unless it has the blessing of nature, he analyzed the dynamics of the *Janmi* system from the point of view of the *janmis*. He argues that it was based on the mutual trust and the cooperation of the lord and the tenant – not through exploitation – and the *janmi* alone should not be blamed for the failure of this concord. He explains the share of the *janmi* as 'bhikṣa' which was collected for his social and spiritual role in this joint venture. There was no disparity or master-slave relationship between the lord and the tenant. Just like the peasant, the Nambūtiri too woke up in the early morning and involved himself in ritual duties aimed at social good. This kind of cordiality – which deserved to be imprinted in golden letters – remained for a long time and decay set in only when this was broken. VT also argued that the Nambūtiri, who knew that temporal and spiritual power should go hand in hand, retained them for a long time in his hands and during this period there was perfect peace and happiness all over the country. But those chieftains who fought each other disregarding the Nambūtiris not only put an end to this golden age but surrendered the land to the foreigners. It was the foreign rule that converted the *janmi* into an agent of exploitation. He was then set upon the shoulders of the peasant, who had to bear the burden of the *Janmi*. All the vices attributed to the Nambūtiris of later times like cultural decay, pollution rules, and caste hierarchy were the aftermath of foreign rule. Thus for VT the old system was perfect and the foreigner was the crucial factor behind the 'decline'.

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[172] "Kēraḷam Keduthiyilēkku" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 455-458.

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[172] "Kēraļam Keduthiyilēkku" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 455-458.

In an article analyzing the origin and development of the caste system in Kerala, VT tried to justify the system implicitly.[173] He starts with the point that caste feeling is equally strong among all existing castes and in proof of this cites the example of the Nāyaṛs. He proceeds to justify caste as based on the doctrine of *karma* and hence he holds it to be a scientific system. He develops the interesting point that it was the *savaṛṇas* who suffered greatly on account of the rules of pollution. He says that they suffered also from sub-caste hierarchy and from intra-caste distinctions. He takes the side of the Brahmin ideology by stating that all castes in the hierarchy had caste-pride and had practiced untouchability towards those groups below them. The very system was introduced in order to keep up the purity of body and mind. VT drew a line between the *smṛiti* authors, who distorted caste, and the new genre of lawyers, who brought about a moral decline in society. He lambastes the new politician by exposing them to be parallel to the priests of the past. Thus VT tried to redeem the Nambūtiris from the blots cast on them by the caste system. He argued that the perversities practiced in the name of caste were created by the times; neither the individual nor the society is responsible for it.

In another article VT repeats his arguments about the origin and functioning of the caste system.[174] He starts with the point that the epithet 'Kerala is a lunatic asylum' has been reaffirmed by the caste associations. Both the SNDP and the NSS have drifted greatly from their original objectives. After having stated that both were failures, he moves on to analyze the case of the *Sabha* where he gives a wrong impression of its objectives.[175] Though it is commonly held that the *Sabha* came into being to modernize the Nambūtiris, VT states that its main aim was to justify and protect the traditional practices of the Nambūtiris from

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[173] "Aspṛiśyata Kēraḷathil" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 459-462.

[174] "Jātikaḷ Eṅganē Uṇdāyi?" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 463-464.

[175] Though not explicitly stated in his memoirs, VT in this article makes it clear that the *Sabha* was founded for the defense of privileges. It runs counter to the popular version of modernization of the community as its main objective.

external interferences. He narrates that the *Sabha* was trying to justify caste and to save the Nambūtiris from the criticism of others. The *Sabha* opposed the charge that servitude and tenancy were imposed by the Nambūtiris. VT explains, as the exponent of the *Sabha*, that intelligence and ability are the basis of the caste system which had its origin in the prevailing environment of intellectual and cultural inequality. It is natural that the Nambūtiris who were superior in terms of intellect and ability, as also in cleanliness, came to be dominant. Among others, those who were in the orbit of the Nambūtiri cultural influence prospered, while those who were outside its orbit had to end up as inferior groups. VT tries to convey the message that obedience to the Brahmins is the way of social advancement. He ends up the article in the usual tone of despair over the present state of things, especially the post-independence developments. Everything has been lost; nobody is there to take care of the ruined. VT appears greatly aggrieved over the downfall of the Nambūtiris because for all the lower castes, post-independence period presented an era of progress and prosperity.

In an article on secularism VT puts forward his ideal which comes closer to the Hindutva model.[176] By pointing out the lack of secular roots in most of the other religions, V.T. glorifies the Indian tradition as nurturing tolerance and coexistence of creeds. Though not openly referring to R.S.S, he outlines their views and takes their side. He attributes tolerance to the guidance of the ancient *ṛiṣis*. Indian tradition was the worship of nature and not its conquest; while conquest represents arrogance, worship shows humility. Real knowledge is that which is gained through experience and is religious in nature; today the politician has gained an upper hand. True ideal rests on cleansing the hearts which the politician never encourages. The challenge before the new generation is the choice of the right course they should take for the well-being of the nation. In another article, VT discussed the urgent need of an ethical revolution in

[176] "Mathētharatvam – Saṅkalpavum Yāthārthyavum" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 465-467.

politics.[177] He equates the priest of yesterday with the politician of today and observes that both impinged individual liberty. He reminds of the need of a purification process in politics through the application of *dharma* and puts the ideal of a *dhārmic* society, inspiration for which must come from 'true' religion or 'true' Brahmanism.

In his obituary to Śri Nārāyaṇa Guru VT analyses the contributions of this great saint to his community and to the whole society of Kerala.[178] VT identifies the historical role of the Guru as the organizer and unifier of the various strands of anti-Brahmin thoughts and sentiments that led to a renaissance in Kerala. He was also instrumental in weakening the power of the Brahmins in the spiritual realm. He fought against social evils and as a result the lower castes were granted the right of temple-worship. VT recollects that when the Nambūtiri liberals started fighting against the conservatives, the Guru had been the greatest influence and source of inspiration. In an attempt to trace the roots of this phenoMēnōn, and to find an answer to the question why the Īzhavas pioneered the movement and not the Nāyaṛs, VT finds answers in 'history'. He explained that during the time of the migration of the Nambūtiris, Īzhavas were the dominant group of the land; but losing their struggle against the Nambūtiris they fled to Śri Lanka. They returned as Buddhists and continued their fight but again failed. The tradition of anti-brahmanism had made them a potent force in the new era and they organized the fight in a new way and in this, they succeeded. For all those who would like to fight against caste and religion, the Guru is the Mahābali, the legendary symbol of equality.

In another article VT strongly pleads for temperance and condemns those who are addicted to it.[179] He links the growing immorality with alcoholism and thinks that the decline of religion has been considerably influential in increasing

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[177] "Purōhitanum Rāshtrīyakkāranum" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 468-469.
[178] "Yugapurushanāya Gurudēvan" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 473-474.
[179] "Madyanirōdhanathēppatti Alpam" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 475-477.

this trend. The freedom movement had made prohibition a part of the nationalist agenda but the post-independence government, for fear of a steep fall in government revenues and because of the proven inefficiency of clamping prohibition on a people who were not prepared to accept it, showed little interest in it. Though the cause of prohibition may not get many people in support of it, the larger moral concerns make it obligatory on the governments to take strong measures to introduce it. VT links the habit of alcoholism with passivity and self-defeatism and equates it with declining humanism. It is important to note that VT looks at the habit of drinking from the point of view of personal ethics and its impact on political morality but does not take into account its social roots.[180]

In a very important piece of evaluation, VT delineates his views about Gandhism and the way it influenced a generation of people including him.[181] He says that Gandhism originated at a crucial juncture of the history of our country when priesthood in religion, capitalism in modern liberal ideology and communism in the socialist system had begun to challenge humanism. In this context Gandhi was trying to redefine social life in accordance with human love and virtue. In fact, VT holds that, there was nothing new in Gandhism; it was 'ārṣadharma' promulgated by ancient Indian philosophers and which was being reshaped to suit the modern times. For Gandhi, truth and non-violence were the most essential ideals. His uniqueness rests on the fact of his stress on ethics and the dignity of the individual, in public life. His concept that ends and means are equally important made him a leader of unrivalled moral stature. In fact end is a sheer illusion; it is unattainable as well; therefore, according to VT, it is futile to

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[180] It is highly probable that VT's opposition to both alcoholism and non-vegetarianism were associated with his abstract ideal of Brāhmaṇyam. Though he did not write an article exclusively on vegetarianism, he has referred to it oftentimes, especially in Uma's story. He also attacked violence associated with the *Yagas* (See *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.636-37) and the cruel treatment of cattle at the Vāṇiyamkuḷam weekly fare and the cruelty involved in their slaughter. See O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "Vipḷavāchāryanāya VT", *YK*, 3:6,7,8, Feb-Apr.1982, pp.7-8.

[181] "Gāndhimārgathekkuṛichuḷḷa Chila Chintakaḷ" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 478-481.

sacrifice the individual-self to achieve a purely imaginary end. For Gandhi, the individual was as important as society. His concept of 'saṛvōdaya' must have taken its origin from this ideology. It is futile to combine Gandhism with Marxism; yet it is the greatest problem confronting us. VT's appraisal gives us an inkling of how his mind worked and also the dynamics of his infatuation towards Gandhism: its boundary with Brahmanism is very narrow.

In an appraisal of two mythical personalities, Pākkanāṛ and Agnihōtṛi,[182] VT conveys to us the magnitude of their lives. Pākkanāṛ was bought up in a low caste family and earned his living by making baskets, but was renowned for his wisdom and knowledge. Agnihōtṛi gained fame for his role in introducing post-puberty marriage among the Nambūtiris but at the expense of excommunication.[183] VT praises both of them because they belonged to his place, Mēzhathōl, and also because they were intimately associated with the Brahmanical culture. They are seen as the true exponents of the moral tradition. But while glorifying ethics, values and morals, VT praises the feudal norms of caste hierarchy, temple culture and rituals and superstitions of the medieval era with which the two mythical figures were associated with. It is significant also to note that while VT criticizes the successors of Pākkanāṛ for disregarding tradition, he does not hint at any deviation from tradition on the part of the descendants of Agnihōtṛi.

In an article titled "Vedivaṭṭam" (which also happens to be the title of the collection) VT glorifies the habit among the Nambūtiris of passing their time in conversations and discussions which according to him played a revolutionary role in bringing about desirable social changes. VT says that in the course of the talks, Nambūtiris discussed any subject that came to their way, in their own

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[182] "Pākkanāṛ" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 484-485; "Mēzhathōḷ Agnihōtṛi" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 486-489.

[183] For details of the story behind this tradition see C.K. Nambūtiri, "Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Parappu", *YK*, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, pp.12-13.

humorous way without any ill-will, hatred or rancour. They were inspired by high values like dharma. It is from *Vedivaṭṭam* that every revolutionary movement among the Nambūtiris had started. The first widow and inter-caste marriages were the results of such a time-pass discussions. It is surprising to note that VT could praise pastime talks as revolutionary as he himself had vehemently opposed the Nambūtiri custom of time-killing during the days of reform. *Vedivaṭṭam* was revolutionary only in so far as it involved enlightened individuals; in the normal case it was in fact reactionary and anti-reformist.[184]

Sathyamennathu Ividē Manuṣyanākunnu

This collection in fact is a continuation of *Vedivaṭṭam* with the same focus and the same kind of argument. There is a thread of continuity that connects all the articles – the glorification of the past and the denunciation of the present. It is natural that an individual may respond to different situations differently; but here VT shifts his concern from social reform to moral reform and cultural revivalism. His reaction is charged with sentimentalism and from wrong historical premises.

The first article of this collection entitled "Entē Maṇṇu" resembles an earlier one both in content and in the message it contains.[185] Here V.T. argues in favour of true patriotism which is not just love of one's country but respect towards the tradition and culture of the land. He repeated his personal inhibitions like his faith in Gandhism, his doubts about the efficacy of the parliamentary system and his skepticism of the course contemporary politics was pursuing.

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[184] A similar social practice called *Adda* prevailed in Bengal in the first half of the twentieth century which has ceased to exist now. It is translated as "a place" for "careless talk with boon companions" or "the chats of intimate friends". It was the practice of friends getting together for long, informal, and unrigorous conversations. See Dipesh Chakraborty, "Adda: A History of Sociality" in his own work *Provincializing Europe,* New Delhi, 2000, pp.180-213.

[185] *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ.* pp. 497-499. It is a replica of "Kēraḷam Keduthiyilēkku" in *ibid,* pp. 455-458.

In the next article VT outlines his concept of nationhood which is totally different from the modern concept.[186] He holds that modern nations, with their base in the democratic system, leads to warfare, much against the will of the people. He links warfare with the innate defect of the modern democratic system since diplomats, commanders of defense forces, educationists, politicians, all become agents of weapon-vendors. Ideologies like parliamentary democracy, socialism, secularism, non-alignment etc are the products of the modern system and are mere ideals. Political parties are the monopolists of the democratic system. True democracy aims at attaining a social system that provides the individual the opportunity for self-expression for which parliamentary system is only a medium. He frowns at the parliamentary system as the autocracy of the 51% of population against the 49%. He argues that since every citizen is a voter the state keeps control over him and this impinges on his individual liberty. Hence the very concept of modern state hinders the progress of humanity. He finds solace in science because a scientist has no boundaries of community, nation or religion; universe is his limit. Human progress depends on new scientific technology. Hence the only hope of the future is a renaissance with science as its base. VT's position is extremely contradictory since though he lays faith in science and reason, he is opposed to modernism and popular democracy.

In an enquiry into the aim of human life, VT reveals his nostalgic and revivalist concepts with high skepticism on modern developments.[187] He admitted that eulogy had persuaded him to take up many deeds that he had performed and expressed remorse over his immature actions. He recollected the miseries of his early life and pointed to the new generation people for whom there is no hardship and no discrimination. While the activities of those days were inspired by high sense of self-sacrifice, for the new generation the motive of action is personal gain. VT laments that, earlier, the fear of sin had kept

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[186] "Entē Rāshṭrasaṅkalpam" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 500-502.
[187] "Jīvitam Enthinu?" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 503-506.

people away from doing wrong things but now all activities are based on profit motive and human values have degenerated. Drawing a line from feudalism to capitalism VT says that everything old is not bad; the mantras of the saints were meant for the good of all. He also finds parallels between the old *kāryasthan* and the new lawyer and politician and condemns them all unequivocally because all the modern changes turned out to be beneficial to them alone. He suggested that the existing problems could be solved by sitting together and discussing things (which was the Nambūtiri tradition).

In an article VT discloses his concept of theism and atheism though implicitly.[188] He pointed out that in his early age his prayers were for personal gains but was not so later. He says that he is unable to affirm whether he is a theist or not because nobody has been able to answer the question in an absolute and authoritative manner. He ends up by stating that on an issue in which the great men have failed, he is not the competent person to pronounce the last word. In fact VT tried to conclude that what the great men professed is right; what he did on his own account may not be so; the results of his personal decisions were truly disgusting; the *ṛiṣis* had found the eternal truth.

In another article VT attacked people's unconcern for ethics in life and made a strong call for self-sacrifice in life and a revival of human values.[189] By defining culture as a system of regulations carved out of human virtue and to function as a bulwark against causing harm to others, he states that people who follow this path make progress. He justifies his point through the example of Kāḷidāsa's character Agnipaṛṇan. VT says that everyone has become an Agnipaṛṇan today and has gone back to barbarism. While criticizing politicians for bringing about such a state of affairs in politics, he attributed an equal blame on the priesthood of the former days for bringing about similar evils in religion. He reminds the politician of his responsibility in maintaining *dharma* in the

[188] "Entē Āsthikyavum Nāsthikyavum" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 507-508.
[189] "Orē Pātha" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 509-510.

society and the writers of their moral duty in warning the politicians. For him, it is difficult to accept the point that constructive changes are the result of struggles; rather it is possible only through cooperation. Conflict and struggle are always destructive. Only boundless personal virtue could create the essential environment for bringing about this cooperation. Hence he calls upon individuals towards the ideal of self-sacrifice.

In a self-appraisal, VT discloses his life experience, his self-identity and his record in life.[190] He starts with the statement that by birth he was a *janmi* and by deed a perfect Brahmin. In his early life he faced only 'don'ts' which he could not obey because of his high ambitions in life. He tried to rouse young men and to agitate against all evil customs and forms of bondages and to instill in them the spirit of freedom and humanism. But he could not develop his life strictly in accordance with the essential and eternal principles of ethics and values. Still he finds his record of life and his gains satisfactory so that it leaves hope for further gains in the future. It is curious to see VT portraying himself as a Brahmin and as a landlord; and presenting his life record as satisfactory despite him being still agitated over so many issues.

In an article highly critical of the new order, VT evaluated the kind of progress that we have gained as ridiculous and unethical.[191] Everything is moving towards doom as has been reminded of by *The Gita*. The new system provides everyone opportunities for growth and progress, and undue opportunities for the traditionally deprived groups, but they too remain dissatisfied and take recourse to strikes and rebellion and wish to gain effortlessly. This catastrophe is the result of the new value system. Selfishness, lack of dedication and unconcern for the good of the society make the new order extremely baseless. Even the empowerment of the dispossessed has failed to bring in a socialist order. The new class which replaced the old one is worse than

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[190] "Jīvitam Entē Nōṭṭathil" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p. 511.
[191] "Niṣkaṛmakāmam" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 513-515.

the old; the latter even in their vileness had retained some ethics and values. As in many other articles, here too VT implicitly glorifies the old Brahmanical system as just and humane and the system of caste as natural and scientific. While criticizing the present he uses revivalist symbols plentifully and explicitly; it is upon ideals from the past (that too from literary texts and not from history) that he tries to dub the present as the age of doom and darkness.

On another occasion VT wrote that the freedom that India gained is not real because the people are not mature enough to realize its significance and hence it is being misappropriated by a few.[192] Not only had we surrendered our freedom to the foreigners but showed our inability to wield it when we got it back. Those who, like him, had laid faith in the new freedom were greatly disillusioned. He observed that for the millions of poor people independence has been of no value because the movement was led by the industrialists. It was equally so for the declining class of *janmis* who, not because of any fault of theirs, were not able to understand the changing scenario. The new ruling class failed to assure equal justice to all. He regards the concept of secularism as a craze for power and privileges and considers communalism to have originated right from the early days of religions. Politicians make use of these communal interests in order to further their greed and indolence. Even while attacking politicians and the political system, VT does not support the method of the Naxalites, despite their insistence on political morality, but frowns at their ideal in the name of violence and hidden vested interests. He views them as politically blind and considers their method of struggle as barbaric. A person cannot be held guilty for being born as rich; but one must have a conviction that it is unjust to appropriate and misuse unbounded property. In fact the concept of trusteeship was there in our tradition and is the only hope for tomorrow. Therein lies the relevance of Gandhism.

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[192] "Swātantṛyam Āṛkku, Enthinu?" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.516-520.

In an article smashing the Indian experience of parliamentary democracy VT proposes the old system as the true alternative.[193] He holds that India is not fit for parliamentary system, which is foreign in nature and content, and is hence unsuitable to our environment. In our old system rulers were selected by the popular intellectuals (read Nambūtiris) and they stood for the well being of the true majority. The king could never become autocratic since he was supposed to be controlled by both God and the priest. But the system declined, due primarily to the misdeeds of the kings. We lost our political independence due to the same reason. Democracy is good but the majority is not competent to handle it. In fact VT argues that since the present system of government has become oligarchic with no ideals and no concern for the people, and the majority are neither aware of their rights nor are educated in the art of democracy, the earlier system, which though not fully representative, was in practice far superior to the modern system both in terms of quality and ethics.

Almost a similar point is put forward in another article written on the question of corruption.[194] Every sphere of life is permeated by corruption and it infringes the concept of the equality of opportunity among individuals. Nobody has concern about others' rights. Politicians appropriate undue rights in the same way caste movements acquire undue space for their castes with regard to rights and privileges through collective bargaining.

In an attempt to link himself with the nationalist movement and to evaluate the legacy of the movement and its failures, VT makes a similar assessment of the political and social situation.[195] He remembers that it was the nationalist movement that brought him to the public sphere but he was more interested in the social aspects of the movement and hence concentrated his attention to the reform of his community which he saw as an integral part of the national

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[193] "Bahujanahitāya" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.521-523.
[194] "Azhimathiyudē Pṛaśnam" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.524-525.
[195] "Manuṣyatvamenna Matham" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.526-528.

movement. But it was equally difficult and needed self-sacrifice. But the attainment of freedom washed away all his expectations. Politicians disappointed him; the future lay only with the humanists; and Gandhism alone is the practical ideal to mould the future. He exhorts that we should be inspired by our culture which developed out of tradition and environment and firmly believed that it would lead us to the ultimate ideal of humanism. This culture is what the *Vedantis* call 'unity in diversity' the greatness of which is yet to be realized by our people.

No other article of VT is as revivalist and anti-modern in its spirit as the one entitled "Adhamarē".[196] Starting with a criticism of the existing system of democracy in which crucial issues are decided by the 51:49% voting system, he poses the concept of *grāmaswarāj* as the viable alternative. It is noble because it evolved out of tradition and through the long process of trial and error and is not a handiwork of the modernists. Democracy is unfit for dealing with such important matters as the introduction of *grāmaswarāj* or the abolition of cow slaughter or forced conversion. In this article VT is inclined towards the concept of a golden age of the past, the basis of which was village life with the village temple as the hub of all important social and religious activities and the principle of trusteeship as the ideological foundation of the government. For him, the ideal type of government was the decentralized village government for which his model was the one postulated by the *Kēraḷōlpathi*. The government of the present day is just like a temple situated in a jungle but kept closed for the people. It is painful to see that renowned freedom fighters and social activists are succeeded by selfish and corrupt politicians with no concern for values.

VT makes the call for a return to spirituality and morality in yet another article.[197] He links contemporary violence with declining spirituality and remarks that there were no such problems when the spiritualists reigned since the

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[196] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.529-531.

[197] "Sathyamennathu Ividē Manuṣyanākunnu" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.532-533.

people of the day were god-fearing. There is truth in both spiritualism and materialism but they are only partial truths. Since the very existence of humanity rests upon the balance between the material and spiritual domains, it is an urgent necessity to strive for the revival of spiritual values. What is necessary is not a return to god but to find god in oneself.

In a note enquiring how castes came into existence, VT presents a clear *savaṛṇa* judgment on caste hierarchy and Brahmin dominance.[198] Presenting the ideological background of the SNDP and the NSS movements as anti-Brahmanism, VT moves on to speak in favour of the *Sabha* movement and explains it as a defensive attempt. Like in an earlier article, he points out that the main plank of the *Sabha* movement was opposition to other caste movements. As a representative of the *Sabha*, he justifies caste as a natural social phenomenon and explains that the movement itself had it as the main objective. He acquits the Nambūtiris from the responsibility of having given birth to the caste system; the whole society had equal share in its development. VT is not simply justifying caste and defending the community from external criticism but is trying to give a different message on the social role of the *Sabha* about which he had given a different version in his memoirs. If the main programme of the *Sabha* was to defend the community from others, then the radicalism and revolutionary role attached to it can no longer exist; it also would erase out the halo of social radicalism and secularism associated with VT's personality. In fact he is announcing the point that his prime concern was to defend the interests of the Nambūtiris in relation to others.

In one of his several articles VT makes a non-biased comparative analysis of the priest and the politician but condemns both from the point of view of the concept of individual liberty.[199] He welcomes all kinds of protests against the existing political culture and pronounces that it alone provides hope for the future.

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[198] "Jātikaḷ Eṅganē Nilavil Vannu?" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.534-535.
[199] "Purōhitanum Rāshtrīyakkāranum" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.536-537.

In probably the last of his articles, VT looks back on his life and dreams of a rebirth. He had a fairly successful record of life and he was satisfied. For him his struggle was directed against obtuse *Nambūtiritham* and idle *janmitham*. It was the neglect and alienation that he had to suffer in his life which added fire to his radicalism. But there is an element of despair as well: the factors that inspired the previous generation, like self-sacrifice and social commitment, is now totally absent among the new people. If in rebirth he comes across similar social problems, he says, he will fight them with the same vigour and enthusiasm. He wants to be reborn in the same village of Mēzhathūr on the banks of Bhārathappuzha and covets for the same family and family members. He does not answer directly whether he wants to be reborn as a Brahmin but states that he would remain a humanist and would continue to work in the social and cultural field. He winds up with the statement that all what he had done was for others. A few of VT's statements are particularly striking. He tells that he was provoked by blind Brahmanism and passive landlordism; VT's other works have amply revealed that he was not opposed to Brahmanism and *janmitham* per se. He had also stated that personal ambitions had persuaded him to enter into the social sphere; in fact his late entry had denied him of many opportunities. His dream of a rebirth in his own Nambūtiri family in fact makes his ideal of humanism a mockery since he refuses to refer to his first wife and children born to her. His ideal of self-sacrifice also does not match with reality; the record of his career as also his published reminiscences and unpublished notes give us a truly different picture.

Answering a query which sought explanation for his speech in the RSS meeting at Pālakkād, VT refused to reply in the affirmative but stated that since people knew him well there was no need of any clarification.[200] But by justifying

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[200] See the letter of A.V. Jose dated 11-4-1980 and VT's reply in the *Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.631-32. VT is reported to have spoken in a meeting of the RSS at Palakkad that he regret for realizing the greatness of the organization very late; had he been healthy, he would work

his speech he lent an air to the anxieties of people as to whether he was getting attracted to RSS ideology. He justified his speech in the context of his own experiences; he argued that science, which was the only hope of the future, had become a tool in the hands of the reactionary forces; such a situation necessitated alternate means to attain peace and security. In fact VT stated implicitly that since science failed to provide hope for the future, religion and morality could only be relied upon; RSS stood to attain this aim and hence there is nothing wrong in associating with them.

There are three more articles which are not included in the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ* but which are of particular interest because they deal with important matters. In an article explaining his views on rationalism VT tells us that his attraction to the ideology was quite natural and in tune with the changing tempo of the times as it is the most scientific tool that helps to analyze natural phenomena and human behaviour.[201] He believes that rationalism alone can help us to become perfect human beings and all religious prophets are rationalists in one sense. But he disagrees with the narrow rationalism propagated by M.C. Joseph and a few others. He also says that for some time he has been keeping away from the organized rationalist movement. In fact VT seems to hold the view that true religion is rationalistic and hence scientific. He also attempts to correct the view that rationalism is atheism.[202]

In another article VT tries to prove the veracity of his statement that he was illiterate till the age of 18 which many people disbelieved.[203] VT explains the

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enthusiastically for it. See Akkitham, "Nambūtiriyē Manuṣyanākkān", in *VTyē Kaṇdethal*, p.38. VT's diary affirms this fact.

[201] "Entē Yuktivādam", *Vivēkōdayam Special*, May 23, 1976.

[202] Even in his 80s, Premji expressed his deep rational credentials; he denied has faith in after-life and in any form of religious rituals. See Premji, "Avaśēṣikkunna Swapnaṅgaḷ", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 30 Aug. 1998, pp.6-7.

[203] "Akṣarajnānathinu Vaikiyatentē?" in V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Karmavipākam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1988, pp. 402-407. The criticism was levelled by Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri in an open letter. Mādamb argued that no Nambūtiri, except those ones physically or mentally handicapped, would have been illiterate in the given circumstances.

issue thus: in his childhood the Pāzhiyōṭṭ Mana, which was about to be extinct because of the lack of successors, wanted to adopt him. But he lost the chance because of the foul play of the Nambūtiris of the Manjappatta Mana, who intrigued to poison the *kāraṇavaṟ* of Pāzhiyōṭṭ and acquired the property through civil suits. VT's father was a litigant against them and had to spend a great amount of money on this suit that failed. VT writes that this event had pauperized them and he had to remain illiterate for this reason. VT also points out that among the Nambūtiris literacy is not compulsory except among the landlords; the Nambūtiri is a union of both *Brāhmaṇyam* and *Janmitham*; as regards the former, which is concerned with *papa* and *punya*, there is no need of literacy; as regards the latter, which deals with profit and loss, literacy is a must. As VT's family pauperized and ceased to be a *janmi*, he too had to remain illiterate. Though it has been explained that VT's experience was exceptional and hence it runs counter to the general situation,[204] it was a fact that the existing Vedic education was a parrot-like recitation of scriptures and had neglected other aspects of cognitive domain including the writing faculty. As a writer, and highly emotional, VT may have been exaggerating things considerably but the relevance of his statement cannot be rejected.[205]

In an article remembering Sahōdaran Ayyappan, VT praises his relation with the great radical and his contribution to the awakening of modern Kerala.[206] VT writes that though both stayed at Tṛiśśūṟ, they were not able to develop friendship because of the custom of pollution but later when the situation became congenial they cooperated with each other in the struggle against pollution rules and in their efforts at temple-entry. They realized that the fight

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[204] See Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, pp.38-40.

[205] It has been observed that among the 19358 Nambūtiris of Malabar only 6689 were able to read and write; in Travancore only 628 and in Cochin 633 out of 1000. See Poomully Thuppan Nambūtiripād, "Nammudē Talkkāla Stithi" in V.S. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Samudāyabōdham*, Trichur, 1917, p.5.

[206] "Sahōdaran: Oru Dhīrātmāv", in C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, *Sahōdaran Ayyappan: Smaraṇakaḷum Paṭanangaḷum*, Kottayam, 1996, pp.60-62.

against priesthood and feudalism would not be successful unless the support of all those who were opposed to it were brought together. Both had worked together for the propagation of inter-dining and inter-caste marriages and VT praises Ayyappan's efforts as landmarks in bringing about brotherhood among different castes of Kerala.[207]

2:A:8. Speeches and Responses

Though VT was famous as an orator and had made hundreds of speeches during the period of the reform movement, only a few are available in full text. Some of them are included in the *Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ* but their dates given are not correct. In addition, there are a few articles of VT, which deal with important issues of communitarian and secular interest, and which are not included in any of his collections except the *Complete Works*. An analysis of some of his letters also gives us considerable information about his anxieties, and his priorities, in his old age.

In one of his famous speeches, VT eloquently portrayed the lives of the Antaŗjanams inside their *illams,* in an effort to reveal how trivial the life in an ordinary Nambūtiri *illam* was and how it hindered the progress of the community.[208] He observes that great men are creations of good domestic environments and that this may explain why there were no renowned persons among the Nambūtiris for a long period in their history. He expresses his disgust over the utter negligence in the upkeep of the *illam* compound, the total withdrawal of the *mūss* into ritualism, the gruesome superstitions of the Antaŗjanams, the hopeless life of the widow, the inability to give proper care to their children, and the disgraceful infighting between wives. By portraying the irresponsible and chaotic life of an *illam*, VT wanted to convey the message that

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[207] Kesavadev identified Ayyappan and VT as the foremost social revolutionaries of Kerala, the former for his resounding radical speeches encouraging the downtrodden to tread towards light and freedom and the latter for exposing the kind of servitude that prevailed over the dark interiors of the outwardly luminous Nambūtiri illams. P. Kesavadev, "Kēraḷathilē Ādyathē Samūhya Vipḷavakāri", *Yuktivādi,* 14:15, Dhanu 1118, pp.155-56.

[208] "Nammudē Gṛihya Jīvitam", *YK* 20:18-19, 1929 Nov. 23-27. See *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.550-553.

the cause of the downfall of the Nambūtiris lay in the unhealthy nature of their domestic life and urged the community to support the measures for a family regulation for regeneration.

In the longest speech ever delivered by him, VT analyzed the condition of the community and proposed the future programmes of the movement.[209] He started with an attack on the Vedic educational system and stated that it hindered the progress of the community to a great extent and urged the Nambūtiris to send their children to ordinary schools so that they might catch up with the other communities who were already far ahead of them in the field of secular education. He supported girls' education on the ground that in future educated Nambūtiris will find it difficult to adjust with illiterate Antaṛjanam*s*. He also urged the Antaṛjanam*s* to reform their dress; not because the Nambūtiris were fascinated by their beauty or because other women were not available to gratify their sexual urges; but simply because of community considerations. He set high ideals for them to achieve and advised them to seek employment and find some provision for personal income. He strongly pleaded for an organization of the Antaṛjanam*s*. But at the close of the speech he warned the Antaṛjanam*s* of the possible eruption of ultra-liberalism among them in the future; probably he was setting some limits to feminine freedom just as he had done earlier in his drama.

In another speech at Ālathiyūṛ in 1930 VT differentiated remarriage from widow marriage and linked it with the ongoing discourse on the marriage reform. He explained remarriage as second marriage of an Antaṛjanam, after getting divorced, in order to escape from sorrows of *Sāpatnyam*. But the urgent issue is widow-marriage since the sorrows of a widow far surpassed the sufferings of the *sapatnis*. VT called upon to take up widow marriage on a revolutionary footing as a humanitarian issue as well. His speech was also meant to instill among the widows a thirst for life which would help to swell the community in the future.

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[209] Speech at Ālathiyūṛ Upasabha, Oct.24, 1930, cited in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.566-579.

A speech of VT in 1933[210] explained his declining interest in community reform and increasing concern on Gandhian constructive programme especially temple entry and *Harijan* Welfare. He urged the Nambūtiris to realize the situation; *Aikya-Kēraḷa* was around the corner; they should come down to the earth and work wholeheartedly for the uplift of the downtrodden. Evaluating the progress of the reform movement on the 25th year of the *Sabha*, he observed that the Antaṛjanams had started to participate in public affairs and the programme of inter-dining was making headway. But the condition of the widow was still deplorable and the efforts for their emancipation were still at a low ebb. Making an estimate of the Nambūtiri special school, he realized its pathetic condition, but at the same time, expressed the fear that a separate school would only perpetuate the alienation of the Nambūtiris from the others. He urged the Nambūtiris not to think about marriage for the time being, since it would tempt him to seek warmth in his home and family neglecting his commitments to his community. VT presented his vision of an ashram-like community life (which he later founded) in order to overcome the prevailing economic problems and organizational hurdles. The speech was important in that it strongly urged the Nambūtiris to enter the civil society with a view to gain an upper hand in the management of social affairs. The speech also reflected his dream of establishing a Gandhian type ashram which would function as the centre of socio-political activities.

VT's speech at Harikanyāpuram had a tone of great despair. Stresses and strains had developed in him around 1933 due to his isolation from the *Sabha* after his call for the 'burning down of temples' and the consequent outlawing of him from the state of Cochin.[211] He lamented that a large number of former radicals had by then become hard core conservatives and the *Sabha* itself had

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[210] VT's speech at Alathiyur, *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri*, April 28, 1933. It is included in the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ* as "Nikutijamayudē Ēttathilalla Nambūtiriyudē Mahima", pp.545-49. In the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, the year of the speech is wrongly given as 1928.

[211] *UN*, 1933 December 22, *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.612-615.

fallen into the hands of the nobility. He was grieved to see that the *Sabha* had restricted itself to conservative positions and strict communitarian demands without taking up problems of great social importance such as eradication of untouchability and the issue of temple entry since it was the moral responsibility of the Nambūtiri to uphold national and humanitarian considerations. In fact VT's speech was noted for its radicalism; it appeared to be a continuation of his earlier radicalism but by then a great amount of disillusionment seems to pervade him not just for the growing anti-reformism but for his increasing marginalization.

There are a few articles of VT which were his responses to certain issues in which the Nambūtiri community was involved. It was also an exposition of his personal views on such issues. He recognized the revolutionary role played by Kuṛiyēdath Tāṭṛi in the awakening of the Nambūtiris and the origin of the *Sabha*.[212] VT argues that the Tāṭṛi case was instrumental in keeping down sexual immorality among the Antaṛjanams. He places his reformist role in bringing about sexual morality through marriage reform. He says that if Tāṭṛi was able to marry a man of her choice well in time, the issue of *Smāṛtavichāram* would not have originated. He observes that Tāṭṛi's act was neither for sexual pleasure nor for money. It probably was a natural reaction against the prevailing male-oriented sexual anarchy. However, VT identifies her struggle as ushering a cultural renaissance (read sexual morality) and the event as the conclusion of the promiscuous culture of the medieval era.

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[212] Reply to M.K. Kumāran dated 13-8-81, reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.626-627. VT's reading of Tāṭṛi comes closer to that of Mūthiringōd. Mūthiringōd identified Tatri as the pioneer of the protest movement in harems and justified her infidelity as a step to liberate the Antaṛjanams. Through her self-sacrifice, she was wrecking vengeance on the callous life ideal of the Nambūtiris. See the undated Notes of Mūthiringōd, courtesy: M.C. Nambūtiripād, Tṛiśśūṛ. He also wrote that Tatri was then leading a serene, but remorseful, life at Palakkad with a new husband. Instead, Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam, though the strongest exponent of the cause of Nambūtiri women, in her novel *Pratikāradēvatha*, denied Tatri and refused to acknowledge her means of protest as it contained dangerous proportions. See also Sarah Joseph, "Kaṇṇīrum KināvumVimochanavum" in M.N. Vijayan ed., *Nammudē Sāhityam Nammudē Samūham*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, pp.265-66.

In an article condemning the *yāgam* that was being performed at Pānjāl in 1975, VT refuted all the arguments adduced by its exponents in its favour such as cleansing of the atmosphere, elimination of diseases, bringing in rain, bringing increase of crops, etc etc.[213] He criticized the *yāgam* in the context of the increasing tendency to revive the practices which had already been eradicated by them in their mighty effort to 'create a modern Nambūtiri'. In fact VT was opposing the violence involved in the *yāgam* and was questioning the propriety of the organizers in arranging it.[214] However he makes a point that Vedas are the common property of all those who are interested in culture and nobody should lay claim over them in the name of tradition. It is certain that VT was not opposed to *yāgās* because he had great admiration for the Vedas; he was only questioning the practice of violence and the tendency to revive superstitions in the name of religion.[215]

2:B. BIOGRAPHIES ON VT

The image of V.T as the heart and soul of the Nambūtiri reform movement has given birth to a large number of studies on him. There are six biographies[216] on him in addition to several articles and studies. In terms of number, works on VT stands next only to EMS. Admiration and the consequent attitude of adoration is the general feature of most of these works. Intense votaries have enthusiastically established his ancestral links with Śṛi Śaṅkara and Mēzhathōḷ Agnihōtṛi. But one among them, Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan's *Abhivādayē,* is highly

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[213] "Pāñjāḷ Pādathē Kaśāppuśāla" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.636-637.

[214] He poses a simple – but typically *savaṛṇa* – question to the organizers of the *yāga.* If the *yāga* had the efficacy of purifying the whole universe, why do they not attempt to purify all the non-brahmins to make them Brahmins?

[215] Akkitham remarks that it was VT's opposition to violence in the Pāñjāḷ Atirātṛam that ended animal sacrifice during the occasion of yāgas in Kerala later. See M.R. Manmathan, "Charitṛam Oru Piriyan Kōṇiyāṇu", *Mādhyamam Weekly,* 9: 34, August 25, 2006, p.37.

[216] Mathramkot Aśōkan, *V.T. Ethiṛpilūdē,* Kottayam, 1982; Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē,* Kottayam, 1989; A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *V.T. Oru Yugapuruṣan,* Calicut, 1992; Vayala Vasudevan Pilla, *V.T.Bhaṭṭathiripād,* Trichur, 2000; K. Gopalakrishnan, *V.T.Bhaṭṭathiripād,* New Delhi, 2001; Anappaya Sethumadhavan, *Chitalum Māṛālayum Thaṭṭātha VT,* Kozhikode, 2005.

critical in its assessment of V.T; while recognizing him as the champion of the interests of the community, it complained that his agenda was a bit too revolutionary, that its modernizing ethos finally brought about the collapse of the community.

2:B:1. ***V.T. Ethiṛpilūdē***

As the earliest of the biographies on VT, Mathṛamkōṭ's work is a very simple exposition of his life and his greatness but it is particularly important in that it began the tradition of presenting VT as a life-long revolutionary and as a renouncer for the social cause. Mathṛamkōṭ starts with the exceptional personal qualities of VT, especially his humility and humanism, and counts him as one of the prominent leaders of the renaissance of modern Kerala. Among his contributions, his efforts for female emancipation deserve special recognition. He also explained that for VT community reform was not an end in itself but was just a preliminary stage for his subsequent wider struggle which included his crusade against caste, and its manifold expressions, and against all kinds of social evils. Thus VT is not just great but he is a legendary figure.

2:B:2. ***VT Oru Yugapuruşan***

Among the many biographies of V.T, A.P.P. Nambūtiri's work has been the most popular. It follows the usual course of a eulogy and depends on VT's memoirs and the reports in the *UN* as the only source of data and that too with no attempt in hermeneutics. A.P.P. sets the VT of his early days in the real backdrop of the feudal and ritual-ridden Nambūtiri community and identifies that, the severity of his childhood experiences had a determinant role in moulding his later public career. But he is presented as the one and only leader of the movement and as solely responsible for the entire changes in the community. One of the significant aspects of the argument of A.P.P. is that VT's public life had two phases, the first was the period of community reform and the second was devoted to reform of society as a whole; the second being the natural and necessary corollary of the first. He had been trying to liberate the Nambūtiri

movement from its narrow sectarian agenda and to provide it with a truly secular and universal outlook; his participation in the temple-entry and Harijan welfare measures, his call for the disbandment of the *NYS* and the subsequent launching of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* colony, and the inter-caste marriage experiment, all were designed to serve this purpose. But the society was not mature enough to understand and assimilate his radical measures which led to his alienation from society bringing about his total retreat from social activities.

The post-independence era saw VT greatly marginalized and highly disillusioned because of his disagreement and disgust with power politics. The declining appeal of Gandhism and the mounting corruption forced him to react emotionally to contemporary politics reaffirming political morality.[217] APP argues that his unique and inimitable qualities such as his refusal to brook any disparity between word and deed, his steadfastness in truth and non-violence, his faith in upholding equality in personal relationships (such qualities incapacitated him from becoming a political leader), all raised him to the level of a moral reformer of the post-independence era.[218] He effectively played this role through his literary activities. He continued his single-handed struggle relentlessly until his death. His attachment to the principle of individual liberty and freedom of expression induced him to associate with the RSS during the period of emergency; but that does not mean that he was an exponent of the Hindutva forces.[219] He was being deceived by the organized reactionary forces, but VT was himself an institution – a bulwark capable of resisting all such forces.

It is only on the question of VT's first marriage and his remarriage that A.P.P. has some disagreement about him; but he absolves VT on the excuse that compulsions of contemporary social realities had forced him to behave in that

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[217] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit,* p.160.

[218] *Ibid*, pp.211-217.

[219] *Ibid*, p.176. A.P.P. writes that VT participated in the RSS meeting during the Emergency period, when RSS alone led the agitation for the reinstatement of freedom and democracy, but fact is that he attended the meeting in 1972 and not in 1976. See Akkitham, "Nambūtiri-yē Manuşyanākkān" in VT Smāraka Samiti, *VT-yē Kaṇdethal,* p.36.

manner.[220] While dealing with the question of his divorce and remarriage, A.P.P. quotes three unpublished notes of VT, which are not only excluded from the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, but run counter to the popular argument justifying VT's stand. It is often argued that VT divorced his *sambandham* wife to be sincere to the reform movement, that it was the unwillingness of the Vārasyāṛ to accompany him to his home that necessitated a remarriage, and that VT had always been remorseful over the event. In fact these notes reveal that VT had taken his decision to remarry even before consulting his first wife. May be due to this factor, which may run counter to VT's popular image, A.P.P. does not attempt to develop a halo around VT as if he was the pioneer of the women's emancipation movement in Kerala.

A.P.P. tries to give considerable importance to VT as one among the leaders of the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha though contemporary evidences are insufficient to establish this fact.[221] A.P.P's work raises VT to a legendary figure, as the very title of the book would convey, and presents him as one who had done what was considered to be almost impossible. VT is of course a great figure but his image conveyed through the pages of this work does not in fact conform to historical realities.

2:B:3. *Abhivādayē*

Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan's *Abhivādayē* was written in the lifetime of VT; it is written in the present tense, but it was published after his death.[222] *Abhivādayē* differs basically from other biographies in its treatment of source materials. While other works have taken the popular image of V.T and his autobiographical

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[220] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.98-108.

[221] *Ibid*, pp.126-135.

[222] Mādamb in his preface stated that he started writing the book while V.T was alive but could not publish it before his death. However, he did not try to change the narration into past tense because V.T is immortal. Taking into consideration the author's overall negative attitude to V.T. and his identification of the peculiar factors that determined V.T's career, it has to be assumed that the book would have been rejected as absurd by V.T himself if it was published in his lifetime.

writings as the factual basis for exposition, *Abhivādayē* not only does not take them for granted but utilizes many other sources of information which evidently stand against V.T's popular image. Thus many Nambūtiris who had taken a position against V.T and the reform programme are repeatedly quoted in the work.[223] Moreover, Mādamb is highly skeptical of the information provided by V.T. and regards them as subjective and prejudiced.

The author declares V.T. to be the last important person of the Agnihōtṛi lineage. And both were rebels of their respective ages. Agnihōtṛi had introduced the practice of post-puberty marriage among the Nambūtiris and was excommunicated. V.T. too had been an outcast.[224] He thus suggests that there is a line of continuity in the rebellious tradition which VT too inherited. It is interesting to note that VT in his memoirs had denied his ancestry to the line of Agnihōtṛi. Even more surprising is the attempt of Mādamb to bring in astrology to justify VT's renown. He emphasizes the role of fate in V.T's life; in his case, everything was predetermined. Having studied the horoscope of V.T. in detail Mādamb identified it as that of a really gifted person and noticed certain striking similarities with the planetary positions of Mahatma Gandhi.[225] Nature, (the author prefers to use this term for God) had been very kind to V.T and had blessed him profusely. An equally significant aspect of the study is the absence of any criticism against the pre-reform condition of the community; even while presenting VT as a great revolutionary, Mādamb does not expose the pitiable, yet conservative, position of the Nambūtiris that had necessitated a radical movement. He makes us believe that shortcomings, though not as horrific as VT had painted, were there but the very structure of the community was adaptive to changes. Even an ultra-radical like VT was a product of the community.

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[223] For instance, Mādamb repeatedly quotes Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri's diary for alternate information.
[224] *Abhivādayē*, pp.13-14.
[225] *Ibid*, pp.12-13.

The author states that V.T's presentation of the community was not based on facts and was highly subjective.[226] V.T's case was a special one. VT came from a problem-family but the community in general had not faced all such problems. He admits that the community had degenerated much and had forgotten true *Brāhmaṇyam*. It was the new circumstances of capitalism and money economy that hastened their degeneration. He thinks that the decline of the Nambūtiris began with the establishment of the British power and with the introduction of the new land system. Material concerns began to undermine spiritual values.[227]

Mādamb holds that V.T's retirement from active social life was hastened by his high radicalism and compares it with the case of Śṛi Aurobindo.[228] He tries to impress his readers that like Aurobindo, V.T too repented over his immature radicalism. He ends up the biography with a statement on V.T's great disillusionment at the close of his life.[229] To him, V.T was basically a utopian. While the *Sabha* had achieved all its objectives, almost all of V.T's radical measures were failures. Though he hesitantly admits the relevance of the call of E.M.S. for the need of humanizing the Nambūtiris, he reminds us that a more serious mission was waiting to be addressed: that of raising men to divinity. He identifies V.T's disillusionment in his old age as the outcome of the failure on the part of the new generation in achieving this noble aim.[230]

As a biography, *Abhivādayē* would disappoint a serious reader; it falls into the level of a fiction. The basic shortcoming of the work is its fatalistic approach. Neither material forces nor social environment but heavenly bodies had played crucial roles in determining VT's career and personality. It is also important to note that the work denies VT a significant space in the reform movement. It is

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[226] *Ibid*, pp.26-31.

[227] Similar arguments have been raised by others (Veluthat Kesavan, "Nambūtiriyum Manuṣyanum", *Sāhityalōkam*, March-April 2003) but there are evidences that the decline of the Nambūtiri community had started well before the advent of the British rule. See *Kerala Through the Ages*, p.30.).

[228] *Abhivādayē*, pp.221-223.

[229] *Ibid*, pp.227-229.

[230] *Ibid*, p.229.

argued that since he himself was a utopian almost all his radical ventures had failed. The work thus not only rejects the positive role of VT in the rejuvenation of the community but even denies the play of historical forces in the making of historical figures.

Other biographies on VT are not of much importance since they do not carry any significant data nor do they interpret his life and activities in the light of any ideological formulations.

2:C. ARTICLES ON VT

There are numerous articles on VT, majority of which have been written after his death. Some journals had brought out special issues with obituaries on his death. Similarly special issues were published by many journals in the year of his birth centenary.[231] Meetings were also organized on his 60th, 70th and 80th birthdays, the felicitation speeches made on these occasions were later published. All these speeches and articles were brought together into collections such as *VT-ye Kaṇdethal*,[232] *VT-Oru Itihāsam*,[233] and *VT: Studies and Memoirs*.[234] There were also stray articles on him by contemporaries, friends and academicians. Some of these articles revealed a new tendency. The gradual emergence of VT as the one and only leader of the Nambūtiri movement created a situation in which most of his contemporaries had to establish their connection with him, in one way or the other, in order to gain a space in the movement. A few articles, which are of special importance and which serve as study materials, are reviewed here.

Akkitham Achuthan Nambūtiri. Akkitham wrote four important articles on VT. Of these the earliest one may probably be the first article written on VT

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[231] *Vivēkōdayam*, V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād 80th Birthday Supplement, 10:27-28, May 23, 1976; *Vivēkōdayam*, VT Special Issue, 14:5-6, May-June 1982; *Janayugam* VT Special Issue, 35:31, Feb. 28, 1982; *Dēśābhimāni* VT Special Issue, 22:27, November 12, 1995;

[232] V.T. Smāraka Samiti, *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, Mēzhathūr, 1984.

[233] Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *VT-Oru Itihāsam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1996.

[234] A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT: Studies and Memoirs*, Mēzhathūr, 1997.

which presents him as a person of exceptional abilities.[235] Akkitham introduces VT as the leader of the Nambūtiri movement and his objective was to 'make the Nambūtiri human' a lofty aim but an arduous task to achieve. VT's insistence on keeping hearty personal relationships and his sincere concern for maintaining spiritual values is praised at length. In spite of being a Congressman VT was not fully able to understand Gandhi's concepts of God and Ahimsa. This may be the reason why he became a Marxist and sincerely enjoyed it. He is the true Kamal Pasha of the community but he did not realize it. It was VT's love of reform and his insistence on fighting against tradition that made Akkitham to compare him with Kamal Pasha.[236]

Akkitham's changing perceptions on VT had found its expression in the three articles he wrote on him after 1970. During the interval his estimate on VT underwent a great metamorphosis. In the first of these articles,[237] Akkitham argued that though VT was famous as a revolutionary, it is better to interpret him according to the present day criteria or in connection with the current notions prevailing about him. During his 80th birthday most of the speakers had compared him with Śṛi Śaṅkara; as if there was something in him above that of an ordinary revolutionary, some transcendental powers similar to that of

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[235] "VT: Nambūtiri Samudāyathintē Kamal Pasha", *Mangaḷōdayam*, 23:11, Kumbham 1123 (1948). Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād had written an account of the housewarming of VT's 'Rasikasadanam' in 1931. See "Abhūtapūṛvamāya Antapuravipḷavam", *UN*, 23-10-1931. But it did not attempt at an evaluation of VT. In his speech at VT's illam on the occasion of the staging of the drama, Mōzhikunnam praised VT as the 'Patel of the Nambūtiris'. Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇa Mārāṛ's description of the widow marriage also is marked by the absence of a detailed evaluation of VT except in that it referred to him as the person solely responsible for all the changes in the Nambūtiri community. See "Nambūtiri Vidhavā Vivāham" in his own work *Nizhalāṭṭam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1945, pp58-63.

[236] Akkitham later reshaped the article in accordance with his changing ideology. No longer was V.T. a Kamal Pasha but rather a spiritualist, anti-communist, philosopher and rishi. See "VT Enna Vyakthi", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *Op.cit*, pp.275-79. Similarly, Akkitham had rewritten some of the poems, such as "Karińchanta", he had written in the 40s to suit to the changing attitudes. Akkitham Achuthan Nambūtiri, *Akkitham Kavitakaḷ: Sampūṛna Samāhāram*, Kottayam, 2002, pp.56-57.

[237] Akkitham, "VT Vipḷavakāriyo Ṛiṣiyo?", *Vivēkōdayam* 10:1, July 1976. The article is reproduced in Akkitham, *Samāvaṛtanam*, Kottayam, 1978, pp.67-72 with the same title.

Śaṅkara. It is important to note that this change of attitude took place at a time when VT was largely passive and was engaged only in writing and making speeches. Akkitham identifies that the works of both Śaṅkara and VT show striking similarities in ideologies, attitudes and in the nature of observations. Only in one respect both differ: while Śaṅkara's works deal primarily with *Jnāna*, VT's focus was on *Kaṛma.*

In another article Akkitham analyses how the cultural environment and the all-encompassing nature of the Nambūtiri community helped to develop the personality and career of the 'future' radical VT.[238] He learnt Veda from the Kūdallūṛ Mana; he was lucky to get an opportunity to enter the wonderland of letters when he worked as a priest at Muṇdamuka; the *Vādhyān* of Tirunāvāya helped him to learn English while he was at *Muṛajapam*; and the Nambūtiri school provided him the facility for education. Akkitham describes the activities of VT as if there was no opposition at all from any section of the community against them and even the hard core conservatives were ready to support reform once they came to know of the need of such reforms. Certain actions of VT which had created considerable tension within the community, such as his remarriage, the partition of his *illam* property, the first *ghōṣa* boycott, etc are described as quite natural events. Even the widow marriage and the inter-caste marriage that were conducted under his auspices, appear as if they were accomplished with the support of the whole community. A point that Akkitham stresses is the great disillusionment that the post-independent developments created in him. It aroused the moral crusader in him and inspired him to write many intuitive literary pieces of high excellence exhorting the need for moral regeneration. It had its culmination in his statement that the need of the hour was to start a movement to 'make men Nambūtiris'.

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[238] "Oru Vīrāḷ Puruṣantē Charitṛam", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op. cit*, pp. 58-70.

Akkitham is not only attempting to impress the reader by giving them wrong notions[239] but is also trying to erase out the whole social context of the movement of VT's struggle. There are no references to the internal dynamics of the movement and no indications of the aims and objectives of the struggle. Here VT appears as a representative of the patriarchs and as guided by the Brahmanical ideology. One really wonders about the relevance of a movement among the Nambūtiris, if there were no inherent problems and no forces of internal opposition.

In another very important appraisal of VT, Akkitham observed that in his last years VT was preoccupied with a totally different mission of reconverting humans into Nambūtiris.[240] VT's earlier mission was to convert the Nambūtiri into a human being, and this objective had been accomplished to a great extent; but the Nambūtiri in his haste to catch up with the other communities had forsaken his ancient traditions and values. The new circumstances needed their revival. VT's speech at the meeting of the RSS at Pālakkād had inspired Akkitham to make a note on his new mission. Brushing aside the general belief that VT was succumbing to pressures in participating in the meeting and in making the controversial statement,[241] Akkitham argued that there were certain

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[239] For example, he writes that the *Yāchana Yātṛa* took place in 1922 (though it was in 1931), that VT's stories were published in the *UN* (though in fact they appeared in *Pāśupatam*), that he became the secretary of the *Saṅgham* in 1930 (though he did not), that when the Cochin government issued an order banning VT's entry in the state he was at Ernakulam and immediately returned to the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* colony (though the colony was started only three years after this event), and that VT was the central figure of the Ōngallūṛ movement (though in fact he had only a second line leadership in it). More surprising is the lack of any reference to the role of E.M.S. in the movement.

[240] "Akkitham, "Manuşyanē Nambūtiriyākkān", *Kalākaumudi*, March 13, 1983; also in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, pp.36-45.

[241] VT's speech at Palakkad was reported by *Kēsari weekly* on June 4, 1972 and is quoted by Akkitham in the article. VT is reported to have said that in spite of larger facilities for reading, it did not reflect in the knowledge of the people or in their dedication to work. All appear to be disillusioned. Real knowledge could be found in ancient Indian culture. He addressed the RSS activists as the Brahmins of the future. He expressed his helplessness to participate in its activities as he had become old and regretted for his late realization of the greatness of the RSS. There is a summary of the speech in VT's diary, kept by his son V.T. Vasudevan. The speech written down in the diary is the same that is quoted by Akkitham.

elements in VT which conformed to the RSS ideology. He had believed in certain 'sanātana' values for which the RSS too stood for.[242] Though he did not practice temple-worship, he used to recite a mantra from the Rig Veda. VT's concept of the Nambūtiri was built upon the abstract ideal of 'Brāhmaṇyam', a qualitative variant, which is attained not through birth but by deed, *kaṛma*. He found that the food habits of an individual is closely connected with his ideals and life style. His attitude to the concept of progress sharply contrasted with the ancient Indian ideal of 'doom' as embodied in the *Bhāgavatham*, but rather conformed to the one held by Vivekananda that man's journey towards virtue is progress. The progress of man may take him to the final position of vegetarianism with the adoption of which the prevailing conflicts and wars would come to an end. VT too had thought of an ideal man, a world government and man as a spiritual and moral being. It was in this sense that VT talked of *Brāhmaṇyam*; he wanted all to wear white dress but not khaki clothes.[243]

M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "V.T: Communisathinappuṛathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṛayilē Māṛgadaṛśakan". In a very significant estimate of VT and his career, Prof. M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan examined the popularity gained by him as a social activist and as a writer – the two characteristics complementing each other perfectly.[244] If VT used literature as a medium to supplement the reform measures, he later utilized it for their interpretation. It was his ability as a writer that raised him to the exalted position of a *ṛiṣi*. His literary works are sources of inspiration for the struggle for an egalitarian society without sacrificing the essence of the individual. He grew from sectarianism to secularism and universalism. And this process is well reflected in his works. While analyzing VT's literary creations it

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[242] Akkitham is reported to have said that VT had inspired his social ideas; VT taught him how a society could be regenerated from its stagnancy. P. Sukumāran, *Akkithathintē Kavithayilē Sāmskārika Dāṛśanika Dhārakaḷ*, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 2002, p.85.

[243] Elsewhere Akkitham opined that he would rather say RSS had its origin from VT. *Mādhyamam Weekly*, Ap.2, 1999, p.16.

[244] M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "V.T: Communisathinappuṛathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṛayilē Māṛgadaṛśakan", in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, pp.46-63; also in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit*, pp.75-83.

can be seen that they had a determinant role in the development of the movement. M.G.S. hints how the message of his works stole into female hearts and subdued them. This could be interpreted from the Freudian perspective.

M.G.S. points out that VT's entry in the public sphere was politically motivated but the condition of his community compelled him to focus on the social realm. It does not mean that he was a sectarian: there was no need of upholding the rights of the Nambūtiri in opposition to others. The Nambūtiri wanted the love and cooperation of all others in the process of evolving himself into a faultless 'human being'. For this it was necessary for him to renounce his privileges. In fact VT was trying to rescue the community which was trapped in exclusiveness on account of historical reasons. One of the significant aspects of VT's activity was that he started all reforms at home; it denotes sacrifice and negation of traditions on his part.

Within the community, VT was the champion of the dispossessed: he wanted to uplift the *Āsyans, Apphans,* Antarjanam*s*, and the poor in general. For this very reason it was unlikely that he would receive the whole-hearted support of the dominant groups of the community in the future. They would either take advantage of his name or would purposefully neglect him. VT's ideals failed because of his innate weakness: a feeble power instinct and lack of selfish motives. His insistence on ideals isolated him, but the very isolation heightened his creative abilities as a writer.

Nambūtiris were first attracted by capitalism and later by Marxism. It is a wonder that both the rich as well as the poor were equally fascinated by Marxism: while the rich were attracted by the possible advantages that an attachment to it would bring them, the poor chose it because of their deprivation. VT was unable to ally with capitalism because he was poor but what kept him away from Marxism? M.G.S. attributes it to his lack of practical sense. However his choice had a positive aspect; otherwise he would not have been able to keep

up his sincerity and faith in human individuality. The increasing alienation forced him to study and analyze things and thus he became the greatest exponent of humanism and emerged as a noted philosopher.

VT was not turning out to be a revivalist. It is a universal phenomenon, as is witnessed in the socialist countries, that the downfall of the prevailing system would be followed by a return to the past and an appeal to traditional values. VT was talking about a utopia of the past as a conscious attempt to rejuvenate the essence of the past. Even his revolutionary attempts were noted by a respect for tradition. Indeed, VT had realized the faults of capitalism and the good points of communism; but he was more influenced by humanism. Hence his observations need to be taken as real prophesies and he deserves to be treated as the true philosopher-guide in the journey beyond communism.

P. Chitran Nambūtiripād, "VT Oru Kaṛmayōgi". As a man who was personally associated with V.T and the Nambūtiri movement, Chitran Nambūtiripād identifies VT's efforts for *swajātivivāham* and liberation of the Antaṛjanam*s* as his most important contributions. Among these the second being more important than the first.[245] No one before VT had responded to the problems of the Antaṛjanam*s*. He discloses that VT was a subject of enthusiastic discussion in the harem but among the menfolk he was viewed with disrespect and contempt. Nambūtiripād also evaluates the results of the movement: the number of the Nambūtiris increased; landlords became middle class peasants; maintenance of nuclear family necessitated even the employment of women. When the Land Reforms Act was passed in 1970, it did not affect the community much. Hence, he notices that, VT's movement was relevant as an economic measure too.

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[245] P. Chitran Nambūtiripād, "VT Oru Kaṛmayōgi", in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, pp.1-4; an abridged form of this article is given in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit*, p.141.

M.R.B, "Entē Pṛiyappeṭṭa VT". In an obituary on VT, M.R.B. pays homage to VT as the person who had greatly shaped his life and image.[246] M.R.B. portrays him as a revolutionary and true votary of the cause of humanism. He links VT's widow marriage and inter-caste marriage experiments as steps towards the freedom of womenfolk and as measures for the progress of the community. He equates VT with Śṛi Śaṅkara and Śṛi Nārāyaṇa Guru. He quotes a few lines from Akkitham's classic poem stating that he was VT's favourite poet and that these lines would appeal to him the most.[247] In another article M.R.B. observed that VT fought for human equality and brotherhood and that for him humanism and love counted more than anything else.[248] However it is surprising to note that nowhere does M.R.B. refer to the personal bond between them during the days of community reform or later but keeps on observing him from a distance. This makes his observations considerably different from that of M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād.

C.A. Kiṭṭuṇṇi, "Proof Reader Thirumēni".[249] By referring to his experience at *Mangaḷōdayam* Press, Kiṭṭuṇṇi stated that VT considered everyone as equal; he treated the manager and the labourers with equal regard. He did not like him to be addressed in the semiotic milieu in noble terms and by using traditional symbols of respect. Kiṭṭuṇṇi attests that VT was the real force behind both the *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri* and *Pāśupatam*.[250] At the *Mangaḷōdayam* press Kiṭṭuṇṇi worked first as composer and then as VT's assistant which helped him to gain experience in journalism as also in public activities. In his anti-pollution struggles, VT was his source of inspiration. VT also introduced his work *Ayitham* to the reading public.

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[246] M.R.B, "Entē Pṛiyappeṭṭa VT", in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, pp.75-79.

[247] Akkitham's poem "Irupathām Nūttāṇdintē Itihāsam" is the story of a Marxist-turned-spiritualist. VT's intimacy with Akkitham is revealing because there is sharp contrast between the known VT and the known Akkitham.

[248] M.R.B, "Puthiya Kēraḷathintē Tatchan", in *MRByudē Upanyāsāṅgal*, Calicut, 1988, pp.327-329.

[249] C.A. Kittuṇṇi, "Proof Reader Tirumēni", in his own work *Katthunna Tirikaḷ*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1955, pp.27-33; also see A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit*, pp.286-88.

[250] Kummiṇi Krishnan Nambūtiri was the editor of *Pāśupatam*.

N.V. Krishnavāriyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam".[251] Vāriyar holds the view that VT was the person responsible mainly for the transformation of the Nambūtiri community. He chose the social realm because he found that Nambūtiris were not sufficiently developed to enter the political field. Reforming the Nambūtiris was a necessary prerequisite for the reform of the Hindu religion too. Just like Gandhiji, VT understood that the reform of the community should be preceded by the emancipation of women; and it is no wonder that women faithfully followed both of them. E.M.S. started from the point where VT had stopped. Vāriyar observes that VT contributed much to the later programme of economic reform initiated by E.M.S. by removing all hindrances through a ritual reform. Thus Vāriyar places the activities of E.M.S, including the land reforms, far superior to that of VT because they had played a more important role in making Nambūtiris human.[252] Vāriyar observes the limitation of VT's ideology in that he laid undue faith in rationalism as a means to solve all the existing problems. VT's role appears to have come to an end with the Nambūtiri becoming human. He also pointed out that though VT was ready to continue his fight, he had almost lost his social relevance in the new circumstances of the declining relevance of Gandhism and the increasing corruption and injustice.

M. Prabha, "VTyum Yuktivādavum".[253] As a person closely associated with VT in the rationalist movement, Prabha analyses the salient features of the rationalist thought in order to substantiate that VT's ideology conformed perfectly to it. He explains that rationalism meant scientific outlook as against superstitions and blind practices. It is not just atheism; but the application of reason in every realm of life. It certainly does not recognize god, religion, heaven, hell, fate or priestly exploitation. Rationalism incorporates values necessary for the development of the individual. Since a rational person does not

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[251] N.V. Krishnavariyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, pp.26, 35. (The article was originally published in *Kumkumam Weekly*, 17:26, March 14, 1982).
[252] *Ibid*, p.35.
[253] M. Prabha, "VTyum Yuktivādavum", *VTyē Kaṇdethal*, pp.80-99.

accept fate, it is his/her duty to work for his/her own well being. Prabha responded to the distrust expressed by many as to whether VT was a true rationalist by stating that not only did he believe in it but openly associated with it. He was not just a rationalist but an atheist too. His statement of 'burning down temples', emphatically declares his faith in atheism. His fight against superstitions, his active involvement in the nationalist movement, all are instances that would justify his unflinching faith in this ideal.[254]

Thāyāṭ Śaṅkaran, "Sūri Nambūtirippādil Ninnu VT Bhaṭṭathiri-ppādilēkku".[255] After having made an observation of the three Nambūtiris of the novel *Indulēkha*, viz, Sūri Nambūtiripād, Kaṛuthēdath Nambūtiri and Cheṛuśśēri Nambūtiri, Thāyāt Śaṅkaran went on to comment that Cheṛuśśēri, if he had imbibed the spirit of the 20th century, would have been a VT Bhaṭṭathiripād. For the Nambūtiris the enemy was within and VT's historic mission was to convince the community of this fact. But it was not so easy: it would be easy to mobilize a community in opposition to others if rights were to be gained from others. But among the Nambūtiris the son had to fight against the father, the younger brother against the elder brother, women against men, daughter against mother; families were split vertically into self-seeking identities. In-fighting in the families was the motive force of the Nambūtiris' transformation and yet it was the Nambūtiris that changed more radically than any other community in Kerala. This was the end of VT's mission.

I.C.P. Nambūtiri, "VTyudē Kaṛmakāṇdam".[256] As a co-activist, I.C.P. Nambūtiri remembers some of the experiences he had had with VT as well as his impression of him. He writes that VT attracted him as a catching orator. In those

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[254] VT explained later that by his statement 'to burn down temples' he was making a call to fight against superstitions; it should not be taken in the literal sense. See VT's speech at Calicut University quoted by M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.80. Prabha does not notice VT's later retreat from rationalism and atheism. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.507-508.

[255] Thāyāt Śaṅkaran, "Suri Nambūtirippādil Ninnu VT Bhaṭṭathirippādilēkku", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, pp.43-48.

[256] *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, pp.33-37. Also in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, pp. 128-133.

days VT was the craze of the youth. It is important to note that despite the difference in ideological and political outlooks, I.C.P. does not make any critical statements on VT. While referring to *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, he refuses to make any comments on it and repeats VT's statement that financial crisis led to its decline, though many other factors were involved in it. But he expressed considerable grief over the sufferings that VT's sister (by *anulōma* inter-caste marriage) and her family had to endure and stated that it turned out to be a blot on progressive movements. However, I.C.P. praised VT for his life-long progressive outlook. Though he did not become a communist, he was not an anti-communist either. His story "Sakhāvuṇṇi" was not a denunciation of the communists as a whole, but the evaluation of a person who did not practice the true ideals of communism. Regarding the criticism that VT in his last days was moving towards a Hindutva ideology, I.C.P. says there is no relevance in such a charge because VT himself had dismissed it emphantically. Nevertheless VT had a serious limitation: "while we believed in the socialist system attained through communism as the viable means leading to social progress, VT could not appreciate it and remained as a mere humanist".

Uma MRB, "Thalayilezhuthu Thiruthiya Kai".[257] In a very important note, containing a lot of information coming from the female side and from the woman who was the heroine of the first widow marriage, Uma recollects her experiences as an Antaṛjanam and the way VT determined her fate. She narrates her experiences in the context of the restaging of the drama in association with the birth centenary of VT. She sees the drama as a revolutionary tool against the old order and as instrumental in bringing about desirable changes in the harems. VT soon became the hero and the hope of the Antaṛjanams. Thereafter she, along with other girls, started reading the *UN*; articles and speeches of VT were realistic presentations of the sorrows of the Antaṛjanams and he slowly started emerging as their saviour.

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[257] In Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, pp.134-139.

Uma presented herself as a radical within the *illam*. She started introducing reforms in dress and behaviour in accordance with the directions of VT. Her brother I.C.P. supported her. VT's marriage with her elder sister came to be a promise for the future. When she began to lead the life of a widow on the death of her husband 14 days after their marriage, I.C.P. rebuked her and wanted her to lead a normal life. It was VT who encouraged her to take a strong decision in favour of a second marriage.

In another piece of reminiscences Uma observed that in the present day widow marriage is not a hurdle at all and that it had taken place even in the family of the Taikkāṭ Vaidikan.[258] But the hardships she, and other remarried widows like her, had to suffer in those days and the relatively insignificant number of widow marriages in the 1930s and 40s indicate that ritual reforms depended more on the general socio-economic changes of the later period and not due to the movement as such.

Śrīdēvi Antaṛjanam, "Sahadhaṛmam Charata:"[259] In the only piece of reminiscences available from VT's wife Śṛīdēvi, she describes her marriage as a decisive incident in her life and portrays VT as the great saviour. She remained unmarried up to the age of 25 due to the problem of dowry and at last her marriage was fixed as the third wife of an old Nambūtiri. Since VT in his drama had presented the scene of preventing an *Adhivēdanam* by a court injunction and since he was *sambandham* married, there started a discussion as to why should not he be persuaded to save her? Mūthiringōt and C.K. Nambūtiri played a crucial role in these deliberations. Though VT's brother opposed the move, the situation resulting from the staging of the drama at his own *illam* made the marriage inevitable. Śrīdēvi describes the way VT continued his community reform measures in the midst of economic distress and family problems. But serious financial strain haunted them after the failure of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* colony.

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[258] Mrs. M.R.B, "Chaṅgala Poṭṭichavaṛ", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, pp.40-41.
[259] In Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, pp. 123-127.

M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmji: VTyudē Śṛishti".[260] M.P. introduces himself as being moulded by VT into a man of worth. He pays his respect to VT as his mentor since it was he who had instilled in him the first lessons of enlightenment. VT gave him a life by teaching him the essentials of proof-reading when he was his assistant at the *Mangaḷōdayam*, and he remained in this job till the end of his life. VT made him an actor by giving roles in his drama and this brought him great fame in his later life. He says that VT's speech urging the Nambūtiris to live by the sweat of their brow had inspired him to work for his livelihood instead of wandering in *vārams* and *pūrams* seeking *dakṣiṇa*. M.P. attests the statement of E.M.S. that the drama was the result of group work and discussions at the Yōgakṣēmam lodge. Only the first six acts were written by VT personally, other parts were completed as a collective endeavour. He also writes that it was he who had brought out the drama as a printed book.

P.S. Kēśavan Nambūtiri, "Entē Sahapāṭi".[261] The first law graduate and the first munsiff among the Nambūtiris, one of the earliest Nambūtiris to do *Parivēdanam*, the member of the Cochin legislative assembly authorized to present the family regulation and a participant in the *Yāchana Yātṛa*, P.S. Nambūtiri narrates his experiences with VT. VT was also his classmate at the Nambūtiri School. He writes about VT in high terms both about him and his radical measures but records his displeasure over the inter-caste marriage he conducted: it is practically impossible for couples of such marriage to live together due to the apparent cultural disparities. He had also prepared VT's will at his death bed. Memories of the days with VT still continued to thrill him.

N. Dāmōdaran, "Entē VT".[262] As a close associate and friend of VT, Dāmōdaran's memoirs are of significant value. Although he had seen VT for the first time during the days of the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha, they became close

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[260] *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27. Nov.12, 1995, p.39. Also see "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam*, November 1992.
[261] *Ibid*, p.42.
[262] In Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, pp.107-112.

associates only after 1950 when they worked together in the *Ponnāni Kalāsamiti*. Dāmōdaran writes that VT had wished to write the memoirs of his post-independence experiences, but unfortunately he did not. VT was very particular in maintaining intimate personal relationships and in upholding values like love, compassion and liberty. He was very much aggrieved over two developments: the growth of conservatism among the Nambūtiris and the decline of moral values among people as a whole. He denounced both capitalism and communism for their stress on the concept of 'economic man'; instead, he wanted to create 'moral man'. In spite of being a rationalist, VT was not an atheist; probably he was an agnostic.

Kadavanāṭṭ Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇan, "VT-kku Oru Katth".[263] In an obituary, Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇan sums up his impression of VT. Analyzing his divorce and remarriage, Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇan expresses his feeling of compassion to the Vārasyāṛ in the name of humanitarianism but supports VT and lauds his decision as that of a bold leader: a leader should show the way. For VT it was a matter of sacrifice for the good of the community at the cost of considerable mental strain. Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇan absolves VT of the sin of abandoning his first wife and children for the reason that among the *marumakkathāyam* families a divorce did not wind up the life of a woman since she was protected by the family. But if VT's mission was to create the environment for the comprehensive development of the individual self, then such a mission did not seem to have included women in its scope.

E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "VT-yum Navotthāna Pṛasthānavum". [264] As a companion of VT in the reform movement, the observations of E.M.S. are of particular importance. E.M.S. says that VT was the leader of the left group of the *Sabha*. Inspired by the messages of Śṛi Narāyaṇa Guru and Chaṭṭambi Swāmikaḷ, VT wanted to replace '*Nambūtiritham*' with '*manuṣyatham*'. He was

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[263] *Ibid*, pp.113-120.
[264] In Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, pp.11-20.

also a follower of Gandhi. His *Yāchana Yātṛa* was an imitation of the Dandi March and his *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* was an imitation of the Gandhian ashram. All these indicate that VT saw his social reform measures as a part of the nationalist movement. While the Kerala renaissance as such suffered the basic shortcoming of being in political alliance with either the British or the native rulers, a few important leaders like T.K. Mādhavan and VT sided with nationalism. It was this group that later developed into socialists and communists.

E.M.S. also acknowledges VT's contributions in promoting his personal career. Though he had been familiar with VT as the stalwart of the *Sabha* and as the author of many short stories, he happened to meet VT for the first time at Tṛiśśūṛ when he came there for college education. His experience as the assistant of VT at *Mangaḷōdayam* press had greatly helped him to develop his journalistic capacities. When VT became the organizing secretary of the *Saṅgham*, EMS had to take up the responsibility of the publication of the *UN*. EMS argues that the entire proceeding related to the staging of the drama was the result of group work, but with VT as the leader, and he too played a significant role in it. The staging of the drama is significant in that it represented the victory of the left-wing against both the hardcore conservatives and the vacillating moderates of the community. The reforms it envisaged such as the elimination of *Adhivēdanam*, promotion of love marriage and boycott of *ghōṣa* were radical and revolutionary and hence was leftist in their spirit.

E.M.S. observes that the *Yāchana Yātṛa* was different from the Dandi March in that the former lacked a political agenda. But apart from its open aim of enlisting financial support for the education of Nambūtiri boys, it aimed at creating awareness within the community of the need of a family regulation. In its results it was as revolutionary as the staging of the drama. As regards VT's role in the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha, he wrote that he did not have any awareness about it.

In another article,[265] E.M.S. observed that though VT came to be famous as a rationalist, he did not associate directly with the movement but just attempted to spread the ideal of rational thinking, through his revolutionary measures, among the members of his community. As regards E.M.S, VT was first and foremost a social revolutionary. Without him changes in the community would not have been so swift and smooth.

T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Samudāyadṛōhi".[266] In an article severely condemning the *Sabha* movement, T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād lambasted VT for his alleged anti-Nambūtiri stand. He says that along with a few others, he opposed the movement for its tendency to undermine the Nambūtiri culture. T.S. says that there was a tendency among the reformers to generalize a few out of the way events as examples applicable to the whole community. He decried this tendency because in effect it only tarnished the image of the community. T.S. asks why VT did not follow the path of Mannam by upholding the pride of one's culture. The desirable course of reform was to keep the Nambūtiri as a Nambūtiri. T.S. argued that his criticism of the movement was also on account of the tendency to convert the *Sabha* into a wing of the communist party. He justified the launching of the journal *Patāka* as an organ against the *Sabha* in the context of the starting of the *Tozhil Kēndṛam* at Lakkidi for the Antaṛjanam*s* which in fact was a recruitment centre of the communist party. The speech of E.M.S. at Ōngallūṛ was evidently political; by associating himself with E.M.S, VT committed a serious sin of supporting the anti-Nambūtiri agenda. Instead of retaining the Nambūtiris intact, E.M.S. and VT attempted to make them 'human beings' at the cost of their cultural identity; they cannot be forgiven for their attempts at pulling down the cultural edifice erected by the sages of yore.

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[265] E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "VT: Oru Anusmaraṇakkuṛipp", *Vivēkōdayam*, 10:27, 28, 1976 May 23.

[266] *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, pp.47-48.

K.C. Nārāyaṇan, "Vēruṇaṅgātha Vākku".[267] K.C. Nārāyaṇan analyzed the Nambūtiri movement in the context of the sufferings of the *Apphans* and the Antaṛjanam*s* – whom he called the 'internal proletariat' of the Nambūtiri community. It was influenced by the new concepts of nuclear family and individual liberty.[268] The leader of this movement was VT for whom emancipation of women was the primary agenda. Nārāyaṇan analyzes VT's reformist activities on the basis of a study of his literary works; they were aimed at achieving emotional interaction which was in fact the essence of his activities. VT had identified three principal kinds of tasks: first, the emancipation of women; second, secularizing the public sphere; and third, instilling humanitarian values among all. Nārāyaṇan finds evidences for all these in the works of VT, not realizing the dangers of "taking the elite reformers at their own face-value" and on their prevailing public image. He also does not realize the impropriety of treating VT's movement as female-emancipatory or in portraying its deeds as instances of great sacrifice.

Civic Chandṛan, "Enthukoṇdu VT?"[269] In an attempt to present VT and his ideals against E.M.S. and the communist movement, the Naxel-turned-social activist Civic Chandṛan argued that VT and E.M.S. represented contrasting attitudes, while that of the former is constructive, simple and cultural the latter's is mechanical and arrogant; the failure of the former happened to be truly catastrophic to Kerala. Civic calls the two extreme positions as *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* and Leftist Kēraḷam – the former is culture-oriented whereas the latter is political; it is unfortunate that a healthy dialogue between the two did not take place. The net result was that the course of the history of Kerala in the

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[267] *Māṭṛubhūmi Weekly*, Jan. 5, 12, 1997; also see "Avathārika", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.15-29.

[268] Devika observed Nārāyaṇan's approach as journalistic; for him, the key feature of the Nambūtiri movement was the tension between individual liberation and community-building. See J. Devika, "Engendering Individuals: The Project of Nambūtiri Brahman Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-Aug.2004, p.79.

[269] *Māṭṛubhūmi Weekly*, Dec.26, 1999, pp.8-9, 54-55. Also see Civic Chandran, *VT Ividēyuṇdu*, Vatakara, 1999.

post-independent era took a unilinear direction. As an ex-naxelite, Civic apologizes for his and his colleagues' failure to make a correct evaluation of VT in their days of ultra-radicalism, since at that time they were unaware of VT and the innovative projects that he had carried out in the realm of social reform. In the context of the failure of the communist movement and the near elimination of Gandhian ethic from the public sphere, Civic laments that it has been disastrous that the model of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* could not make headway. What the communist tradition left behind in Kerala is just empty claims. This situation ought to alert us of the greatness of VT's ideals; being rooted in the culture and tradition of Kerala the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, with its emphasis on Gandhian ethics, still remain as a promise for the future.

M.K. Sānu, "Kalāpam Oru Ātmabali".[270] In a lengthy article on his cordial experiences with VT, Sānu expresses his wonder as to how a small man like him was able to shake the very foundations of the Nambūtiri community. Sānu is embarrassed at the marked contrast between VT's legendary image and his real figure. He could not compromise with the fact that such a great man like VT was short, thin, dark and had a child-like appearance.

Sānu observes that the work of a social activist is more difficult than that of a political worker because the former usually has to function in the midst of animosity of the people since most of them, even while taking progressive attitudes in political outlook, keeps a conservative attitude in regard to customs and tradition. Sānu praises VT for his captivating quality of treating all people on equal terms and for keeping permanent contact with friends and acquaintances. In fact his weakness of sacrificing everything for maintaining personal bonds had slowly started developing into succumbing to the pressures of friends who sometimes misused the friendship for their advantage. As an estimate of a person by his intimate friend, Sānu's evaluation of VT is entirely on positive terms and largely on the basis of his own literary works.

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[270] M.K. Sānu, *Tāzhvarayilē Sañdhya*, Kottayam, 1992, pp.11-33.

K.S. Rādhākṛiṣṇan, "VT Oru Apphan Nambūtiri".[271] In a critical evaluation of VT, through a dissection of his own works, Rādhākṛiṣṇan examines the way the prevailing studies on him stands in contrast to the historical reality. He argues that VT had always taken pride in Nambūtiri culture and in his identity as a Nambūtiri. He had consciously justified the past in which the Nambūtiris dominated and the caste system which had benefited the Nambūtiris the most. He notices that VT considered all non-Nambūtiris, who showed their efficiency in any walk of life, as Nambūtiris. To identify all able and efficient people as Nambūtiris would in effect be a declaration that Nambūtiris are able and efficient. His Nambūtiri pride had persuaded VT to criticize other religions for their tradition of proselytization. Nor was his attitude sympathetic towards lower caste Hindus. It is a paradox that while Ayyaṅkāḷi, who worked for the Pulayās and conversed with them in their language through his works, is known as a Pulaya leader while VT, who worked for the Nambūtiris and spoke to them in the Nambūtiri language, is glorified as the great leader of Kerala renaissance and his works are glorified as the heritage of the entire population. It is not really correct to qualify him as the exalted emancipator of the women of Kerala since his perception of women never went beyond the Antaṛjanam*s*. He not only divorced his *sambandham* wife but did not care for his two daughters born to her.

Interview of VT.[272] In an informal talk of the later years of his life, VT disclosed his ideas on many aspects associated with his activities. He explained the circumstances of the origin of the *Sabha*, the struggle within the *Sabha* as to the course it should take; in the future the factors that attracted him to the reform movement, the major activities under his leadership, the success and failures of the *Sabha*, the reason behind his gradual withdrawal from the public sphere, and

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[271] *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement*, 16, 23 Dec.2001.

[272] By K.Gopalan Kutty, Kesavan Veluthat and D.D. Nambūtiri. It is published in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, pp.100-114, A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit*, pp.238-245, and Civic Chandran, *op.cit*, pp.90-97.

also about the areas in which he disagreed with the new social order. The interview is particularly significant in two respects. First, VT makes certain important comments about the factors that motivated him to take part in community affairs.[273] Secondly, he explains his attitude to the communists. VT observed that Nambūtiris were attracted to communism because the traditional Nambūtiri system denied a large majority of Nambūtiris property rights. He attributed his antipathy to communism to his unflinching faith in Gandhism, the ideal of Trusteeship and his natural inclination to adhere to tradition.

V.T. Vāsudēvan, VT-yudē Lōkam.[274] VT's only son, Vāsudēvan has written a large number of articles on his father, most of which are repetitions of VT's writings and are attempts to add colour to his existing cult-image. Vāsudēvan's write-ups only remind us that he is 'blessed to be the son of a great father' and is shining in borrowed light. Vāsudēvan tries to bring out the two extremes of VT's life: radicalism and impoverishment. He also refers to a typical quality of VT – his hospitality – an ideal which he retained even in his extreme poverty. His insistence on maintaining good friendships is also glorified. Apart from his references to VT's friendship with Kēḷappan, N.P. Dāmōdaran, Idaśśēri, N. Dāmōdaran, etc, Vāsudēvan points to two other important personal relationships. One of them was with Rāmasimhan's father-in-law who used to visit him. VT had great sympathy for him because he had lost everything in his suit against the murderers of Rāmasimhan. The other one was a Nambūtiri-turned-Muslim who too used to visit him; but before reaching VT's house he would take off the Muslim cap he was wearing. Both indulged in conversation all through the night.

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[273] VT reveals that he was first attracted by the nationalist movement but the slow pace and the lack of any programmes greatly disappointed him. This statement contradicts with his other statement in which he says that his association with the *Sabha* started with the Veḷḷinazhi sabha in 1916. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.192-94.

[274] In Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, pp.140-145.

In another article[275] Vāsudēvan describes certain episodes from VT's quarrels with his elder brother as if these are nowhere referred to by his father, though in fact there is nothing new in them. He traces the root of the quarrel to the general context of the Nambūtiri community where the senior and junior sons fought with each other over the question of marriage and property. A point of interest, however, is the reference to VT, staking claim over fertile plots of land, jewels and other valuables. The fight continued even at the registrar's office. This evidence contrasts sharply with VT's claim of self-sacrifice as his ideal.

Another article of Vāsudēvan on the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* colony provides us with certain important information.[276] In the context of VT's near silence on the colony project, Vāsudēvan's two observations acquire particular importance. Firstly, he associates it with the ideal of *Aikya-Kēraḷam*. Decades before the idea had come to the fore, VT had put its archaic and miniature form into practice. Secondly, Vāsudēvan recalls that VT used to attribute the collapse of the colony to the sabotage of the communists in private communication.

2:D. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF OTHER PERSONS

There are a few autobiographies of other Nambūtiri men/women who were closely associated with the *Sabha* movement or were the victims of the social system which the movement tried to replace. Apart from the autobiography of E.M.S, we have the works of Kāṇippayūṛ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, I.C.P. Nambūtiri, Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam, Pṛiyadatha Kallāt and Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd. It is unfortunate that prominent leaders of the movement like Mūthiringōt and Pāndam did not write their memoirs. Mōzhikunnam wrote his memoirs in the form of his encounter with the Malabar Rebellion which does not directly refer to the movement.

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[275] V.T. Vasudevan, "VT Ezhuthān Maṛanna Ātmakatha", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam,* March 18, 2005, pp.14-18.

[276] V.T. Vasudevan, "VTyudē Ulbuddhakēraḷam – Oru Swapnam Pōlē", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam,* Nov. 1, 2006, pp.116-119.

Among the memoirs of the contemporaries and colleagues of V.T. in the movement, that of E.M.S. Nambūtiripād is the most prominent; it is described as an ideal autobiography.[277] The memoirs of E.M.S. differs from that of V.T. in that it presents things in an extremely dispassionate manner as if walking along with history. Rather than being an autobiography it becomes the social history of his time. E.M.S. declares that his story is nothing but the story of the society at large. E.M.S. makes a study of the context of the departure from tradition to modernity and the first chapter itself is a rational interpretation of the traditional religious practices. He presents his role in the Nambūtiri movement as a necessary adjunct to his later political activities and does not present it as an end in itself as is done by V.T. Nor does he claim a supreme role in the movement as VT has so often done. He examines how his involvement in the movement equipped him to take up wider issues of social importance later in his life. Thāyāt Śaṅkaran makes a correct, though not perfectly historical, observation on the difference between the approaches of VT and EMS thus:

"In his autobiography, E.M.S. sets himself against the backdrop of the social revolution. VT and his colleagues appear as the originators of this great social transformation. E.M.S. also had an important role in it; but he shunned limelight and did not give prominence to his role anywhere in his autobiography...By heightening the emotional aspect, the master-artist in VT had in effect transformed every incident in this great social event into an appealing short story. Generally this is the method used by consummate authors of autobiographies for their overriding aim is to convey their profound emotional experiences to their readers and to arouse similar experiences in them. This emotional entanglement of the author with the theme of his work leads him astray and he sometimes slips from facts into fiction. In such cases pursuing the golden rule of the middle path is the only solution. In this matter E.M.S. and VT seem to be at two extremes. Look at the approach of these two men to the first widow marriage that took place in the Nambūtiri community. EMS sets aside all emotional factors and examines the issue with complete objectivity, as if he were drafting a party resolution. On the other hand, VT reacts with a passionate outburst and every line he writes blazes with the fire of emotion. His writings on this matter have the emotional appeal of a battle-song. As a writer, E.M.S. is a thoroughgoing realist; but VT with his emotional exuberance takes to romanticism".[278]

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[277] Vijayalayam Jayakumar, *Ātmakathā Sāhityam Malayāḷathil*, Kottayam, 1982., p.37.
[278] Thāyāt Śaṅkaran, *Vyaktikaḷ: Saṅkalpangaḷ*, Kottayam, 1978, p.42-43.

One of the very interesting autobiographies comes from Kāṇippayūṟ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, who was a prominent leader of the *Sabha* till early 1930s. He had been very active in demanding *Kaniṣṭavivāham* and *bhāgam* and even supported elimination of *ghōṣa* and the dress reform of the Antaṛjanams. But by the end of the 1920s he began to keep away from the movement complaining that 'ultra-radicalism' had crept into it and in the 1940s when the *Sabha* was revived at Ōngallūṟ he openly allied with the anti-reform party headed by T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād.[279] The mouthpiece of this group namely *Pathaka*, was published by the Panchāṅgam Press, Kunnamkuḷam, which is still owned by the Kāṇippayūṟ family. In the 1950s Kāṇippayūṟ emerged as a strong votive of the Nambūtiri interests. He unleashed a crusade against Iḷamkuḷam's historical findings, especially those related to the causative role of the Nambūtiris in the rise of the matrilineal system, feudal system, etc. He wrote a number of books attacking the views of Iḷamkuḷam.[280] He also played a crucial role in the cultural revival of Nambūtiri traditions which were attacked at one time from the point of view of reason and modern science. The books published even today by the Panchāṅgam press relating to ritualism and traditionalism is a testimony to this fact.[281]

Kāṇippayūṟ's *Smaraṇakaḷ*,[282] in three volumes, appeared in the 1960s. In these volumes, he writes about the customs and traditions of the Nambūtiris of the pre-reform days from his personal experiences. In the preface of the book he writes that the fourth volume would be the history of the *Sabha*, but it was either

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[279] T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 2:27, November 12, 1995, p.47.

[280] See his *Iḷamkuḷathintē Nambūtiri Śakāram*, Kunnakulam, 1961; *Āryanmārudē Kudiyēttam Kēraḷathil*, Kunnamkulam, 4 Vols, 1965-67; *Āchāravimarṣanam*, Kunnamkulam, 1968; *Nāyanmārudē Pūṟvacharitṟam*, 3 Vols, Kunnamkulam, 1962. As early as 1931 he had written a monograph defending the Nambūtiris against the attack from the Nāyars. See his *Samudāyamytṟi*, Kunnamkulam, 1931.

[281] Now the Kāṇippayūṟ family is specialists in *Jyōtiṣam* and *Vāstuvidya*, both are greatly influenced by traditional and largely unreasonable ideas.

[282] Kāṇippayūṟ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, *Entē Smaraṇakaḷ*, 3 Vols, Kunnamkulam, 1963-64.

not completed or is missing.[283] However, the absence of the fourth volume came to the rescue of the author for he was delivered from justifying his switching over from radicalism to revivalism. Even in his memoirs, he plainly refuses to depict the real condition of the community that necessitated a reform movement; in spite of being a critic of tradition and an activist of the reform movement in the 1920s and 30s, he presents the past as faultless and in glorious terms; in fact by refusing to examine the past critically, he is denying the basic ideals and contours of the movement. The spirit of revivalism, which started its course in the late 1930s but gained momentum in the post independence period, forced earlier reformers like Kāṇippayūṛ to depict the past as harmless. One wonders why Kāṇippayūṛ participated in the reform movement and why he opposed customs so fiercely if they were not harmful as has been portrayed by him in his memoirs. Kāṇippayūṛ's role in history also is a striking example of the development of community consciousness among the Nambūtiris with Nāyaṛs as the 'other'. A recent study of the memoirs of Kāṇippayūṛ vividly analyzes the tradition-modernity dichotomy that have worked in his thinking and social action; but it does not consider seriously the dynamics of the Nambūtiri movement or the role Kāṇippayūṛ had played in it.[284] On the whole, Kāṇippayūṛ's real personality as a reformer of the 20s and 30s is obscured in his memoirs; tradition, in contrast to modernity, gets undue space in them, but at the expense of history.[285]

I.C.P. Nambūtiri in his autobiography[286] sets himself in the backdrop of the two important developments of the times – the Nambūtiri movement and the

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[283] Kāṇippayūṛ Parameswaran Nambūtirirpad, the eldest member of the family told that it was written at the close of the life of Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād and the manuscript copy has been irrevocably lost.

[284] Sujit Kumar Pāṛayil, "Swatvathilē Samūham: Kānippayyūrintē Smaraṇakaḷ", *Pacchakkuthira*, June 2006, pp.48-59.

[285] *Ibid*, p.48.

[286] I.C.P. Nambūtiri, *Vipḷavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*, Kottayam, 2002. One half of this small work, comprising only 100 pages, deals with the reform movement.

communist movement – and depicted the dynamics of the former as having served many young Nambūtiris as a springboard to gain entry into the latter. He too, just like E.M.S, presents the *Sabha* movement from a highly rational point of view; he held that the inability and unwillingness of the community to adjust with the changing social milieu necessitated a radical reform movement. Even in his nineties, when he wrote his memoirs, there was no attempt on his part to glorify tradition and this factor sharply differentiates him from VT or Kāṇippayūṛ. But, may be because of his late entry into the movement (by then VT had become the most prominent figure in the movement) or due to his connection with VT as his brother-in-law, he has given greater importance to the role of VT in the movement than to many others, who are not even referred to (except Kuṛūṛ). But I.C.P. can be absolved of this charge on the ground that he was writing about his experiences and about the persons he was familiar with. And this may also be because he was rather a "subdued flame".[287]

In a touching memoir, Laḷitāmbika gives us her experience as a representative of the women of the Nambūtiri community and depicts her role in the reform movement as a writer and as an activist.[288] Her narration conveys the picture of a really insignificant and disgruntled life of a Nambūtiri girl in an *illam* and describes how her courage, determination and intense desire for freedom helped her to break the crust of tradition and get away to freedom. But it is an equally important fact that she would not have been able to assert herself had she not been born to a father of a considerable liberal outlook and had she not been married to a radical revolutionary. Despite her role as a social activist and a popular and versatile writer, Laḷitāmbika is not entirely free from the sort of diffidence or lack of assertiveness common to most of the feminine autobiographers of Malayāḷam. The very first sentence of the preface of her memoir states that she presents the work before the readers with considerable

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[287] M.N. Vijayan, preface in *ibid.*
[288] Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam, *Ātmakathakku Oru Āmukham*, Calicut University, 1997.

diffidence. This is not just because the work is not a real autobiography but because she was scared to look inward. This timidity worked more explicitly in withholding from the public a drama which she had written to highlight the life of a widow in 1934. She explained that an inexplicable kind of fear prevented her from it.[289] Thus, as has been correctly observed, while the autobiography of a man is the story of his gains and of his encounters with history, that of a woman is the story of her disabilities and of her disgraces.[290]

We have the memoirs of Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd,[291] who had taken part in the movement of the Antaṛjanam*s* in the 1940s after the Ōngallūṛ Sabha, especially in the working of the *Tozhil Kēndṛam* and the *Pāliyam Satyāgṛaha.* She describes the life in an *illam* in a simple and touching way without attempting a critical evaluation. Since her experience as an activist was extremely limited both in terms of space and time, she explains the condition of the community as directly experienced by her as a woman and as a native of the most conservative of the Nambūtiri villages. Apart from her faithful depiction of life inside an *illam* from a feminine perspective (but certainly not negative) and the lucid style of presentation, her memoirs fail to provide us any substantial information of the period because of her meager experience. Nor does her account in any way contribute to the cause of feminine liberation. She continued to write on some other aspects of Nambūtiri life especially those associated with the process of transformation during the reform days.[292] These are substantially informative of

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[289] *Ibid*, p.79. But her literary works of the reform period, especially her short stories, were "a slice of the Antaṛjanams' resistance as exhibited in literature" They have to be placed in the project of resistance and subversion. "The idea of a process of active self-fashioning helps to model the subjectivity of women in terms other than those of passive victims of patriarchy..." See K.M. Sheeba, "Contextualizing Sexuality: Antaṛjanams in the 20th Century Namboodiri Caste Order of Keralam", *Indian History Congress Proceedings Volume,* Millennuim Session, Kolkota, 2000-01, p.932-33.

[290] S. Saradakutty, "Stṛī Swantham Jīvitamezhuthumbōl", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 82:31, Oct.3, p.37.

[291] Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd, "Naṣṭabōdhaṅgaḷillāthē: Oru Antaṛjanathintē Ātmakatha", *Bhāṣāpōṣiṇi Annual*, 27:1, June 2003, pp.207-226.

[292] Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd, *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, Oct. 15, 2004; 83: May 15; 83: May 22; 83: June 5; 83:16, June 19; 83:20, July 17; 83:32, Oct 9; 2005. What is important here is that Mrs.

the kind of changes that took place at the cultural level but presented the Nambūtiris as victims of custom and tradition which only helped them considerably to absolve themselves from the responsibility of their downfall. In a study on the basic features that differentiate the style of the memoirs of a woman from that of a man, with special reference to Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd, a critic observed that her work lacked an assertion of the self that is visible in works of men like EMS. If it is the individual who speaks in the case of the latter, the society is the self for the former and speaks out. While for a man the ocean ahead is for being conquered, for a woman it has to be just crossed.[293]

2:E. NAMBŪTIRI WEBSITE

We have a Nambūtiri Website[294] which gives some details about the culture and tradition of the community such as the ancient Brahmin settlements, customs and habits, traditional system of education, the Nambūtiri style of architecture, etc., but strictly from a conservative viewpoint. It also gives us a summary of the history of the *Sabha* movement, which too is a reproduction of the conservative version presenting events as though they were quite natural and peaceful. Though VT and his radical intervention are presented, the description does not do justice to him. As in other kinds of conservative evaluations, there is no reference either to the pre-reform condition of the community or to the internal dynamics of the *Sabha* movement. This is particularly surprising because the text is based on the well-informed history of the *Sabha* prepared by Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri.[295] The distortion of history is more evident in the portion dealing with the history of the *Antarjanasamājam*, the early and radical period of its activity is totally relegated to the background and the relatively less significant and moderate later phase is highlighted.

Nilayaṅgōd personifies the sorrows and sufferings of the Antarjanams and the new generation people identifies her as the true representative of the Antarjanams of the reform days.

[293] S. Saradakutty, *op. cit.*, pp.34-37.

[294] Nambūtiri Websites Trust, Calicut. (www.Nambūtiri.com)

[295] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam*, Unpublished manuscript.

CHAPTER 3

THE NAMBUTIRIS: TRADITION AND CHANGE

The Malayāḷi Brahmins, who are called Nambūtiris,[1] were migrants to Kerala.[2] They were concentrated in what is now called Central Kerala and constituted less than one percent of the total population of the land.[3] Though numerically small, they were the dominant caste of the land with enormous possession of land holdings and innumerable social and political privileges. Thurston wrote that "the Nambūtiris form the socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar, and, as the traditional landlords of Paraśurāma's land, they are everywhere held in great reverence".[4] The oft quoted view of the Nambūtiri in the Census Report of Travancore, 1875, reads: "...His person is holy; his directions are commands; his movements are processions; his meal is nectar. He is the holiest of human beings. He is the representative of the god on earth..."[5] Buchanan,

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1 The term Nambūtiri is of modern origin. Ancient and early medieval records refer to them as *Nambis*. Personal Conversation, M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut, 16-01-2005. Also see M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, p.148. The Travancore Census Reports included Pottis and Embṛāns into the category of Malayāḷa Brahmans. They too were migrants to Kerala and followed practices almost akin to the Nambūtiris. While the Pottis, who were Vaishnaites, were concentrated in the extreme south, the Embṛāns were located in the extreme north. See V. Nagam Aiya, Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891, Vol. I, Report, Madras, 1894, pp.651-52. Traditionally the Nambūtiris treated them as ritually inferior and the *Yōgakṣēmasabha* movement started a programme to form a monolithic community by bringing together all these subdivisions.

2 M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, "A History of the Nambūtiri Community in Kerala" in Frits Stall ed., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, Vol. 2, Delhi, 1983, pp.256-59.

3 Based on the Census of 1891, Fawcett stated that the Nambūtiris of Malabar constituted 0.4% of the total population of the province i.e., 9926 out of 2,652,565. Their families numbered 1017. Fred Fawcett, *Nambūtiris*, Madras, 2001, Reprint, p.48. The Census Report of Travancore, 1891, puts the population strength of the Malayāḷa Brahmans, including all subdivisions, at 0.66% of the Hindu population. V. Nagam Aiya, *Report on the Census of Travancore*, 1891, Vol. I, Report, Madras, 1894, p.652.

4 E. Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Vol. V, Delhi, 1975, p.152.

5 *Report on the Census of Travancore 1875*, TVM, 1876, p.191. The report is evidently panegyric but it reveals the status of the Nambūtiris. The remaining part of the quoting reads: "...His house is his castle. It generally commands an extensive view and is situated in the centre of his large estates of which he is the undisputed Jenm Lord. His tenants, all of them

writing at the beginning of the 19th century, observed that "...the Nambūris, the lowest of whom is of a much higher birth than any prince on earth".[6] However, some of the Europeans equally scorned the Nambūtiris: "Of the Malayāḷi castes the most exclusive, and the most conservative, and in the European sense, nearly the most unenlightened is that of the indigenous Malayāḷi Brahmins called Nambūtiris...They seem to have embodied in the Sānskṛit language rules of life regulating their most trivial actions, and at every step their conduct is hampered and restrained by what appear to European eyes absurd customs. They shun publicity, and it is exceedingly difficult to obtain exact knowledge of what they do, or think, or feel".[7] Their two special characteristics – exclusiveness and simplicity – also struck the European observers.[8]

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peaceful and contented on account of his unexacting nature, his genial manners, and considerate treatment, bow down to him not simply as a landlord, but as their royal liege and benefactor, their suzerain master, their household deity, their very god on earth, and pay their customary dues with a goodwill and happy face generation after generation...The walls of his house keep immaculate the purity of his household. His lowborn tenant dare not approach within the polluting distance. He dare not cast his eye upon what passes within the holy precincts. Even the lawless robber shrinks from the desecration of the venerable 'illam'. Such is the popular estimation in which he is held". The same passage is repeated in the Census Report of 1891. See V. Nagam Aiya, *op.cit*, p.653.

6 Francis Buchanan, *A Journey From Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara And Malabar*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1988, Reprint, p.424.

7 William Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, p.119. The European missionary perception of the Nambūtiris is much harsher than those of Logan or Nagam Aiya. "The Brahmans in Travancore have secured for themselves a singularly high and unfair superiority over all other classes – very different from their present position in British India. Though comparatively so few in number..., they are the only class that are free from all social and religious disabilities, and enjoy perfect liberty of action. The whole framework of Hinduism has been adapted to the comfort and exaltation of the Brahman. His word is law; his smile confers happiness and salvation; his power with heaven is unlimited; the very dust of his feet is purifying in its nature and efficacy. Each is an infallible pope in his own sphere. The Brahman is the exclusive and Pharisaic Jew of India. He is professedly the pure and exalted priest, separate from all that is 'common and unclean'". Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi, 1991, pp.31-32.

8 Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.33. Exclusiveness was of course a general character of all Brahmans. Gough observes: "The Brahmans exhibit a high degree of internal interaction and external exclusiveness". E. Kathleen Gough, "Caste in a Tanjore Village" in E.R. Leach ed., *Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan*, Cambridge, 1971, p.35. Gough points out the special customs that characterized the Brahmans which were mostly connected with their belief in pollution and their ascetic philosophy. These included cremation rather than burial of the dead, widow celibacy, the prohibition of divorce, vegetarianism, the prohibition

A Nambūtiri sought his tradition in the *Kēraḷōlpathi* chronicle and the legend of Paraśurāma.[9] As per tradition, Paraśurāma reclaimed the whole land by himself from the sea and donated it to the Brahmins[10] whom he brought in and made the sovereign *janmis* thereof; the earliest 32 settlements[11] were founded by him; he made certain innovations in their customs and manners in order to enable them to stick on to the country; he ordained the caste system in Kerala to suit the new conditions; and he regulated the customs and traditions of the Śūdras, such as *marumakkathāyam* and *sambandham*, for purposes of personal service and for the benefit of the Nambūtiris. Nambūtiris referred to *Śānkarasmṛiti,* which was held to be written by Śaṅkara, as the authentic and divine scripture that regulated their daily life and life-cycle rituals. It ordained their life in accordance with the 64 *Anāchārams* or irregular customs not observed by Brahmins elsewhere.[12] Thus

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of animal sacrifice except during the performance of yagams and the use of Sanskrit texts in household ceremonies. *Ibid*, pp.53-54.

9 The *Śānkarasmṛiti*, also called *Lakhudharmapṛakāśika*, in its present form, was a product of about the seventeenth century. M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, p.274. It is observed that it is a "law book of uncertain date and unidentified authorship, but which declares itself to be based on the much larger Bhargavasmriti attributed to Paraśurāma...out of the thirty six chapters the work is supposed to contain, only the first twelve has come down to us and that neither *Śānkarasmṛiti* nor the *Bhargavasmriti* is mentioned in any of the known works on *Dharmasastra*. Even in Kerala the latter work is known only by its mention in the former..." S. Venkatasubramonia Iyer, "The Anācārās of Kerala", *Journal of Indian History,* Vol. XLVII, Part II, 1969, pp.559-60. Iyer, by quoting Uḷḷūr (*Keraḷasāhitya Charitṛam*, Vol. II, p.37) stated that the author Śankara was the Śankarapujyapada of Payyur and attributed the work to the 14th century. In his discussion with Gandhi over the question of pollution during the time of the Vaikam Satyagraha, Vaḷḷathoḷ argued that *Śānkarasmṛiti* was not only a concocted work but was not older than 500 years. *YK*, 15:53; Mar 28, 1925.

10 It is observed that the tradition of Paraśurāma's violent quarrels with the kṣatṛiyās, his gift of the whole earth to Kaśyapas, and his creation of the new land from the sea have nothing to do with Kerala. They are associated with places in Saurāṣtra, Gujarat and Maharashtra because they refer to places of the north up to the Vindhyas. However, these legends may allude to northern settlements on the west coast of Brahmins belonging to the Kaśyapa and Bhāṛgava clans. When these Brahmins migrated further south along the west coast, they seem to have carried the Paraśurāma legend with them, with the result that there is an association of the Konkan, Canara and Kerala countries with the alleged reclamation of land by the great sage. M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, p.257.

11 Of the 64 grāmās, 32 proper were located in the land of Kerala. See Kesavan Veluthat, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies,* Calicut, 1978, pp.21-38.

12 For a list of the 64 Anāchārams, see T.C. Parameswaran Mūssat, *Śānkarasmṛiti,* Tṛiśśūṛ, 1081ME, Section 4, Chapter 12, pp.263-67; Edgar Thurston, *op.cit*, pp.185-89; Fred Fawcett,

while Paraśurāma bestowed them with their lands, Śańkara regulated their daily life and customary traditions.

As the landed aristocracy and the religious elite, the Nambūtiris were keen in keeping up their population low, befitting a true aristocracy, and their marriage and inheritance clearly served to meet this end. They followed primogeniture which was meant to keep the *illam* property intact: if only the eldest son could produce an heir to the family estate it would never have to be divided. Thus it was easier for them to maintain their position as a landed aristocracy; indeed, any addition by gift or purchase only served to improve a family's position. These wealthy landlords would have had far less influence and power if their property had been split every generation or two, as was the case among the Brahmans in other parts of India.[13]

3:1. Migration and Settlements

The Brahmin migration to Kerala has been traced back to the last centuries of the first millennium BC. The first wave of migration took place in the age of Sańgam or the period of ancient Tamiḻakam.[14] It has been observed that Brahmins, along with their Vedic-purānic lore and ritual tradition, formed an influential section of Tamiḻ Sańgam society and played a crucial role in policy-making in the

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Nambūtiris, New Delhi, 2001, pp54-56; L.K.A.K. Iyer, *Tribes and Castes of Cochin*, Vol.15 (ii) New Delhi, 1987, pp262-66. It was believed that Malabar had 4 *Āchārams* or good rules of conduct and 60 *Anāchārams* or peculiarities which were looked upon as irregular and as such condemned by foreign Brahmins. It was held that in the other coast there were only 4 *Anāchārams* while 60 were *Āchārams*. The foreign Brahmins ridiculed them as 'vanarāchāram', or the practice of monkeys. But the Nambūtiris held that so far as the Śastṛa-basis for ceremonies were concerned, there was absolutely no difference between the Brahmins of the East and the West Coast; the differences, if any, were only in the minor observances or 'tantṛams' as contradistinguished from 'mantṛams'. V. Nagam Aiya, *op.cit*, p.677. Thurston writes that these Anāchārams may be grouped into six main classes: 1) personal hygeine – bathing, 2) eating, 3) worship of the Gods and manes, 4) conduct in society, 5) āśṛamās or stages in life, and 6) regulation of women's conduct. Thurston, *op.cit*, pp.189-91.

[13] Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, "Kinship and Marriage Regulations Among the Nambūtiri Brahmans of Kerala", *Man*, 2:1 (n.s), March 1967, p.89.

[14] M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, pp.256-57.

courts of the chieftains of Tamiḻakam during the Saṅgam age.[15] Repeated waves of Brahmins came and settled in Kerala; the second largest migration was during the time of the Kadambas and Chālūkyas from 4th Century AD onwards; the thirty-two traditional settlements of Kerala were established in the period of Chālūkya hegemony during the seventh and eighth centuries AD.[16] The three biggest clusters of the traditional Brahmin settlements are found on the banks of Pamba, Periyār and Pērār[17] which would appear to reveal an early preference for arable land. The Brahmin settlements played a decisive role in the rise of the Cēra kingdom of Mahōdayapuram in the ninth century. These Brahmin settlements were distinguished by their peculiar temple-centered organization; with temple councils having vast regulatory and punitive powers for the administration of communal property; and systematic functioning of villages through regulatory codes called the *kacchams*.

Vast landed properties came into the hands of the Brahmins as corporate and individual holdings which were administered through village councils and regulatory codes. The landed wealth naturally gave the Brahmins great authority over a large army of tenants, both as temple administrators and landlords. The alliance between the ruler and the priest tightened feudal ties of dependence; the skilful blending of the sense of obligation to the landlord and devotion to the deity certainly made the lord-tenant relationship doubly strong and secure.[18] As in the case of tenants, the Brahmin settlers were in an advantageous position in respect to the temple servants as well. In addition to the priestly hierarchy, large groups of skilled labourers were necessary for the temples. These functionaries, who were remunerated by land assignment on service tenure, became hereditary and gave birth to small sub-castes generally known as *Ambalavāsis*.

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[15] M.G.S. Narayanan, "The Vedic-Puranic-Sastraic Element in Tamil Sangam society and Culture", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, XXXVI Session, Aligarh, 1976.

[16] M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, p.258.

[17] Veluthat Kesavan, *Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies*, p.31.

[18] M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, p.262. Gough calls this structured social relationship as "relationship of servitude". E. Kathleen Gough, "Criteria of Caste Ranking in Kerala", *Man in India*, Vol. 39, No. 2, June 1959, p.115.

Besides control of landed property and human resources through temple patronage, the Kerala Brahmins also enjoyed political power through the constitution of *Nālu Taḷi* (the Four Temples), which functioned at the capital town of Mahōdayapuram. The *Nālu Taḷi* were the seats of the representatives of the four important Brahmin settlements of Mūzhikkuḷam, Airāṇikkaḷam, Paravūr and Irinjālakkuda and acted as the advisory council of the Perumāḷs.[19] Whether the council of *Nālu Taḷi* had the power to control the sovereign, as is claimed by *Kēraḷōlpathi*, is not certain, but the status of this institution as the integral part of the Perumāḷ's ministerial council is established by epigraphic evidence.[20]

The strange phenomenon of a numerically small community, unarmed and totally non-violent, with starkly simple life-styles, spreading wisdom and learning, with conspicuous generosity, genes among all around and establishing such complete cultural domination over a territory, has naturally prompted several theories in explanation. The conventional and popular one is that it was the superiority of the intellect of the Brahmins that led them to the conquest. As extension of this explanation, it is pointed out that they were the confidantes and councilors of the kings, and, in course of time, biologically also their fathers.[21] So the Nambūtiri prominence was because they were independent and sacrosanct which enabled the release of the forces of production. Recently, historians have sought a materialistic dialectic to explain it, by postulating that the Nambūtiris contributed to increased production of wealth, by innovating and propagating new technologies of agriculture and by 'knowledge production'.[22]

A significant feature of the Cēra period was the rise and development of numerous brāhmanical temples. This was also a period in which Vedic ritual had lost its popularity all over India and the Agamāic mode of temple worship

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[19] M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, p.263.
[20] *Ibid*, p.264.
[21] M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, 1996, pp.141-49.
[22] KN Ganesh, *Kēraḷathintē Innalēkaḷ*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1990, pp.265-72.

assumed importance.[23] A curios amalgam of the two may have developed in Kerala too; while the Vedic forms of community ritual survived in certain pockets as a relic of ancient tradition, the new forms of Agamāic temple worship dominated in the social realm. In addition to routine worship and special offerings, the temple was also the major proprietor of the land in Kerala, regulating conditions of tenure and influencing rate of interest, prices and wages. Attached to them were also institutions like the *śālai* or Vedic college[24] and the *Kūthambalam* or theatre.[25] Soon the brahmanical temples grew into gigantic establishments controlling every aspect of social life and culture.[26]

After the collapse of the kingdom of the Perumāḷs and with the disintegration of the central government, political power fell into the hands of several feudatory chieftains. The Brahmin community, with its numerous interrelated settlements and temple corporations, became the only pan-Kerala power. They had established a system of legal immunity which in a sense elevated their status even over that of the ruling class. Most of the settlements continued to be economically prosperous, although the increase of wealth often weakened the sense of solidarity and led to licentiousness.[27] A few Brahmins emerged to political authority as chieftains (like those of Edappalli and Ambalappuzha) and as influential families (such as those of Āzhvānchēri). The political influence of the *saṅkēta* or temple corporation also became very powerful in this period.

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[23] M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, p.265.

[24] The great *Śalais* of Kerala such as those of Kāntaḷūr, Pārthivasēkharapuram, Tiruvalla and Mūzhikkuḷam promoted Sanskritic and Brahmanical studies. Teachers called *Bhattās* imparted learning to their disciples who were known as *cattās* or *chatras*. See Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1970, pp.267-77.

[25] While the *Śālais* catered to the educational needs of the Brahmin community, the *Kūthambalam* fostered the arts of singing, acting, dancing and storytelling. A large number of Chākkiyārs, Nambiyārs and Nangiyārs were attached to the temples. Women called *dēvadāsis* or *tēvadichikaḷ*, also were attached to the temples. *Ibid*, pp.278-83.

[26] The temple committees were placed almost above the "wrath of kings and feudatories". Veluthat Kesavan, "Role of Temples in Kerala Society (AD 1100-1500)", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. III, Part II, 1973, p.185.

[27] Ilamkulam described this period as the orgiastic season of the Nambūtiri elite. Ilamkulam Kunjan Pilla, *Kēraḷa Charitrathintē Iruḷadanja Ēdukaḷ*, Kottayam, 1963, p.81.

The Brahmin settlements also engaged in fierce competition with one another, the feud of the two neighbouring settlements of Panniyūṛ and Chōkiram is a classic case on this point. It developed in the post-Cēra period but its origins are unclear.[28] When the Zāmōṛin patronized the Panniyūṛ faction, Vaḷḷuvakkōnātiri, who was an ally of the Cochin Rāja, supported Śukapuram. The intensity of the feud is indicated by the fact that the two grāmās followed opposite ways in everything from sacrificial rituals to the manner of cutting vegetables. They never dined together, and they did not intermarry. The Panniyūṛ Brahmins ultimately lost the privilege of performing Vedic sacrifices. Moreover, Āzhvānchēri Tambṛākkaḷ, who was the spiritual leader of the Śukapuram group, also became the chief ecclesiastical functionary in the coronation ceremony of several Rājas in medieval Kerala, including the Zāmōṛins of Calicut and the rulers of Vēṇād.

The successful domination by the Nambūtiri community of medieval society and polity was the outcome of a grand alliance between the Nambūtiris and the ruling groups. It would appear that the Brahmins of Kerala had 'aryanized' them, giving them Sānskṛit names and sānskṛitic culture. These ruling families, which had been following the matrilineal form of succession, now started getting their women usually married to Nambūtiri Brahmins, with the result that all the rulers in Kerala were sons of Brahmins. This was also true of the Sāmanta and Nāyaṛ kings, chieftains and landlords. Therefore the priestly educated group of Nambūtiris had a direct hold on politics, war and administration, in addition to their functions as councilors and messengers. Thus as relatives of the rulers, administrators, and warriors, the Brahmins occupied a unique position which enabled them to command respect and influence.

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[28] According to tradition, the spirit of competition led Panniyūr Brahmins to accept Paradēśi teachers, and this paved the way to disputes and violence. Finally they polluted the temple of Śukapuram, as a result of which they lost ritual privileges and came to be looked down upon by the rest of society. M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, pp.270-71.

By acquiring a command over the society and administration and having established their supremacy over the tenant and temple classes, the Nambūtiris emerged as the wealthiest and the most protected section of the society. They did not take to priestly function since it was beneath their dignity to take up such an occupation. Temple arts and culture prospered at the patronage of the Nambūtiris. The Brahmin ownership of temple, coupled with *sambandham* relations with temple-serving classes, accelerated the dissemination of brahmanical Hindu culture. Throughout the medieval period the Nambūtiris contributed much to creative activities and achieved a high standard in science, philosophy, the arts and literature. However, most of the Nambūtiris followed worship and learning by proxy, concentrating their attention primarily on worldly affairs and the pursuit of arts and leisure.

3:2. Subdivisions

At the top of the traditional hierarchy in Kerala were the Nambūtiri Brahmins. They were never a homogenous community; they were fragmented into numerous groups on the basis of ritual hierarchy. There were 8 subdivisions among them in addition to several other groupings.[29] Aiyappan observes this Kerala pattern as the ancient rank order.[30]

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[29] Mencher says that they were divided into ten endogamous sub-castes with diminishing privilege and prestige. But she does not list the groups separately. Joan P. Mencher, "The Nāyars of South Malabar" in M.F. Nimkoff ed., *Comparative Family Systems*, Boston, 1965, p.166. Innes observed that they cannot be regarded as sub-castes, since marriage between them was not prohibited. C.A. Innes, edited by F.B. Evans, *Malabar*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p.108. Iyer stated that these divisions, to some extent, were based on occupation. To some Brahman families were assigned the learned professions and the privilege of making sacrifices, to others the professions of medicine, sorcery, and magic, to a third astrology and astronomy, to a fourth the duty of performing pujas in temples and so on. While some had the Government of the land, others were armed to protect the country from foreign incursions and internecine quarrels. There were also others who were endowed with special spiritual functions. He also noticed that they were slowly losing their social prominence. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *Tribes and Castes of Cochin*, Vol.15 (ii), New Delhi, 1987, p.275.

[30] A. Aiyappan, "A Case Study for a Sub-discipline: Brahminology", *Man in India*, 63:4, Dec.1983, p.344. Aiyappan noted the nature of social ranking in Kerala with the highest being those proficient in Vedic studies, the next those skilled in the Vedic sacrifices, the next one the

1. Tambṛākkaḷ: The lordly Brahmins of the illustrious houses of the Tambṛākkaḷ were the most important of the Brahmins of Kerala. Of the two Tambṛākkaḷ families of South Malabar, namely, Kalpanchēri and Āzhvānchēri, only the latter one has survived.[31] The Āzhvānchēri Tambṛākkaḷ thus became the supreme authority, the pontiff of the community, whose decision on any matter relating to caste or to ritual was final. They had supervised the coronation ceremony of many of the chieftains of medieval Kerala.[32] As spiritual samṛāts, they were entitled to (1) *bhadṛāsanam*, or the highest position in an assembly, (2) *bṛahmavarchassu*, or authority in Vedic lore, and consequent sanctity, (3) *bṛahmasāmṛājyam*, or lordship over Brahmans, (4) *saṛvamānyam*, or universal acknowledgement of reverence.[33] Once in six years he was bestowed by the MahaRāja of Travancore with the greatest honour of being invited to take part in the *Muṛajapam*. Though considered higher than all other subdivisions, they formed, with the *Āddhyans*, an endogamous community.

2. Āddhyans. They form eight families, called *Aṣṭaddyas*.[34] The fund of accumulated spirituality inherited from remote ancestors was considered to be so large that sacrifices (*yāgas*) as well as vānapṛastha and sanyāsa were reckoned as

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purōhits, then those proficient in śastṛas, arts etc, and finally those working as pūjāris in the temples.

[31] See Thurston, *op.cit*, p.164. This family also is facing extinction. Since succession is patrilineal, there will be no male heir to inherit the title after the present Tambṛākkaḷ (who is 84 now) and the term of his only son. The son do not have male offspring but only a daughter who cannot succeed him. Personal conversation, Āthavanād, 11-10-2005.

[32] Buchanan wrote that after meeting the Tambṛākkaḷ he soon discovered him to be "an idiot, who grinned with a foolish laugh when the most serious questions were proposed to him". Buchanan, *op.cit*, p.424.

[33] Thurston, *op.cit*, p.164.

[34] Nagam Aiya, *Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891*, p.657 lists the eight families as 1) Pūvaḷḷi, 2) Oḷappamaṇṇa, 3) Varikkāśśēri, 4) Kūdallūr, 5) Porayannūr, 6) Oraḷāchēri, 7) Mēppāttu and 8) Edamana. But he goes on to state that "these Ādhyans are now a numerous body, having multiplied from the original eight families of Paraśurāma's time, though now known under other new names of 'Illoms'". In fact the number 8 does not seem to be sacred; Iyer gives a list of 8 clusters of Nambūtiri houses consisting of 20 houses. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *Tribes and Castes of Cochin*, Vol.15 (ii), New Delhi, 1987, p.171.

being supererogatory for even the last in descent.[35] The Tantṛis of Kerala were Āddhyans with temple administration as their specialized function. They were constituted to act as gurus of the temple priests and were the final authorities in all matters of temple ritual. In conversation they are always referred to with the suffix 'Nambūri' (such as Pūmuḷḷi Nambūri, Oḷappamaṇṇa Nambūri). Their women were distinguished from other Nambūtiri women by peculiarities of dress and caste marks[36] and they marry their girls only into other Āddhyan families.

3. Viśiṣṭa. The members of the community (irrespective of whether they were Āddhyans or not) who had performed yāgas or yajnas, and had attained exceptional knowledge of the Vēda, Vēdānta, and śāstṛa, were known as Viśiṣṭa or distinguished. These were of two classes, Agnihōtṛis and Bhaṭṭathiris. The former were the ritualists, and were of three kinds – Akkithiris, Aditiris and Chōmātiris. The Bhaṭṭathiris were the philosophers and were the great religious teachers of Malabar. Another set of people that came under this head was the *Vādhyāns* or heads of Vēdic schools, such as those at Tṛiśśūṛ and Tirunavaya; the six *Vaidikans* who specialized in the interpretation of the rules relating to the caste and its observation by the members thereof; and the *Smāṛtas* who were specially appointed as presidents of tribunals constituted for conducting *Smāṛtavichāram.*

4. Samanyas. Thurston calls them as the Nambūtiri proletariat.[37] They were the common people, constituting the bulk of the Nambūtiri population. They were subdivided into the *Ōthuḷḷa* (fully entitled to Vedic lore) and the *Ōthillātha* (not entitled to Vedic lore) varieties. They performed *pūjas* in temples and practiced *Mantṛa-vādams*. They were also *Tantṛis* in temples.

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[35] Thurston, *op.cit*, p.165.

[36] They wore silver bangles instead of the common practice of wearing bell-metal bangles. There are also several differences between the Ādyans and non-ādyans. For details see Thurston, *op.cit*, pp.169-70. For a flimsy and highly flattering description of women's dressing patterns see Kāṇippayūṛ Śankaran Nambūtiripād, *Entē Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. I, Kunnamkulam, 1963, pp.171-79. VT gives a few more details. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.176.

[37] Thurston, *op.cit*, p.166.

5. Jātimātṛas. This category include the eight leading physician families of Malabar, or *Aşta Vaidyans* (also called Müss); the class of Nambūtiris called *Yātṛakaḷikkāṛ* (or *śāstṛa* Nambūtiris), who were half-kşatṛiyas, in as much as they received the sword from Paraśurāma for the defense of Kerala; and *patita* Nambūtiris, who had abandoned the study of the Vedas owing to poverty, disease or physical debility. All these groups, though not entitled to undergo the full course of the Vedic studies, were admitted to the first or the primary course known as *mutalmuṛa*.

6. Sānkētikans. They were Embṛāns and were of six kinds such as Thiruvalla Dēśikaḷ, Trippūnithuṛa Dēśikaḷ, Akkara Dēśikaḷ, Ikkara Dēśikaḷ, Kaṛnātakanmaṛ, and Thōvāḷanmaṛ. They were degraded by Paraśurāma for they had refused to stay on the land, finding it uninhabitable, but returned after some time.

7. Śāpagrastanmaṛ. They were said to have questioned the divine nature of Paraśurāma. They were neither entitled to any caste honours nor to the study of the Vedas.

8. Pāpişţanmāṛ. They were descendants of those who vicariously bore the burden of Paraśurāma's sin in having massacred kşatṛiyās and consisted of such minor subdivisions as (a) Ūrilparişa Müssath; (b) *Grāmaṇi* Nambūtiris who conspired to murder Bhūtharāya Pāndi Perumāḷ, one of the sovereigns of Malabar; (c) the Nambūtiris of the Panniyūṛ village; (d) Nambidis, who murdered the sovereign to please the Brahmins; (e) Iḷayats who condescended to perform the rites and ceremonies of the Südṛa class.

All the eight orders of Brahmins may be classed under two large subdivisions with reference to their right to the study of the Vedas, namely those who had the right or *Ōthuḷḷavaṛ* and those who had not or *Ōthillāthavaṛ*. While the former were entitled to recite and propound the Vedas and perform and conduct the 16 rites or the *şodaśakṛiyas*, the latter were denied the right to both the study of the Vedas and to superintend the performance of the 16 ceremonials. The Jātimātṛas and the

Śāpagrastās belong to this second class. They were however, allowed to observe the ceremonies for themselves. The women of one class did not eat in the company of the other class whether males or females.

It is recorded in the Cochin Census Report, 1901 that certain special privileges in regard to the performance of religious rites and other matters of a purely social nature serve as the best basis for a subdivision of the Nambūtiris in the order of social precedence as recognized amongst themselves. For this purpose, the privileges may be grouped under two main classes, as given in the following mnemonic formula:-

A

1. Ēdu: the right of studying and teaching the Vedas and Śāstṛas
2. Piccha: the right of officiating as family priests
3. Ōthu: the right of studying the Vedas
4. Adukkaḷa: the right of cooking for all classes of Brahmans
5. Kaṭavu: the right of bathing in the same bathing place with other brahmans.

B

1. Ādu: the right of performing holy sacrifices
2. Bhikṣa: the right of becoming a sanyāsi
3. Śānthi: the right of performing priestly functions in temples
4. Araṅgu: the right of taking part in the performance of *Śāstṛāṅgam* Nambūtiris
5. Panthi: the right of messing in the same row with other Brahmans

Those who enjoyed the privileges of No.1 in A were entitled to all the privileges in A and B; those enjoying No.2 in A had all the privileges from No.2 downwards in A and B; Those having No.3 in A had similarly all the privileges from No.3 downwards in A and B, and so on. Those entitled in No. 1 in B had all the privileges except No.1 in A; similarly those entitled to No. 2 in B had all the privileges from No.2 downwards in B, but only from No.3 downwards in A, and so on.[38]

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[38] Cited in Thurston, *op.cit*, pp.167-68.

The sixteen families of Payyannūṛ formed a distinct group among the Nambūtiris.[39] They were called *Tirumumbus* or *Ammōmans* and were matrilineal. They were *Yajuṛvēdis* and had no priesthood. Even in their own temples, they did not officiate but employed Nambūtiri priests. Though one of the earliest Brahmin settlements in Kerala, they were treated as ritually inferior by other Nambūtiris. It was supposed that they were not pure bred, having Kṣatṛiya blood in their veins. They were not invited to partake in the *Muṛajapam*. But they too observed all the 16 *samskārams* and all the 64 *Anāchārams*; wore the sacred thread, kept the frontal tuft and were addicted to the mania of purificatory bath. Married and unmarried Tirumumbu women observed *ghōṣa* like the Antarjanams. They followed all the marriage rites prescribed for Nambūtiris, but being matrilineal, marriages were matrilocal.[40] Tirumumbu women were always married to Nambūtiris just like the Nāyaṛ *sambandham* but it was rare that Nambūtiri women were given in marriage to Tirumumbus.[41] Nambūtiri husbands stayed on and were maintained by their wives' families;[42] they were largely sexual partners only. Males married outside the caste, from the matrilineal castes especially Nāyaṛs, and their children did not belong to the father's caste or *taṛawād*. But their marriage was 'virilocal', for the husband brought the wife home and lodged in a separate

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[39] Among these only 7 survived in the 1970s. They were Thāzhēkkāṭṭ, Rēramangalam, Kunjimangalam, Kunnathu, Thaḷiyil, Thāvathu, and Thēlakkāṭṭ. Fr. J. Puthenkalam, *Marriage and Family in Kerala*, Calgary, 1977, p.192. Earlier, in 1912, Iyer had noted that only the first four manas survived. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit*, p.195.

[40] Their marriage was as much a sacrament as the marriage of the Nambūtiris. To adopt it to the system of inheritance through females, they used the well-known formula of the *smritis* applicable to the marriage of a girl whose issue were intended to become the children of her father. The marriage formula "this girl, *without a brother*, I give you...the children born of her shall be my children" the Payyannūr Brahmans used after omitting the words 'without a brother'. *Ibid*, p.189.

[41] Besides considerations of caste, which were itself weighty reasons, there might have been also economic deterrent against such marriages because the Tirumumbu males had no right in the family except for maintenance and the Nambūtiri woman lost all her financial rights in her father's *illam* on marriage. *Ibid*, p.188.

[42] Nambūtiri bridegrooms of Tirumumbu women were baptized Tirumumbus and in almost all cases these lost touch with their *illams*. *Ibid*, p.189.

house called *madham*.[43] Adultery was severely punished by a court of trial called *Smārthavichāram* as in the case of the Nambūtiris.

3:3. Caste Council

The caste council of the Nambūtiris consisted of the *Tambrākkaḷ*, *Vādhyans*, *Vaidikans*, *Smārtans*, *Mimāmsakās* and *Akakōyma*.[44] All the posts were hereditary. The council dealt with cases of caste offences including incest and adultery and disputes within the community. Though it functioned at four levels – at the locality, *grāmam*, territory and state – almost all the affairs of the caste were settled at the *grāmam* level. Minor offences were punishable by infliction of penance, fasting or doing special *pūja*. Graver offences were dealt with excommunication from the caste, which was the most terrible punishment. Against the decision of the *Smārtans*, there was no appeal. Adultery between a Nambūtiri woman and a man of inferior caste was perhaps the most serious of all caste offences.

All Nambūtiri families of Kerala were affiliated to two *Yōgams* - Tṛiśśūṛ and Tirunavaya – and owned spiritual allegiance to two ecclesiastical heads or *Vādhyans* of these two *yōgams*.[45] Their office was hereditary and they belonged to two ancient Nambūtiri families –*Yēṛkkara* and *Changiliyōdu illams* respectively. The two mutts (Tṛiśśūṛ and Tirunavaya) owned immense estates and the revenue from these were spent by the *Vādhyans* for the Vedic instruction of hundreds of Nambūtiri youths who were fed and boarded there.

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[43] But she along with her children had to vacate the house at the death of her husband and to return to her natal home. *Ibid*, p.194.

[44] For details see P.R.G. Mathur, "Caste Council Among the Namputiri Brahmans of Kerala", *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 22:2, 1969, pp.207-24.

[45] Though they were the principals of these Vedic schools, they were invited to attend caste councils during the time when very serious cases affecting the community were resolved. *Ibid*, p.209.

For dealing with offences against caste regulations, there was a council consisting of six *Vaidikans* and eight *Smāṛtans*.[46] The seat of the *Vaidikans* was hereditary; they came from such families as Thykād, Cheṛumukku, Perumpadappu, Kapḷingād, Pandal and Kaimukku and belonged to three villages, with two from each village. The first two belonged to Chovvaram village, the second two to Peruvanam and the last two to Iriṇjālakuda. They dealt with caste offences, disputes on custom and took vigil on enforcing ethical codes. They were supposed to be men of great learning and ability, and well versed in caste matters as laid down by *Smṛitis* and long established usage. For heinous infringement of caste rules, they excommunicated the offenders; for smaller aberrations they laid down expiatory ceremonies such as fasts, baths, *japam*, *dānam* and penalties. No decision could be passed except by the two *Vaidikans* sitting together. The decisions of any two of these *Vaidikans*, so far as their villages were concerned, were final in all caste disputes.[47]

In addition there were six *Smāṛtans* (originally 8), who presided over the assemblies at which caste offences, particularly related to incest and adultery called *Smārtavichāram*, were tried. They were in fact Vedic judges but acted in accordance with the advice of the *Vaidikans* in the matter of caste rules during the caste trial. The *Mimāmsakās* were religious preceptors who were particularly well versed in caste rules and they accompanied the *Smāṛtan* to the place of trial. The *Akakōyma* was the local caste headman, in most cases, the biggest landlord of the area, who presided over resolving local disputes and caste offences.

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[46] Though it is the traditional number, the real number of them is different. Mathur gives the list of 11 vaidikans at the level of 7 gramams all over Kerala. *Ibid*, p.222.

[47] Writing at the end of the 19th century, Logan observed that during the last few years the decision of such an assembly, which in former days had yielded no appeal to any other authority, was called in question and there were attempts to overrule its decision. William Logan, *op.cit*, pp.121-22.

3:4. Inheritance and property Rights

The law as followed by the Nambūtiris differed from the Hindu Law of *Mitākṣara* followed by Brahmins elsewhere, in that it barred the members of an *illam* from demanding partition of the family properties. In this respect the law of the Nambūtiris was the same as the *marumakkathāyam* law. But whether the Nambūtiri law was an adaptation of the *marumakkathāyam* law or a continuation of the old Hindu Law before it was subjected to modification into the *Mitākṣara* law is not certain.[48] Its variations from the strict Hindu law and its resemblance to *Marumakkathāyam* law was fully stated in Vāsudēvan v. Secretary of State thus:[49]

"As to the question, what law is to be applied to Namboodri Brahmins, the Judge has found that they are governed by Hindu Law as modified by special customs which they have adopted since their settlement in Malabar...succession is traced among Namboodries through males and property passes from father to son...Again legal marriage is the basis of the law of succession among the Namboodries as among Brahmins of the East Coast...Thus the notion of paternal relation founded upon legal marriage as the cause of inheritance obtains both under Hindu law and among Namboodri Brahmins. Further, a Namboodri woman in common with a Brahmin on this side of the ghats, takes her husband's *Gōṭṛam* upon her marriage and passes into his family from that of her father; and perpetual widowhood and incapacity to remarry on her husband's death are the incidents of marriage both among Namboodries and Brahmins of the East Coast...Moreover the same rule of collateral succession obtains both among Namboodri Brahmins and other Brahmins in southern India...Moreover, Namboodries and the Brahmins on the east Coast recognize alike the authority of the Vedas and of *Smritis* and they have faith in the religious efficacy of ceremonial observances and of funeral and annual obsequies. We may also refer to the ceremony of investiture or *Upanayanam* and to the notion of second birth as common to both. The view therefore, that when Namboodries settled in Malabar, they carried their personal law with them though they changed it in some respects after their settlement on the west coast, is supported not only by the foregoing facts, but also by the fact that *Gotrams* of

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[48] It is argued that the Nambūtiris carried with them to their new home the Hindu Law as it prevailed at the time of their migration in the place from where they went. The *Mitākṣara* was written certainly long after the Nambūtiris had gone to Malabar. The Hindu Law in this respect was subsequently modified and the right to division of joint property was recognized. See P.R. Sundara iyer, *A Treatise on Malabar and Aliyasanthana Law*, Madras, 1922, pp.210-13.

[49] Indian Law Report, 11, Madras, 1887 cited in Madayil Pothen Joseph, *The Principles of Marumakkathayam Law*, Kottayam, 1918, pp.269-72.

Namboodri Brahmins are said to be the same as those of Brahmins on the east Coast, indicating thereby common descent from the same original male ancestors...the personal law which they presumably carried with them was the Hindu law as received by Brahmins at the time of their settlement in Malabar, and that it is not the Hindu law as modified by customs which have since came into prevalence among Brahmins on the East Coast. For instance, the form of marriage called *Sarvaswadanam*[50] marriage which is referable to the ancient Hindu Law of Putrikaputra or of the appointed daughter and her son, is still in force among Namboodries as a mode of affiliation, though it is obsolete on this coast...Under Hindu Law both ancient and modern, partibility is an incident of ordinary Hindu property, coparcenary depending for its continuance upon the mutual consent of co-sharers; but among Namboodries, as among Nairs, family property is not liable to be divided at the instance of any one of the coparceners. Again, self-acquired property merges, on the death of the person acquiring it, into family property as is the case among Nairs...among Namboodries, the eldest brother alone usually marries, and the others, as is the case among the Nairs consort with Nair women otherwise than with the sanction of marriage. Having regard to the evidence on both sides, the conclusion that we come to is that Namboodries are governed by Hindu Law, except so far as it is shown to have been modified by usage or custom having the force of law, the probable origin of the special usage being either some doctrine of Hindu Law as it stood at the date of the settlement though now obsolete, or some *marumakkathayam* usage".

Thus, the customs of Malabar Brahmins did not differ very widely from the customs of the Nāyaṛs. Except in the constitution of the family, which in the case of the Nambūtiri *Illam* followed the law of descent through sons and in case of *marumakkathāyam taṛawād* followed the law of descent through sister's children, so far as the rights to property was concerned there was no difference whatever between Nambūtiri *illam* and Nāyaṛ *taṛawād.* Impartibility of family property was the rule prescribed and community of interests could not be severed by partition without the consent of all the members of the *illam.* As in the *marumakkathāyam taṛawād* the right of the junior members both male and female was the right to be supported in the family house out of income of the property of the family, and the

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[50] *Saṛvaswadānam* was the final solution to overcome the situation in which an illam ceases to have a male member to produce progeny. A man of another family was brought into the family and married to a daughter of it, who after the manner of the 'appointed daughter' of old Hindu Law, handed on the property through her children. The man brought in was henceforth a member of the family he had joined and as such he performed the *Śṛāddha* ceremonies. See Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.47.

absolute control of the family affairs was vested in the senior member, who represented the family. The manager of a Nambūtiri *illam*, as in the case of a *kāraṇavan* of a *marumakkathāyam taṛawād*, had no power to alienate permanently by sale, gift or otherwise any portion of the common property without the consent express or implied of all the members of the family. [51]

The main points of difference have also been noted.[52] The radical difference between the two systems was the rule of succession. In case of the Nambūtiris, inheritance was through eldest sons whereas in a *marumakkathāyam taṛawād* it was through sister's children. The manager of a Nambūtiri *illam* had higher powers than a *taṛawād kāraṇavan* in making temporary alienations for fixed customary periods. Of course the alienation must be for proper family purpose. On marriage, except in *Saṛvaswadānam* form, the female member of an *illam* passed to the *illam* of her husband and she lost her right in her paternal *illam*, whereas among the Nāyaṛs the female members did not lose their right by marriage. Again, legal marriage was the basis of the law of succession among the Nambūtiris, while among the Nāyaṛs, there was no recognized connection between marriage and inheritance.

Since the Nambūtiris followed primogeniture,[53] with the eldest son alone retaining the right both for legal marriage and manager-ship of *illam* property, the junior sons were entitled to nothing beyond maintenance. *Illam* was the unit, and, as the senior male succeeded to the management, it may happen that a man's sons do not succeed directly as his heirs. The eldest son alone could inherit the family property after his father.[54] If the eldest son should be younger than any of his

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[51] *Ibid*, p.267.

[52] *Ibid*, p.268.

[53] The system could be traced back to the 9th-10th centuries. See M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, p.148.

[54] Francis Buchanan, (*A Journey From Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1988, p.425) observed that in order to prevent themselves from losing dignity by becoming too numerous, the younger sons of a Nambūtiri family seldom married. Fawcett noted this arrangement as an excellent one for the material prosperity of the

father's brothers, then the uncle succeeded to the right of governing the family. If the father died before the son attained the age of majority, and if there were no adult males to look after the affairs of the family till he came of age, then the eldest female of the house succeeds to the right. The head of the family may be a female in other circumstances as well – in the absence of members belonging to the other sex.

In the event of the first son failing to beget a male progeny, even after repeated marriages, the second son was allowed to go for *swajātivivāham* for the sake of perpetuating the *illam*. In such cases the son of the second son became the next successor of the *illam* property. Two other devices were also used for the same purpose in the absence of a male offspring. They were 1) the rare form of marriage known as *saṛvaswadānam* and 2) adoption of a son who then became heir to the *illam*. In both cases, the new heir was considered to be related to his old *illam*, and thus there was a relationship between the two *illams* involving restrictions on marriages between them as well as mutual obligations to observe ritual pollution. Nevertheless, many *illams* did become extinct.[55]

Exception to the general rule of inheritance was the 16 Nambūtiri families of Payyannūṛ who followed the *marumakkathayām* or the nepotismal law of inheritance.[56] Males had no right in the family property except for maintenance. The children had no right to inherit their father's properties, while they became

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family, for there was no dispersion; every circumstance tended towards aggrandizement, and the family was restricted to no more than a requisite number by one member only marrying and producing children. He also noted that though there were rare cases of Nambūtiri families becoming extinct, such a thing as a Nambūtiri's estate escheating to government was rare; somehow other Nambūtiris managed to retain the family property among themselves. Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, pp.46-47.

[55] Ilamkulam calculated that there were considerably more illams in the fourteenth century and larger Nambūtiri population. See his "Brahmin Population in Ancient Times" in *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1980, pp.193-99.

[56] Other Nambūtiri families of Payyannūr did not follow inheritance through female line and the matrilocal system of residence. P.P. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Aryans in South India*, New Delhi, 1992, pp.152-54.

entitled to the properties of their mother's family. Nambūtiri fathers of Tirumumbu children had no right of guardianship, the right being vested in the senior male of the *mana* who was the manager. When families were getting extinct without women, the custom was to adopt girls from other Tirumumbu *manas* or from Nambūtiri *illams*.[57]

One of the special characteristics of the Nambūtiri Law as distinct from the *Mitākşara* Law was the collateral ownership of the female members over the *illam* property.[58] If the rule of the ordinary Hindu Law was applied, the consent of the female members was unnecessary for alienating property through gifts, for according to it, the ownership vested only in the male members, and the female members had only the right to maintenance, and were entitled to object to an alienation only if it affected their right of maintenance, and not otherwise.[59] In the case of the Nambūtiri families, the patriarchal propensity of the law made males and females in much the same position; the right of all except the patriarch was only for maintenance. When he died, no doubt, another male member would succeed to his position, and a female might be disqualified for that office. That is, males would have a superior right to manage the family estate, and only in the absence of males would females be entitled to manage. But this was only the recognition of a superior capacity in the male to manage and did not show any superior ownership in him.[60] The Madras High Court decreed that according to the

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[57] There were two instances of Nambūtiri girls from the south being adopted, one to the Rēramangalam mana and the other to Kunjimangalam mana, both in the beginning of the twentieth century. After being adopted according to *saṛvaswadānam*, the Nambūtiri girls lost their Nambūtiri status.

[58] P.R. Sundara Iyer, *op.cit*, pp.216-17. But this was in sharp contrast to the *marumakkathāyam* law where proprietorship was vested in the female members only, and the males had no ownership rights.

[59] When the ancient Hindu Law was transformed into *Mitākşara* Law with provision for partition of ancestral property among the males of the family, it evidently discriminated women who were denied the same rights and were entitled only to maintenance and marriage portions. See Lucy Caroll, "Daughter's Right of Inheritance in India: A Perspective on the Problem of Dowry", *Modern Asian Studies*, 25:4, 1991, pp.791-809.

[60] In a number of verdicts, the courts in Travancore and Madras recognized the co-ownership right of females in the *illam* property with respect to two questions: 1) where an alienation was

archaic Hindu Law which prevailed among the Nambūtiris of Malabar the women of the family had no less right than the males excepting the patriarch.[61]

As a result of the rule of primogeniture the proliferation of lineage segments among Nambūtiris was necessarily much slower than that noted in other patrilineal societies.[62] Since only one male in each generation was allowed to marry it was rare for branches to form, though they did form in some cases. If the eldest son did not beget a son after repeated marriages, the second son was allowed to take a Nambūtiri wife, and in that case, his son was expected to perpetuate the family. If at that point the first son succeeded in begetting a male child, the first male child (i.e., the son of the second son) still retained the rights of the eldest son, though in occasional cases this led to a schism in the family, and thus a new *illam* could be formed. Occasionally also, a younger Nambūtiri son might be sent off to form a branch *illam* in order to develop land owned by the family in some distant place; this was especially common in the unoccupied forest areas of north Malabar before the twentieth century, but was otherwise rare.

3:5. Livelihood

The Nambūtiris formed the landed aristocracy of the country and claimed the lands by *janmam* or birth right,[63] tracing their title to the legend of the original gift by Paraśurāma.[64] But they did not cultivate the land by themselves, instead, they

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impeached as not binding on the family, and 2) in the case of right to succeed to management where there were no adult males competent to manage. In Devaki Antarjanam v. Sambhu, the Travancore High Court ruled that the Nambūtiri ladies possessed greater rights than a right to maintenance and that the empowerment of all the members was necessary to preserve the property from being wasted or alienated. P.R. Sundara Iyer, *op.cit*, pp.217-21.

61 In Vasudevan v Secretary of State, *ILR*, 11, Madras, 1887 cited in *ibid*, pp.220-21.

62 Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, "Kinship and Marriage Regulations among the Nambūtiri Brahmans of Kerala", *Man*, 2:1 (n.s), March 1967, p.90.

63 It is observed that the higher castes held the higher landed interests and the Nambūtiris had the greatest holdings of janmam land. Adrian C. Mayer, *Land and Society in Malabar*, Bombay, 1952, pp.96-97.

64 Fawcett wrote that most of the Vaḷḷuvanād taluk was the property of the Nambūtiris. Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.33. *Report on the Census of Travancore, 1875*, p.192 observed that most of the janmis south of Quilon belonged to the Pōtti class. *Report on the Census of Travancore,*

let them out to tenants, mostly Nāyaṛs, on various tenures.[65] Seldom did they earn their livelihood by personal exertion. "They were such a favoured class that from the king downwards to the lowest peasant everyone would forego even his necessity to pander to their luxury. Instead of scorning delights and laborious days are ordained by *Śānkarasmṛiti* they make their utmost endeavour by deed and word to impress on others the idea that all excellences in the world are their birth-right and that whatever is low and mean is the portion of the lower orders. In fact, it is the Nambūtiris, of all Brahmans in India, who strictly follow the injunctions of Manu, 'never serve'".[66] The difficulties incidental to an effect of land division have made the Nambūtiris 'a litigious population and the ruinous scale of expenditure necessary for the disposal of girls, be it of the plebian kind, has brought their general prosperity to a very low level'.[67]

They were also temple priests; but it was only the poorest of them who would consent to act as priests in temples. But they did not involve in any other vocation going into the world to earn a livelihood in the ordinary way.[68] Fawcett observed: "Unlike the Brahmins of the remainder of the Presidency, who so largely absorb

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1881, p.193, while referring to the occupation of the Malayāḷa Brahmans listed 931 as following agricultural occupations; but clarified the point that it meant management of landed property and not farming or cultivating land.

65 The traditional agrarian structure was based on a three-tier relationship between *janmis* (landlords), *kāṇakkār* (tenants) and *veṛumpāṭṭakkār* (sub-tenants). Most of the land was controlled by the Nambūtiris as *janmam* or a *dēvaswam* (temple lands). The customarily enforceable three-tier hierarchical relationship crystallized only during the post-fifteenth century period under the immediate impact of money economy and greater occupational mobility. In the traditional system, the net produce of land was shared equally by *janmis*, *kāṇakkār* and actual cultivators. K.N. Panikkar, "Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala", *The Indian Historical review*, Vol. III, No.1, 1977, p.36. For more details see K.N. Panikkar, *Against Lord and State*, Delhi, 1989, pp.1-48.

66 L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit*, p.277.

67 *Travancore Census report 1901*, pp.277-78.

68 *Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891*, p.687 stated that generally the Nambūtiris looked after their household duties or the occupation of the 'Gṛihabharanam'. But of course the winds of change were visible in the south. *Report on the Census of Travancore, 1881*, p.193, listed 239 as being employed in government service. The case of Malabar fitted perfectly to the general stream. Fawcett noted the solitary instance of a Nambūtiri occupying the position of Secretary of the Cotton Mills at Calicut. But he went on to note that "this fact in no way contradicts what has been said". Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.49.

all appointments under Government worth having, who engage in trade and in, one may say, every profitable profession and business, including the stage, the Nambūtiris hold almost entirely aloof from what the poet Gray calls: "the busy world's ignoble strife", and more than any class of Brahmans retain their sacerdotal position, which is of course the highest". [69] The Report of the Malabar Marriage Commission denounced the Nambūtiris for not "taking the lead in every intellectual pursuit, as do the Brahmans in other parts" and observed that "the Nambūtiri has become enervated to such an extent that it would be difficult to find more than a few who have mastered the grammar and syntax of the Sānskṛit, which is the chief vehicle for their sacred text. Most of them get no further than committing a number of *sḷōkās* to memory. Not only do they refuse altogether to tread the path of knowledge opened up to them by the barbarian Government, but it is rare to find one of them who has studied the literature, such as it is, of his own vernacular".[70]

Even an encomiast of the Nambūtiris like Iyer lamented that they did not adapt themselves to any of the requirements of modern days: "Having left off their old ideals, they have not been entering into any of the pursuits which are thrown open to them in these days."[71] But he found a hope for the future from the rare example of the Dēśamaṅgalam family. He wrote: "Fortunately in the state, there is one aristocratic Vedic family the members of which, maintaining the religious life, are following trade, and are the proprietors of a tile factory. They had at one time invested a few lakhs of rupees in the construction of a cotton mill at Calicut and still have many shares in that Joint Stock Company. They are besides traders in other articles. One young member of that family is the editor of a popular monthly.

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[69] Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.33. However, Fawcett remarked that by not entering into any of the ordinary pursuits of livelihood, the Nambūtiris were able to maintain their high position and to exercise their influence on the entire society. *Ibid*, p.49.

[70] Cited in *ibid*, p.48.

[71] L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit*, p.278.

Their example may well be followed by others of the caste who are not wanting in the necessary capital. The members of the non-Vedic class, on the other hand, are more enterprising and some of them are gentlemen farmers and traders. Their children are reading in schools".[72]

Every Nambūtiri was theoretically, a life-long student of the Vedas; under close study between 7 and 15, or for more than 8 years of his life, and nothing whatsoever was allowed to interfere with this. They were probably more familiar with Sānskṛit than any other class of Brahmans; but their scholarship might not have been of a high order.[73] Knowledge was not supposed to be a source of livelihood for the Nambūtiris; they could learn and teach but normally receiving fees from the students was considered despicable. Learning and transmission of knowledge was a mission, or had become a ritualistic act; its quality had greatly deteriorated by then, it had lost its vitality and was had become unproductive with an unnecessary stress on parrot-like recitation.[74]

3:6. Life and Rituals

Fawcett described the Nambūtiri residence and its surroundings thus: The Nambūtiris chose sites the most secluded for their habitation, compatible with living in touch with the world. The abode of the Nambūtiri is known as an *illam*, while that of the Nambūtiripād was a *mana*. Some of the Nambūtiri houses were immense structures, almost palatial, while hard by its temple, an adjunct of the house. At the eastern side of the compound was the gate entrance, sometimes almost a small house in itself. In all the larger houses there was a room in this

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[72] *Ibid.*

[73] Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.49.

[74] William Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, pp.107-08. But he acknowledged that "...the teaching which the Nambūtiri Brahmans receive is wholly religious. The study of the different sciences seems to have descended in particular families, and astronomy in particular has had great attention paid to it, and the knowledge of it is fairly exact. These Brahmans had a monopoly of learning for many centuries, and doubtless this was one of the ways in which they managed to secure such commanding influence in the country".

'gate house', as it was sometimes called, kept as a guest chamber for strangers. From the gateway to the house was a raised walk of earth or hardened mud. The yard in front of the house, which faces the east, was plastered with cow-dung, and kept perfectly clean.[75]

The domestic architecture of an *illam* house did not differ fundamentally from that of a *taṛawād* house. It was a square or quandrangular building and was constructed in the typical Kerala model of 'Nālukeṭṭu' or 'Eṭṭukeṭṭu'. It consisted of several courtyards in the centre with rooms on all sides. There were not as many bedrooms as in the case of a *taṛawād* house, since only the eldest male member married and used to sleep in the *illam* house. On the east or west of the courtyard, an annex called *Pathāyappura* served as drawing room and the dormitory of the unmarried members of the house. These out-houses also served to house the Nāyaṛ women and children in the regions of patrilocal Nāyaṛs.[76] The rest of the house was zenana to the stranger. There was a tank in the north-east or south-west of the compound near the house.[77] The construction of the house perfectly served to segregate the Antarjanams; the location and passages to the bedrooms, the position of the kitchen, the location of the well inside the kitchen and the proximity of the bathing tank close to it with separate arrangements for them to bathe in the tank, all allude to this presumption.[78] There was a separate room inside the house for the worship of God. In the compound, was a place set apart for the serpent god, the figure being represented in carved granite.

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[75] Fred Fawcett, *Nambūtiris*, pp.43-45.

[76] M.S.A. Rao, *Social Change in Malabar*, Bombay, 1957, p.82.

[77] Thurston wrote that in most of the Nambūtiri houses, there were three or four of them, the largest being used for bathing and the other for general and kitchen purposes. Wells were never used for bathing and a hot-water bath was avoided as far as possible, as plunging in a natural reservoir would alone confer the requisite ablutional purity. Thurston, *op.cit*, p.173.

[78] T.K. Anandi, "Home as a Sacred Space – The Household Rituals and the Namputiri Women of Kerala" in K.N. Ganesh ed., *Culture and Modernity*, p.147. "The construction of the *kulappura* is such that women cannot be seen or interact with anybody outside the compound. (For the women of other castes, *kulam* serves the purpose of interaction, gossip and counseling centre where man-woman issues were discussed and exchanged)". Antarjanams were allowed to worship in the *illam* temple alone, which also highly restricted their scope for social interaction.

Little difference existed between the ways in which a *taṛawād* and an *illam* was managed. There was single common kitchen. It was the duty of the *kāraṇavan* to supply all the materials necessary for the kitchen, to supply clothes to all the members, and to arrange for the payment of the washerman, barbers and physicians. The life of the Nambūtiris was crowded with rites and ceremonies. The heavy expenditure on the sixteen *samskāras* and other annual ceremonies connected with the family deities were all met by the income from the family property.

Within the patrilineage consisting of male brothers, unmarried sisters, children of the eldest brother, father, mother, father's brothers, certain characteristic behaviour patterns were visible. The eldest brother, as the *kāraṇavan*, expected the maximum respect and absolute obedience from the juniors. The younger brothers regarded the sons of the eldest brother as their own since they performed funeral ceremonies for the former. The female members of the house observed *purdah* and strict segregation was maintained.[79] The younger brothers were not supposed to talk or even see their eldest brother's wife or wives.

Even from childhood, boys and girls were brought up in an atmosphere of rigid rules and set standards of conduct. The traditions of family intervened in every aspect of behaviour. Boys were put to study scriptures with the performance of *Upanayanam*. They assisted their father in the religious observances. Girls grew up more under the supervision of their mothers. They assisted their mothers in the household work and received training in all the household tasks before marriage.

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[79] A staunch critique of the Nambūtiris, P.K. Balakrishnan, viewed the purdah system among the Antaṛjanams more brutal than that which was imposed on Muslim women by the medieval sultans and as perfectly conforming to licentious male-wantonness. While commanding conjugal tradition on all the Hindu castes, Nambūtiris mercilessly denied majority of their women marital prospects and sexual pleasures. It is a paradox that while Nambūtiri men reaped the benefits of sexual anarchy they had created for themselves, it was their women who had to suffer its worst consequences. P.K. Balakrishnan, "Kēraḷathilē Jātivyavastiti", *Māṭṛubhūmi Weekly*, 30 Nov. 1975, p.13.

After they came of age their sphere of movement was confined to the female section of the house. After marriage they went to their husband's house occasionally to return to their natal *illam*.

When talking among themselves, Nambūtiris used the vernacular in the ordinary way, but, when a Nambūtiri talked to a Nāyaṛ, or with one of any other caste, the manner in which the conversation must be observed, strictly according to custom, is such that the Nambūtiri superiority was apparent at every turn.[80] Thus, a Nāyaṛ addressing a Nambūtiri spoke of himself as a 'foot servant'. If he mentioned his rice, he should not call it rice, but his 'gritty rice'. He must call his house 'dung pit', his cloth as 'old cloth'. But he must speak of the Nambūtiri's rice as rice and his house as his *illam* or *mana*. The Nāyaṛ calls his sleeping lying flat' and the Nambūtiri's 'closing his eyes' or 'resting like a Rāja'.

The Nambūtiris were Vedic Brahmans: their scriptures were the Vedas. They were also *śaivās*, but not to the exclusion of Vishnu and the lingam was the ordinary object of worship. But their religious practices differed basically from the north Indian tradition to be explained either as a "degraded form of Brahmanism" or an "elevated form of earlier Dravidian religion". The Nambūtiri religion was of the Vedas from the north, tinged of course by the Dravidian medium in which it existed. Sacrifice was the heart of it. Hymns, prayer, praise, etc., were subsidiary to sacrifice. The Nambūtiri's life was a round of sacrifices, the last of which was the burning of his body on the funeral pyre. Various kinds of sacrifices for various objectives in life were performed. Thus *Puṭṛakāmeshti* was for begetting male issue, *Mṛityunjaya Śānti Yāgam* for restoring good health and *Aja yāgam* for salvation. In sacrifices, the essence of organic substances seems to be offered through sacred fire to the deity and in which the fire-god and the officiating priest are invoked as it were to witness the due observance of the rites attending it.

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[80] Fawcett, *op.cit.*, p.78.

A Nambūtiri had to pass through sixteen ritual acts, or life-cycle rituals, which are collectively called *Ṣōdaśa-kṛiyas*, of which 11 are concerned with birth. Of the remaining four, *Upanayanam* and marriage are the most important ones. *Upanayanam* is the ceremony of 'leading a boy to his guru' and was the formal ceremony in which he was invested with the sacred thread by which he was made the 'twice-born', the true Brahman. Without it he was not able to study the Vedas, to take part in any religious rite or to recite the *Gāyatṛi*. The boy was thus initiated as a Bṛahmachari – unmarried religious student. It lasted for eight years, from the eighth to the sixteenth year. The *samāvaṛtanam* ceremony was significant of his return to his own family, and after it he may be married.

The Nambūtiris used to have a special pattern of dressing. While there was a uniform pattern for all the males,[81] women had two styles of dress.[82] There were strict restrictions in wearing ornaments. Beyond plain finger rings and a golden amulet (*Ēlassu*) attached to the waist-string, the Nambūtiri wore no ornaments. His ears were bored, but no ear-rings were worn unless he was an Agnihotri. *Rudṛakṣa* necklaces, mounted in gold, are sometimes worn. The ornaments of the Nambūtiri had several peculiarities. Gold bracelets were proscribed even for the most wealthy. Hollow bangles of brass or bell metal for ordinary Nambūtiris, and of solid silver for the *Āddhyans*, were the ones in use. The *chittu* was their ear-ornament. A peculiar neck-lace called *Cheṛu-tāli* was also worn. The Nambūtiris did not bore their noses nor did they wear nose-rings.

The Nambūtiri had plenty of leisure, though their daily routine was full of various religious practices. At the palaces of royalty, and the mansions of the aristocrats, the Nambūtiri consorts of the several women of the households came

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[81] It was called *tattudukkuka* and was the kind of dressing worn during religious hours in which the cloth worn had a portion passing between the thighs and tucked in at the front and behind, with the front portion arranged in a number of characteristic reduplications.

[82] Viz., *okkum koḷuthum vetcchudukkuka* for the Āddyans and *njoṛinjudukkuka* for ordinary Nambūtiris.

together and spent their idle mornings in disputations and discussions. While the licentious culture bred laziness and intellectual ruin, it greatly helped the Nambūtiris to generate a corpus of knowledge in various subjects.

The daily life of the Nambūtiris at an *illam* was highly dependant on the ceremonial kind of service of the Nāyaṛ families. Quoting Rāman Uṇṇi, Fuller points out that the Nāyaṛ *taṛawāds* were linked by hereditary duties of a ceremonial or ritual nature to Nambūtiri families dominating the villages. By virtue of these duties, the *taṛawāds* gained a 'reflected' prestige dependant on the status of the Nambūtiri family.[83]

3:7. System of Marriage

Like all Brahmin communities, *gōtṛa* exogamy and community endogamy was the rule of the Nambūtiris in marriage. They were keen in observing three chief rules in marriage. The parties of the marriage must not be of the same *gōtṛa*;[84] they must not be related to each other through father or mother; the bridegroom must be the eldest son of the family. Mencher outlines the basic structural characteristics of Nambūtiri marriage as under: 1) an extreme emphasis on patrilineality and primogeniture; 2) large dowries with a high incidence of exchange marriages; 3) an absence of distinct affinal terms for male speakers; 4) the total amalgamation of the female with her husband, so that she used the same terms for his relatives as he did; 5) the prohibition of cross-cousin marriage; 6) the absence of positive marriage rules; and 7) a duality of organization (i.e., apart from the internal marriage and kinship system, Nambūtiri social structure included a symbiotic relationship with matrilineal families following a different set of rules, so that a man could even form an alliance with the daughter of his own father – his half-

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[83] C.J. Fuller, "Internal Structure of the Nāyar Caste", *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 31:4, Winter 1975, p.293.

[84] L.A. Krishnayyar, *Kerala and her People*, Palghat, 1969, p.95. It is said that there were seven original gotras, called after the sages Kamsha, Kashyapa, Bharadvāja, Vatsya, Kaundiniya, Atri, and Tāṭṛi; and that other gotras have grown out of these.

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sister – through a matrilineal woman).[85] The wife joined her husband's gōtṛa, forsaking her own altogether. Women may remain unmarried without prejudice.[86] Needless to say that this was not favoured by Brahmans outside Malabar.[87] But the Nambūtiri girl or woman who died as a spinster had to undergo certain rites of marriage before the starting of her funeral rites.[88]

To keep down the number of the members of this caste, only the eldest son in the family was allowed to formally marry a female of his own caste by Vedic rites and beget children of Nambūtiri status. He was also permitted to marry more than one wife.[89] Traditionally he could have up to three wives at any time, but if one should die he could then take another to replace her. Younger sons were ideally

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[85] Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit*, p.87. Mencher and Goldberg argued that though property was important in influencing the structure of the Nambūtiri community; i.e., the concern over consolidating their property was critical in the development of the system of primogeniture, and the fact that land was never given to a daughter confirmed this, the ongoing kinship structure and the way marriages were used for consolidating power could not be explained with reference to property. *Ibid*, pp.101-02.

[86] This is in sharp contrast to the general Indian tradition where spinsterhood was almost unknown. Pauline Kolenda, *Caste, Marriage and Inequality: Essays in North and South India*, Jaipur, 2003, pp.352, 381.

[87] Iyer writes that post-nubile marriage existed only among the Kanyākubja Brahmins of Agra and Oudh, Kulīn Brahmins of Bengal and the Nambūtiris of Kerala. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit*, p.197.

[88] The reference by Dubois of a custom among the Nambūtiris of course did not find any supportive evidence from elsewhere. He wrote: "The girls of this caste are usually married before puberty; but if a girl who has arrived at an age when the signs of puberty are apparent happens to die before having had intercourse with a man, caste custom rigorously demands that the inanimate corpse of the deceased shall be subjected to a monstrous connection. For this purpose the girl's parents are obliged to procure by a present of money some wretched fellow willing to consummate such a disgusting form of marriage: for were the marriage not consummated the family would consider itself dishonoured". Abbe. J. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, New Delhi, 1992, pp.17-18. Henry K. Beauchamp, who edited the work, denied the authenticity of this statement by referring to Logan's *Malabar* and in consultation with the leading members of the Nambūtiri community. In fact Abbe must have been confused the tāli-tying ceremony before the funeral by a competent relative, which was noted by many writers (Fawcett, p.61; Logan p.128), with the act of consummation of marriage.

[89] The custom of polygamy, known among the Nambūtiris as *Adhivēdanam*, finds its parallel among the Bengali Brahmans in the form of Kulīnism. The Kulīn Brahmins, an aristocratic caste with rigid marriage rules, were highly sought after as bridegrooms and were able to marry as many women as they wished. Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India*, Delhi, 2000, pp.22-23.

expected to remain celibate and devote their lives to religion, but in actual practice, they normally formed permanent or semi-permanent liaisons, *sambandham*, with women belonging to matrilineal caste groups, particularly the higher matrilineal sub-castes such as Kşatṛiyas, Ambalavāsis and high caste Nāyaṛs.[90] The children of such unions were attributed the caste-status of their mothers.[91] So, unlike other patrilineal communities, not all the children of all the sons belonged to the family. The eldest son in a Nambūtiri family might also form liaison with women from matrilineal castes, along with his legal marriages. From the point of view of the Nambūtiris, these liaisons were definitely not marriages, though they were often viewed as such by the matrilineal castes.[92] For the

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[90] Shaikh Sainuddin attested the universality of *Sambandham* among the junior sons of the Nambūtiris as early as the 16th century. See *Tuhfat al-Mujahidin*, Calicut, 2007, p.41. Some attribute *Sambandham* to the military colonization of the land by the Nambūtiris which had necessitated the absence of the younger sons from the house. G. Ramaswamy, *Kerala: Past and Present*, Trichur, 1942, p.33. On the basis of Ilamkulam's findings, Uṇṇi suggested that the presence of a much larger Nambūtiri population in Kerala in the fourteenth century may have made both hypergamous and polyandrous marriages more common at that time. K. Rāman Uṇṇi, "Polyandry in Malabar", in Manis Kumar Raha ed., *Polyandry in India*, Delhi, 1987, p.288. He argued that the peculiar marriage custom among the Nambūtiris led many women to remain unmarried, the affiliation of the children born of the Nambūtiri-Nāyar union to the Nāyar taṛawād, high sickness rate due to the custom of purdah and outcasting of unmarried women for charges of immorality were some of the important factors which reduced the numbers of the Nambūtiris by half in every two hundred years. But M.G.S. observed that the tendency to practice *sambandham* could have been prevalent even during the Chera times even though it is condemned outright in all the law codes. M.G.S. Narayanan, *Perumals of Kerala*, Calicut, p.148.

[91] The husband had no exclusive rights in his wife and in wife's children. Kathleen Gough, "The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. 89, 1959, pp.32-33. Gough observed that these hypergamous unions were regarded by Brahmans as socially acceptable concubinage, for the union was not initiated with Vedic rites, the children were not legitimized as Brahmans, and neither woman nor her child was accorded the rights of kin. For the same reason Yalman calls it as pseudo-marriage. Nur Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland*, 1963, p.34. But for the matrilineal castes, however, the same unions were regarded as marriage, for they fulfilled the conditions of ordinary Nāyar marriage and served to legitimize the child as an acceptable member of his matrilineal lineage and caste. Kathleen Gough, "Nāyar: Central Kerala", in David M. Schneidher and Kathleen Gough ed., *Matrilineal Kinship*, Allahabad, 1972, p.320.

[92] Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi, 1991, p.30; Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit.*, p.89. Mencher & Goldberg writes that since Nambūtiris never regarded liaisons with matrilineal castes as

Nambūtiri it was concubinage and for the Nāyaṛ it was true marriage.[93] The Nāyaṛ woman and children must observe death pollution when the Nambūtiri male in question died, but he did no such thing when his *sambandham* wife died. Here the differential evaluations of the strength of the same relation according to the dominance and differentiated privilege were implied by the 'direct order of castes'.[94]

The liaisons were useful to the Nambūtiris in two ways: 1) most obviously, to provide sexual partners for their younger sons, and 2) to create useful connections with important families. The Nambūtiris could gain considerable power through these alliances with important matrilineal families such as local chieftains, and even ruling houses.[95] They also helped to forge some kind of unity among all caste-Hindus.[96] But it is pointed out that the suggestion of a mutual economic and political advantage involved in such unions was partially misleading, since the only advantage to the *sambandham* family was usually one of social prestige; all the other advantages in this one-sided affair went in the Nambūtiri's favour.[97]

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marriages, there were never any restrictions on their relations with matrilineal women. Though rare, cases have been reported of a Nambūtiri son forming a liaison with his step-sister, i.e., a daughter of his own father through a Nāyar union. *Ibid*, pp.99-100.

93 It is observed that the peculiar system of marriage have had its genesis in the past situation of scarcity of women in the early phase of their migration and settlement in Kerala and when communities were less closed. They also must have recruited non-Brahmin wives, and stopped the practice when they had an adequate supply of women. A. Aiyappan, *Personality of Kerala*, Trivandrum, 1982, p.150.

94 S.J. Tambiah, "From Varna to Caste Through Mixed Unions", in Jack Goody ed., *The Character of Kinship*, Cambridge University Press, 1973, p.211.

95 Joan. P. Mencher, "Nambutiri Brahmins: an Analysis of a Traditional Elite in Kerala", *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, I, 1966, pp.7-20.

96 Eric J. Miller, "Village Structure in North Kerala", in M.N. Srinivas ed., *India's Villages*, Calcutta, 1955, p.44. Uma Chakravarty observes that it gave the Nambūtiris new notions of property and morality as Nāyar men became part of the professional middle class under colonial rule. Uma Chakravarty, "Exploring a 'No-Conflict' Zone: Interest, Emotion and the Family in Early India", *Studies in History*, 18:2, n.s, 2002, p.168.

97 Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit.*, p.100. The Nambūtiri was often from a poor illam and was well aware of such advantages. One Nambūtiri described: "we were having a good situation with that family. The women were pretty, they fed the husbands well, and they were useful people to be close to..."

Infant marriage, which was the rule with other Brahmans, was unknown among the Nambūtiris.[98] But girls were married both before and after they reached the age of puberty.[99] Daughters retained membership in the *illam* so long as they were not married. But thereafter they became affiliated to their husband's *illam* and took on the *gōtṛa* of the husband. Unlike the Nāyaṛs, the Nambūtiris did not hold public pre-puberty rites for their women, such as that of the *tālikeṭṭu-kalyāṅam.*[100] There was also an absence of cross-cousin marriage.[101] Property alone was the real thing to be considered;[102] but land never played any part in arranging marriages. Since a woman could not inherit land and since her dowry was always in the form of movable property, there was never any need to use marriages in order to consolidate holdings.[103] In order to get his daughters married at all, a Nambūtiri must be rich, for with each of them he has to pay the bridegroom a heavy dowry and many an *illam* resources have been drained in this

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[98] But this view had been refuted by a competent authority. Mārār wrote: "...marriages are always celebrated before puberty. There are instances, though rare, of infant marriages among them". Justice K. Nārāyaṇa Mārār, "Nambūtiris", *Malabar Quarterly Review,* I, 1, 1902, cited in Thurton, *op.cit*, p.197.

[99] L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit.*, p.184. But it was not sanctioned by custom.

[100] Nur Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland,* 1963, p.53. Pre-puberty marriage was taken to be a necessary measure to safeguard the purity of women and to secure their positions in the caste before any conceivable threat to their sexuality could be contemplated. For the Nambūtiris the *ghōṣa* system served the same purpose. Iyer observed that in Malabar, the Tamil Brahmans and the Nambūtiri Brahmans showed two methods of dealing with the danger of female un-chastity: the former married them in their childhood, the latter hided all their women. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit.*, pp.170-288; 289-343.

[101] A. Aiyappan, "A Case Study for a Sub-discipline: Brahminology", *Man in India,* 63:4, Dec.1983, p.388. Aiyappan noted that among other Brahmans of South India, only the Nambūtiris resisted it.

[102] Fawcett writes that while among other Malayalis, youth with university degree had a command in the marriage market, a Nambūtiri was bothered only about how a matrimony bring advantage to his family. Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, p.61.

[103] Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit.*, p.98. Mencher and Goldberg pointed out that among the Nambūtiris the term 'alliance' meant a different thing. In fact marriages did not bring about permanent alliances between families; neither the bride's nor the groom's family took interest in retaining family ties as among other castes and communities. What the girl's father was concerned with was minimizing the amount of dowry which had to be paid and yet not arranging a marriage for his daughter which would cast aspersions on his family as being a miser. In fact no Nambūtiri wanted to be branded as a miser in regard to marriage and feast.

way.[104] To avoid the intricacies of dowry, they developed a common practice known as exchange marriages by which the exchange of dowry amount could be avoided.[105]

In fixing marriages between families, status and nobility were major determining factors. Though it was uncommon for Nambūtiris who had the right to recite the Vedas to intermarry with those who lacked this right, it did occur from time to time.[106] In the past, if a Nambūtiri belonging to a higher ranking *illam* gave his daughter to an *illam* of a lower rank, then the girl was not permitted to enter the kitchen or *pūja* room of her father's *illam*, nor to participate in the religious rites conducted there; but such hypogamous unions did not reflect badly on her family, except perhaps to indicate that they were not doing so well financially. But since among the Nambūtiris marriages were not of primary use in cementing caste relations, or in maintaining alliances between families,[107] or in helping the family politically,[108] such differences in status or nobility was often

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[104] William Logan, *op.cit.*, p.128. Iyer stated that the sum of dowry varied from 1,000 to 2,000 rupees in ordinary well-to-do families and from 4000 to 5,000 rupees among he Āddyans of the Aristocratic families. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit.*, p.184. The latest reference to this comes from Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd, "Japthi", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 15 May 2005, pp.14-15.

[105] See E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha*, p.29. It is noted that dowry was harmful in 2 ways: 1) it made *adhivēdanam* attractive and 2) those who could not pay a heavy dowry were forced to sell their daughters to unknown men in far-off lands. K.P. Sṛīdēvi, "Kēraḷathilē Nambūtiri Stṛīkaḷ" in *500 Varṣhathē Kēraḷam: Chila Aṛivadayālangaḷ*, Kottayam, 1999, p.298.

[106] For details see E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha*, pp.20-21; P. Bhaskaran Uṇṇi, *Pathombathām Nūttāndilē Kēraḷam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 2000, p.28. Sankarji in his story, "Ēṭṭē Enthā Ī Kāṭṭaṇathu?" (*UN* 11:19, Nov. 1, 1929, p.2), described the case of such a marriage. An Āddyan Nambūtiri girl was given in marriage to an Āsyan family. While her parents were about to return after attending the 'kudiveypu' ceremony, the bride embraced her mother in tears. At that time, her father rebuked her: "when one goes out shouldn't he be pure?" Though being their daughter, she had become ritually impure to the parents once she was married to an Āsyan Nambūtiri.

[107] This appears to be a pan-Indian tradition with slight regional differences. Cohn observes: "Members of lineages are tied to other lineages through marriage, but, by and large, marriage within the marrying groups of a caste does not establish peer relations between the two families who have established marriage ties. Generally speaking, the boy's family, by accepting a girl from another family, establishes a higher status within the marrying group than the family that gives the girl..." Bernard S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, New Jersey, 1971, p.112.

[108] Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit.*, pp.89-90. Mencher explains that in contrast to other parts of India, where the decisions of caste councils were influenced by various

disregarded and what in fact counted was the amount fixed as dowry. There was also the tendency for *Yajuṛvēdi illams* to give their daughters to other *Yajuṛvēdi illams*, either in the same or in different *grāmam*. Similarly, Nambūtiris north of the river Kōrappuzha never gave their daughters in marriage to *illams* south of the river, though the opposite did occur occasionally.[109]

There was no divorce.[110] Remarriage of widows was also strictly forbidden.[111] But a widow was not disfigured; her *tāli* alone was removed. However, the restrictions upon their behaviour, conduct and sexuality were extremely stringent; the danger to Brahmanical patriarchy insisted on strict control over female sexuality. Like an unmarried girl who had attained puberty, an unguarded widow was also an object of moral panic. Therefore a widow had to be marked and marginalized. There were severe regimentation and strict routine in life. Public symbols and the peculiar code of conduct that marked a widow were meant to make them powerless. [112]

3:8. Position of Women

The Nambūtiri women were called Antarjanam, the literal meaning being "people within". The entire Nambūtiri life was patterned in such a way as to ensure the virginity of the Antarjanam. Their movements were restricted; their

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alliances, including marital ones, the Nambūtiri councils were headed by hereditary legal authorities who ruled on infractions of rules, methods of atonement, and related matters.

[109] For details of the wedding ceremonies see Thurston, *op.cit.*, pp.196-210.

[110] It is suggested that the Parāśarasmṛiti and Nāradasmṛiti contained a verse which permitted the wife the right to divorce in traditional Hindu law. It stated that 'another husband is ordained for women in five calamities viz. when the husband is lost (unheard of), is dead, has become a sanyasin, is impotent or is a patita'. Arvind Sharma, "How to Read Manusmriti?" *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences,* Vol. IX, No.2, Winter 2002, p.32. But none of these conditions were met in real life.

[111] In sharp contrast to the Nambūtiris, widowhood as an enforced system did not exist among the *marumakkathāyam* communities. A woman who used the freedom to get out of a *sambandham* was not looked down upon. So were widows who had freedom to remarry, and not be treated as inauspicious. K. Saradamoni, *Matriliny Transformed,* New Delhi, 1999, p.65.

[112] Mayer Fortes and R. Firth have suggested that symbols, private and public, constitute a major instrument of power when used directly or indirectly. Cited in Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood" in Martha Allen Chen ed., *Widows in India*, New Delhi, 1998, p.65.

travels were limited to temples or to houses of their close relatives, but that too had to be in the company of a maidservant. While travelling, she had to take all precautions to protect her chastity. In the life cycle ceremonies and other aspects of life, female discrimination was present to a shocking level. The first ritual ceremony after conception is *pumsavanam*, a ritual for the expectant mother to give birth to a male child. This discriminatory attitude against the female child continued throughout her life and was woven into the fabric of Nambūtiri lifestyle with all details up to the end of her existence. Female children were brought up to understand that they were not only not free but were also a step below their brothers. The girl child's education was just reading, writing and basic arithmetic while that of the boy child was an elaborate process continuing throughout his life. The girl children moreover were made to feel that they occupied only second place at home and in society, and the rites and rituals were patterned after this belief to instill in them this feeling. The Antarjanam also had separate places for worship, and their rituals had restrictions placed on them: women were not allowed to chant, for instance, and to do other ritual performances like those of males. In addition, after her attaining puberty, a Nambūtiri girl was not allowed to leave the *illam*; she was not allowed to visit even close relatives.[113] She was neither allowed to see men nor allowed to be seen by them. Cooking food, serving the husband and looking after the children were taught to her as the essence of womanhood. The wife should eat from the same plantain leaf used by the husband; the water used for washing the feet of the husband was considered to be *tīrtham* (holy water) for the wife.

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[113] M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād (Premji) in his drama *Ṛitumati* vividly portrayed the prevailing social sanctions against a Nambūtiri girl after her attaining puberty. He poetically described it thus:
"The tender girl has come of age;
It is time for her to stop schooling;
To cast away her usual dress;
And to go hiding under her umbrella;
And this cruel hypocrisy is glossed over as morality".
(M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Ṛitumati*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1991, p.5)

The life-cycle of the Brahmin women all over India provides a more or less uniform pattern with slight differences in detail.[114] Among them, the female child spent her youth preparing for marriage. Her marriage with a man of the same caste was arranged by her parents. Following the marriage ceremony she was sent to her husband's home and was required to adjust to their customs. Her husband was to be regarded as 'the supreme god among all gods' and served accordingly. The fortunate women gave birth to sons while issueless women or those who gave birth only to daughters were treated with disdain. The aging woman watched her children mature and marry and accepted the new roles of mother-in-law and grandmother. If her husband died before her, she became a widow with abstemious habits. After his death she was to devote her life to his memory, her impurity could never be removed, and she was to live out her life as the most inauspicious of all creatures. By faithfully performing her duties, a woman helped to maintain the order of the universe.[115]

But the slight differences are certainly striking. The Antarjanams obtained at least an elementary knowledge of language; some of them could read and write; pre-pubertal marriages, though not uncommon, were not sanctioned by custom. Still, girls had no voice in the choice of their husbands, whom their parents or elder brothers chose for them. Everyday life in the *illams* was organized in accordance with a highly complex set of rules of conduct upholding various

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[114] It is very difficult to construct the real picture of the lives of women before the colonial rule. Though there are abundant prescriptive texts, fewer documents shed light on their actual lives. Trayambakayajvan's *Stṛīdharmapaddhathi* is the only extant work totally devoted to women's duties. But this work describes the lives of women from the highest ranking, landholding groups only. See I. Julia Leslie, *The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Stridharmapaddhati of Trayambakayajvan*, Delhi, 1989. Leslie observes that the more orthodox ideas concerning women tend to be held even today by high-ranking, land-holding groups among whom patrilineage is strong and wives are economically dependent upon their husbands and their husband's families. *Ibid*, pp.19-20.

[115] But there were a lot of exceptions to the ideal. Some women became educated, attained fame and commanded armies; some were able to live outside patriarchal households and gain status as courtesans. *Ibid*, p.19.

hierarchies. Sex difference was certainly important, but not the sole base upon which this structure of regulation rested; consideration of age, position in the kin network and intra-jati hierarchy, marital status and other factors were also crucial. The very structure of the regulation itself permitted potentially subversive spaces. "Accounts of reformers themselves reveal faultiness that indicate not so much a total subordination of one sex by the other in the *illam*, but a more complex, mobile play of power with other factors like age, seniority, 'moral authority' in very specific settings etc. in tilting the balance".[116]

In patrilineal descent groups recruitment of new members is through the males of the group. Woman, according to the *smṛitis*, is herself a form of property through which a son could be obtained for continuity of the remaining property, and for offering food to the manes.[117] Women may be regarded as mere receptacles, or they may be believed to contribute nothing more than a favourable medium for the development of the foetus. But there are distinct limits as to how far women may be regarded as irrelevant to the recruitment process, for by definition women do care for the children and men do not.[118]

The Nambūtiri women are kept in the strictest seclusion.[119] Of all the virtues, chastity is accounted as the highest, and any violation of this entails loss of caste,

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[116] J. Devika, "Engendering Individuals: The Project of Nambūtiri Brahman Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-Aug.2004, p.84. Devika also argues that the reformers' account of the Antarjanams as passive characters does not perfectly conform to reality.

[117] D.D. Kosambi, "Brahmin Clans" in Brajadulal Chathopadhyay ed., *DD Kosambi: Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*, New Delhi, 2002, p.187.

[118] David M. Schneider, "Introduction" in David M. Schneider & Kathleen Gough ed., *Matrilineal Kinship*, Allahabad, 1972, p.15.

[119] Regarding the rules of conduct and restrictions on the movement of the Antarjanams, the *Census Report of Travancore, 1891*, p.684 remarked: "The women are guarded with more than Moslem jealousy. Even brothers and sisters are separated at an early age. When the Nambūtiri lady goes to worship the village god, or visit a neighbouring *illam*, a Nair maid who accompanies her commands the retirement of all the males on the road while the lady moves all shrouded in cloth with a mighty umbrella, which protects her from the gaze of profane eyes. At home they are simple in their habits, dressing like Nair women up to the waist. A

social status and total separation from the family. Enquiries into cases of conjugal infidelity are conducted by the *Smāṛtan,* under a caste tribunal,[120] and the entire course of caste trial was known as *Smāṛtavichāram.*[121] A report in West Coast Spectator described fairly well the nature and details of the trial in 1898.[122] Logan stated that a trial sometimes lasted several years, the tribunal met occasionally and the kinsmen of the accused were obliged to entertain the members and any other

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Nambutiri lady is thus kept in the strictest *ghosha.* She is inaccessible and invisible to everyone except those mentioned below. She may be seen and spoken to by all the members of her parents' families as well as such of those families as observe ten days' pula pollution; by everyone in her own family except her husband's brothers; by her parents' sisters' sons and grandsons; by her mother's father and his sons, his brothers and their sons; by her father's maternal grandfather, uncles and grandfather's brothers, and their sons. In some places her husband's uncles too are allowed to see her. Among other virtues chastity is reckoned as of the highest importance, the least suspicion either in manor woman entailing loss of caste, social position and separation from the family..." Mateer wrote in 1870: "Their women are carefully concealed from the public gaze; and, when venturing out of their house, are enveloped in cloths, or are covered by an immense umbrella". Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi, 1991, p.30.

[120] It consisted of the Smāṛthan (the president), two or more Mīmāmsakās (Nambūtiris versed in caste laws), the Akakōyma (local head of the community), and the Purakōyma (the representative of the Raja).

[121] For details of Smāṛtavichāram, see P.R.G. Mathur, "Smartavicharam Among the Namputiri Brahmans of Kerala", *Journal of Kerala Studies,* Vol. 2, Part III, Sept. 1975, pp.353-63; P. Bhaskaranuṇṇi, *Smāṛtavichāram*, Kottayam, 2000.

[122] "Of the several curious customs of the Nambūtiris, the most remarkable is their investigation of cases of adultery. If a woman misbehaved herself, there is no attempt at concealment, although the consequences of exposure are terrible, and not infrequently the informer against the woman is her father, brother or son. The procedure is briefly this. The community being informed of the suspected adultery, the woman is confined in an out-house, pending enquiry. The whole of the family is also cut-of from association with the community. The Raja in whose jurisdiction the case has arisen...being informed of the case, issues orders to the *Koyma* or the local head of the community, to the *Vaidikan* (preceptor) and to the *Smartan* (arbiter), to call a meeting of the community and hold an enquiry. A meeting is accordingly held and the Raja is represented by a deputy. The inquiry is begun by the *Smartan*...if the *dasi* admit the guilt, the woman herself, who is thenceforward called *sadhanam* (thing) is called before the meeting...A very minute examination, often very scandalous and indecent, is then conducted by the smarthan under the instruction of the *Vaidikan*, cording to certain set forms and the answers are recorded. After all a confession of guilt is wrung out, and the *Vaidikan* declares that the woman and her seducer, to whatever caste he may belong, ought to be excommunicated...The woman is considered dead to the family, and her funeral rites are performed in her presence. She is then taken to a public place, where a man from the assembly goes and snatches from her the cadjen umbrella...as she is no longer worthy to carry it. Her *dasi* is ordered to leave her. The *Smartan* then claps hands in token of being turned out of caste..." *West Coast Spectator*, 4th August 1898, cited in Fred Fawcett, *op.cit*, pp.74-76.

Nambūtiris present on each occasion. The kinsmen themselves were temporarily cut-of from intercourse with other Brahmins pending the result of the trial, and all *śṛāddhas* were stopped while it lasted.[123] He said that no amount of evidence was accepted as proof of guilt, unless the women confessed. Yet, she was forced to confess. A Pattar Brahman was used to name the adulterer(s). They were immediately banished from their respective castes.[124] Expenses for a trial were rarely less than Rs.1000 and had been known to amount Rs.12000.

In fact the *Smāṛtavichāram* was a pointer to the kind of anxiety that the Nambūtiris expressed towards regulating female chastity as a means to maintain caste purity. Women were a doubly condemnable creature, feared and hated; young widows were objects of real moral panic. It also revealed the male approach towards women as instruments of procreation and their regimented life pattern in accordance with male priorities. It is also observed that for the women concerned, the *vichāram* and the consequent excommunication amounted to 'social death' since the long process of trial and the psychological impact of the persecution involved in it destroyed her mental stature. It was also a clear message to other Antarjanams enjoining them to be 'disciplined' and to be 'good and moral wives'.[125]

By the beginning of the twentieth century, and particularly after the famous case of 1905, the continuation of *Smāṛtavichāram* became absolutely difficult due

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[123] William Logan, *op.cit*, p.123. A.M.N. Chakyar, *Avasānathē Smāṛtavichāram*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2001.

[124] Excommunication from caste was normally a matter of 'social death'. It was the most extreme sanction available to a person and was meant to coerce recalcitrants to obey caste rules. Robert M. Hayden, "Excommunication as Everyday Event and Ultimate Sanction: The Nature of Suspension From an Indian Caste", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XLII, No.2, Feb. 1983, pp.291-92.

[125] K.N. Ganesh, *Kēraḷathintē Innalēkaḷ*, pp.226-27. Yalman considers the Vichāram as an extreme instance of the control over women carried to sadistic lengths. Nur Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland*, 1963, p.52.

to the emerging public opinion against it[126] and to the royal sanction of the Cochin government binding the Nambūtiri caste council to deposit Rs.10000/- as security to get prior sanction for holding it. Equally important was the royal order, contrary to the traditional practice, to conduct a counter-trial of the accused (*puruṣavichāram*). The *śāstṛaic* jurisprudence thus received a fatal blow and marked a shift from the traditional jurisprudence to the Roman laws for individual freedom.[127] Thereafter there was a marked decrease in the number of cases reported and trials conducted[128] though *vichārams* continued up to 1918, when the last of them took place.[129] In fact there was an increase in the number of cases around 1900; press reports between 1901 and 1905 and the remark that a special court would have to be set up for these trials indicated the increase in such cases.[130] Reports of the trial of 1905 show that Antarjanams had started to retaliate against custom and had found them as escape routes from the grips of community control, even at the cost of social boycott.[131]

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[126] See Malayāḷa Manorama, July 22, 1905; Kāṇippayūṛ Śankaran Nambūtiripād, *Entē Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. 3, pp.127-28.

[127] Rajan Gurukkal, "Development Experience of Colonial Keralam", in M.A. Oommen ed., *Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1999, p.95.

[128] Kāṇippayūṛ wrote that there were five cases of trial in his lifetime from the *Vichāram* of Tāṭṛi in 1905 onwards. *Entē Smaraṇakaḷ*, Vol. 3, p.142. Though very active in the reform movement, Kāṇippayūṛ showed great sympathy towards the practice of *Smāṛtavichāram* when he started to write his memoirs in the 1960s.

[129] A.M.N. Chakyar, *op.cit.*

[130] K.M. Sheeba, "Contextualizing Sexuality: Antaṛjanams in the 20th Century Namboodiri Caste Order of Keralam", *Indian History Congress Proceedings Volume*, Millennuim Session, Kolkota, 2000-01, pp.932-33.

[131] In an article "Manasthitikku Vanna Māttam Athavā Charitṛathintē Pōkku" (*YK*, 17:95 & 96, Sep. 2 & 7, 1927), Kāṇippayūṛ analyzed the changing approach of Nambūtiris towards *Smāṛtavichāram*. Sanctity attached to chastity was declining, accused men had started to question the verdict of the caste councils in the law courts, and in one case the *sādhanam* was protected by the accused Nambūtiri with the blessing of his father. Kāṇippayūṛ linked adultery with the existing marriage practice; he pointed out that women involved in such cases were of three categories – unmarried women, widows and wives of aged husbands – and reminded the elders that people are righteous not just because they are god-fearing but also because they are disinclined to face disgrace and punishment. In the new circumstances where there was no fear of disgrace and no matter of alienation from the family and no loss of property rights, keeping morality would be a challenging task. If the community wanted to maintain chastity and

3:9. Pollution

Closely connected with the caste system were the rigid theories of pollution, which may be classed under two heads, namely, pollution by approach and by touch. The social distance between castes in Kerala was traditionally expressed in spatial terms.[132] In the treatment of the lower castes, a recognized scale of distance was kept at which each of the polluting castes must stand from a man of the higher caste or his house, the distance increasing in proportion to the low status of the caste. In south India where Brahmans were not only powerful spiritually but also materially, prohibitions against lower castes were very strong.[133] M.N. Srinivas has specified three conditions of pollution and purity – a state of normal purity, a state of impurity and a state of ritual purity.[134] In the latter condition, one might transact with divinities, namely gods and ancestors. Stevenson distinguished pollution as internal and external. Internal pollution results from absorbing polluting substances into the body and is much harder to remove than external pollution, which is the consequence of mere contact with polluting substances or contact with lower caste persons.[135] Other agents causing states of impurity include pollution due to death, birth, menstruation, sexual intercourse, defecation, urination, bodily dirt, and eating. Means of purification include taking bath and wearing pure cloths.

There were strict rules regarding commensality. The Nambūtiris received food from their equals or from those who were superior to them in the sub-caste

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morality, the present marriage system, which forced women of 30 and 40 to remain unmarried, had to be replaced with the universalization of *swajātivivāham*.

[132] M.N. Srinivas, "The Indian Village: Myth and Reality" in J.H.M. Beattie and R.G. Lieuhardt, *Studies in Social Anthropology: Essays in Memory of E.E. Evans-Prichard,* London, 1975, p.73.

[133] Pauline Kolenda, "Purity and Pollution" in TN Madan ed., *Religion in India,* New Delhi, 2003, p.94.

[134] Cited in *ibid,* p.79.

[135] H.N.C. Stevenson, "Status Evaluation in the Hindu Caste System", JRAI, 84, 1954, p.56 cited in C.J. Fuller, *The Nayars Today,* Cambridge, 1976, p.120.

hierarchy. Custom forbade the Nambūtiri husbands of the *sambandham* marriage to eat with their Nāyaṛ women. This was because (a) this would make them into wives (against liaisons), and (b) they would then pollute the men 'internally' through their stomachs.[136]

Besides, there was also ceremonial pollution: a person ceremonially polluted conveyed pollution to even members of the same caste. Women were considered as ceremonially polluted during their monthly periods and after delivery; and this they conveyed as a kind of atmospheric pollution. They had to live in seclusion during this period.[137] Scrupulous maintenance of ritual purity was imperative, especially in the kitchen and its vicinity, and women were required to observe the necessary rites carefully.[138] A death or birth in a family entailed pollution on all the agnates and cognates; normally this lasted for ten days and could be removed by a bath and certain prescribed ceremonies.

The traditions by which the Nambūtiris talked to members of other communities were strictly ceremonial and revealed the character of ritual hierarchy. Even in the 1930s many had followed the practice and were severely criticized for it.[139]

Malabar was the most conservative part of south India because pollution rules were observed here with Spartan severity. Nambūtiris distinguished two pollution agents: first, people whose mere approach within certain well-defined distances carried atmospheric pollution; and second, people who only polluted by actual contact. Indeed, 'indirect pollution' of a high caste individual by an untouchable

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[136] Nur Yalman, "On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar", *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland,* 1963, p.42.

[137] Seeing a woman during menses was polluting. Only the mother was an exception in this matter. Even seeing menstruating sisters and aunts were defiling events. Fr. Pallath J. Joseph, "Women and Caste Discrimination: The Nambūtiri-Dominated Period of Kerala Culture and Society", AHRC Website, dated 16-8-2002.

[138] Laḷitāmbika Antarjanam, *Cast Me Out if You Will: Stories and Memoirs,* Translated by Geetha Krishnankutty, Calcutta, 1998, p.xvii.

[139] *Lakṣmibhāi*, 16:4, 1106 Thulam, (Oct-Nov.1930) pp.313-316.

was carried to an extreme in Kerala where the shadow of a Cheṟuman would pollute a Nāyaṛ on the road.[140] The man of high caste shouted occasionally as he passed by, so that the low caste man may go off the road and allow him to pass unpolluted. And those of the lower castes, Pulayās and others, shouted as they passed by, to give notice of the proximity of their pollution-bearing presence, and to receive the command of the men of high castes, so that they could move away from the road.

Bathing was one of the most important means of driving off pollution and hence was a significant religious duty of the Nambūtiris.[141] A Nambūtiri only wanted an excuse for bathing. Every Nambūtiri bathed at least twice a day, and sometimes oftener. The fastidious sense of bath purity occasionally took the form of a regular mania, and the Nambūtiri received a nickname *jalappiśāchu* because of this obsession. Never did a Nambūtiri fail to bathe at least once a day, unless extreme physical weakness prevented him from doing so.[142]

Houtart and Lemercinier observed that pollution practices translated the relationships of dependence in terms of repulsion.[143] The more completely the groups were dominated by the higher castes, the more they were looked upon as intrinsically impure, and consequently by their essence disturbers of the social order, to such a point indeed as to justify the physical elimination of any of their

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[140] Joan P. Mencher, "The Nayars of South Malabar" in M.F. Nimkoff ed., *Comparative Family Systems,* Boston, 1965, p.166.

[141] Bougle summarized the system of caste into three elements: separation, hierarchy and hereditary specialization. The social groups, i.e., castes, pushed each other off in an opposition of pure-impure. A caste remained pure by performing rituals and customs: honouring its gods, making gifts to temples, bathing in order to wash away pollution, performing ceremonies at birth, marriage and death, and observing its rules for intermarriage, eating and dressing. A caste that did not observe similar rituals and customs was considered to be impure in relation to the caste that did not observe them. Cited in Hugo Ks' Jacob, *The Rajas of Cochin 1663-1720: Kings, Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company,* New Delhi, 2000, p.3.

[142] Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd, "Kuḷi", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 83:16, 19 June, 2005, pp.34-36.

[143] Genevieve Lemercinier and Francois Houtart, "Social Functions of Religion in Pre-Capitalist Societies – the Case of Kerala", *Social Scientist,* Vol. 23, Nos. 1-3, Jan-March 1995, p.101.

members who infringed any of these taboos. So much was this the case, in fact, that it was by impressing on these lower groups the conviction of their exclusion from the social unity – an exclusion to which the pollution practices gave both verisimilitude and reality – that the dominant groups ensured their complete dependence. It was really by this means that the unity of the system was maintained.

3:10. Challenges of the Modern Age

The Nambūtiri hold on Kerala society remained fairly strong as long as they possessed the major part of the landed estates and influenced behaviour and belief through the management of temples. The first serious challenge to their power was administered by the Mysore invasions and the occupation of Malabar in the second half of the eighteenth century. Large numbers of Nambūtiris left their ancestral homes and lands to become refugees in Travancore. Large numbers of them were forcibly converted.[144] It was only after the defeat of Tipu by the British that the Nambūtiris could return from Travancore. In fact, the Mysorean occupation of Malabar was significant in that the traditional social system received a rude shock and the Brahmins were for the first time made to understand that they had no immunities and that they were no better than other human beings. Though the period was brief it was adequate to show to the people of Kerala that the Hindu order was alterable and could be changed.[145]

With the beginning of the nineteenth century the firm establishment of British rule in Malabar and British supremacy in Cochin and Travancore took political, social and cultural initiative out of Nambūtiri hands.[146] The Nambūtiris withdrew

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[144] Logan wrote that in 1788 about 200 Brahmans were 'seized, confined, made Mussalmans and forced to eat beef'. Logan, *Malabar*, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, p.449.

[145] A. Aiyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, Bombay, 1965, pp.126-27; P.K. Balakrishnan, *Chandumēnōn: Oru Paṭanam*, Kottayam, 1980, p119.

[146] In Travancore, for example, the 1812 Decree which confiscated the extensive landed properties of the three hundred and seventy eight biggest temples had the impact of breaking the power of Nambūtiri and Nāyar chiefs. The legislation which coincided with the

more and more into their own shell of old world rituals and beliefs in the seclusion of villages.[147] In Malabar, the Nāyaṛs, who had lost their traditional military functions, discovered new opportunities in English education and the British administrative set up.[148] Thus these Nāyaṛs were increasingly alienated from their Nambūtiri mentors and masters. *Indulēkha* depicts the educated Nāyaṛ community in revolt against its traditional Nambūtiri alliance.[149] In fact it was landlordism that made the Nambūtiris feel secure even in the face of challenges and remain calm and retired in the midst of disastrous storm.[150]

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suppression of the Nāyar army abolished the Nambūtiri *saṅkētams* whose lands were all confiscated. The Nambūtiris were now virtually reduced to mere religious agents who stood deprived of institutional authority, which until then had informed their dominance across the region. Deprived of the support they always had from the military castes, the Nambūtiris were no longer in a position of power when faced with a political authority supported by the colonists. K.M. Sheeba, "From the Kitchen to the Stage and Back: Continuing Forms of Women's Exclusion in Keralam", *Journal of South Indian History*, Vol. 2, No.2, March 2006, p.58.

[147] The Cochin State Manual observed: "The Nambūtiris form but a small community numerically, but owing to their character, intelligence, wealth and social position, their importance considerably exceeds their numerical strength. This importance however has been on the decline during the past half century, which is mainly due to their caste exclusiveness and conservatism. Their influence in State councils, which was once supreme, is now a negligible factor, and on account of their objection to English education, they are being elbowed out by other castes from almost every literate walk of life". C. Achutha Menon, *Cochin State Manual*, TVM, 1995, Reprint, p.251.

[148] Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād attributed the indifference of the Nambūtiris to modern culture to landlordism; all Brahmins except the Nambūtiris responded to the challenge posed by the modern age immediately and could overcome the crisis economically and culturally. See his *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ*, pp.234-35.

[149] "...Indulekha underlines the growing awareness about the iniquity of the Nayar-Nambutiri marriage alliance. The new generation resented sexual exploitation by the Nambutiris and questioned the ideological dominance which sanctioned it. Indulekha's rejection of Suri Nambutiripad is a powerful statement of this cultural consciousness..." K. N. Panikkar, "Creating a New Cultural Taste: Reading a Nineteenth Century Malayāḷam Novel" in R. Champakalakshmi & S. Gopal ed., *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology*, New Delhi, 1996, p.103.

[150] The difficulty of the Nambūtiris in adapting to the new situation has been illustrated with considerable sympathy thus: "Following the loss of political control and socio-economic supremacy, the Nambūtiris were fast becoming the relics of the old world. For as long as they could, they clung to their lands, temples and caste privileges and turned their back to the 'mleccha' system of modern English education. They could not participate in the social reform movement, since it was largely directed against their dominance; and with their aversion to manual labour they were strangers in the world of industry and commerce. Even in matters connected with their landed property they had become dependant on a professional class of lawyers, composed of the tenants and caste subordinates. With their sensitivity sharpened by

Moreover, the network of traditional caste occupations and caste cultures was weakened by the impact of modern transport, education and commerce. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the wind of social reform unleashed by the Īzhava reform movement under Dr. Palpu and Sri Nārāyaṇa Guru in Travancore shook the very foundations of the caste hierarchy over which the Nambūtiri had presided for so many centuries. While Nāyaṛs agitated for the abolition of *taṛawād*, *marumakkathāyam* and *sambandham*, Christian missionary work among the lower communities accelerated the dissolution of caste. Even in Travancore and Cochin, where the native rulers still exhibited special consideration towards Brahmins, the latter had now been dismissed from all positions of power at the court and the palace. Nambūtiri dominance continued only in rural agricultural life and in the religious life of the orthodox section of the people. Even the hold on agrarian life was soon threatened by the rise of the tenancy movement and the reform of land tenure which came first in British Malabar and spread to Cochin and Travancore.

Thus the Nambūtiris had been pushed to the defensive and was seen as the greatest impediment to the material progress of the land.[151] "The traditional and quasi legal rights and privileges conceded to Brahmans in Travancore, constitute a formidable barrier to the general progress and political improvement of the country. They are exempt in a native state from capital punishment for any offence whatsoever, and their crimes are very leniently dealt with, while those committed against them are severely punished. The laws as to *caste distance* also, as far as they are carried out, cannot but put a stop to the elevation of the lower orders, and

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misfortune, they grew more and more cynical and sought refuge in the palliatives of archaic faith and culture in the timeless haven of *Koodiyattam*, *Kathakali* and the feasts and festivals associated with the temple; and in purificatory rituals as if to shut out the noises of modern society by chanting mantras and ward off its sights by closing their eyes in mediation...the majority Nambūtiris observed the rigid caste rules...harsh treatment of women and compulsive ritual observance". M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, *op.cit*, pp.276-77.

[151] E.M.S. pointed out that by the time of the establishment of the British power in Kerala, the Nambūtiri janmis had become a socially unproductive class and their presence itself had become a great hindrance to the general progress of the society. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *EMS-nte Diary*, Vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p.107.

necessarily limit the natural freedom of large classes of individuals..."[152] "...Ordinary cleanliness is doubtless a virtue, and the pretty tanks close by the temples are, when supplied with *clean* water, both ornamental and useful. But the idea of ceremonial caste pollution sadly hinders the people from social intercourse with one another and from improving intimacy with other nations. Europeans, because they eat flesh and mingle with all castes, are excluded from access to the interior of a native house, or entering beyond the common reception hall of a Hindu palace. After shaking hands with a European, the caste Hindu must bathe to remove the pollution; and there are special occasions when it is highly inconvenient to them to meet foreigners even in the most casual manner."[153]

3:11. The Yōgakṣēmasabha Movement

The awakening among the Nambūtiris was evidently defensive; it was stimulated by two broad categories of factors. By the close of the nineteenth century new forces had started to dislodge the existing socio-economic environment paving its way for new ideals and new tendencies. To continue in the old order with the old traditions was not only difficult but also suicidal. Secondly, other communities – both lower and upper caste Hindus and non-Hindus – had already been awakened and had far transcended the path of modernization. The entire context had become so adverse that reform was the only means of survival.[154]

Efforts of the Nambūtiris to respond to the changing social milieu had its organized beginning with the founding of the *Yōgakṣēmasabha*. The *Sabha* was born on 18th Kumbham 1083 ME (2nd March 1908) on the day of Śivarātṛi in a

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[152] Samuel Mateer, *The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People*, New Delhi, 1991, p.32.

[153] Samuel Mateer, *Native Life in Travancore*, New Delhi, 1991, p.332

[154] *Census of India, 1931 Vol. XXI Cochin*, Part I Report, p.263 observed that the chief aim of the Sabha was "the reformation or the rejuvenation of the old and worn out Nambūtiri caste by means of social and other reforms calculated to bring the life of the community into adjustment with modern conditions".

meeting at the illam of Cheṟumukku Vaidikan in Aluva presided over by Dēśamangalath Valiya Śankaran Nambūtiripād.[155] Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād and Chittūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād were prominent dignitaries of the first meeting. Other prominent participants included Vadakkillath Jatavēdan Nambūtiripād, Kapḷingāt Vaidikan Neelakantan Nambūtiri and Kirāngāt Vāsudēvan Nambūtiripād, all of whom were Nambūtiri husbands at the Cochin royal family but were liberals and reform-minded men. Almost all the prominent Āddhyan Nambūtiris, Āzhvānchēry Tambṟākkaḷ, Vādhyāns and Smāṟthans participated in the early activities of the Sabha.[156] For about ten years Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād led the Sabha as its undisputed leader.

There has been considerable debate over the immediate factor that had led to the founding of the Sabha. Most of those who have written about the origin of the Sabha have referred to an incident that took place in the Tṟipūnituṟa palace. During a usual nighttime talk among the palace ladies and their Nambūtiri husbands, one of the women rebuked the Nambūtiris for their conservative outlook and lack of modern education and expressed her disgust over her fate of being the wife of such a backward-looking and diehard man.[157] This rebuke is interpreted to have provoked the *sambandham* Nambūtiris and forced them to find ways of overcoming this disgrace by getting organized and by reforming customs so that they could adapt themselves to the changing times. But this argument does not conform to realities and fails to explain satisfactorily the circumstances that had led to the origin of the *Sabha.* In fact C.K. Nambūtiri's citation of the palace lady's rebuke reveals more details. She criticized the Nambūtiris not only for their obtuseness but also for their lethargy which had been the cause for the erosion of

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[155] C.K. Nambūtiri, *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum,* p.9; Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitṟam*; P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilekku*, pp.34-36.

[156] P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.35-36.

[157] C.K. Nambūtiri, *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum,* pp.7-8; Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitṟam.*

their privileges, holdings and belongings. She was referring to the tenancy laws which would affect the Nambūtiris adversely, the material progress of other communities through English education and modern vocations, the proposed legislations which sought to attach Dēvaswam properties, the refusal of the lower castes to serve the Nambūtiris during ritual occasions, etc.[158] In fact the rebuke itself reveals the defensive character of the response of the Nambūtiris; they were besieged by numerous forces and were denounced even by their wives.

Some people consider the Tāṭṛi case as an important factor causing to generate conditions for the origin of the *Sabha*. Mādamb observed that it in fact shook the entire community; provided the Nambūtiris with a common cause to come together; and more importantly, it provoked the liberal sections to find ways to regenerate the community through modern organizational and normative lines.[159] VT held that two women had played their decisive roles in the awakening of the Nambūtiris – Tāṭṛi and Indulēkha – both in almost identical ways: by exposing the moral and material decay of the community.[160] But the impact of the incident seemed not to have played any overt role in the birth of the Sabha; even if it had anything, it was certainly concealed and negative; the Sabha had refused to take up women's issues on a revolutionary footing and rather stressed on 'disciplining' women through new norms and behavioural patterns. If the community had learned anything from the issue, it was the lesson that immorality had become a serious menace to the stature of the community and that some makeshift

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[158] C.K. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.8.

[159] Mādamb Kunjukṭṭan, *Abhivadaye*, Kottayam, 1989, pp.88-89. For a critique of Mādamb, see M.R. Manmathan, "Imagined Identity against Documented History: Assumed Images of V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād", *Proceedings of the South Indian History Congress*, Bangalore, 2006, p.629.

[160] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 626-27. VT places the Tāṭṛi case more decisive than the Cochin Raja's proclamation of 1080 in provoking the Nambūtiris to unite together. M. Govindan, taking his position from VT, argued that the origin of the Sabha was intimately associated with the Tāṭṛi case; it enforced the Nambūtiris to associate on modern organizational lines and to take measures to cleanse the community off the vices and to work for a cultural renaissance. M. Govindan, "Stṛīyē, Enikkum Ninakkum Tammil Bandhamenthu?" in *M. Gōvindantē Upanyāsangaḷ*, pp.730-31.

arrangements had to be made in order to save its tottering image. On the other hand, there is some plausibility in Mathur's argument. He writes: "Doubt may arise whether physical force was employed by the traditional caste elders for their progressive views particularly relating to caste matters. It is said that most of those ostracized belonged to a factional group which was responsible for establishing the Nambūtiri Yōgakşēmasabha immediately after this excommunication case... Perhaps, the traditional caste elders wanted to take revenge on the liberal castemen who refused to recognize the authority of the former. It is observed that one of the liberal castemen who carried the English book to the Vedic school was one of the 63 excommunicated persons...It seems highly improbable that, in a closed society such as Nambūtiris, a woman could have 63 men and yet the things would remain a secret for such a long time. It is quite probable therefore that the whole case was made up by some interested parties".[161]

The entire social situation was turning against traditional privileges and the easy-going nature of the Nambūtiris. Even the patronage given to them by the governments was slowly being lost. This was first expressed in Travancore where the government was not as committed to the Nambūtiris as in Cochin; it was here that the tenancy legislation had its origin. Even in Cochin, the first decade of the twentieth century saw the initial steps towards tenancy reforms. In fact it was the royal order enforcing the tenancy issue (29-11-1907) that had sparked off conditions for the origin of the Sabha.[162] This assumption is supported by the fact that the Sabha gave its first priority to the tenancy question by appointing a committee under Kuṟuṟ Nambūtiripād to take necessary measures in this regard.[163]

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[161] P.R.G. Mathur, "Caste Council among the Nambūtiri Brahmans of Kerala", *The Eastern Anthropologist,* Vol.22, No. 2, 1969, pp.218-19.

[162] *Ibid,* pp.21-22.

[163] Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād is reported to have said: "In addition to their traditional occupations of gaining knowledge in Sanskrit, offering pūjās, chanting Vedic hymns and performing holy sacrifices for the welfare of the society, the Nambūtiris should concentrate on learning English to acquire the ability to present their own cases in courts of law in order to protect their

The provision that "nothing should be professed, followed or resolved in the Sabha that would adversely affect the traditional customs, procedures or nobility status of the Nambūtiris"[164] also indicated that the prime concern of the organizers of the Sabha was not the refashioning of the community in tune with the norms and ideals of the emerging social order. Even otherwise, a cursory analysis of the demands and decisions of the Sabha would reveal that all of them – such as English education, marriage reform, and family regulation –were interlinked with the main agenda of the Nambūtiri movement – defense of privileges and was meant to keep the old structure intact.

The Sabha in its formative phase lacked a solid institutional base and programme of action.[165] Moreover, it was constituted mainly by the patriarchs who had been concentrating on the defense of their community's interests in relation to others and the modern state system. Though the statute of the Sabha defined that its aim was "the educational, moral, political and economic progress of the Nambūtiris",[166] reforms within the community affecting the family structure and property relations were only leisurely and cautiously taken up. The issue which received immediate attention was English education; even the ultra-conservatives were coerced to submit on this issue on the ground that safeguarding community interests in the new era warranted knowledge of English language. The priority given to English education was a tacit expression of the appalling fact that traditional knowledge was ineffective in defending community interests and to confront the emerging issues. Though resolutions were presented/passed in the

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property and safeguard their rights". Cited in Akkitham, "EMS-um Yōgakṣēmasabhayum", *Bhāṣāpōṣiṇi,* 21:12, May 1998, p.20.

[164] *Ibid,* p.17.

[165] I.V. Babu justifies this languor by referring to Blumer's observation that in its initial stages every social movement may be badly organized and would have no clear-cut organizational set up. Herbert Blumer, Social Movement Studies in Mc Lang Barry ed., *Social Movements,* Collier McMillan, 1969, p.8 cited in I.V. Babu, *Social, political & cultural Result of Nambūtiri Renaissance*. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1996, pp.110-11.

[166] P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *op.cit,* p.34.

Sabha on such matters as reform of marriage customs and changes in ritual observances, serious efforts were not made to put them into practice just as in the case of the English education.

The history of the Nambūtiri movement could be differentiated into its moderate and extremist phases; while the period from its origin till the birth of the *Saṅgham* was marked by moderation and caution in objectives and methods of action, the subsequent period was radical in all respects. In the first phase the *Sabha* was led by the elders, took English education as its foremost goal and had been based on the tacit assumption that reform and reconstruction should be accomplished only with the full support of the community. This period, however, was marked by the undisputed leadership of Kuṟūṟ Damodaran (Uṇṇi) Nambūtiripād. Radicals emerged in the Sabha by angrily protesting against its life-long and slow-moving leadership and its undue insistence on making speeches and passing resolutions. They demanded changes at two levels: one, expanding the agenda of the movement by incorporating marriage reform and partition of family property and second, taking to direct action rather than sticking on to passing resolutions and appealing to the consent of the community as a whole. The period was also marked by attempts to link the Nambūtiri movement with the civil and the nationalist movements. If the first phase was formative and foundational – but frustrating in terms of results – second was pragmatic and dynamic and capable of bringing about revolutionary changes.

The Nambūtiri movement was marked by the following important features.

1. The principal goal of the reformers was progress. Changing modes of social strength and power led them to attempt a reconstruction of customs and traditions. All the programmes of the movement were designed to regenerate the community as a means to achieve this goal.[167] Even the efforts to improve the status of women

[167] It is an overstatement that the demand for legislative intervention arose at such a dangerous situation when no other measure to save the community from total extinction was possible. See Vasanthakumari, "The Madras Nambūtiri Act (XXI of 1933) – A Study of the Nambūtiri

were posited on the fact that without social reform to substantially improve women's status, regeneration seemed doomed to failure. But there was an equally implicit refusal to acknowledge the concept of the progress of the whole society since it impinged upon the privileged position of the Nambūtiris.

2. The Nambūtiri movement attempted to rally its members of the community behind certain important issues that needed immediate attention and would immensely benefit the whole community.[168] They included a reappraisal of the ideologies, customs and practices, such as the approach to English education, marriage system and the joint family, and a realignment of their ties with other castes and communities, by eliminating pollution and by democratizing social relationships.[169] All these were associated with the question of the 'fall' of the community and how they retarded progress. Thus community-building was sought to be attained through the promotion of caste-cluster consciousness and by mobilizing the support of the people on common issues of interest.[170]

3. The agenda of the movement widened in accordance with the compulsions from within the movement and in response to the pressures from outside; but all these were justified in the name of community interests. The cessation of

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Customs of Malabar in Light of the Judicial Findings Antecedent to the Act", *Proceedings Volume of the Indian History Congress*, Calicut, 1999, pp.753, 757, 762.

[168] In his "Nammudē Dharmam" (*YK*, 13:14, Nov.8, 1922), Kāṇippayūṛ Śankaran Nambūtiripād called upon the Nambūtiris to concentrate on 'selfish' interests, which all others were holding fast to, in order to attain progress and to protect community interests. This they should do also for regaining the lost *Brāhmaṇyam* which would reinstate the old glory and could be made use of for the good of the whole society.

[169] Though the movement succeeded in achieving the goal of endogamous-monogamous marriages, it could not establish a monolithic community by fully eliminating sub-caste differences by introducing a new tradition in marriage. In the case of the Gauda Sāraswata Brahmans, Conlon has displayed how the movement among them had failed in achieving a similar goal. See Frank. F. Conlon, "Caste by Association: The Gauda Saraswata Brahmana Unification Movement", *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, May 1974, pp.351-65.

[170] Arunima writes: "...such natural ties were to imbue the community with a greater sense of unity and cohesiveness, impossible earlier as caste norms had been divisive, disallowing either the formation of a true sense of the community, or the longevity of one. Therefore, all through this period, caste and community sentiments were being used to foster internal reform and reorganization". G. Arunima, "Multiple Meanings: Changing Conceptions of Matrilineal Kinship in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Malabar", The Indian Economic and Social History review, 33:3, 1996, p.303.

sambandham and the promotion of *swajātivivāham* were aimed at protecting the property and boosting the numerical strength of the community;[171] the elimination of the practice of pollution and promotion of temple-entry to all were demanded in order to redeem the community of the sin of discriminating a vast majority of the Hindu population in the name of inhuman and outmoded norms of social behaviour. Nambūtiris were also asked to take part in the Nationalist movement for their commitment to national interests and for chalking out a dominant space for them in the nation-building process.[172]

4. No other caste movement had its most dangerous enemy within itself except among the Nambūtiris. It was easy to unite a community if benefits were sought to be achieved from outside; but the case of the Nambūtiris was different.[173] The three important areas of reform – marriage, property and custom – needed a prolonged struggle against both the *kāraṇavaṛ* and the *vaidikaṛ*. Hence the movement resembled a class struggle, a struggle by the dispossessed against the privileged.[174]

5. Among the many caste reform/community-building movements of 20th century Kerala, only the Nambūtiris took up the question of gender discrimination as a serious agenda of discourse and agitation.[175] The reasons for this has been

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[171] *Census of India, 1941, Travancore*, p.59 stated that "the preference for endogamous marriages has also a political aspect. The political influence which they can exercise will depend upon their numerical strength; and so long as custom prohibits the younger members among the Nambūtiris from marrying within their community, they will be denied this political advantage. This applies equally well to the kshatriyas also".

[172] As Panikkar remarked, religious reformation was not an end in itself, it was for social comfort and political advantage. K.N. Panikkar, "From Revolt to Agitation: Beginning of the National Movement", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 25, Nos. 9-10, Sep-Oct. 1997, p.33.

[173] Thāyāt Śankaran, "Sūri Nambūtirippādil Ninnu V.T. Bhaṭṭathirippādilēkku" in Palkkizh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, p.47.

[174] K.C. Nārāyaṇan observed that the movement was in fact a class struggle because the Apphans and the Antaṛjanams constituted the true proletariat of the community. See his "Avathārika", in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.17.

[175] K.C. Nārāyaṇan wrote: "...For all reform movements of the 20th century other than that of V.T's, women's emancipation was only a marginal issue; but for the Nambūtiri movement, it was the central problem, the very hub of its activities". *Ibid*, p.15.

interpreted variously,[176] but the greatness attached to it gets faded in the context of the extremely difficult living conditions of the Antarjanams and the implicit male agenda involved in their emancipation. The reform process was greatly determined also by the impact of the European theory that the status of women was integral to the level and strength of a civilization.

6. The movement witnessed the replacement of the old patriarchs from the leadership of the community and the *Sabha* by energetic young men.[177] Nobility and seniority in age were criterions of authority in the community. When community interests clashed with the attitude of the patriarchs in the new situation, and as modern methods of agitation required vigour and 'manliness', young men captured the movement.

7. The movement was noted for its vigorous struggle against the old system of patriarchy.[178] The abdication of the *kāraṇavaṛ* was the essential precondition for both the empowerment of the junior males and the emancipation of women. While the Family Regulation introduced democratic values within the family, *swajātivivāham* helped to refashion feudal concepts of gender relations.

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[176] K.C. Nārāyaṇan remarked that what motivated the Apphans was the natural right of women to acquire freedom from male supremacy. *Ibid,* p.18. But the condition of women among *marumakkathāyam* communities was far superior; they enjoyed greater amount of freedom and autonomy. Poly Hill, "Kerala is Different", *Modern Asian Studies,* 20:4, 1986, p.789. It is described as "women's liberation with a vengeance" because divorce was easy and polyandry was not unknown. See Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja*, New Delhi, 1994, p.41.

[177] The Rudolphs wrote: "Leadership in the caste association is no longer in the hands of those qualified by heredity – the senior or more able members of the lineage group which traditionally supplied village sub-caste leadership. The 'availability' of association leaders is conditioned by their ability to articulate and represent the purposes of the caste association, and for this purpose they must be literate in the ways of the new democratic politics. Men whose educational and occupational backgrounds assure these skills have moved into the leadership positions" L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations" in Immanuel Wallerstein ed., *Social Change: The Colonial Situation,* New York, 1966, p.450.

[178] In that sense it was a hegemonic struggle, in the Gramscian theoretical perspective; the struggle looked at gaining a 'war of position' against the conservatives as a means to achieve the reform agenda. For a discussion see Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence,* New Delhi, 1989, pp.25-26, 516-17.

8. The methods and ideology employed by the movement for both mobilization and agitation were new. The organizational structure of the Sabha was modern; agitation was through mass mobilization on specific grievances, based on majority opinion. Popular sympathy towards a cause was created through journalistic propaganda and through the deliberations in the annual and other meetings of the *Sabha*. Support of other communities for reform was also enlisted.

9. Print media played a decisive role in the process of identity-crafting among the Nambūtiris as members of the modern community and the nation.[179] Apart from campaigning through the two organs of *Yōgakṣēmam* and *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri*, published works like short stories, drama, novels, pamphlets, reports etc played an important role in the creation of an ideological environment in favour of reform. A major part of the reform discourse was through the print media and it would be safe to say that print culture contributed heavily for the swift and sweeping victory of the Nambūtiri movement.[180]

10. The movement played a decisive role in changing the Nambūtiris into law-abiding subjects of a secular state. Traditionally they had near-sovereign authority and they controlled and were law unto themselves and had considerably influenced the law-making machinery to a considerable extent. Now, with the establishment of the colonial rule, they lost their *de facto* authority in state matters; with the introduction of the new legislative culture, they had to depend on others even for restructuring their family and marriage traditions. Constitutionalism was intimately associated with modernity, nationalism and the growing civic sense.

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[179] For Anderson, the idea of the nation arrives as a resolution of the problems of both community and equality, generating an imaginary affinity between individuals geographically scattered and socially divided. Thus, the novel and the newspaper become the means for representing and the expression of, the kind of imagined community that is the 'nation'. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London, 1983.

[180] Arunima argues that the rise of the 'print culture' at the close of the 19th century had considerably promoted the process of the development of community identities and a public sphere in Kerala. See G. Arunima, "Imagining Communities-differently: Print, language and the 'public sphere' in colonial Kerala", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 43:1, 2006, pp.63-75.

11. The ideological basis for reform of customs and traditions was the concept of a new society derived from modern science and reason. The question of the continuation of customs and practices was settled on the basis of their adaptability to and utility in the new situation and to the extent they retarded the progress of the community.

12. The entire discourse on reform had been associated with the concept of the 'fall' and changes were justified as means to revive the past glory and a supposed golden age.[181] It was argued that the Nambūtiris were a model community in the past having economic power, population strength, vitality and a social aura.[182] Therefore, the new order sought to be introduced was not exactly new; in fact it was a revival of the old tradition in a new form. An appeal to tradition and to the golden age was seen in all realms of reform, whether in marriage, education or in family management.

13. Two prominent issues that determined inter-caste (Nambūtiri-Nāyaṛ) relationship were *sambandham* and tenancy and both were linked with the question of property. Both played significant role in creating the concept of the 'other', since they had trans-caste dimensions.[183]

14. A fascination towards capitalism and entrepreneurship was evident from the beginning of the 20th century, at least among a few Nambūtiri families like

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[181] The volume *Nambūtirimār*, edited by Pārayil Rāman Nambūtiri, (Tṛiśśūṛ, 1093 M.E. i.e., 1918) to boost the reform process, presented the bygone age of the Nambūtiri dominance as true golden age and expressed great concern over the loss of this glorious past. The work urged the Nambūtiris to revive it in a new way.

[182] Arunima observed that history as a mode of organizing community memory was already familiar to the three groups of Semitic origin in Kerala (Jews, Christians and Muslims); the Nambūtiris also used the rich and complex tradition of mnemo-history to organize their collective memory. Quoting Hervieu-Leger, she wrote: "the normativity of collective memory is reinforced by the fact of the group's defining itself, objectively and subjectively, as a lineage of belief". This lineage is constituted by the religious act of recalling a past that both defines the present and heralds the future. *Ibid*, p.66.

[183] "In constantly constructing the notion of the Nambuthiri caste in opposition to the Nayars the reformers both exploited the growing resentment against the matrilineal community on other fronts (like tenancy relations) and bolstered their own sense of community". G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa*, New Delhi, 2003, p.168.

Dēśamaṅgalam and Kuṛūṛ, and the *Sabha* consciously tried to cultivate and boost the spirit of enterprise through the founding of the *Yōgakṣēmam Company* and the *Yōgakṣēmam Bank*. The members of the community were continuously, but desperately, urged to invest in industry, trade and agriculture.[184] The major thrust of the movement after the Ōngallūṛ revitalization was large scale investment in industry and agriculture.

15. While the Tamiḷ Brahmins were perceived as a model community in the ritualistic sense, the Christians were a source of inspiration economically. The former deserved to be emulated for their high receptivity to change; they took to English education and accepted modern vocations without compromising the essentials of their customs and caste traditions.[185] But the greatest sense of awe was shown to the Christians of Travancore for their enthusiasm, spirit of enterprise, innovativeness and receptiveness to new ideas.[186] However, the former were not given enough respect due to their inferior ritual standing in relation to the

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[184] VT's famous resolution on "Yuvākkaḷum Tozhilillāymayum" at the 8th annual meeting of the *Saṅgham* was much appreciated. See *YK*, 17:29, Jan 5, 1927; 17:31, 1927 Jan. 12. He wanted the Nambūtiris to be entrepreneurial to have a progress in the community and for the success of the reform programme. In an article with the same title "Yuvākkaḷum Tozhilillāymayum" (*YK*, 18:51, Mar 21, 1928), Mōzhikunnam urged young men to enter into trade which was the emerging lucrative profession in the modern period. He pointed at the example of the Māppiḷas. Opportunities for government jobs were slowly fading out.

[185] Mūthiringōd in a series of articles entitled "Samudāya Pariṣkaraṇathil Nām Ārē Anukarikkaṇam?" analyzed various communities including the Nāyars, Tiyyas, Christians and Tamil Brahmins and found the last one as a model community to be emulated. While the Nāyars and Tiyyas were not imitable due to the system of matriliny they practiced, the Christians, despite all their qualities, were defective for their alcoholism. Tamil Brahmins were an ideal community because they were receptive to modern education and ready to accept modern professions, they were intelligent (still not dishonest), they refused to follow customs that would retard their progress, they were independent, and they were not atheists as well. See *YK*, 18:44, Feb 25, 1928; 18:46, Mar 3, 1928; 18:47, Mar 10, 1928; 18:50, Mar 17, 1928. Even in 1980, the new Yōgakṣēmites repeatedly urged the Nambūtiris to imitate the Tamil Brahmins. See Editorial, YK, 1:9,10, May-June, 1980, pp3-4.

[186] E.M.S, "Nambūtiriye Manuṣyanakkan", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.280,293; VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Yuvajanaṅgaḷum Thozhilillāymayum", *YK*, 17:31, Jan. 12, 1927. It is been observed that what motivated the Nāyars to fight against *marumakkathāyam* was the realization that the economic success of the Christian community was partly due to the patrilineal system they were following. See Govindan Kutty, *Kinship Systems in South and South East Asia – A Study*, New Delhi, 1994, p.119.

Nambūtiris and their cultural exclusiveness,[187] but the latter were looked upon with admiration, and fear, for their economic power and religious affiliations to the colonial rulers.[188]

16. Generally, the Muslims were looked upon with hatred and fear. This might be because of their role in the Māppiḷa outbreaks in which their main target was the Nambūtiris. They were looked upon as wild and unruly. After the Malabar Rebellion, Nambūtiris began to show indifference to the National Movement; eradication of pollution became a significant social issue thereafter and religious conversion and declining Hindu population became issues of heated debate.[189]

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[187] C.A. Innes, edited by F.B. Evans, *Malabar*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p.107; Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja*, New Delhi, 1994, p.40.

[188] They were looked with fear because they were emerging as an economic menace. In 1921 half the English literates were Christians, and of the fifty small banks operating in Travancore, eleven were in the Syrian Christian centre of Tiruvalla alone. From 1900 Syrian Christians had turned to rubber planting, and in the 1920s to the finance and export of cashew nut. Robin Jeffrey, "Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1869-1940 – The Temple Entry Movement" in Robin Jeffrey ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States*, Delhi, 1978, p.146.

[189] The Malabar rebellion played a significant role in the formation of modern Hinduism in Kerala. It hastened the anti-untouchability measures and brought forth the temple-entry issue. It gave birth to the frantic call 'Hinduism in danger' and stressed the need of taking urgent measures to 'save' the Hindu religion.

CHAPTER 4
VT: THE REBEL AND THE REFORMER

Those who study the role of individuals in history are truly surprised by the graph of VT's life record – a person having not much capital – except intellect, efficiency and commitment – rose to high positions to merit respect as one of the chief partners of the renaissance movement of Kerala.[1] He was non-noble and economically poor. It was very difficult for men of low ritual status to rise to high positions in his community. It is also important to note that except for some of his personal deeds he has not been subjected to much criticism from the academic circles. Even his retirement from active public sphere has been termed as a positive engagement since for the upright and the sincere, political activity was inconceivable on account of the power-hungriness and corruption involved in it. In fact, VT's abstention from party politics really absolved him from many a criticism that others including E.M.S. had to face in later years.

Any study of VT will not be complete without a comparison with EMS. Both were *Apphans*, but they differed in two important respects. E.M.S. was free from the kind of deprivation that VT had to face all through his life because he was born in a wealthy and noble family. He also did not have to strain for his education as VT had to; the opportunity for higher education provided him with new vistas and possibilities. Though VT was able to enjoy the pleasures of a middle class life early in the 1920s through his job at the *Mangaḷōdayam* Press and his stay at Tṛiśśūṛ, he was forced to lead a rustic life later. The charge that the combined attack of all reactionary forces hastened his alienation and his insularity cannot be accepted as fully convincing; a combination of factors –

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[1] Oḷappamaṇṇa points out that the rise of VT and Pāṇdam to the leadership of the *Sabha* was very important since they came from ordinary circumstances and from a non-noble background. See Oḷappamaṇṇa. "Pazhūril", *UN*, 1:1, Edavam 1122, p.111.

personal, political and pertaining to family affairs– had been instrumental in determining the fate of his later life. Though V.T. and E.M.S. stood for the same cause –the social and economic development of Kerala – the highly rationalist and pragmatic attitude of EMS, combined with his sound economic position, helped him to rise in the public sphere. VT's high emotionalism – which in fact ran counter to his professed rational stand–his economic deprivation and his passion for family affairs retarded his social advancement.

4:1. Early Life

VT was born on 23rd March 1896 in a respectable but relatively poor family as the second son of the first wife of Thuppan Bhaṭṭathiripād.[2] VT's father had married four times and had seven children. VT's mother had no daughters but four sons. VT's paternal *illam* was Veḷḷithiruthi Thāzham at Mēzhathūr near Tritala of the present day Palakkad district, which was a part of the erstwhile Malabar district of the Madras Presidency. Though respectable, VT's *illam* and the surrounding areas were treated as inferior by the noble Nambūtiris. VT attributes two reasons for this.[3] Firstly, the place was (in)famous for the tradition of Agnihōtri and Pākkanār, the former was excommunicated for having introduced post-puberty marriage among the Nambūtiris and the latter was of very low social status. Secondly, he did not belong to the ancient Mēzhathōḷ *illam* but had migrated to the area. The gradually declining economic position of his *illam* was also an important factor. Thus the low ritual ranking combined with the poor economic standing had resulted in VT and his family being rated as inferior in social status by the noble Nambūtiris.[4] But VT wrote that some

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2 *VT -yude Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.5. VT writes that he was born at Kidangūr Kaippiḷḷy Illam, in the princely state of Travancore, to which his mother belonged. So he was a half-Travancorean. *Ibid*, p.145.

3 *Ibid*, pp.142-143.

4 VT describes an incident which instilled in him considerable amount of shame and disgrace; during an informal talk with the women and children of the Mutukuṛiśśi Mana, one of the girls ridiculed him for being an Āsyan. See *Ibid*, p. 176.

other factors compensated this inferiority in relation to several other low ranking Nambūtiris; he belonged to the Śukapuram village, his family was Rig-vedis and were respected hymnists of Tirunāvaya.[5]

VT presents his father as a saintly figure dedicated to a ritualistic and moral life and a deep devotee of God though greatly conservative.[6] His mother was an innocent and loving woman.[7] She loved everyone and was very generous towards people. She never estranged anyone; nor did she speak ill of others.[8] She was the first wife of his father. But surprisingly VT refuses to give details about the usual kind of *sapatnīmalsaram* in the household though he gives some details on it on another occasion.[9]

VT presents his early life in the context of his destitute family environment and his status as a *kaniṣṭan*. He writes that he was not able to enjoy the pleasures of childhood because of these two factors. While the financial backwardness of the *illam* made his childhood unhappy and barren, his birth as a *kaniṣṭan* deprived him of enjoying the pleasures that the first sons could have in a

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[5] Āsyan Nambūtiris had certain other advantages. High-ranking Nambūtiris used to give their (aged or disabled) daughters in marriage to men of Āsyan families along with a huge amount of dowry; similarly, girls of Āsyan *illams* could be married to equally low-ranking families at a fairly low rate of dowry. *Ibid.* p.143.

[6] *Ibid,* p.144. But at another occasion he denounced his father for his cruel treatment during times of Vedic instruction. *Ibid*, pp.136-37. He had denounced his father again for his acquisitiveness which drew him to litigation and impoverishment. *Ibid*, pp.181-82. He also has written that he had sincerely longed for his father's death. *Ibid*, p.137.

[7] *Ibid*, p.145.

[8] VT's characterization of his mother resembles that of reformers in general all over India. It has been observed that because of the very nature of the gender relations prevalent in India, the demographic facts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the nature of childhood, the mother had a profound influence on the making of the adult identity of the intelligentsia. Whatever was the formally retrievable content, the early years spent with the mother would comprise an early education. On the other hand, what the mother is being attributed with is the precise qualities of thrift, forethought, strength, and often her own physical labour. Nita Kumar, "Language, Families and the Plural Meanings of the Nineteenth-century Intelligentsia", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 38:1, 2001, pp.92-96.

[9] See "Sakhāvuṇṇi" in *Ibid,* pp.313-314. He describes it in the context of his father's fourth marriage. The infighting ultimately forced his father to flee from home and to the premature death of his *Cheṛiyamma.*

Nambūtiri family. This had generated a feeling of worthlessness in him[10] and had made him selfish and greedy.[11] But in other respects he thinks his life was not totally unhappy because his loving grandmothers used to tell him stories and he had many playmates, especially girls.

VT's *Upanayanam* and his initiation into Vedic studies took place at the age of six.[12] He remembers that the event had brought about tremendous changes in him: he began to look upon himself as a new individual – a person of importance - he had become a *dwija*, a true Brahmin.[13] But he describes his experience with Vedic education as extremely disgusting, because it was totally unsophisticated and hence incapable of promoting either intellectual development or emotional satisfaction. The method of teaching was rather primitive – a parrot-like repetition of Vedic hymns – and students were cruelly punished even for their slightest faults. The unscientific nature of Vedic education and the inhuman treatment of the teacher developed in him tendencies towards indiscipline and disrespect to teachers.[14] Since *samāvaṛtanam* was not possible before the age of fourteen, children truly wasted their time and grew wayward.

After being educated at home and under the village *Ōthikkan*,[15] he was taken to Pātākkara Mana near Perintalmaṇṇa for higher studies. Though the people of

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[10] *Ibid*, p.135.
[11] *Ibid*, p.137.
[12] *Ibid*, p.152.
[13] Kancha Ilaiah wrote: "When we first heard about Upanayana, we too desired to wear such a thread... But the fact is that at the age of seven or eight, if there had been an occasion when we became the focal point of the house and a priest came to initiate us into religion, we would have gained confidence. Not only that, when we learnt that in the Brahman, Baniya and other 'upper' caste families, initiation into the writing takes place at the age of four and that it is also a festive occasion, how much we resented it!". *Why I am Not a Hindu, A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, culture and Political Economy*, Calcutta, 2002, p.15.
[14] Though VT had criticized the very efficacy of the Vedic education (See his Ālathiyūṛ speech, in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.567), in his memoirs he opposed only the method of instruction. Mōzhikunnam has narrated the cruel punishments he had to suffer during the days of his Vedic studies. See Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ*, pp.216-17.
[15] *Ōthikkans* were the Vedic teachers of the Nambūtiris. They also acted as ritual functionaries in *Upanayanam* ceremonies.

the *mana* were strong votaries of tradition and caste rules, they were also exponents of the modern culture. It was here that VT first came in contact with modern trends and the new lifestyle like riding the bicycle.[16] His stay at Pātākkara lasted for two years and thereafter he moved on to Mutukuṛiśśi *mana*. The place was a strong bastion of conservatism and the *mana* was the true lord of the area. At Pātākkara and Mutukuṛiśśi VT came to experience the real power of both *janmitham* and *Brāhmaṇyam;* his memoirs present landlordism with considerable sympathy and respect.[17] However, the severe and unbearable routine imposed by the teacher forced him to disobey him, his guru refused to teach him further and he had to wind up his Vedic studies halfway. VT was ready for penance, but his teacher declined to comply and thus his Vedic studies came to an abrupt end.

After discontinuing his studies, VT came back home and aimlessly wandered for some time. At this time his father fell into a great economic crisis following an unsuccessful litigation against Manjappatta *mana* which nearly pauperized him.[18] In an attempt to tide over this difficult position, VT was asked to work as a priest in a temple at Muṇḍamuka near Shoṛṇūṛ, which he had to comply with, much againt his will.[19] After some time, when the condition at home improved, he decided to wind up the job of the temple *śāṅthi*.[20]

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[16] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.159-168.

[17] *Ibid*, pp. 159-161, 171-175.

[18] Only passing references are available in VT's memoirs on his career after the discontinuation of his studies and on his domestic developments (*VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.181-82); but he gives some details in an anecdote which however was not a part of his autobiography nor is included in the *Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*. See "Akṣarajnānathinu Vaikiyathenthē", in *Kaṛmavipākam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1988, pp. 402-407.

[19] VT's opposition to *śaṅthi* was on account of two factors. First, his was not a priestly family traditionally; in fact priestly profession was not respectable among the Nambūtiris of noble origin; only the low and the impoverished families had opted for it. (Most of the temple-priests were Embrans from Mangalore; the rich and noble Nambūtiris considered it beneath their dignity to take up the occupation. See M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, "A History of the Nambūtiri Community in Kerala" in Frits Stall ed., *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, Vol. 2, Delhi, 1983, p.272). Secondly, VT found the job as servile; one had not only to propitiate the deity, but also to serve the temple authorities. (*VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.180-81). VT also writes about his lack of devotion while doing priestly

In VT's life his stay at Muṇḍamuka was decisive for two reasons. First of all, it was here that it dawned upon him that he was illiterate and was inspired to learn both Malayāḷam and English. When a school-going girl asked him to help her with her homework, he was ashamed to find that he was unable to assist her because of his lack of schooling. However, with the help of the same girl he started learning and soon managed to read Malayāḷam letters.[21] Doubts have been raised about the sincerity as well as the reality behind VT's statement.[22] VT later justified his illiteracy in the context of the prevailing intellectual backwardness of the Nambūtiri community; since the system of Nambūtiri education consisted only of memorizing the stanzas of the Vedas, there was no need of the development of writing faculty for them. This accounted for his illiteracy in spite of his ability of reciting the Vedas. VT pointed out that among the Nambūtiris literacy was not compulsory except for the landlords; the Nambūtiri was a union of both *Brāhmaṇyam* and *Janmitham*; as regards the former, which is concerned with *pāpa* and *puṇya*, there is no need of literacy; as regards the latter, which deals with profit and loss, literacy is a must. As VT's

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functions; but it was not because of his rationalism or atheism. He was certainly a theist at that time but was not a staunch believer because he was indifferent to material pleasures. (*Ibid*, p.186). Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan interpreted VT's dislike of priestly profession in the light of the prevailing tradition (noble Nambūtiris do not take up the job of a temple-priest). He also argued that it is a paradox that the later renowned rationalist VT had to start his career as a temple-priest; so it would be impossible for him to become an atheist. See Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op.cit*, pp.32-33.

[20] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.194. The condition at home improved with his brother's marriage and his father's *adhivēdanam*. He stopped *śaṅthi* also for learning English and to find some other vocation. Quite different from the ordinary life of homeless and indolent *Apphans*, he wanted to get a job, a separate family and a home.

[21] See *ibid*, pp.188-89. It has been noticed that the first words which VT read were of an advertisement ("Deer Mark Umbrella") and which indicated his area of interest. Personal Conversation, T.T. Sreekumar, 19-06-2005. Variyar opined that VT's description of the event is a rare piece of literature and deserves to be treated as a world classic. See N.V. Krishna Variyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, p.28.

[22] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri questioned VT's statement by arguing that it was improbable for a Nambūtiri of 18 or 19 to be illiterate on those days. Cited in VT, "Akṣarajnānathinu Vaikiyathenthē?" in *Kaṛmavipākam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1988, pp. 402-403. But E.M.S. supports VT; he writes that he was unable to write even at the age of 15. See his *Ātmakatha*, pp.15, 69-70.

family had become bankrupt, he too had to remain illiterate.[23] However, with the help of a railway officer at Shoṟṇūṟ he learnt some English.

Secondly, VT's association with the *Sabha* had its beginning during this period.[24] Though VT does not make it clear whether he had participated in the 7th annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Vallapuzha, he explains the experiences of his participation in the 8th meeting at Veḷḷinazhi in 1916.[25] He glorified the nature of the deliberations at the *Sabha,* the commendable arrangements made there for the meeting and the general seriousness and community consciousness visible among the participants. As were the others, he too was electrified by the speech of Kuṟūṟ Nambūtiripād justifying the need of the Nambūtiris to turn to English education. He also praised the organizers of the meeting and the participants for having raised a huge fund for starting a school for the Nambūtiri boys.[26]

Greatly enticed by modern education and culture, VT gave up his priestly job and decided to make enough money to join a school. He moved to Thiruvananthapuram to participate in the *Muṛajapam* in 1918.[27] He had considerable benefits from his stay at Thiruvanathapuram. He was able to collect a sizable amount from the various ceremonies of the *Muṛajapam.* He could seek the help of many Nambūtiris to learn English. He was also able to understand the pulse of Travancore politics of those days. The only matter of disgust was the lack of neatness in areas where the Nambūtiris were fed.[28] He was fortunate in

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[23] *Ibid.* In his autobiography, VT presented his state of illiteracy not in the general context, but as his personal experience. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.188-189. Instead, his depiction of the system of Vedic education in the just previous section would make others believe that he was making a general statement.

[24] *Ibid, pp.190-91.*

[25] It was in this meeting that the resolution endorsing English education for Nambūtiri boys was passed.

[26] But a major share of the offered amount was not received. For most of the Nambūtiris, it was only a show off and not a sincere act. See *UN,* April 3, 1931, reproduced in *Ibid,* p.585.

[27] *Ibid,* pp.205-220. Those days it was a craze for the Nambūtiris to attend the *Muṛajapam.* It was a great source of revenue and all the invitees received VIP treatment since they were royal guests. There were also possibilities for all kinds of entertainment.

[28] It is significant that VT does not refer at all to the contemporary public opposition to *Muṛajapam* or to the pamphlets issued by the *Saṅgham* at Thiruvananthapuram in defense

setting up a friendship with K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, the future editor of the *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri,* and a firebrand radical of the *Saṅgham* and with whom VT worked in running the journal later.

Returning from Thiruvanathapuram, VT joined the Perintalmaṇṇa High School in the first form. He was 22 then. Though modern education was not much popular among the Nambūtiris at that time, the need of learning English was generally felt in the community. Those who did not wish to send their children to public schools, for fear of pollution or fearing the wrath of the conservatives, gave them home tuition by arranging non-Nambūtiri Brahmins as tutors.[29] But for poor Nambūtiris it was unaffordable and so men like VT had to roam about and beg for the mercy of the privileged to afford an opportunity for their education. VT was persuaded by the ambition to pass the matriculation, get some job and thus gain social respect and economic stability.[30] But he had to discontinue his studies due to the spread of a contagious fever in and around the area during the time.[31]

VT was able to continue his studies when the new Nambūtiri School was started at Edakkunni near Tṛiśśūṛ in 1919, in the first batch in the third form. He was very active in the school and even edited a bi-weekly named *Vidyārthi.*[32]

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of it or even of the strong protest raised by the Nambūtiri radicals in 1929 urging the Nambūtiris to end their participation in *Muṛajapam* in the light of popular criticism.

[29] See *ibid,* p.222.

[30] *Ibid*, p.223.

[31] VT remembers only a single incident during his unfinished study at this school. He was summoned by the headmaster for an alleged case of indiscipline of retorting to his History teacher. VT explained that he was just answering to an insulting statement made by the teacher; that when the teacher accused the Nambūtiris of their lust for *pāyasam,* he replied that *payasam* is better than sour-toddy. VT was not punished; he was advised to learn patience since he was an elderly student. *Ibid,* 224. It is surprising to note that VT had no other experiences worthy of being remembered at the school while writing his reminiscences decades later. It has been argued that it was his strong communitarian sensibilities that had forced VT to become exasperated for an insult against his community. See K.S. Radhakṛiṣṇan, "VT Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement,* Dec. 16, 2001.

[32] C.K. Nambūtiri, "Chila Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam,* Vol. 14, No. 5-6, May-June 1982, p.23. Nambūtiri recollects that he wrote his first article in this magazine.

But his school education did not last for more than two years. He was dismissed from school along with two other classmates for attending the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress in February 1921 without taking the permission of the school authorities.[33] VT writes that intense nationalist feeling had induced him to do this act of indiscipline; he had discussed the consequences of the deed with his two other classmates who had accompanied him to Ahmedabad. They were provided free education; the school was facing serious opposition from the conservatives because modern education was against their custom; it was being managed in a strictly disciplined manner in order to pacify the criticism of the reactionaries; English education was provided in a strict Nambūtiri environment of customs and traditions. Ship journey, polluted food, and disregard of daily prayers and dip-bath – all were against custom and hence taboo. Those who had committed a breach of rules were not allowed to enter the class; VT and his colleagues were asked to seek the special permission of the school secretary. Dēśamaṅgalam Cheriya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, the secretary, refused to grant readmission unless they were subjected to some acts of expiation for the sins they committed. VT portrayed the secretary as a conservative who was opposed to all modern reforms like *Kaniṣṭavivāham, bhāgam* and women's education and was an exponent of *Adhivēdanam.* But his 'dharmic and thought-provoking' speech to them, explaining their act as an irredeemable offence against the community, seems to have convinced VT of the graveness of their deed. However all the three refused to bow before the *Vaidikans* and thus their studies came to an end for ever. VT's refusal to undergo expiation was explained in connection with his professed radicalism,[34] but his reminiscence evidently states that his readmission even at the cost of expiatory rites would run counter to community interests since his deed was an open violation of disciplinary rules and the very norms of the special school.[35] Thus,

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[33] See, *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.225-231.
[34] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit,* p.53; Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op.cit,* p.31.
[35] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.228-230.

VT was giving priority to community interests. However, the discontinuation of his studies benefited his own community. Or else he would have ended up in a job or profession such as of a lawyer.[36]

Discontinuing his studies and returning home, VT worked for a while as a Sanskrit teacher in a school at Tritala and started a rice business later along with some friends at Chāliśśēri.[37] The business failed but it revealed the intention and attitude of VT: he wanted to break all conventions and to enter into new arenas which majority Nambūtiris feared to tread. The spirit of enterprise and investment had started to motivate him as early as the beginning of the 1920s.

4:2. Entry into the Public Sphere

From the early years of the second decade of the twentieth century, individual Nambūtiris and the *Sabha* as such had started showing interest in the national movement. But since the movement was in its infancy in Kerala, and as it was dominated by the intelligentsia, the Nambūtiris were not able to find a leading role in it. But with the entry of Gandhi into the movement, and with the introduction of his constructive programme, large number of Nambūtiris began to cooperate with its activities. It was the influence of the Gandhian programmes that had attracted many Nambūtiris including VT to the national movement. Apart from participating in the Ahmedabad Congress, VT took part in the first Kerala state Congress committee meeting held at Ottappālam in April 1921 as

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[36] Most of VT's biographers have held the position that the termination of his studies had been fortunate for his community. Otherwise, the community would miss a dynamic activist. But Mādamb points out that VT's ambition was to become a lawyer, which was the dream of many young men, and to enter into the public sphere. Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op.cit*, p.146. In 1929, E.M.S. urged the Nambūtiris to become lawyers, for both personal and communitarian interests. See E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "Vakkīl Pṛavaṛthiyum Nambūtirimārum", *UN*, 18:12, Oct. 29, 1927, reproduced in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1998, pp.40-42. In fact English education was a means to safeguard community interests.

[37] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op.cit*, pp.149-150. Those days only a few like Dēśamaṅgalam had entered into the field of business. According to custom, agriculture and trade were taboo for the Nambūtiris.

the captain of the Nambūtiri volunteers.[38] Thereafter he became a full time Congress activist.[39] Thus VT's entry into the public sphere was facilitated by the enthusiasm created by the activities of both the *Sabha* and the Congress. But he appeared to be less active in politics afterwards may be due to the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion.[40]

At the Yōgakṣēmam Company

It was in the meantime that he got appointed as a clerk in the Yōgakṣēmam Company at Tṛiśśūṛ in 1923. Tṛiśśūṛ was the headquarters of the *Sabha* and it was from here that the *YK* and the *UN* were being published. His monthly salary was twelve Rupees. In those days it was a fairly good salary for a clerk. Free stay at the *Yōgakṣēmam* lodge and free food at the Bṛahmaswam Maṭam had made his life relatively easy. A more important result of his stay at Tṛiśśūṛ was that it gave him ample opportunities for contacts with active workers of the *Sabha* who frequently visited the lodge. Soon he received a job that he liked very much: as the assistant proof reader under K.V.M. in the *Mangaḷōdayam* press. His work as a proof reader brought him immense opportunities to come in contact with notable writers of the time like Kunjukuṭṭan Tampurān, Vaḷḷathōḷ, Nālappāṭṭ, etc. In fact it was his contacts with K.K. Vāriyaṛ, the well known communist of later years, which sowed the seeds of radical thoughts in VT.[41] The proof reading of Nālappāṭṭ Nārāyaṇa Mēnōn's translation of *Le Miserable* was in fact a turning point for him; he later wrote that the book had a great impact on him.[42]

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[38] VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum,* Kottayam, 1970, p.12.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] In both the *YK* and the *UN* we find strong condemnation of the rebellion. The fact that many Nambūtiris had to flee from Malabar and many had lost their lives also made the Nambūtiris antagonistic to Congress politics. See *YK* numbers from 11:45, Aug.26, 1921. The editorial of *YK*, 11:47, Sep.9, 1921 repeated the government version of the origin of the rebellion and called upon all people to cooperate with the Government. Also see *UN* editorials, 3:2, Thulam 1097 and 3:3, Vrichikam 1097.
[41] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.240-41.
[42] *Ibid,* pp.402-404.

Association with the Reform Movement

At Tṛiśśūṛ VT did not confine himself to his office work. He involved himself enthusiastically in social reform matters. His efforts were many-sided. He started intervening in the reform of his community by writing articles on various issues that affected the community, such as marriage reform and the need of a family regulation. He also wrote articles defending the interests of the Nambūtiris as *janmis* against the tenancy movement. His articles clearly showed his deep awareness of the problems of his community and of the possible solutions. Apart from directly intervening in the reform discourse supporting the radical group, he began to participate in the deliberations of the *Sabha* and tried to instill enthusiasm among the activists through his vibrant speeches. Till about 1928, the reform movement had an exclusive male agenda and constitution. The two fundamental demands were *Kaniṣṭavivāham* and *bhāgam* and the activities were directed towards enacting family regulations in the three legislatures of Kerala. The Nambūtiri *Stṛī Vidyābhyāsa Commission*, appointed by the *Sabha*, though supported women's education, endorsed that home tuition was sufficient for them. But when the Regulations were presented in the legislatures, the conservative party under Paschiman Rāman Nambūtiri, E.T. Divākaran Mūss, Kuṛūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād and others started opposing all kinds of reform measures. It was in this context that the entire reform programme of the radicals had to be diverted to new areas and new methods. The new programme included the enlistment of the support of the Antaṛjanams and members of other communities. This was the context which witnessed the appearance of VT as a radical activist along feminist and secular lines.

The conservative section started strong measures against structural reforms in the community through various means. They influenced the government against ratifying any legislation affecting marriage system and property relations. Since the prevailing conjugal system among the Kṣatṛiyas was

sambandham, and that too with Nambūtiris alone, the expediency of Nambūtiri husbands cautioned the princes against taking any hasty steps towards this direction. On the other hand, conservative Nambūtiris could influence governmental action through their Kṣatṛiya wives as had happened in 1929 when the family regulation bill was rejected by the Cochin Rāja. Apart from this they started canvassing innocent Nambūtiris by convincing them of the dangers involved in a bill for the community: it would not only destroy the culture of *illam* life, if partition became a reality, but would endanger the prevailing age-old dharma sanctioned by *Śāṅkarasmṛiti*. Universalization of *swajātivivāham* would cause to increase promiscuity and immorality; women's education and boycott of *ghōṣa* would lead to wantonness. They started a journal called *Sudarśanam*[43] and unleashed venomous propaganda. They also took steps for an alternate organization to the *Sabha*.

This was an alarming situation. The movement was still in its propaganda level. Some of the erstwhile supporters of the reform had started drifting away. The most important male agenda was *Kaniṣṭavivāham*. Those who dared to resort to *swajātivivāham* had to face the problem of survival; since partition was taboo, they could not have their share of the *illam* property. The ultimate solution lay in the enactment of the regulation. Since the Nambūtiris were a minority, they did not have sufficient members in the legislatures to get it enacted. The success of the hegemonic struggle required the winning over of the support of the majority in the community including women and the support of other communities in favour of the reform programme. Enlisting support of new sections needed new measures. The new slogan of emancipation of women was posited in this context; short stories and drama were targeted to this end; presence of other communities were solicited in the deliberations of the *Sabha*; programmes like the eradication of pollution, temple-entry and inter-dining – all were posited with this end in view.

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[43] Kunnath Janardhana Menon was its editor.

Pāśupatam

As the very name indicates, the new journal started by the Nambūtiri radical young men was targeted to face the attack of *Sudaṛśanam*. It was aimed at what the *UN* sarcastically called 'reinstating old Nambūtiri dharma against the modern tendencies'.[44] In fact its aim was to fight out reform and to retain the old order.[45] Though Kunnath Janāṛdhana Mēnōn was its editor, the real spirit behind *Sudaṛśanam* was Paschiman Rāman Nambūtiri. *Pāśupatam* started its publication when five issues of *Sudaṛśanam* came out.[46] It was noticed that VT was the greatest spirit behind it.[47] Its aim was not to simply defend against conservative criticism but to destroy conservatism for upholding radical reforms. Foremost among them was the introduction of the new concept of family by universalizing *swajātivivāham* and legalizing partition. VT wrote five such stories, and published them in it. They were considered ultra-radical in those days. The intention was very clear; it sought to sow the seeds of ambition and desire for a new life among the Antaṛjanams and to instill in them rebelliousness so that they may be encouraged to resist the prevailing marriage practices. In one sense it was an act of empowerment; an act meant to make them vociferous for the sake of themselves and for others. The new kind of empowerment was concentrated on marriage as the only ideal; but even this narrow aim had revolutionary potential in the given circumstances.

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[44] Editorial, *UN*, 7:9, Edavam 1101, p. 503.

[45] E.M.S. points out that opposition to reform was there right from the beginning, but it acquired an organizational form in the '20s because the conservatives were opposed to all kinds of associational forms as if they were symbols of modernism. They too were forced to become organized when the radicals took measures to enact the Nambūtiri Bill. E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, pp.90-91.

[46] *Ibid*, pp.505-506.

[47] C.A. Kittuṇṇi, *Kaththunna Thirikal*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1955, p.31. But this information is refuted by an Editorial in the *UN* which presents Kummiṇi Kṛiṣṇan Nambūtiri not only as its editor but the true spirit behind its radicalism.

4:3. The Discourse on Marriage Reform

Marriage reform was central to the Nambūtiri movement.[48] There was a strong and concerted move towards establishing a monogamous, endogamous family which was posited as the 'natural'. While the existing custom of marriage had denied the *Apphans* a family life in the modern sense, since *swajātivivāham* was taboo for them, the prevailing system of polygamy (*Adhivēdanam*) set aside the life of the Antarjanams truly pitiful. The emerging modern norms had begun to treat *sambandham* as immoral and uncultured and a strong movement had started developing among those communities with whom the Nambūtiris were having such alliances.[49] In the emerging social situation where progeny was increasingly counted in equal terms with property, since it was essential for having a space in the new representative kind of politics, *sambandham* was frowned upon as being instrumental in keeping the community small and uninfluential. Even more alarming was the drain of property brought about through the *sambandham* wife and children. While the new value system questioned the moral base of *sambandham*,[50] the exigency of the shrinking population of the community as well as checking the erosion of property brought

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[48] The centrality of the question of marriage reform is illustrated thus: "*Sambandhams* between Nambūtiris and Nāyars became the focus of intense criticism, and all arguments relating to reform would lead back to this. The growing threat of tenancy legislations added an edge to these demands to crate a community defined in opposition to the Nāyars..." G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala,* New Delhi, 2003, p.165.

[49] Sheeba writes: "The changed power equations between the Nambūtiris and the Nāyars affected the marital relations between the two castes which found significant reflections in the notion of sexuality that were being produced at the time. The period witnessed the production of a discourse on female sexuality that emerged as the 'other' of the new masculine 'self' that was constituted within the anti-matrilineal discourse. This notion of sexuality echoed the colonial conceptions of morality and sexuality that was taken serious note of by the community seeking to modernize itself". K.M. Sheeba, "From the Kitchen to the Stage and Back: Continuing Forms of Women's Exclusion in Keralam", *Journal of South Indian History*, Vol. 2, No.2, March 2006, p.58.

[50] *Indulēkha* underlined the growing awareness about the inequity of the Nāyar-Nambūtiri alliance. See K.N. Panikkar, "Creating a New Cultural Taste: Reading a Nineteenth-century Malayalam Novel", in R. Champakalakshmi & S. Gopal ed., *Tradition, Dissent and Ideology: Essays in Honour of Romila Thapar,* New Delhi, 1996, p.103.

marriage reform to the fore as an urgent necessity. The slowly advancing humanitarian and rationalist outlook had necessitated a re-evaluation of the entire customs and practices. A strong movement in favour of a Nambūtiri regulation had thus gained momentum. Since marriage reform was central to the Nambūtiri movement, the realignment of the system of marital alliances was determined, among other things, by strong community interests, of which eagerness to check the drain of property caused by *sambandham* and the need to strengthen the community through the escalation of population by universalizing *swajātivivāham* had been predominant considerations.[51]

The problem of marriage reform had already taken a definite shape well before VT's entry into the reform movement. The *Sabha* had passed resolutions against *sambandham* and had accepted *swajātivivāham* as the ideal. Efforts for the enactment of the Nambūtiri Family Regulation were progressing. A perusal of the discourse on the issue of marriage reform would enlighten us of the major factors that lay beneath the urgent measures taken to enact the family regulation.

Serious discussion on marriage reform had started with Kuṟūṟ's "Kanyādānam" in which he had highlighted the sorrows of the Antaṛjanams both as wives and widows.[52] Conceiving conjugal life as the true solace of a woman, he explained that Nambūtiri women missed it greatly because of marriage at an advanced age and that too with aged men. Among the Antaṛjanams he thus found no difference between married life and widowhood. But even this unusual act of sympathy was greatly counterbalanced by the unnatural fear of female sexuality. He raised the question that while by the very nature a woman cannot

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[51] Iyer observed in 1912 that while during every ten years the population of every caste was steadily increasing in the (Cochin) state, the strength of the Nambūtiris was steadily diminishing. This was especially owing to the marriage of a large number of their girls at an advanced age, some remaining in celibacy for a long time and owing also to the marriage of the junior members outside their own community. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *Tribes and Castes of Cochin*, Vol.15 (ii) New Delhi, 1987, p.288.

[52] The article was originally written in Sanskrit and was published in *Mangaḷōdayam*. It was translated and reproduced in *UN*, 5:9, Edavam 1099, pp.441-443.

be sexually gratified by 5 or 10 men, how can they feel contented in the context of *sāpatnyam*? However, Kuṟūṟ refused to suggest a remedy for the issue.

It is important to note that the question of *Kaniṣṭavivāham* arose as a remedy for the sufferings of the Antaṟjanams, but later it began to be linked with the question of the 'fall' of the community. An article noted that several women remained unmarried even after 30 and that the problem of *kanyādānam* (*peṇkoda*) was causing considerable damage to the community.[53] There was a great disproportion between the number of young men and women of marriageable age in the community; women far exceeded men in number. This imbalance perpetuated the sorrows of women and kept the population of the community low. How could the Nambūtiris, whose number dwindled day by day, compete with the galloping number of other communities? *Kaniṣṭavivāham* would make people more responsible and would lead to the prosperity in the community. It also would check the drain of property from the Nambūtiri community to the *sambandham* families. It is natural that one loves his wife and children; realizing this, governments had started enacting laws regulating conjugal relations and making it binding upon both parties.

An editorial in *Malayāḷa Manōrama* ascribed the 'fall' of the Nambūtiri community to the prevailing system of marriage; the junior males had no interest in the welfare of the *illam* because they had no proprietary rights.[54] They did not spent four days together at home, they were wandering or with their *sambandham* wives. Several *taṟawāds* had perished for lack of successors. *Swajātivivāham* was the only way out for both material progress and for population increase. In the prevailing practice of marriage where women outnumbered men, the custom of heavy dowry was quite natural though it had been extremely damaging to the community. The community could prosper only through modern education and *swajātivivāham*.

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[53] See "Kaniṣṭavivāham Koṇḍuḷḷa Guṇaṅgaḷ" by an unknown author, *UN*, 1:1, Kanni 1095, pp.9-12; 1:2, Thulam 1095, pp. 50-54; and 1:3, Vrichikam 1095, pp.85-91.

[54] Reproduced in *UN*, 1:3, Vrichikam 1095, pp.91-94.

The Nambūtiri reformers saw *sambandham* as the root from which almost all vices in the community emanated. This peculiar marriage system was introduced for safeguarding the security of property and for the retention of Nambūtiri dharma; but in the course of time it fell into great disrespect and caused erosion of property. Examining *sambandham* in the context of the 'fall' of the community, Kāvil Avinjikkāṭṭu Bhavadāsan Nambūtiri noted that it brought about erosion of property, fall in population, want of love and attachment to one's family and destruction of *taṛawāds*.[55] It also made the life of the Antaṛjanams hellish and intolerable; their lives tottered between life-long celibacy and the sorrows of *sāpatnyam* or widowhood.[56] While children of the *illams* went astray, great amounts were spent on the siblings of the *sambandham* wife.[57] The community would never prosper unless a solution could be found to put an end to this abusive, ignoble and heinous custom.[58]

An editorial in the *UN* noted the increasing opposition among the young men towards *sambandham* and hailed the new development.[59] Meanwhile, it reminded the Nāyaṛs, who were fighting for the inclusion of more provisions in their favour in the Nāyaṛ Regulation, that they should first switch over to patriliny before demanding property rights from their *sambandham* fathers.[60]

An article, the first of its kind, urged for desirable and timely changes in the customs and practices of women in order to raise them to the level of modern wives.[61] No reform would be complete unless it incorporated programmes for the development of the women of the community. Once *kaniṣṭans* were asked to

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[55] Kāvil Avinjikkāttu Bhavadāsan Nambūtiri, *Samudāyamitṛam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1095 (1920), pp.29-30.

[56] *Ibid*, pp. 55-56

[57] *Ibid*, p. 57.

[58] *Ibid*, pp. 58-59.

[59] *UN* 2:3, Vrichikam 1096, pp.98-99.

[60] *Ibid*, p.102. Kumāramaṅgalass Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād in an article "Nambūtirimārudē Sāhitya Pariśṛamam" (*UN* 3:1, Kanni 1087, pp.6-16) lamented that the 'hybridizing' sambandham, while benefited others, had been a great loss to the Nambūtiris. Endless Nambūtiri seeds were lost among Nāyars, Ambalavāsis and Kshatriyas. (p.12)

[61] "Stṛīsikṣa", *UN*, 2:10, Mithunam 1096, pp.475-485.

follow *swajātivivāham* and thereby to strengthen the community, reform of women inevitably became a part of the reform agenda. In such a situation, women had to change; if they did not, there would be stagnation and the rot in the family would continue. Since the public life of the Nambūtiris was expanding, their wives had to develop an open outlook enough at least to entertain the friends of their husbands; they also had to acquire sufficient literacy to understand the basic developments of the world. This did not mean that they had to go for college education or to vie for modern jobs, or boycott *ghōṣa* or to enter the public domain. Thus women's emancipation was evidently perceived in accordance with male interests and precise boundaries were laid on their freedom.

The issue of marriage reform was intimately associated with scriptural injunctions. The Nambūtiris had followed *sambandham* due to the ban imposed by *Śāṅkarasmṛiti* on *Kaniṣṭavivāham*. But it is argued that it not only prohibited *Kaniṣṭavivāham* but had instructed the junior sons to follow life-long celibacy. Marriage for the senior son was not for sensual pleasures but simply for begetting children for the community and for saving the female segment. When the question of marriage reform originated it had its roots in material gains and hence in fact there was no scope for any discussion on scriptural sanctions. But when the anti-reform group in their attempt to check reforms took up the issue of the contradiction between the scriptures and the reforms, the reformers quoted the same scriptures in support of their reform measures. However there was a striking difference: while the conservatives stuck to tradition as sanctioned by *Śāṅkarasmṛiti*, the reformers turned to the grand Indian tradition as outlined in the *Manusmṛiti* to substantiate their arguments. This is evident from the attack of Mūthiringōd on scriptures and on the *Vaidikaṛ* who stuck to tradition.[62] Though

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[62] See his sweeping criticism on the *Vaidikar* in "Vaidikādhikāra Niyantṛaṇam", *UN*, 8:1, Kanni 1102, pp. 66-72. His "Nālu Parivaṛtanaṅgal" envisaged burning of *Śānkarasmṛiti* as an agenda for ritual reform. See *UN*, 11:51, Sep.12, 1930. In another article he says that he had burnt *Śānkarasmṛiti*. See "Prabhukkanmārum Yuvajanaṅgaḷum", 11:44 May 9, 1930.

the real basis of reform was the emerging ideal of reason, which alone could help material progress, tradition and orthodoxy compelled even the reformers to justify themselves with reference to scriptures.

The strongest criticism of *sambandham,* from the scriptural point of view, was that of Dēśamaṅgalam Nambūtiripād describing it as sheer wantonness.[63] Referring to the Nāyaṛs as śūdṛas, he stated that *sambandham* was anti-scriptural and hence wantonness. Quoting from *Manusmṛiti*, he argued that Brahmins were not allowed to marry from castes below them previous to a *swajāti* marriage. Other *smṛiti* authors had categorically denied śūdṛa marriage for all *dwijas* whatever the circumstances might be. *Śāṅkarasmṛiti* (2:3:1) stated that a Brahman should marry a Brahman woman for dharma; he may marry a Kṣatṛiyas woman for *kāma*; but never a *śudṛa* woman. The concept that *śūdṛa* marriage was recognized by Paraśurāma had no basis; in fact *snātakās* were supposed to renounce contact with women; even when that was not possible, śūdṛa marriage was not allowed. Till the beginning of the Perumāḷ rule, liaison was non-existent with non-Brahmans; thereafter it began to include women from the Kṣatṛiyas, then from the Nāyaṛ chiefs and finally from all Nāyaṛs.

Intervening in the issue of *Kaniṣṭavivāham* on behalf of the conservatives, Vadakkumkūr Rāmavarmarāja argued that *sambandham* had scriptural sanction.[64] He justified tradition by quoting from *Manusmriti* and said that not only Manu but Gautama and Narada also had allowed *snatakas* to enter into marital relations with *Śūdṛa* women. *Kēraḷōlpathi* states that Paraśurāma

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Kōdanāṭṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād compared the *Vaidikar* of the Nambūtiris to the medieval Christian clergy. See Presidential Address, NYJS 7th Annual meeting, *UN*, 7:4, Dhanu 1101, p.238. Modern Turkey under Mustafa Kamal Pasha was becoming a reference point for the Nambūtiri reformers for the radical reforms and anti-clerical measures taking place there. See Editorial, *UN*, 9:10, Mithunam 1103, pp.569-575.

[63] A.K.T.K.M. Valiya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "Nambūtirimārudē Oru Duṛnnadappu", *UN*, 5:3, Vrichikam 1099, pp.164-176. The article was originally written in 1916 and was circulated as a pamphlet along with the *Yōgakṣēmam* of 8-9-1091ME.

[64] "Kaniṣtavivāham", *UN*, 3:2, Thulam 1097, pp.64-71; 3:3, Vrichikam 1097, pp.127-136; 3:4, Dhanu 1097, pp.162-167; 3:5, Makaram 1097, pp.225-233.

allowed *swajātivivāham* only for the eldest sons which the *Śāṅkarasmṛiti* did not question; but by supporting the moral right of all the sons to marry from within the caste, it simply wanted men not to go astray. So *sambandham* was not immoral; it was and has been considered as respectable marriage. Since *Apphans* did not have control over property and as *sambandham* relationships were generally formed with rich families, there was no fear of erosion of property. If the Nambūtiri women were chaste and pure, it was because of *sambandham*. They were sustained by their *illams*; or else they would have had to go out for a livelihood. *Kaniṣṭavivāham* would destroy the prevailing dharma.[65]

An area where marriage reform sharply contradicted with scriptural sanction was that of *parivēdanam*. *kaniṣṭavivāham* would not be successful unless scriptural ban against *parivēdanam* was removed. It was a great sin for a junior son to marry an Antaṛjanam (*swajātivivāham*) provided any one of his elder brothers remained unmarried or was refusing to marry from within the caste. In such a situation universalization of *swajātivivāham* not only required sanction of *kaniṣṭavivāham* but warranted the removal of scriptural ban on *parivēdanam*. An editorial of the *UN* emphasized this fact; it pointed out that conservatives, who stuck to tradition and not to the essentials of the scriptures, would not acknowledge facts unless a royal legislation bound them to do so.[66]

The 15th annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Vaikam had passed a resolution for incorporating provisions for *swajātivivāham* and *bhāgam* in the Nambūtiri Regulation. In his presidential speech, A.K.T.K.M. Valiya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād cautioned the young men for their preoccupation with *Kaniṣṭavivāham* instead of making an earnest effort to seek a source of

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[65] This was what Paschiman Rāman Nambūtiri had been stressing as early as 1920. He argued that *Kaniṣṭavivāham* might lead to increase in population, force the Nambūtiris to wander, and thus weaken *dharma*. Cited in *YK*, 11:8, Nov.12, 1920. Pātiriśśēri replied Paschiman with a comment that the decline of the Nambūtiris was due to their laziness; because they did not follow any vocation, including agriculture and trade. Laziness had been instrumental in accelerating the process of land alienation. "Pariṣkārabahaḷam", *YK*, 11:8, Nov.12, 1920.

[66] *UN*, 6:11, Karkadakam 1100, pp.601-602.

livelihood well in advance so that they would not be a burden to the community.[67] But he did not refer either to partition or to the reform of the Antaŗjanams as a prelude to the marriage reform. Rather, he wanted the Nambūtiris to better their economic position through new economic enterprises and modern education and advised the *kāraṇavans* to give necessary support to them.

By the middle of the 1920s, the *sambandham* issue gained great communitarian interest because of the hectic efforts for a Nāyaŗ Regulation in the legislatures, especially in Travancore.[68] The Nāyaŗs were not in favour of abolishing *sambandham* but wanted to convert it into legal marriage and to obtain the legal sanction to inherit the property of the father by the *sambandham* children.[69] The criticism of *sambandham* as prostitution and of the siblings born out of it as bastards had been considerably humiliating to them.[70] On the other hand, the Nambūtiris were attracted to *sambandham* because it ensured them a completely carefree life without any worry or responsibilities of a householder;[71]

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[67] Presidental Address, *UN*, 4:8, Medam 1098, pp.445-456.

[68] They were aimed at legalizing *sambandham*, transforming *marumakkathāyam* into *makkathāyam* and at sanctioning partition of the *taŗawād* property to encourage the development of nuclear families. See *Census of India, 1931, Cochin, Part I Report*, p.262.

[69] T.K. Velupilla writes that the Nāyar Regulation made it (*marumakkathāyam*) virtually *makkathāyam* by making the widow and children of a deceased Nāyar male heirs to his separate or self-acquired property. It also sanctioned the partition of taŗawāds, the shares being calculated per capita. The children now inherit the property of both father and mother. *Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, TVM, 1996, p.858.

[70] *Sambandham* was not recognized as a legally valid marriage under the existing colonial law. The Madras High court had decreed in 1869 that "the relation is in truth not marriage, but a state of concubinage into which the woman Entērs of her own choice and is at liberty to change when and as often as she pleases" (Cited in K.N. Panikkar, "Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala", *The Indian Historical Review*, Vol. III, No. 1, 1977, p.43). Moving the Nāyar Bill in the Madras Legislature in 1890, Sir C. Śaṅkaran Nāyar had said: ..."our wives are concubines and our children bastards in courts of law, and the necessity therefore for a bill to legalize marriage and to provide for the issue of such marriages, divorce and restitution of conjugal rights" (*Ibid*, p. 44). The disparaging nature of *sambandham* is also revealed by the fact that during the last 150 years, the ceremony used to take place at night. See A.K.B. Pillai, *The Culture of Social Stratification/Sexism: The Nāyars*, Massachusetts, 1987, p.162.

[71] European writers generally use such terms as 'visiting husbands' and 'absent husbands' to refer to the *sambandham* partners. See Francoise Zonabend, "An Anthropological

but soon it came to light that the proposed regulations would greatly harm the interests of the community. Educated Nambūtiris came to the forefront in exhorting for *Kaniṣṭavivāham* and a royal statute for promoting it. Mūthiringōd urged the Nambūtiris to retreat from *sambandham* since it was detrimental to community interests. He, however, identified that the efforts of the Nāyaṛs towards framing a regulation vicariously benefited the Nambūtiris, since by making *sambandham* expensive and by attributing all the blame for the downfall of the Nāyaṛs to the Nambūtiris, they in fact contributed to discourage the practice.[72]

An editorial of the *UN*, written at the height of the discussions on the Nāyaṛ Regulation in 1924, revealed this fact fairly clearly.[73] It advised the Nāyaṛs to give up *sambandham* rather than to demand a share from the Nambūtiri husband of a Nāyaṛ wife. It would add honour to them than to continue with this humiliating practice.[74] While the proposed Nambūtiri Regulation sought to deny proprietary rights to *sambandham*-married men, the Nāyaṛ Regulation attempted to grab the property of the Nambūtiris. In fact *sambandham* was greatly detrimental to the Nambūtiris; it not only drained their property but also withheld the youth from utilizing their energy for the good of the community. All communities who were in alliance with the Nāyaṛs declined day by day. Rather than discouraging an undesirable practice, the Nāyaṛ Regulation sought to foster it. Another editorial on the same subject expressed dissatisfaction over the developments of the Nāyaṛ Regulation.[75] It acknowledged the unequal nature of the marriage partnership; the lack of attachment in father-sibling relationship and the way it harmed other communities; and praised the role the Nāyaṛs had been taking for some time in fighting out *sambandham*. In the new age when

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Perspective on Kinship and the Family" in Andre Burguiere et al ed., *A History of the Family*, Vol. I, Paris, 1986, pp.40-41, 63.

[72] "Sambandhavum Nabūtirimārum", *YK*, 13:93, Aug.22, 1923, p.8.

[73] *UN*, 4:9, Edavam 1098, pp.457-464.

[74] T. Kumarapilla, the NSS leader, complained that for the Nambūtiri husband, his *sambandham* wife was polluting after the nighttime.

[75] *UN*, 5:11, Karkadakam, 1099, pp.507-511.

everything is measured in accordance with the concept of equality, the existing social inequality between wife and husband and father and siblings was certainly a cause of concern. But since *sambandham* had trans-caste foundations, no single caste could do anything against it. Yet, the Nāyaṛ Regulation had laid promise for the future; but its acquisitive agenda disappointed all. By giving *sambandham* a respectable position, the regulation in fact disappointed even the exponents of reform.

After the enactment of the Nāyaṛ Regulation, the *UN* in another editorial pointed out certain clauses in the act that would become extremely harmful to the Nambūtiris.[76] Section 8 of the 2nd chapter of the Regulation, which invalidated the remarriage of a person who had contracted a marriage that was still existing, would not only make the *sambandham* of the *gṛihasthans* (having *swajāti* wife/wives) impossible in future but also would hamper the whole process of the succession in a Nambūtiri *illam* by not permitting a *sambandham*-married *kaniṣṭan* to contract *swajātivivāham* in the event the *mūss* failed to have a progeny. In such cases the whole property would pass on to the *sambandham* wife and children. Another clause equally dangerous is the 21st section of the 2nd chapter. It empowered the Nāyaṛ wife and children of a non-Nāyaṛ (read Nambūtiri) husband to inherit one-half of his 'self-earned and special' property; if he had no other legitimate successors in his own community, the entire property would pass on to them. This clause would endanger even the possibility of adoption for the sake of maintaining *illams*.

In a very important step, intervening in the discourse on the Nambūtiri reform, and in the context of the declining governmental patronage to them, Ramavarma Tampan urged the Nambūtiris to be active and alert to overcome

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[76] *UN*, 6:9, Edavam 1100, pp.490-494. An article by Āṭṭayūr Kṛiṣṇan Nambūtiri, which is a review of P.C. Tampān's work *Ispade Rājākkanmār*, quoted Tampān's opinion that it was the Nāyar Regulations in Cochin and Travancore that had compelled the Nambūtiris to turn towards *swajātivivāham*. See *YK*, 20:81, July 23, 1930.

this disadvantage and reform the existing family structure.[77] The family system ran counter to individualism and this could be corrected only by adopting *swajātivivāham* and *bhāgam*. *Kaniṣṭans* could overcome this difficulty by contracting dowry-less marriages or by entering into marriage alliances with families of low ritual status. Audacity to take up some kind of vocation would eliminate the difficulties in finding a source of livelihood; even the petty job of a *śāṅthi* in a temple was enough to support a family. *Swajātivivāham* was not going to bring about the desirable results unless the youth shunned their lethargy and started working with 'manliness'.

An article by Mōzhikunnam, the first of its kind, directly and forcefully linked the success of *swajātivivāham* with the empowerment of the Antaṛjanams.[78] He found that it was the primitive condition of the Nambūtiri women that had played a crucial role in keeping the existing marriage system alive and suggested a single remedy for universalizing the new marriage culture: to educate them and thus empower them. Once they were made aware of the new world they themselves would find a way out from their destitution. He thus strongly pleaded for women's education. Later in another article he linked marriage reform with the dress reform of the Antaṛjanams.[79] The Nambūtiri women looked very unattractive and shabby in their traditional dress and this was one of the factors that fostered *sambandham*. Thus while education would expand their mental horizon, a total reform of their physical appearance would make them suitable choices to Nambūtiri men.[80]

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[77] M. Ramavarma Tampān, BA LT, "Nambūtiri Yuvākkaḷōdu Orapēkṣa", *UN*, 6:9, Edavam 1100, pp.496-503. Tampān was a member of the royal family of the Zamorins and was the Principal of Zamorin's College, Calicut. He was a strong supporter of the Nambūtiri movement and was an exponent of similar kinds of reforms among the Kṣatṛiyas. He was also one of the earliest votives of the rationalist movement in Kerala and even edited a journal *Yuktivādam*. See Editorial, *UN*, 11:12, Aug.30, 1929.

[78] Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambūtiri, "Peṇkidāngaḷudē Narakamōchanam", *UN*, 6:7, Meenam 1100, pp.399-401.

[79] Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambūtiri, "Nammudē Innathē Athyāvaśyam", *UN*, 7:1, Kanni, 1101, p.4.

[80] In three successive articles, Kāṇippayūṛ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād denounced women's education and liberation. In an article "Stṛīswātantṛyam" (*UN* 7:5, Makaram 1101, pp.279-

Promotion of *swajātivivāham* necessitated not only the encouragement of *Kaniṣṭavivāham* and *parivēdanam* but also the discouragement of *Adhivēdanam*. In an address Mūthiringōd narrated how *Adhivēdanam* contradicted human emotions and humanitarian ideals.[81] Only among the Nambūtiris we find polygamy in the modern age; while people are increasingly concerned as to how matrimony can be transformed into mutual love and responsibility, the Nambūtiri marriage alliances present a totally different picture. Nobody can love one's three wives equally; the behaviour of a Nambūtiri husband is sheer hypocrisy, he pretends to love the one whom he does not love at all and shows indifference to the one who he really loves the most. For his wives, *Adhivēdanam* gives only despair and sorrow. Most of them are forced to accept a husband as aged as their grandfather and they end up their lives in the monotony of the kitchen.[82] The attention of the community was also called to the evil practice of the *gṛihastans* entering into *sambandham* relations in addition to *Adhivēdanam*.[83]

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289) he criticized the emerging demand for freedom of women and justified the *Manusmriti* injunction against them. He explained that *Manusmriti* did not envision women as slaves, but was meant to protect them. Home is their best space and they could excel in home management. In another article, "Stṛīsamājam" (*UN*, 7:6, Kumbham 1101, pp.347-357), he refuted the call of Kōdanāṭṭ for a women organization (Presidential Address, NYJS 7th annual, *UN*, 7:4, Dhanu 1101, p.242) and argued that women organization becomes necessary only when men think of their progress without caring for their women counterparts and it would certainly be an undesirable tendency. Since community is an aggregate of families, selfish and partisan group feelings would harm community interests. In his third article, "Dāmpathyabaṅdham" (*UN*, 7:4, Meenam 1101, pp.423-432; 7:11, Karkadakam 1101, pp.632-640), he observed that marital life is dependant on the mutual attraction of the husband and wife and hence husband should decide how his wife appears to be and vice versa. In fact Nambūtiri men were not dissatisfied over their women presently. Women's new libertarian tendency would destroy the strength of marital life and family structure; Nambūtiris should be guided by the ancient Indian ideal.

81 Mūthiringōd, Presidential Address, Kavaḷappāṟa NY Upasabha, *UN*, 7:3, Vrichikam 1101, pp.187-189. Also see his "Kūṭṭukudumba Jīvitam", *UN*, 8:6, Kumbham 1102, pp.342-346. Similar views are expressed by Kōdanāṭṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād in his Presidential Address, NYJS 7th Annual meeting, *UN*, 7:4, Dhanu 1101, pp.243-244.

82 An article compared a Nambūtiri *Illam* with a brothel where the *Mūss* lived with his many (pitiful) wives. "The house in which women are treated only as instruments of sexual gratification is a brothel". See Balakṛiṣṇan Vannēri, "Vēśyāḷayaṅgaḷ", *UN*, Oct 16, 23. 1931.

83 Śīravaḷḷi Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Presidential Address, 9th Annual meeting, NYJS, *UN* 9:4, Dhanu 1103, pp.275-286. In a later article, Kāṇippayūṟ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād suggested

Moothirigod presented how the conjugal life of the Nambūtiris were totally opposed to the ideals of the family in the modern age such as individual liberty and mutual trust and observed that not only *Adhivēdanam* but also the joint family system had made a mockery of it.[84] True matrimony was impossible in an inn-like Nambūtiri *illam*, where the presence of a large number of inmates and the ensuing internal feuds kept it always turbulent. In fact it could be termed a 'half-an-hour' matrimony. Nowhere in the world could one see such a peculiar wife and husband relationship except among the Nambūtiris. They were not supposed to talk to each other, nor travel together, nor even fondle their own children. The existing joint family system, which caused the greatest harm to individualism and contended family life, had to be demolished.

Mūthiringōd developed his idea of marriage reform by calling attention to the peculiar system of seclusion of women that prevailed among the Nambūtiris.[85] *Ghōṣa* system was found to exist among the Muslim and the North Indian women, but the one found among the Nambūtiris was unique.[86] It was unique not simply for its peculiar features but also for its impact on the

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that *swajātivivāham* could easily be introduced by outlawing *adhivēdanam*. Since polygamy is banned among all modern nations, those who engaged in it should be punished. See "Adhivēdana Nirōdhanam", *UN*, 11:47, May 30, 1930.

[84] See the second part of his article "Pūṛvāchāram Athavā Kīzhnadapp" in *UN*, 7:11, Karkadakam, 1101, pp.646-654. It was the first attempt to analyze Nambūtiri family life from a modern outlook. VT made his famous speech "Nammudē Gṛihyajīvitam" only years later. *YK*, 20:18, 19, Nov.23, 27, 1929 reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.550-553.

[85] See the third part of his article "Pūṛvāchāram Athavā Kīzhnadapp" in *UN*, 7:12, Chingam 1101, pp.674-681. P.M. Manazhi in his "Antaṛjanaṅgaḷum Avarudē Vēṣabhūṣaṇaṅgaḷum" raised a similar plea for dress reform and *ghōṣa* elimination. UN, 7:12, Chingam 1101, pp.713-716. M. Rāmavarma Tampān in his "Nambūtiri Yuvākkaḷē!" (*UN* 9:4, Dhanu 1103, pp.244-254), urged the Nambūtiris to reform customs including *ghōṣa*. An editorial of *UN* noticed that the first step towards the betterment of the life of the Antaṛjanams was the elimination of *ghōṣa*. It explained the practice as absurd and ridiculous because in spite of the prevailing sanctions, they used to travel in bus and train and watched others while letting other to see them. *UN*, 11:8, Aug.2, 1929.

[86] Elsewhere Mūthiringōd attributed the origin of the *ghōṣa* system to the Muslim invasions; since there was no reference to it in the Sanskrit literature, the Nambūtiris were simply imitating the Muslims. See *Nambūtiri Stṛī Vidyābhyāsa Commission Report*, Tṛiśśūṛ, p.8. Mūthiringōd had to face severe criticism for this statement even from his fellow-Nambūtiris.

community: while the *ghōṣa* system did not obstruct the material pursuits of the other communities, it caused great impediments in the progress of the Nambūtiri community. It kept the Antaṛjanams always in the kitchen; it obstructed their educational advancement and material progress. They were like caged birds. The *ghōṣa* system had to be reformed according to the changing environment; in a situation where men increasingly involved themselves in public activities, including trade and other professions, women too had to accompany them from place to place; so *maṛakkuda* had to be replaced by a nominal veil. All these changes were not going to destroy their chastity; chastity depended on one's inner purity. Women should also be educated. Just like the special school for boys, special girl's schools also should be started.[87]

Later, in his most famous series of speeches, Mūthiringōd developed the concept of love marriage.[88] Among the four areas of change which he suggested, the one that was related to marriage envisaged the introduction of the union of harmonious minds. Though VT had tried out this concept in his short stories,[89] it had not been theorized, nor had been developed into a theme of reform.[90]

The reform discourse gained a considerable boost with the appearance of Cheṛumukku Vaidikan Cheṛiya Vallabhan Nambūtiri as the exponent of radical change.[91] Starting with the economic backwardness of the community and the

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[87] His personal stand over girls' education contrasted with his attitude on the same issue as contained in the Nambūtiri Women's Education Committee Report for which he was the secretary. In an article "Nambūtiri Stṛīkal", he emphatically stated that girls should be given the same kind of education as was given to the Nambūtiri boys. *UN*, 9:9:2, Thulam 1103, pp.150-157. (This article appeared before the commission report was submitted) Subsequently, Mūthiringōd identified women education and freedom of *parivēdanam* as the two essential components of *swajātivivāham*. See his Presidential Speech, 12th Annual Meeting of the Talappaḷḷi NY Upasabha, in *UN* 9:7, Meenam 1103, pp.482-483.

[88] "Nālu Parivaṛthanaṅgaḷ", *UN*, 11:51, Sep.12, 1930. The four areas of change were educational, ritualistic, matrimonial and economic.

[89] Three stories of *Rajanīraṅgam* viz., "Viṣukkēṭṭam", "Māyayō Manmathibhṛānthiyō" and "Eṅkil" made pre-marital love as the theme of narration.

[90] Se his article "Nambūtiri Peṇkidāṅgaḷkku Oru Ezhuth", *UN* Jan.19, 1930, reproduced in *VTiyude Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.558, 564-65.

[91] See his Presidential Speech at the 8th Annual Meeting of the *Saṅgham* in *UN*, 8:4, Dhanu 1102, pp.225-238.

increasing unemployment among the youth, he attributed this sad state of affairs to tradition and scriptural injunctions and exhorted the Nambūtiris to go anywhere in the world and do any work; if they went against the scriptures the Nambūtiris need not worry unduly for they are unsuitable for the 20th century. He supported the Regulation as a remedy for all the ills of the community. His greatest intervention was in favour of *parivēdanam*; he placed it at a higher level than *Adhivēdanam*; though both were equally against scriptures, the practical advantages derived from the former made it more acceptable than the latter. He also strongly pleaded for *bhāgam* along with the provision for transferable individual shares.

VT in an article tried to link marriage reform with new sources of livelihood and with a new professional culture.[92] He wanted to solve the economic hurdles that stood in the way of forging a new system of family life. Without a source of income no one could think of *swajātivivāham*. Nambūtiris should start living by self-effort, entering into a job or profession. Due to the prevailing taboos, they were not able to take up agriculture, trade or handicraft. The only way to prosper was to discard the vestiges of their nobility and their aversion to work and accept any job in any part of the world. For a happy and prosperous life, he urged the young Nambūtiris to be active and enthusiastic in their work and to earn money through new professions.

The young radicals who grew restless due to the slow pace of reform began to expand the agenda and the modes of reform at the end of the 1920s. Around 1927 the reform of the Antaŗjanams became the focal point. This might have happened also because efforts at the enactment of the Nambūtiri Regulation made little progress. By then several Nambūtiris had acquired English education and they were in the forefront to demand *swajātivivāham*, but the Antaŗjanams were still in their old medieval social environment. Women's education, *ghōṣa*

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[92] "Yuvajanaṅgaḷum Thozhilillāymayum", *YK*, 17:31, Jan. 12, 1927.

elimination and dress reform all became the new areas of reform. Women's problems had not only taken up a new space in the reform movement but women themselves were identified as the potential instruments of reform. Mūthiringōd revealed this fact fairly clearly.[93] He identified that efforts at reforming men had been greatly progressing and was a near success, but women were still backward. They were in the primitive condition; they were unaware of the world around them. The community could not prosper in such conditions; men's efforts would not be successful unless they are supported by women. The voice of women would be more powerful at home; if they started compelling their husbands to send their children to school, their husbands would not be able to deny their request. A women's forum should be formed to inspire them and to enlist their support to the reform measures.

Meanwhile, attempts were made to appeal to women of other communities to help to root out *sambandham*. An open request to women of related communities,[94] appealed to their conscience and solicited their help to solve the problem of the Antaṛjanams. A real picture of the pitiful life of the Antaṛjanams was presented to them in order to persuade them to retreat from *sambandham*. Pointing out that marriage and happy conjugal life were the ultimate ideals of women, the request revealed that these were denied to the Antaṛjanams. With every *sambandham* an Antaṛjanam missed her chance of married life. So the willingness of the women of the related communities to enter into *sambandham* had been causing sorrows for the Antaṛjanams. Since all other attempts at discouraging *sambandham* had failed, an ultimate and desperate plea had to be made.

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[93] Mūthiringōd, "Abhivṛiddhikkuḷḷa Ēkamārgam", *UN*, 8:7, Meenam 1102, pp.447-450. The demand for a "Stṛīsamājam" was first categorically raised by Kōdanāṭṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād in his Presidential Speech at the 7th annual meeting of the *Saṅgham* in 1926. See *UN*, 7:4, Dhanu 1101, p.242.

[94] "Bandhu Samudāyangaḷilē Mānya Sahōdarikaḷodu Orapēkṣa", *UN*, 8:12, Chingam 1102, pp.679-694. They included all those communities with which the Nambūtiris had marriage alliances.

In an article that reflected the same sentiments, Pātiriśśēri exposed the absence of any woman intellectual in the Nambūtiri community in comparison to several of them in other communities and presented it as a matter of shame both to the Nambūtiris and the other communities.[95] He pointed out that women of other communities had a moral responsibility to emancipate their suffering Nambūtiri sisters which would bring respect and glory to themselves. He places the ignorance of the Antaŗjanams in the context of the prevailing marriage culture, which treats women as instruments of cooking and as commodities in the marriage market purchased along with huge dowry. Every marriage brings profit. Efforts to educate Antaŗjanams are not worthwhile because they have no scope to involve in any other activity than the work in the kitchen and that too in others' homes. Educated and enlightened people reproduce an enlightened new generation. Nambūtiris are the least bothered about either a happy married life or an energetic new generation. Polygamy and very late marriages are instrumental in increasing female offspring.[96] The traditional form of marriage, which was introduced to retain the joint family, has destroyed the very foundations of the community. Since Nambūtiris approach *sambandham* strictly from an erotic point of view, there is no scope for true love and purity in it. From these premises, and from the point of view of the Antaŗjanams, Pātiriśśēri calls upon women of *sambandham* communities to keep away from this heinous and humiliating practice at least in the future.

In a very important exposition of the dynamics of the marriage reform, Kuṛūṛ Nārāyaṇan Bhaṭṭathiripād explained how the cultural backwardness of the Antaŗjanams had been fostering *sambandham*.[97] He points out that the present condition of the Antaŗjanams runs parallel to the fate of the untouchables. He

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[95] "Antaŗjanaṅgaḷum Bandhu Samudāya Stṛīkaḷum", *UN*, 9:3, Vrichikam 1103, pp.188-203.

[96] This has been a general argument raised by all Nambūtiri reformers. But Pātiriśśēri argued that among the Nambūtiris females were lesser in number to the males. *Ibid*, p.196.

[97] "Stṛīvidyābhyāsam", *UN*, 9:3, Vrichikam 1103, pp.206-216. This Kuṛūṛ is not the Kuṛūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, the strong votary of the *Sudaŗśanam* party.

found the lack of women's education greatly detrimental to reform, particularly in the realm of marriage. Not only the aged and conservative men but also several women were opposed to *parivēdanam*. He gives us the example of A.K.T.K.M. Guptan Nambūtiripād, who was forced to enter into *sambandham* because of the pressure of his mother.[98] Thus not only the old people, men and women, were to be blamed for the slow pace of reform but also the young Antaŗjanams had a share in it as their shabby and the ungainly appearance repelled young men. He strongly pleaded for girls' education but rejected the proposal of special education for them; they should be taught in public schools and should be provided special hostel facilities in towns.

An article on the future of marriage, with ideas from western scientific and rational tradition, presented some revolutionary concepts on the topic.[99] Prostitution and abortion are very common in the west and are justified as means to avoid the eruption of certain types of aberrations and violence in social life. Certain kinds of laxity in moral principles are essential for the smooth development of marital life. Existing form of marital life is extremely disappointing and unhappy. There are no eternal values associated with marriage or family life; they should undergo periodic and timely changes. Another article questioned the very institution of marriage because it curtailed individual freedom. In many societies women do not marry; unwillingness to marry will bring about a revolution in the institution of marriage. It may also lead to the proliferation of love marriages.[100]

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[98] See *YK*, 16:1, Sep.19, 1925.

[99] K.N. Kesavan Nambūtiripād, "Vivāhathintē Bhāvi", *UN*, 11:20, Nov.8, 1929. A preface to the article stated that the system of marriage became institutionalized with the rise of male dominance, but it had always been unfair to women and it is not surprising that in the present age when women get more freedom they try to introduce changes in the system which men would not be able to accommodate. Changes which had been taking place in marriage practices in the West would create considerable confusion among people who stuck to outdated ideals and morals. The article was based on Norman Hair's book.

[100] *UN*, Oct. 9. 1931.

A very important development of this period, especially after the drama enactment, was the appearance of articles of many Antarjanams about their ideas on reform. The first of these was that of Mrs. Pārvathi Manazhi in which she called upon women to acquire literacy and to reform their dress.[101] Mrs. Chēnnamaṅgalam in an article complained that in spite of the sympathy shown by the community and the efforts of the *Sabha* and the *Saṅgham*, women do not take much interest in bringing about changes in their appearance.[102] She recognized that their husbands do not like Antarjanams to be shabbily dressed in the outmoded traditional style and hence dress reform is an essential prerequisite for their emancipation. M. Uma Antarjanam made a comparison between polygamy among Muslims and the Nambūtiris and observed that the freedom for divorce makes the case of the former less painful.[103] She therefore supported direct action like picketing as a means to check *Adhivēdanam*.

4:4. Staging of the Drama

The staging of the farce AA on the occasion of the 22nd annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Edakkunni in December 1929 played a crucial role in the success of the reform movement and in the emergence of VT to a place of prominence. It was a very tactical intervention in the reform programme; but no single individual could claim the sole credit for it. The 1920s was significant in the reform movement in that it discerned almost all the problems to be solved within the community but there was considerable confusion as to the method of action to be pursued. The two reformist groups – viz., the moderates and the radicals –

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[101] "Antapurathil Ninnu", *UN*, 11:31, Jan.24, 1930. Mrs. Manazhi was the first Antarjanam to boycott *ghōṣa*. She publicly participated in the 22nd Annual Meeting of the *Sabha* in which the drama AA was staged. Right from 1921 articles authored by women were being published in the *YK*, but given the fact that most of the Antarjanams were illiterate and were unaware of the world around them, such articles would be faked. One K.N. Sreedevi Antarjanam, Changanasseri in "Antarjanaṅgaḷkku Avaśyam Vēṇda Chila Pariṣkāraṅgaḷ", *YK*, 11:27, Apr.8, 1921, p.6 presented herself as educated (at home) up to 7th standard and strongly pleaded for dress reform among the Antarjanams. Two more articles of women were published in the *YK*, 11:36, June 24, 1921.

[102] "Nammudē Anantarakṛityaṅgaḷ", *UN*, 11:36, March 7, 1930.

[103] "Adhivēdana Nirōdhanam", *UN*, 11:57, Aug.8, 1930.

suggested different means to the end. Though the conservatives were against basic changes, the moderates did not want to alienate them and so requested for a slow-going and gradual reform. Instead, the radicals were not ready to wait; they wanted to sideline the conservatives from the purview of the movement. But since property and progeny were in their custody, only a royal legislation could overcome the tangle. So the creation of a majority opinion in favour of the reform was an urgent necessity. In the new era of democratic politics, public opinion had to be created through the mobilization of all the discontented sections. In the context of the failure of the Nambūtiri bill in the Cochin legislature, some kind of direct and success-oriented measure was intensely felt. The drama was targeted towards creating such an environment for reform.

The drama was a part of the programme of the *Sabha* to press forward its agitation through a more effective means of popular appeal. With the rejection of the Nambūtiri bill by the Cochin Mahārāja, there spread a deep disillusionment among the activists. This despair created considerable skepticism about the viability of continuing the prevailing methods of agitation. This was the context in which many began to think seriously of seeking an entirely new and effective mode of propaganda other than the usual methods through journals, meetings and speeches.

As a landmark in the movement, we have a lot of information on the drama episode.[104] VT has written an impressive account of it, claiming both the drama and the very idea behind it as his own.[105] However, it has been revealed that while he wrote the earlier acts by himself, the later ones were shaped through discussion among the activists; in fact the entire work was a group venture.[106]

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[104] P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri noted that the drama was a missile, aimed not only at liberating the Antarjanams but also at finding solution to the entire problems of the community. Hence he described the 22nd annual meeting of the *Sabha* as a landmark in its history. *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku*, Tṛiśśūr, 1969, pp.96-97.

[105] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.249-50.

[106] See E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha*, p.115; M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmji: VTyudē Sṛiṣṭi", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, p.39. K.C. Nārāyaṇan gives evidences to

The last part of the play was completed in just fifteen days. Though VT acknowledges the helping hand of M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād in finishing the work, he does not refer to any other at all. He asserts his determinant role both in its composition and in its staging and affirms that its success was decisive in transforming him to a prominent figure in the movement. He was appreciated for his role as a catalyst and was soon appointed as the organizing secretary of the *Saṅgham*. He also asserts that the drama was crucial in converting many moderate leaders into supporters of the radical programme.

The presentation of the drama was equally problematic. The moderate group opposed its staging since the subject matter of the drama was exceedingly radical and hence would further alienate the conservatives.[107] It was also considered to be absurd and humiliating to the community. In those days the annual meetings of the *Sabha* and the *Saṅgham* were held in the same pandal and so the moderates refused to grant permission to perform it. The opponents yielded only on the threat that the *Saṅgham* would not conduct its meeting.[108] The very first staging of the drama was a great success; one and all sat watching it for six long hours with uninterrupted enthusiasm; spectators seemed to be witnessing a real event; it in fact shook the community to its foundations.

The drama put forward the agenda of reform forcefully; it exposed the fetters that checked the progress of the community; it suggested new ideals and opened a new world before them. Quite different from the title of the drama, the kitchen did not appear in it at all. Most of the events at the *illam* took place

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support this view and calls it as a sort of group-farming. See K.C. Nārāyaṇan, "Nāṭakakalayum Navōthānavum", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, Mēzhathūr, 1997, p.201.

[107] The detractors put Kapḷingāt Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri to the fore of the opposition; they alleged that it would humiliate the community before the non-Nambūtiris. Chittoor Kunhan Nambūtiripād, who was in charge of the welcome committee, permitted to stage the drama due to the high pressure exerted by the radical young men. See P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.101-102. Also see M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam*, November 1992.

[108] VT writes that Chittūr acquiesced on his threat. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.252. He presents things as if he was the only figure involved in the whole episode.

either in the *tekkini* or in the verandah. The play did not envisage to bring the Antaŗjanams to the public sphere. It aimed at *swajātivivāham* and modern education of boys as the most important ideals and that too from the strict male point of view.

YK wrote in a triumphant tone on the exhilaration created on the staging of the farce and described it as "the new movement that burnt down orthodoxy to ashes".[109] When people came to know that it was VT, the author of *Rajanīrańgam*, who had written the drama, there was not even an iota of doubt in them about the enjoyment that it would provide. The fact that many who came as bystanders were attracted by the drama so much that they sat unmoved watching it for seven hours was the real testimony of the success of the drama. While some scenes caused the audience to burst out into laughter, certain other ones filled them with remorse. And as Mannath Padmanābhan remarked in his felicitation speech, the result of the drama presentation of a single night had outstripped the cumulative results of all the activities of the past 22 years. He requested the Nambūtiris to stage dramas during ceremonies like marriage in future instead of *Sańghakkaļi* or *Pānēńkaļi*.[110]

In an appraisal of the first staging of the drama, Kuţţikŗişņa Mārāŗ wrote hopefully that the 22nd annual meeting, owing to the staging of the drama, would bring about within a year a sudden transformation equivalent to that which had been achieved over the last ten years.[111] Another piece of review glorified the drama for the revolutionary changes it brought about within the community and compared it with the exploding of a bombshell.[112] It concluded with the

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[109] *YK*, 20: 27, Dec. 25, 1929. p.3.
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] Kuţţikŗişņa Mārāŗ, "Abhinandanam", *UN* 11:27, Dec. 27, 1929.
[112] M.B.N, "Adukkaļayil Ninnu Arańgathēkku – Oru Sāmudāyika Prahasanam", *Mangaļōdayam*, 17:9, Medam 1105, pp.660-663. M.B.N. wrote: "If the worth of literature is assessed by the valuable transformation it produces in a nation or in a society, this social satire too has been highly successful in producing sweeping changes in the Nambūtiri community leading to its radical social transformation. The massive quakes that have been

statement that the farce was capable of transforming the very foundations of the Nambūtiri community. E.M.S, who took part in the deliberations of the first enactment of the farce, wrote later that it could by itself bring about changes among the Antaŗjanams equal to the one the decade-long agitation through newspapers and meetings had brought about in the community.[113] In a preface written to the third edition of the drama in 1957,[114] K. Kēḷappan compared it to an atom bomb of 'those days'. Presenting VT as an exceptional personality and his drama as a revolutionary move, Kēḷappan tried to impress upon the readers that it liberated a community from sheer ignorance and exclusiveness. VT led the transformation of the community from depression and decay towards modernity, but it was his drama that played the crucial role in this transformation.

Following the staging of the play at Edakkunni, it was enacted at 9 places.[115] It set a new method of propaganda. It conversed directly with the spectator; even the most illiterate person could digest it. Thus it played a truly revolutionary role in educating the Antaŗjanams about the crucial issues of communitarian interest.[116] In all the places where it was staged, special arrangements were made for the Antaŗjanams to watch it. The farce was published within a month of its

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rocking the community for the last four months testify the explosive power of this satire in bringing about valuable social changes. In short, this satire is not only a powerful weapon of social change but also a top-ranking work of literature", p.663.

[113] E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, p.117.

[114] K. Kēḷappan, "Avathārika", in V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku*, Calicut, 1957.

[115] Editorial, *UN*, 11:46, May 30, 1930 wrote that there were 8 performances. But a report of the staging of the drama at VT's *illam* by the same *UN* stated it as the 9th performance. *UN*, 11:46 May 23, 1930.

[116] E.M.S. wrote that the drama staged at his home could convert even his mother into a strong supporter of the reform programme including *swajātivivāham* and *bhāgam* and she seemed to have desired all her sons marry from within the caste and to have their own shares of the *illam* property. The drama had created a similar impact among many Antaŗjanams. E.M.S. also attested that the impact created by the drama became the foundation for all the subsequent changes. See his *Ātmakatha*, p.117. I.C.P. Nambūtiri wrote that his 14-year old sister declared after having seen the drama that she would not put out her blouse in future. See I.C.P. Nambūtiri, *Vipḷavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*, p.34.

first enactment and all the copies were sold out within two months.[117] It made a great impact on all walks of life, especially in instilling a sense of enthusiasm in the Antaṛjanams. An editorial of *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri* wrote:

"...While a drama or farce is generally looked upon as a mere source of entertainment, for the young Nambūtiris they were potent forces of social change. Through their biting satires, they conveyed the necessity of putting an end to all evil practices and customs, checking the abuse of power by Nambūtiri priests and protecting all forms of social freedom. Their experiment in this new field of performing arts was immensely successful. The new social satire turned out to be a crowning glory for the young Nambūtiris and brought them great satisfaction. For the last two decades, social change had remained an unfulfilled dream even to the great Nambūtiri stalwarts of social reform; but today a handful of young Nambūtiris have worked wonders through their satires. Their seemingly playful activities brought about swift and sweeping changes in the community. Who can desist from singing their praises? The illiterate Antaṛjanams, who were dwelling in the darkness of ignorance, who could not even read a newspaper or a pamphlet and who were strictly forbidden from attending the *Sabhas*, were aroused by the strong wind of social change let loose by the social satires staged by the young Nambūtiris".[118]

A report of the staging of the drama at the Mūthiringōt Illam, in which more than a hundred Antaṛjanams participated, described it as a great event and praised it for the visible changes that it had created in the community.[119] In a note of appreciation after seeing the drama staged at Chittūṛ Mana, Rāmavarma Thampān congratulated VT and all others who were associated with it and hopefully stated that it would be able to break all the chains that bound the Antaṛjanams and would destroy conservatism within the community.[120] He also observed that the *ghōṣa* system was crumbling and would be swept away by the impact of the drama in the near future.

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[117] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.254.
[118] *UN*, 11:47, May 30, 1930.
[119] Cherūḷiyil Kunjuṇṇi Nambisan, in *UN*, 11:30, Jan.17, 1930. There is another report on the event on similar lines. See *YK*, 20:31, Jan 11, 1930.
[120] M. Ramavarma Thampān, "Oru Prahasanābhinayam", *UN*, 11:31, Jan. 24, 1930.

VT identified another important role the drama was able to play in the contemporary situation: that of bringing the underprivileged Nambūtiris together with the noble and the upper sub-caste groups. One of the very important agenda of the movement was to remove all the distinctions of nobility and status by equalizing every one to the same level. The staging of the drama at Panniyūṛ was designed to redress a historical wrong; by getting together and by dining together they set new ideals of equality and tolerance before the community. Mōzhikunnam publicly participated in the Tritala *upasabha* meeting at VT's *illam*, where the drama was staged.[121]

At the Edakkunni annual, VT was appointed as the organizing secretary of the *Saṅgham* with Mūthiringōd as the secretary.[122] VT has written that the president of the Sabha had strongly pleaded that he should not be let to suffocate within the four walls of the *Mangaḷōdayam* and had requested to bring him to the front rank leadership; but it was not heeded.[123] In his new tenure as the organizing secretary he roamed about with the drama presentation and propaganda work. The successful staging of the drama at VT's house, even in the midst of the strong opposition from his elder brother supported by hardcore conservatives, in fact symbolized the surrender of the conservative elements and the triumph of the radical reform programme.[124]

During this time VT was also appointed as the assistant editor of the *UN*. Even earlier, he had been the *de facto* editor because K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād,

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[121] *UN*, 11:46 May 23, 1930. Mōzhikunnam was banished from the community for having been jailed during the Malabar Rebellion for his alleged involvement in it. He made a powerful speech at Mēzhathūr. See *UN*, 11:47 May 30, 1930.

[122] He was deputed from *Mangaḷōdayam* for the new job; he received an allowance of Rs.25/-, which was in fact lesser than his salary at *Mangaḷōdayam*. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.254-55.

[123] *Ibid*, p.254. But it is interesting to note that *YK* reported Potti as requesting VT to concentrate on literary field since he was gifted with an original style and an idealist vision. *YK*, 20:27, Dec 25, 1929.

[124] VT's description of the staging of the drama at his *Illam* (*VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.259-269) perfectly conforms to contemporary reports. See, *YK*, 20:63, May 21, 1930; *UN* 11:46, May 23, 1930.

the editor, was staying at Changanāśśēri and was available only for writing editorials. Hence, all other activities, including the selection of articles, were done by VT. He encouraged young Nambūtiris to write articles on various issues related to reform and several men like M.R.B. rose to prominence as notable writers during this time. As the assistant proof reader under VT, M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād attests the role of VT in the propaganda work.[125] E.M.S. Nambūtiripād also began to associate himself with the *UN* around this time and he too writes that it was VT who taught him the essentials of journalism.[126]

Subsequently VT along with a team of workers including K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, Mūthiringōt and Pāndam, started a propaganda tour to the northern parts of Kerala in order to spread the message of reform in the interior parts and to enroll new members.[127] Except in Taliparamba, the *Sabha* was not very active, *upasabhas* were not founded yet and so reform measures were very slow in these areas. The Nambūtiris of Payyannūṟ, who were matrilineal, were looked down upon by others and were truly out of the deliberations of the community.[128] Since Paḷḷam Kṛiṣṇan Nambūtiri fell ill the propaganda tour was cancelled halfway.

4:5. Nambūtiri Bills

The Nambūtiri reformers saw in the Nambūtiri Bill the fulfillment of their reformist agenda. In fact the entire movement in the 1920s was focused on enacting the bill. While other communities looked towards government acts as a means to settle their issues with other communities, which needed government

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[125] M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam*, November 1992.

[126] E.M.S, *Ātmakatha,* p.108. When VT started his *Yāchana Yātṛa,* E.M.S. had to take up the charge of the assistant proof reader.

[127] *UN*, 11:35 Feb.28, 1930; 11:36 Mar 7, 1930. The team included K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, Mūthiringōd, VT, Pāṇdam and Paḷḷam Kṛiṣṇan Nambūtiri. They visited many places around Payyannur, Alappadamba and Nileswaram.

[128] In an article VT sarcastically recollects his memories and experiences with the matrilineal Nambūtiris of Payyannur. Though he was a great exponent of community-building sought to be introduced by eliminating sub-caste differences, he was not able to accommodate the matrilineal Nambūtiris. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.600-606.

intervention since it was capable of creating serious inter-caste tension, for the Nambūtiris it was aimed at settling matters of intra-caste contention. As the community was a theatre of contrasting interest groups and as customs and tradition, and the prevailing laws based on tradition, were unjust to the majority in meeting their democratic and human rights, a new law based on new principles alone was the panacea for the ills of the community. In the prevailing system of joint property in which the *mūss* had the supreme power of management, and in which the junior sons had no say over it except to meet their maintenance from it (that too not in the legal sense), there was no question of a compromise between tradition and reform. It was also the only enduring means to check the erosion of property and progeny from the community.[129]

Serious efforts towards introducing a bill had started with the 12th annual meeting.[130] Since *sambandham* was increasingly found to cause drain of both property and progeny and since the prevailing marriage system had been causing considerable suffering to the Antarjanams, measures for bringing about

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[129] The Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Nambūtiri Bill, introduced in the Madras Legislature, expressed the resentment of the younger generation in unmistakable language: "With the advent of democratic government in this country the numerical strength of the community has become a very important question. The Nambūtiris cannot hope to exercise any influence on the political life of the country unless their number is proportionate to their stake". Cited in M.W.M. Yeatis, *Census of India 1931*, Vol. XIV, Part I, Report, Government Press, Madras, 1932.

[130] In an article "Kanyādānam Athavā Kudumba Regulation" (*YK*, 15:20, Nov.26, 1924), Mūthiringōd analyzed the history of the Nambūtiri Family Regulation. The 3rd annual meeting had decided not to have any changes in the nature of marriage. Important discussions on marriage reform started only with the 5th annual; in order to perfect the marriage system, *kanişţavivāham* and *bhāgam* were found essential. The 8th annual took up the issue again, and urged all Nambūtiris to denounce *sambandham* for the sake of the progress of the community. The 9th annual gave a new turn to the issue; arguments were raised to abolish post-nubile marriages, which would invariably bring in *kanişţavivāham* and would terminate *sambandham*. 10th annual resolved for *kanişţavivāham* and the next annual supported *parivēdanam*. All these decisions were taken in the face of strong opposition from the orthodox sections. It was the 12th *sabha* that resolved to draft a regulation. The 14th annual decided to publish the draft regulation and to submit it before the three governments. The 15th annual provided for individual share as a means to materialize *swajātivivāham*. The committee for preparing the draft regulation was appointed in the 16th annual *Sabha*.

Kaniṣṭavivāham slowly captured the attention of the community.[131] In the prevailing condition of customary laws and rules of inheritance that was also not possible. It needed reform of custom as well as of property rights.[132] Equally important was the discussions over the role of the marriage custom in bringing about the 'fall' of the community, both morally and materially; by nurturing lethargy and inertia, it stood as a great impediment to the advance of the community. As the *kāraṇavans* were against any kinds of changes in the prevailing custom, reform could be possible only through government intervention. This was the context in which measures were taken to present Nambūtiri Family Regulations in the three legislatures of Kerala, viz., Travancore, Cochin and Madras.

The draft regulation,[133] prepared by a committee instituted for the purpose with K. N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād as the secretary, was submitted to the *Sabha* for discussion, and a heated debate ensued.[134] The original draft envisaged both

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[131] There has been considerable dispute as to the main objective behind proposing the Nambūtiri bill: whether as a measure to discourage *sambandham* or as a means to avert the difficulties involved in getting the Antarjanams married. It is a fact that the *smārtavichāram* of Tāṭri had brought the attention of the community towards the problem; the prevailing marriage culture was creating considerable immorality within the community; that unless some strong measures were taken, it would cause considerable damage to the image of the community. But it can safely be said that the origin of the *sabha* had nothing to do with the sufferings of the Antarjanams, as is shown by its clause that no measures should be taken against custom.

[132] *Parivēdanam* had become a matter of discussion from the first annual meeting and even the elders had spoken of *kaniṣtavivāham* as a means to avoid difficulties in the marriage of the Antarjanams. In the fourth annual the clause against reform of custom was avoided. See C.K. Nambūtiri, *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, pp.11, 17-19. But all these measures were mere verbal exercise; so the young men wanted radical and immediate changes.

[133] *Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation (Committee Reportum Karadu Regulationum)*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1100ME. Chapter 2 proposed to legitimize *sajativivāham* including *parivēdanam* and chapter five resolved to provide equal share to all the adult, *swajati*-married males of an *illam*, along with the share of his wife/wives and children, from the date the regulation came into force but with no right of alienation.

[134] These discussions were marked by the absence of women's voices. Nor did the Select Committee constituted to collect the opinion of the community approach any women to heed their suggestions. Antarjanams were viewed as creatures incapable of expressing competent views. Meera Velayudhan observes that of the 863 witnesses consulted over the

swajātivivāham and individual partition of *illam* property. It also aimed at abolishing *Adhivēdanam*. With the publication of the draft regulation, a conservative group emerged opposing the efficacy of reform arguing that it would destroy the prevailing dharma among the Nambūtiris. Even among the reformers diverse opinions arose, especially on the question of partition. *Swajātivivāham* was not a matter of much dispute but *bhāgam* created a hue and cry.[135] Some argued that partition was not good (*bhāgam bhaṅgiyalla*), some others held that partition was good (*bhāgam bhangiyāṇu*); but the vast majority argued that partition alone was good (*bhāgamē bhaṅgiyāvū*).[136] In the prevailing custom of the *kāraṇavaṛ* acting as the manager with the right of primogeniture

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Report of the Īzhava Law Committee in 1919, only 10 were women. See Meera Velayudhan, "Reform, Law and Gendered Identity", in M.A. Oommen ed., *Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience*, New Delhi, 1999, p.62.

[135] Kōdanāṭṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, "Āḷōhari Bhāgam", *YK*, 14:30, Jan.5, 1924. While accepting *Kaniṣṭavivāham*, he rejected *bhāgam*. He opposed *bhāgam* on another ground later: if a person got *sambandham*-married, after having received his share, property would certainly be lost to non-Nambūtiris. See *YK*, 14:46, March 8, 1924. Ālathūr Anujan Nambūtiripād opposed *bhāgam* on the ground that it would devastate the *taṛawād*. "Bhāgam Bhaṅgiyalla" in *YK*, 14:50, Mar.22, 1924; 14:51, Mar.26, 1924; 14:52, Mar.29, 1924; and 14:53, Apr.2, 1924.

[136] In an article "Vēḷiyum Bhāgavum", Pātiriśśēri argued that *bhāgam* was a necessary precondition for *Vēḷi*. He justified *swajātivivāham* for the sake of a peaceful family life. There was total disorder and property went on losing by way of legal suits and drain through Nāyar ladies. It was essential also for keeping women's chastity: there was rarely an *illam* where abortion had not taken place. *YK*, 14:25, Dec. 15, 1923. In reply to Kōdanāṭṭ, and in support of Pātiriśśēri, Mūthiringōd wrote in an article "Madhyavarthitvam" that though *bhāgam* would cause fragmentation, it would check the loss of property. Presently it was lost through court cases and *sambandham* expenses. *YK*, 14:39, Feb. 9, 1924. In his famous and repeatedly quoted article "Bhāgamē Bhaṅgiyāvuḷḷu', Mūthiringōd rejected the arguments of Alathur, especially his contention that the *Sabha* did not have the true representation of the community since majority Nambūtiris were keeping away from its deliberations. The democratic way was to go for majority opinion if there was no unanimity. *YK*, 14:55, Apr.9, 1924 and 14:56, Apr.12, 1924. By setting aside all dissenting voices, Pātiriśśēri in his article series "Bhāgamē Bhaṅgiyāvu", repeated his points in its favour. He said that it was absurd to argue that *bhāgam* would bring about poverty. Except a Pūmuḷḷy, Oḷappamaṇṇa or Dēśamaṅgalam, no other Nambūtiri was rich; what they did have was only nobility. He rejected the allegation that *bhāgam* would destroy kinship bonds since in the present system no such thing existed. *YK*, 14:57, Apr.19, 1924; 14:58, Apr.23, 1924; 14:59, Apr.26, 1924; and 14: 60, Apr. 30, 1924. In its first editorial on Family Regulation, the *YK* strongly supported it on the two grounds of drain of property and the sufferings of the Antaṛjanams. *YK*, 15:84, July 18, 1925. Kāṇippayūṛ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād in his article supported *bhāgam* and argued that *swajātivivāham* was a must and *bhāgam* was the only means to achieve it. See *YK*, 16:97, Sep. 15, 1926.

and the *kaniṣṭans* having no legal right of maintenance, *swajāti*-married men would find their position precarious if the *kāraṇavaṛ* opposed the marriage. So without *bhāgam, kaniṣṭavivāham* was not possible; without *kaniṣṭavivāham, sambandham* would have to be continued; *sambandham* had been causing the drain of property and progeny and thus was hastening the process of 'decline'. There was also considerable debate over whether *Mitākṣari* or *Āḻōhari* was the desirable form of partition.[137] *Mitākṣari* was rejected on the ground that

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[137] The British conception of the Nambūtiri law was for the first time outlined in Lewis Moore's *Malabar Law and custom* published in 1905. It was periodically revised during judicial verdicts. The main features of the law were as follows: The laws laid down in the Dharmasastras with the translation for Dharma as 'sacred law' which guided the Brahmans throughout India was recognized by the courts. However, the Dharma of the Nambūtiris was more orthodox and priest-dominated and came to be interpreted as a direct heritage from the ancient patriarchal system of the Vedic Aryans in which the patriarch's control over the rest of the family members was almost absolute. Nambūtiri customs finally codified under a substantial legal framework came to be known as 'Nambūtiri Law'. The first conception of family was of an indivisible unit, a mere aggregate with no separate rights, living under one head, united more especially by their connection with the same sacra. The law accepted in the case of the Nambūtiri property was that partition among Malabar Brahmans was wholly alien to the principle of the law, which governed them. As in *Marumalkkathayam, Kāraṇavan's* authority in the management of *Illam* properties was almost absolute and unquestionable so long as he was bonafide and not fraudulent was judicially recognized. The junior members' and unmarried female members' right in the family property, that is the right to maintenance, too got judicial recognition. Legal marriages formed the basis of succession as in the case of the rest of the Brahmans of India. And only the descendants of the eldest male, who definitely were the children from a legal marriage, should perform the obsequies and become their heirs. The earlier impression that the Nambūtiri Law did not permit the junior male members to marry was corrected and found that there was no rule of law and no custom prohibiting them from marrying According to Nambūtiri Law, a married woman lost her rights in her parental *illam*; she would take her husband's *gotram* and continued to stay in the husband's *illam* even after becoming a widow. Regarding the right of the female members in the Nambūtiri *illam*s for the ownership of property, the ancient patriarchal state of law was made applicable, in which except the patriarch, both males and females had equal rights. The females to become the managers of the *illam* property, the one who was married to the *illam* first got the superior position and not the one senior in age; in the case of the unmarried, she became eligible if born before the first marriage of a male took place in the *illam*. Nambūtiri widow did not possess the power of alienation of *illam* property became legally accepted. As self-acquisition was rare among the Nambūtiris, no definite law was mooted in the beginning; but later the ordinary Hindu law which gave the right to inherit such properties to one's own immediate heirs became the rule of the law in the case of the Nambūtiris also. However, in the case of the personal debts of the Nambūtiris, for example, due to illness etc. the *Marumakkathāyam* usage was given legal effect since no individual had separate claims in the *illam* property; hence the *illam* was liable for maintenance. The Nambūtiri customs, which were never explained by any historian of the pre-British period or made available by any written authority through

according to it only 1/3 of the property would go to the *Müss* and 2/3 to the *Apphans*. Since the latter were *sambandham* married, there was every possibility that a major share of the property might easily drain out from the community. It was also rejected because it envisaged no right of share for the Antaṛjanams.[138] In the meantime the conservative group sought to torpedo it.[139] The dissenting faction under Paschiman Rāman Nambūtiri and Taikkāt Müss appeared on the scene and *Sudaṛśanam* started its publication.[140] With the rise of diverse and conflicting factions, the possibility of unanimity of opinion receded and even the feasibility of a bill appeared forlorn.

The draft regulation was later submitted in the three legislatures. Kapḷingātt Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri presented it in the Cochin legislature,[141] Thuppan Nambūtiripād in the Travancore legislature and O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan

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interpretation, were put on a complete legal footing to become effective guideline not only during judicial proceedings, but later to guide the protagonists of social reform. Cited in C. VĀśānthakumari, *State and Social Change- the Role of Judiciary- A case Study of Malabar*, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 2003, pp.130-35.

[138] Intervening in this issue Pātiriśśēri outlined the reasons why *Mitākṣari* was not solicited. See his article "Mitākṣari and Āḷōhari". *YK*, 14:79; July 5, 192 and 14:80; July 9, 1924. It was not desirable also because it would deny the elder brother's children their due share. Müthiringōd rejected *Mitākṣari* on two grounds. First, it would lead to erosion of property to non-Nambūtiris and second, as it would deny property rights to women; there would be no one to look after them in future if they were widowed. *YK*, 14:88; Aug 9, 1924.

[139] They summoned many meetings against the regulation. In June 1926 a meeting was arranged at Irinjalakuda. Paśchiman made a speech against the Regulation as if it ran counter to customs and scriptures. Supporters like Pātiriśśēri, Kapḷingāt and Pāṇḍam spoke in favour of it. There was great uproar and the meeting had to be disbanded half way. See *YK*, 16:78 July 3, 1926. Another similar meeting was summoned by Kuṛūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād at Tṛiśśūṛ in March 1927. Supporters participated in this meeting also. The resolution presented by Kuṛūṛ urging the author of the Bill to repeal it and the Cochin legislature to reject it was defeated by a margin of 37:77 votes. See *YK*, 17:53, Apr 2, 1927. The secretary of the *Sabha* had to publish a circular requesting Nambūtiris not to invite Paschiman in the proceedings of the *sabha* in future. See Editorial, *UN*, 7:5, Makaram 1101, pp.276-278.

[140] But it is striking to note that Cheṛumukku Vaidikan strongly and openly came in support of the Regulation. In an article he rejected the allegation that it was against tradition. See *YK*, 16:80, July 10, 1926.

[141] The speech made by Kapḷingāt while presenting the bill in the Cochin legislature, is very important because it contained the grave concerns of the community. He linked it with the very survival of the Nambūtiri community and with the general progress of the society. See Kapḷingāt, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation", *UN*, 7:7, Meenam 1101, pp.392-403.

Nambūtiripād in the Madras legislature. For many years there was considerable lobbying from both the supporters and the opponents for and against the bill. While they were passed without much difficulty in the Travancore and Madras legislatures, it had to face considerable impediments in Cochin. In spite of the bill being considerably modified from its original draft,[142] the Cochin government withheld it for a long time and when passed in the legislature, it was rejected by the Mahārāja.[143] This unprecedented situation forced the *Saṅgham* to take strong measures for getting the bill passed. Repeated deputations were sent to the government; stories and articles were published in order to arouse popular conscience towards the sufferings of the Antaṛjanams and *apphans*; members of other communities were invited to express their views on important issues[144] and to partake in the proceedings of the *Sabha*; efforts were made to declare solidarity with the sufferings of the lower castes by supporting their anti-untouchability and temple-entry measures;[145] and the drama *Maṛakkudakkuḷḷilē*

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[142] By this time the bill had deleted both *swajātivivāham* and *bhāgam* and insisted only on the banning of *adhivēdanam*. An editorial in *YK* reassured the community that all other reforms would follow if this single point was materialized. See *YK*, 20:38, Feb 12, 1930.

[143] The Cochin Dewan justified the king's rejection of the bill on the grounds of the defects in it. He argued that the provisions were not sufficient either for universalizing *swajātivivāham* or for providing material support to the *kaniṣtans*. He also pointed out that passing of a bill in Cochin alone would create problems. See *YK*, 20:47, Mar 19, 1930.

[144] A.P. Varkey advised the Nambūtiris to learn from the Christians; partition and individual share led to their prosperity. He also supported *swajātivivāham* as the timely reform. "If the present system continued, the Nambūtiris might perish in a period of 2 centuries". A.P. Varkey, "Pariṣkārathintē Māṛgam", *UN*, 11:52 July 4, 1930.

[145] Though the changing social environment and the impact of the nationalist movement had its impact in bringing about this chang of attitude, most important factor was the new legislative culture. Issues of social interest had to be discussed in the assembly and had to get majority vote before being enacted. The Nambūtiris had only nominal representation in the assemblies. When the Cochin government withheld the bill, a revised bill was presented in the assembly by Gowri Pavitran, the Īzhava member. See Editorial, *YK*, 20:23, Dec 11, 1929. Similarly, the 21st annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Mavēḷikkara in 1928, while discussing the progress of the Malabar Nambūtiri Bill, expressed great discontentment over the lethargy shown by O.M. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād MLC and suggested that the task might be entrusted with K. Madhavan Nair. See *UN*, 10:4, Dhanu 1104, pp.228-229. In the case of the Cochin Bill, the suggestion to appeal to the British government created an uproar. See *Ibid*, p.228. But in both cases the moderates won. An article ("Namukku Oru Pāṭam", *YK*, 19:62 May 8, 1929) urged the Nambūtiris to be thankful to K. Ayyappan for

Mahānarakam was staged exclusively before the Cochin legislative members in order to convince them of the plight of the Antaṛjanams.[146]

Right from the beginning VT was a strong exponent of legislation for social change and his articles as also speeches emphatically stated this aspect.[147] In his articles he argued for marriage reform in the name of the pitiful life of the Antaṛjanams and against *sambandham* from the point of view of the interests of the community as it was draining the community of both progeny and property. He also argued against the fear of the conservatives that with partition the community would collapse; in fact the regulation was intended to check the ruin of property. Though VT did not lambaste the scriptures, as had been done by Mūthiringōd or others, he pointed out that the Nambūtiri practice was not only against the pan-Indian tradition but also was highly unethical and inhuman. Finally he interlinked the partition issue with the new capitalist spirit; he wanted the Nambūtiris to learn from the Christians and the Nāyaṛs and to start living through either agriculture or trade.

Detailed evidences on VT's personal involvement in the process of its enactment are not available; but it is certain that he had taken active interest in getting it passed. In fact his drama *AA* had focused on the need of a government regulation in accelerating reform; *Adhivēdanam* was prohibited through a court injunction. VT himself wrote that the rejection of the Nambūtiri Bill by the Cochin Rāja had sown considerable disillusionment and it provoked them to

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raising a question of the Nambūtiri Bill in the legislature. The author wanted the Nambūtiris to reward it by fighting against pollution.

[146] It was a dramatic version of M.R.B's short story with the same title published in *UN* 11:15, Sep.27, 1929 and 11:16, Oct.4, 1929.

[147] VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation (Committee Reportum Karadu Regulationum)", *YK*, 15:75, 1925 June 17; 15:76, 1925 June 20; 15:77, 1925 June 24; 15:79, 1925 July 1; 15:80, 1925 July 4; 15:81, 1925 July 8. Also see VT Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kudumba Regulation-tē Karadu", *YK*, 16:44, February 24; VT Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Select Committee-yudē Anvēṣaṇam", *YK*, 16:77, June 30 1926; VT Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kudumba Regulation-Ūṛjitha Pariśṛamaṅgal", *YK*, 17:19, Nov 24, 1926; VT Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Bill: Oru Swathantṛa Nirūpaṇam" – I & II, *YK*, 17:50, Mar. 23, 1927 and 17:52, Mar. 30, 1927; VT Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Brahmacharyavum Swajāti Vivāhavum", *YK*, 17:57, Apr. 20, 1927.

embark on a new venture of reform, the staging of the drama.[148] When he was appointed as the assistant editor of the *UN*, VT played a significant role in ushering in activities for the enactment of the marriage reform bill through political journalism. In the 12th annual meeting of the *Saṅgham* at Guruvāyūr, VT is reported to have made a strong speech condemning the Cochin Rāja for his antipathy to the Bill.[149] Later he made several such speeches at many other places. He took special interest in getting Pārvathi Nenminimaṅgalam nominated to the Cochin legislature as a representative of the Antarjanams.

M.R.B. wrote his short story *MM* in an attempt to expose the sufferings of the Antarjanams, whose salvation lay only in the enactment of the bill. Since Cochin was the bastion of conservatism, and as the royal family still stuck to the tradition of *sambandham*, the enactment of the bill was very difficult. The drama *MM* which was staged for the first time at the Guruvāyūr annual meeting of the *Sabha* in 1930 was restaged at Cochin. However, the bill was delayed. When the bill was passed in the Madras legislature, VT wrote a jubilant note in the *UN* glorifying it and praising the role of all the people, especially Mattanūr Tańgal,

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[148] *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.248. A brief history of the Bill up to its rejection is as follows. Presenting the bill in the Cochin legislature, Kapḷingāt Śańkaran Nambūtiri made a touching speech in which he emphasized the necessity of a bill for bringing about substantial changes in the community. (Kapḷingāt, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation", *UN*, 7:7, Meenam 1101, pp.392-403). The Bill was soon handed over to a select committee, with Kapḷingāt as the convener, for collecting more evidences from all sections of the community (*UN*, 7:7, Meenam 1101, p.391). Subsequently it was published in the Cochin Gazette for the notice of the people (Reproduced in *UN*, 7:9, Edavam 1101, pp.541-550). It was followed by a long process of enquiry, taking evidences, through a prepared questionnaire and sittings arranged at various centers, from both the supporters and the opponents. After the second and third readings (Editorials, *UN*, 8:8, Medam 1102 & 9:9, Edavam 1103), and being passed in the legislature, the final ratification delayed (Editorial, *UN*, 9:11, Karkadakam 1103). The Veḷḷinazhi *Upasabha* passed two important resolutions, the first one registering discomfort over the Maharaja's decision in delaying the bill and the other urging the Nambūtiris not to cooperate with the royal family (Editorial, *UN*, 10:3, Vrichikam 1104, pp.172-173). An editorial of the *UN* severely criticized the King for his callousness in kingly duties (Editorial, *UN*, 10:7, Meenam 1104, pp.393-397). When the bill was finally rejected, the *UN* kept its editorial page blank with a statement "The Kochi Nambutiri Bill, which we all had considered as our last resort, was ruthlessly butchered by the Maharaja, the other day" (*UN*, 11:34, Feb.21, 1930).

[149] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.88.

who had wholeheartedly worked for getting it passed.[150] He glorified the bill for it was more comprehensive and far-reaching than the Travancore and Cochin bills (the former had already been passed[151] and the latter was still under consideration[152]) since it enlisted the provision for individual share and partition.[153]

One of the striking features of the Nambūtiri movement was the constitutional character of its agitation; it strictly adhered to democratic ideals and resorted to constitutionalism as the means of social change.[154] While

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[150] *UN*, 1932 November 11, also see *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.607-608. It was with the election of Maṭṭannuṛ Madhusūdhanan Taṅgaḷ to the Madras legislature that hectic measures were taken to get it enacted.

[151] The Travancore Nambūtiri Act, 1931 laid down its chief objectives as: 1) to correct the misgovernment of the *Illam*; 2) to ensure independent maintenance to those members who wanted to live separately. It stated: "Except for *Illam* necessity and only with the written consent of all the major members of the *Illam*, no *kāraṇavan* or other managing member shall sell *Illam* immovable property or execute *kāṇam* deeds in respect thereof, or mortgage it with possession for a period of more than 12 years". (*The Regulation & Proclamation of Travancore*, Vol. VII, 1105-1109 ME, Ch. II, Section 5, p.57). But the Act left to remain the guardianship of the *kāraṇavan* unchanged.

[152] The Cochin Act provided for *swajātivivāham* and prohibited *adhivēdanam*. But it did not enlist partition of the *illam* property. Section 16 of the Act stated: "Notwithstanding any custom or usage shall, subject to any law, for the time being in force, be at liberty to marry in his own community" (Cochin Acts 1110 to 1114, Ch.III, Section 16). By banning *adhivēdanam* it stated: A Nambūtiri male can have only one Nambūtiri wife, and a second wife can be taken, only if the first wife is afflicted with any incurable disease for more than 5 years, or is found unfit for conjugal union or when the wife becomes an outcaste or she has not born him any male child within 10 years after her marriage. A new second wife under this situation requires the previous sanction of the principal civil court of Original jurisdiction. For any act of violation, fine up to Rs.1000 can be imposed. Law Department, Legislative Council Section, No.13436/14 dated 9 Aug.1939, cited in K.S. Ramadevi, *Social Change among the Nambūtiris of Kerala*, PhD Dissertation, University of Kerala, 1989, p.289. However, the *Census report of Cochin, 1941, Part I, Report*, p.22 presented it as capable of bringing about conspicuous change for the better in the future.

[153] See *The Madras Nambūtiri Act XXI of 1933*. Every member of an *illam*, whether male or female, was taken to have equal proprietary right (Ch.II, section 3(1)) and was entitled to claim his or her share separate from the *illam* with power of disposal (Ch.VI, section 23(1)). Henceforward *swajātivivāham* would be a legal form of marriage (Ch.III, section 9) and *adhivēdanam* a punishable offence except under certain unavoidable situations (Ch.III, section 11). "Any Nambūtiri male who contracts a marriage in contravention of section 11 shall be punished with fine which may extend to one thousand rupees, but a marriage so contracted shall not be deemed to be invalid" (Ch. III, section 12(1)).

[154] Veluthat Kesavan, "Nambūtiriyum Manuṣyanum", *Sāhityalōkam*, March-April 2003, pp. 22-25. This is interpreted as an impact of the Nationalist Movement.

decisions were taken according to majority opinion, changes were sought to be perpetuated through statutory reform. This was not because the Nambūtiris had a grand tradition of democracy in the past but because in the newly emerging situation of political democracy and the nationalist movement the underprivileged Nambūtiris (the *kaniṣṭans*) had to take advantage of it in order to fight against the patriarchs for their rights. It was also because the rights and demands of the reformist Nambūtiris were new and modern; naturally it necessitated modern methods of agitation. Taking recourse to state legislation as a means of social reform was not the feature of the Nambūtiri movement alone, almost all the communities depended on the state as a platform for social advancement and as a stepping stone for further gains. The nature of constitutionalism among the Nambūtiris was different in that they demanded legislation against themselves, since the enemy was within. A single legislation affecting the marriage rules and property inheritance was sufficient to bring about fundamental changes in the community.

The movement and the whole deliberations leading to the enactment of the bills played a very significant role in transforming the Nambūtiris as true and loyal citizen of the state.[155] Till the beginning of the twentieth century the Nambūtiris were above the state: they were the privileged and hence beyond the law. They were a state in themselves; even the kings came to power after swearing to protect Brahmins and cows. Though the establishment of the colonial power had considerably reduced their sovereignty, their high rank and priesthood remained considerably stable. But with the rise of the new civil society with new concepts of civic rights and ideas of progress, with the active involvement of the media and caste based movements, not only were their

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[155] "The ascendancy of common laws was a crucial development in the process of the making of a citizenry in the region". Rajan Gurukkal, "Development Experience of Colonial Keralam", in M.A. Oommen ed., *Rethinking Development: Kerala's Development Experience*, Vol. I, New Delhi, 1999, p.96.

existing privileges seriously attacked but they began to see themselves as underprivileged and destitute. This was the situation which warranted legislation in their favour; but they had to surrender their sovereignty to the state and to become its loyal citizens. Thus contrary to tradition, the Nambūtiris had to obey the state and its institutions for both their survival and for their progress; rather than being a patron of the state, the state appeared before the Nambūtiri as an authority above him.[156]

4:6. The Success of Marriage Reform

A marked progress in the efforts towards materializing *swajātivivāham* was evident by the end of 1929. The staging of the drama AA had played a crucial role in bringing about a new vigour among the reformers and a changed attitude even among the Antaŗjanams. The first *parivēdanam*, that of Paḷḷathēri Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri, was reported in this year.[157] Subsequently *parivēdanams* began to take place in large numbers.[158] Though the conservatives, with the active support of

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[156] The Nambūtiri Bill submitted in the Madras legislature initially made void any *sambandham* contracted after the commencement of the Act but the select committee brought it in conformity with the Marumakkathāyam Act that recognized *sambaṇdham* with Nambūtiris. Report of the Select Committee, Madras Marumakkathāyam Bill, Fort St. George Gazette, 30 August 1932 cited in Praveena Kodoth, "Shifting the Ground of Fatherhood: Matriliny, Men and Marriage in Early Twentieth century Malabar", Working Paper Series 359, CDS, Thiruvananthapuram, May 2004, p.46.

[157] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri writes that Sabha had promised to give a sovereign to the first man who dared to do *parivēdanam* but it was given to Pallatheri Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri who was actually the second person. The first Parivēdanam was that of Madhavappalli Jayanthan Nambūtiri. *Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Charitŗam,* unpublished document. This may not be a mistake because the *YK* had published reports of the marriage; the gift may have been meant to boost up *parivēdanams* in future and hence applicable to the first one that took place after the declaration. See *YK*, 17:72, June15, 1927. There was the report of a *parivēdanam* even earlier, of Tūravūr Nārāyaṇa Mangalath Bhaṭṭathiri, in *YK*, 16:16, Nov 14. 1925.

[158] Paḷḷathēri Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri with Maḷḷiyūŗ Sāvitŗi; both of them were *parivēdanakkār* (*YK*, 20:65, May 26, 1930; *UN*, 11:3, June 28, 1929). Another one was that of Kummiṇi Rāman Nambūtiri (*YK*, 20:66, May 29; *UN*, 11:47 May 30, 1930). Both these were particularly significant in that they took place in the most conservative areas, the former at Peruvanam and the latter at Sukapuram. Another *parivēdanam* was that of Chandanavēli Kubēran Nambūtiri at Ālathiyūŗ (*UN*, 11:54, July 18, 1930). We also get information of 2 Parivēdanams of Mangalath Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri and Vēṇātt Kŗiṣṇan Nambūtiri, both at

the *Vaidikaṛ*, could cause considerable difficulties to those who contracted *parivēdanam* through several measures including *bhṛaṣt*, the general environment in favour of reform and the strong support of the radical reformers encouraged them and thus enlivened the process. Most of the *parivēdanams* were arranged at public functions, especially on the occasion of *upasabha* meetings, in order to give publicity and to extend the support of the *Sabha* to the couples.[159]

Success of the marriage reform needed the discouragement of *adhivēdanam*, along with the promotion of *parivedabam* and *kaniṣṭavivāham*. This was the greatest hurdle, since *adhivēdanam* was not illegal, it could not be encountered through legal measures, and since they were arranged marriages with the support of both parties, they could not be opposed successfully. In order to counter them, the *Saṅgham* decided to resort to peaceful picketing at the entrance of the *illam* where the marriage was to take place.[160] Majority of such picketings failed, because they were strictly non-violent; it emboldened the parties to take alternate measures to get them solemnized.[161] Certain marriages, in order to avoid

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Ēlamkuḷam (*UN*, 11:60 Aug 29, 1930). VT's marriage also took place during this time. (*UN*, 11:50 June 20, 1930)

[159] An Editorial in *UN* entitled "Vaivāhika Parivaṛthanam" (11:54 July 18, 1930) wrote that Vaidikar were not been able to oppose parivēdanam as earlier. It reminded that checking *adhivēdanam* and aged marriages were the immediate necessity.

[160] Edamana Vāmanan Nambūtiri in his "Picketing-ntē Āvaśyam" pointed out its effectiveness in dealing with *adhivēdanam*. Since freedom movement had popularized it, and since all people who read newspapers were familiar with it, it was the best tool. He also recommended that picketing can be resorted to discourage *Yāgam, Vāram, Pūram, Sadya*, etc all of which made the Nambūtiris extremely idle and indolent (*UN*, 11:56, Aug.1, 1930). M. Uma Antaṛjanam called upon the Antaṛjanams to take part in the picketing against *adhivēdanam* along with men (*UN*, 11:57, Aug.8, 1930). The picketing of a marriage n Āluva where an old Nambūtiri was marrying a young girl was widely acclaimed by the press of that time (*The Hindu*, 28 April, 1931, p.10). Similarly, at Vaikam, the third marriage of a Nambūtiri was foiled by managing to present the first wife as the bride in veil (*The Hindu*, 2 January, 1931, p.2).

[161] E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, pp.122-23. The case of such a frustrated picketing at Perintalmanna was reported by the *UN*, 11:54 July 18, 1930. But Pāṇḍam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri wrote that the Perintalmaṇṇa picketing had its results. Many who had thought of *adhivēdanam* were forced to retreat. Jayantan Nambūtiri himself has been humiliated. It has also created considerable

confrontation, were arranged to take place at night, in certain other cases the marriage party bypassed the main entrance to reach the *illam*. The greatest dilemma of the agitators was about suggesting an alternate marriage to the bride in the event of the blocking of the *adhivēdanam* through picketing. This was the context in which the *Saṅgham* activists, both unmarried and *sambandham* married, undertook to marry the girls who were proposed to be given in marriage to *adhivēdanam* husbands. VT's marriage was a classical case on this point.

In order to promote the new marriage culture and to coordinate the movement, a marriage committee was formed with Kānjūṟ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād as the president and C.K. Nambūtiri as the secretary.[162] A notice of the committee invited proposals from fathers who were willing to give their daughters in *parivēdanam* but cautioned them that they must be satisfied with only the personal qualities of the bridegroom (they may miss the *taṟawād* since the kinsmen might disassociate). It also warned the fathers of unmarried girls against *adhivēdanam* for in the coming season a volunteer corpse would be arranged to confront those who indulged in this practice.[163] Even more emphatic was the warning by the President reminding fathers of serious consequences for not keeping away from *adhivēdanam*. He explained that polygamy was not different from polyandry and was equal to animal sacrifice.[164]

In spite of the fact that a large number of *parivēdanams* had been taken place and a social consciousness had been created against *Adhivēdanam*, several obstacles stood in the way of universalizing *kaniṣṭavivāham*. In the context of

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impact among the Antaṟjanams. See his article "Paśu Chathiṭṭum Mōrintē Puḷi Nilkkunnu", *UN*, 11:56 Aug 1, 1930. E.M.S. later wrote that without the help of any government intervention *adhivēdanam* was stopped; this was through picketing. See his "Malabar Nambūtiri Niyamam", *UN*, Nov. 10, 1933; reproduced in *EMS-nte Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 158-162.

[162] Kānjūṟ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād was its president and C.K. Nambūtiri its secretary. Kāṇippayūṟ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, Taḷiyil Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād and Tekkēdath Vāsudēvan Bhaṭṭathiripād were its members. See *UN*, 11:51 June 27, 1930.

[163] "Vadhū-pithākkanmāṟ Śṛaddhikkuvin", *UN*, 11:55, July 25, 1930.

[164] Kānjūṟ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "President-ntē Munnaṟiyippu", *UN*, 11:58, Aug.15, 1930.

the strong organizational set up of the reformers, the conservatives could not stand in the way of the new developments. But what made the situation precarious was the lack of property rights for the *kaniṣṭans*; the new conjugal family could not find a source of livelihood and for this reason many progressive-minded fathers refused to give their daughters in marriage to them. The family regulation was still in the offing; the entire female population of the community was the property of the *gṛihastans*; majority of the Nambūtiri young men had not been trained in any vocation other than *śāṅthi*;[165] and Antaṛjanams were still in their backward condition.[166] Against this situation, and unable to wait till the bill was enacted, many Nambūtiris continued to seek satisfaction in *sambandham*;[167] others resorted to radical measures to get the *illam* property partitioned even in the absence of a Regulation.[168]

Economic constraints and financial considerations apart, a factor that greatly discouraged *swajātivivāham* was the physical appearance of the Antaṛjanams. Primitive form of dressing, heavy ear-studs,[169] ugly brass bangles, *maṛakkuda*, and strict *ghōṣa* system all made the Antaṛjanams truly an unattractive lot. A

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[165] Rāmavaṛma Tampān had urged the Nambūtiri young men fairly early to accept *śaṅthi* as a source of income since it was sufficient enough to sustain a family. He invited the attention of them towards the life of the Embṛāntiris who are working in Kerala as temple priests and were sending a considerable amount to Mangalapuram, their native place. See his "Nambūtiri Yuvākkaḷōdu Orapēkṣa", *UN*, 6:9, Edavam 1100, p.499.

[166] Kāṇjūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād wrote that *kanitans* disliked *swajātivivāham* mainly because they were not ready to take up its responsibility. Even without the Bill, there was scope for both *vēḷi* and a livēḷihood. Wives could be educated even after marriage. "Vividhābhipṛāyaṅgaḷ", *UN*, 11:39 Mar 28, 1930. On the other hand, K. Kṛiṣṇan Nambūtiripād replied Kāṇjūṛ that his observation as to the uneducated Antaṛjanams was not wanted as wives would be correct, but the main problem was dowry. Nobody was ready to give dowry to men who married as *parivēdanam*. How could they live by *dharṃavēḷi*? See *UN*, 11:40 Apr 4, 1930.

[167] Kuṛūṛ Nīlakaṇṭan Nambūtiripād declared that he will go for *sambandham* if the Regulation gets delayed. See *YK*, 16:3, Sep.30. 1925.

[168] V.T. got the share of his property years before the Madras Nambūtiri Act was passed. It was in September 1930. See V.T. Vāsudēvan, "VT Ezhuthān Maṛanna Ātmakatha", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam*, March 18, 2005, p.17.

[169] Among the Nambūtiris it was called *Marakkorad*. Mannath Padmanabhan in his memoirs describes the great difficulty and pains involved in expanding the ear-lobes. See, his *Entē Jīvita Smaraṇakaḷ*, Kottayam, 1964, p.3.

very important agenda of the reform measure was what has been called 'dress reform' of the Antaŗjanams. They were persuaded to wear sari and upper garment, to cut short their ear-lobes and to wear small gold ear-studs, to use modern umbrellas instead of *maṛakkuda* and to come out of seclusion boycotting *ghōṣa*. VT played a very important role in liberating the Antaŗjanams by bringing his own wife outdoors and by encouraging other women to come out to freedom defying publicly the custom of *ghōṣa*. The day of VT's housewarming at Alur witnessed a meeting of Antaŗjanams and the first public boycott of *ghōṣa* under the leadership of Arya Paḷḷam and Pāṛvathi Nenminimaṅgalam.[170] Arya Paḷḷam later wrote that VT's support was the moral force behind their act and that his radical position had been a great source of encouragement for them to enter into the public sphere.[171]

With the enactment of the Nambūtiri Bills, all the obstacles against *swajātivivāham* were removed. Bills passed in all the three legislatures legalized *kaniṣṭavivāham*, including *parivēdanam*, and made *adhivēdanam* a punishable offence. Still, a few *Adhivēdanam* cases were reported later; but they were not numerous nor were they powerful enough to challenge the new marriage culture. *Sambandham* continued in lesser proportions due to certain other reasons.[172] Thus, the old system of marriage and family were replaced by a new structure based on equality among the partners, individual love and division of family duties. But a serious new problem was developing: with the popularization of *swajātivivāham* and with the partition of property the demand for dowry increased and by around 1940 the new marriage system itself began to face a serious crisis and many Nambūtiris started 'selling' their daughters to non-

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[170] See Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, "Abhūthapūṛvamāya Antapuravipḷavam: Āśājanakamāya Oru Viśeṣasambhavam", *UN*, Oct 23. 1931. Also see Premji, "Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam", *UN*, 1:2, Edavam 1122, (May-June, 1947), p.66.

[171] Cited in Mathramkōṭṭ Aśōkan, *op.cit*, p.43.

[172] E.M.S. observed in 1944 that financial difficulties involved in forging a new family and the opportunity for *sambandham* in the *kōvilakams* helped to perpetuate the practice. See his "Nambūtiriyē Manuṣyanākkān", in *EMS-nte Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.278.

Nambūtiri Brahmins of Mangalore or Coimbatore due to their incapacity to meet the exorbitant dowry demands.[173] Women were reported to have said: "Earlier we were in search of a husband, now we are in search of dowry".[174] The rate was hiked to Rs.10000/- around 1939. This was because there was the urgent need for independent households and individual partition had been lagging.[175] The only source of livelihood (and perhaps the easiest) was dowry. It was in this background that the *Antaŗjana Samājam* began to discuss the question of dowry, their share of property and job opportunities for them. They even passed a resolution against dowry.[176] This was the context in which the *Sabha* was revived at Ōngallūŗ in 1944 and measures were taken to help the Antaŗjanams to organize themselves and become economically self-supporting.

4:7. VT and his Marriage(s)

The episodes of VT's *sambandham* and remarriage are clearly illustrative of the dynamics behind the marriage reform movement among the Nambūtiris and indicate how communitarian agenda determined the patterns of personal behaviour. In 1924 VT entered into *sambandham* with Mādhavikuṭṭy Vārasyāŗ, who was his student and an inmate of the *Vadakkē Vāriyam* at Tŗitāla. The alliance lasted for six years and in 1930 he abandoned her in order to marry Sŗīdēvi Antaŗjanam, the eldest sister of I.C.P. Nambūtiri. In 1924 custom did not

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[173] The new system of dowry basically differed from the customary practice. Tambiah noted the twin principles that had supported the old system: dowry connoted female property or female right to property which was transferred at a woman's marriage as a sort of pre-mortem inheritance; dowry also connoted, in complementary fashion, that property was transferred together with a daughter so that she was enabled to Entēr into marriage. In other words, a daughter and her dowry became vehicles for setting up a relation of affinity between the bride's family and the husband's family. Both wealth and women travelled in the same direction. The received dowries were used for securing husbands for their sisters. S. J. Tambiah, "Dowry and Bridewealth, and the property Rights of Women in South Asia" in Jack Goody and S.J. Tampiah eds., *Bridewealth and Dowry,* London, 1973, pp.62, 64.

[174] Cited in T.K. Anandi, *The Impact of Changing Land Relations and Social and Political movements of Nambūtiri Women*, PhD Dissertation, University of Kerala, 1999, p.191.

[175] E.M.S, "Nambūtiriyē Manuşyanākkān", in *EMS-ntē Sampūŗņa Kŗitikaļ,* p.278.

[176] The Thōṭṭaŗa Antaŗjana Samājam passed a resolution to this effect. See *YK*, 31 July 1939, cited in T.K. Anandi, *op.cit*, p.191.

allow him to marry from within his own community, in spite of his strong passion for the same, and had to satisfy himself with a *sambandham* wife; but in 1930 he was at liberty to marry a *swajāti* wife, an opportunity which he appropriated for both personal and communitarian interests. The years between 1924 and 1930 were decisive in the history of the movement, and the two incidents that took place during this period served as pointers to the changing pattern of marital alliances in contemporary society. What is striking is that V.T. was not prepared to be satisfied with *sambandham,* and certainly wanted to have a Nambūtiri wife. The overriding necessity for caste-marriages was profoundly felt by almost all Nambūtiri young men during this period and many conscientious objectors of *sambandham,* rushed for *swajātivivāham.* In fact the realization of *swajātivivāham* represented the achievement of one of the foremost goals of the Nambūtiri movement for which the young Nambūtiris had been striving for a long time. Since marriage reform was central to the Nambūtiri movement, the realignment of the system of marital alliances was determined, among other things, by strong community interests, of which the eagerness both to check the drain of property by way of *sambandham* and to strengthen the community by helping to increase the population through universalizing *swajātivivāham* had been predominant considerations.

VT's *sambandham*, divorce and remarriage have been subjects of considerable debate among his fans and foes. He has been severely criticized for divorcing his *sambandham* wife in order to marry from his own caste whatever the reason might be, since it had caused considerable damage not only to his image as the exalted emancipator of the Antaṛjanams but also as an exponent of the feminine cause.[177] Most of the apologists of VT have acquitted him of this

[177] VT is severely criticised for this issue recently; his humanism and feminism were nothing but pretensions. See K.S. Radhakṛiṣṇan, "VT Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement*, Dec. 23, 2001. Radhakṛiṣṇan questions the myth created around VT as the most illustrious champion of gender equality. He wrote that for VT women meant Nambūtiri women alone, as is clear not only from his marriage and remarriage but also from his

charge on the ground of humanitarian considerations; by divorcing a woman he was rescuing another woman who otherwise would have to end up her life as the third wife of an aged Nambūtiri. Though his deed was obviously dictated by strong communitarian considerations, it was supposed to be radical since it represented deep commitment on the part of a social worker who, while fighting for a cause, had been struggling to correlate one's deed with what one professed.[178] What the situation needed was an act of this kind which would set as an example for others to emulate; as a leader of the Nambūtiri movement his primary duty was to fulfill his commitment to his community.[179] VT has been defended also on the ground that among the matrilineal families marriage was not a lifelong contract; remarriage was possible and quite easy; and that even in the absence of a partner the woman and her children would be looked after by the *taṛawād.*[180] Thus, though the event of his divorce was a factor that tarnished his clean image as an emancipator of women, so painstakingly built by him, his remarriage helped him to regain his lost image in a different way.

It is interesting to note that VT encountered considerable difficulty in defending himself against his marriage and remarriage.[181] Among all his articles of an autobiographical nature, the one that deals with this event alone begins with a note of self-evaluation and self-defense.[182] By presenting himself as a miscreant, committing a great deception amounting to homicide, he pointed out that autobiography must be faithful; the entire truth needed to be revealed.

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attitude to his non-Nambūtiri daughters. He writes: "Though V.T stood for the cause of women, we do not have any proof to show that he felt the pulse of women in general. In fact there is substantial evidence to show that he was insensitive to the sufferings of at least the *Vārasyāṛs*.

[178] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.108.

[179] N.V. Kṛiṣṇavāriyar observed that like Gandhiji VT too was very particular that he should advise others only what he could do. See his "VT Enna Itihāsam", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.28.

[180] Kadavanād Kuttikṛiṣṇan, "VT-kku Oru Kaththh" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, p.117. VT himself has argued along these lines. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.103.

[181] VT, "Oru Vālmīki Kayaṛi Vanneńkil", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.282-291.

[182] *Ibid*, pp.283-284.

Thereafter he attempted to justify his act by attributing the responsibility to the inherent and unpredictable nature of human behaviour and the inescapable compulsions of circumstances. He compared human life to the course of a river, both were unpredictable; obstacles caused by the environment might divert their entire direction. While describing the developments that had led to his *sambandham*, he presented it as a combination of a large number of accidental events. By describing the whole episode as unfortunate, VT attributed the responsibility of the whole events to mere 'fate', though he does not use the term explicitly.

VT thereafter proceeded to narrate the situation that had led to his *sambandham*. He explained that he had intense desire for *swajātivivāham* and had tried desperately to fulfil it.[183] The prevailing custom and the autocratic powers of his *jyēṣtan* foiled his attempts. It was unthinkable for a *kaniṣṭan* in those days to marry from within the caste without the blessing of the *kāraṇavaṟ* since in matters relating to marriage it was not the individual but the *taṟawād* that was counted. Being the custodian of the *illam* property and the undisputed authority of the *illam*,[184] his brother refused to consent to *kaniṣṭavivāham* and the slowly blossoming desire was nipped in the bud.

This was the situation which compelled VT to enter into *sambandham* alliance. He explains in detail the circumstances which induced him to involve in *sambandham* much against his will.[185] He presents it in the general context of the failure of the *Sabha* in materializing *swajātivivāham*, with the family regulation still in the offing, and in his personal context where his brother took

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[183] *Ibid*, pp.284-285.

[184] His father was still alive but was powerless. The *illam* had been pauperized due to the litigation against Manjappatta mana; it was revived with brother's two *vēḷis* and father's *adhivēdanam* in his old age. While the two *vēḷis* of his brother rendered an amount of Rs.9000/-, his father's remarriage afforded Rs.3000/- It was with this amount that the *illam* property was released from mortgage. The *jyēṣtan* argued that since it was with the amount received through his marriage that the property was recovered, he was havingthe sole proprietor of the illam property. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.101-102.

[185] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.285-287.

an unequivocal position against it. VT thus prefaced the contemporary situation with a note that marriage was essential for him and that there was no option for him other than *sambandham* in the prevailing circumstances. He described his *sambandham* as an unpremeditated or a trick played upon him by his brother in order to defame him and to destroy his morale as an activist; he unwillingly accepted it just because the denial might have led to the ruining of the future marriage prospects of the woman involved.[186] It is important that VT had realized that he was trapped not by the unscrupulous *sambandham* brokers, but was cunningly victimized by his own brother. But he unwillingly succumbed to the pressures of his friends on the ground that "if the first marriage proposal fails to materialize its after-effects may persist throughout a person's life".[187]

The *sambandham* was just nominal, VT did not cohabit with her on the first night, nor did he turn to her afterwards for a long time. He writes that it was a matter of great shame for him and that he had to face considerable rebuke from his friends and companions because of it.[188] Since he was working at Tṛiśśūṛ and was an active member of the *Saṅgham*, his *sambandham* was seen as a crime against the rules and ideals of the organization. He was 28, English educated, employed, and was a city dweller. As an active member of the organization he had the moral responsibility to fulfil the reform agenda. Every new member of the *Saṅgham* had to undertake to abide by the five conditions of the code of conduct of the *Saṅgham*; the third condition of the *Saṅgham* categorically stated

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[186] C.K. Nambūtiri mentions about an earlier, but failed, *sambandham* attempt of VT when he was twenty. It failed because he was illiterate; the lady had rejected him for this reason. See C.K. Nambūtiri, "Chila Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam*, Vol. 14, No. 5-6, May-June 1982, pp.22-23.

[187] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.286. VT also writes that the proposal for a *sambandham* was forwarded by his friend Pathiyil Nārāyaṇan Bhaṭṭathiripād and was discussed during a *Vedivaṭṭam* but he had taken it casually and was surprised when one night his friends came ready for arranging the *sambandham*. He refused to comply with, but on the consideration that the denial might become disastrous to the future of the girl, he followed them. He was unwillingly acquiescing to this shameful practice also because he was not able to alienate his friends who too were innocent in the issue. *Ibid*, pp.285-287.

[188] *Ibid*, p.288.

that a member would implement the decisions of the *Sabha* to the best of his ability.[189] The *Sabha* had by now resolved to encourage *kaniṣṭavivāham* and to eliminate *sambandham* and the draft of the family regulation had already been published. Marriage reform was the most seriously discussed subject at the moment. VT's behavoiur was an act of indiscipline and ingratitude; he was not only violating the rules of the *Saṅgham* in which he was a member but was disregarding the most important and live issue of the movement.

An editorial in the *UN* denounced the extremely undesirable tendency of many young men who refused to practise what they preached and stated that *sambandham* was in all respects against the declaration submitted by its members to the *Saṅgham*. It was also against the clause that members should not indulge in any activity that might cause harm to other communities. It had become clear by now that the practice of *sambandham* was detrimental not only to the Nambūtiris but to the interests of all those communities which were associated with it. The editorial went on to suggest that the government may tax outspoken men.[190] The sixth pamphlet of the *Saṅgham* entitled "An Open Letter to our Best Friend" condemned the *sambandham* of 'a prominent person'. It also denounced the communities which stood for "sexual gratification without marriage and procreation without the self-esteem of a husband".[191] Answering to the criticism of Kāṇippayūṛ that it was not fair to attack other communities for the fault of the Nambūtiris, the then Secretary of the *Saṅgham* wrote that since the practice of *sambandham* involved other communities, it was natural that they too should be subjected to criticism and derision; he went on to depict *sambandham* as a mean and absurd custom.[192] Again intervening in the issue, another editorial of *UN* lamented: "As a *Yōgakṣēmasabha* activist, as an

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[189] See the notice of the NYJS Secretary, "Nambūtiri Yuvajana Sangham", *UN*, 2:4, Dhanu 1096, pp.176-181.
[190] *UN*, editorial, 4:11, Karkadakam 1098, pp.571-572.
[191] Cited in Kāṇippayūṛ, "Āṛām Number Lakhulēkha", *YK*, 15:17, Nov.15, 1924.
[192] Taḷiyil Rāman Nambūtiripād, "Āṛām Number Lakhulēkha", *YK*, 15:21, Nov.21, 1924.

educated and cultured man and as a person respected by all, his attempts to contract a *sambandham* marriage only filled our hearts with disappointment and gloom".[193]

Though he resented the alliance and refused to proceed with it for some time, he used to send her Rs.25/- every month.[194] A highly sensitive letter from his wife touched his heart and swept away all his ill-feelings against her and he rushed to meet her.[195] Thereafter, till the cessation of the alliance, he maintained hearty relations with her and two daughters were born to them (she was carrying at the time of the divorce).[196]

The situation was vitiated by certain new developments. With the staging of the drama, a new enthusiasm began to permeate the community and *kaniṣṭavivāham*, including *parivēdanam*, came to be quite common. In association with the staging of the drama at his own *illam*, which his brother with the support of his conservative friends had tried hard to obstruct, his brother deserted home in protest. Thereafter it became his responsibility to maintain the joint family and VT wrote that such a situation compelled him to take certain urgent and necessary measures to save the family through a *swajātivivāham*.[197]

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[193] *UN*, 6:2, Thulam 1100, p.99.

[194] This information provided by VT himself (*VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.288) appears to be incorrect because his monthly salary at *Mangaḷōdayam* was around 12 rupees. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.59. When he was appointed as the organizing secretary of the *Saṅgham* in 1929, his allowance was just 25 rupees. See *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.255.

[195] She wrote him that he was indifferent to her since their marriage and that it was hightime that some kind of decision had to be taken as to whether the alliance would be continued or terminated. (The style and language of the letter resembles VT's). *Ibid*, p.288-289.

[196] One of VT's biographers wrote: Mādhavikuṭṭy Vārasyār, who had no selfish interests, had always stood for his pleasure and serenity of mind and had sacrificed herself for his radicalism. She never stood against any of his endeavours; helped to make him energetic by gratifying him. His stories and drama, which gave him repute, were written during this time. K. Gopālakṛiṣṇan, *V.T.Bhaṭṭathiripād*, New Delhi, 2001, p.45. It is also important to note that he did not register the marriage in accordance with the marriage act of 1896. *YK*, 15:73; June 10, 1925, quoting a report published by the Madras Government, wrote that till 1924 only 120 *sambandhams* were registered in accordance with the act. None was registered in 1924.

[197] See *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.290-91; VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Akṣarajnānathinu Vaikiyatenthē?" in *Karmavipākam*, Tṛiśśūr, 1988, p.406.

In the meanwhile another important incident took place. I.C.P. Nambūtiri approached the *Saṅgham* activists with a plea to save his sister from an *adhivēdanam* and Mūthiringōd persuaded VT to rescue her through marriage. The coincidence of the two events and the refusal of Mādhavikuṭṭy to follow him to his *illam* as 'true wife' (or as *sapatni*) led to the twin unfortunate events of the divorce and the remarriage.[198]

VT's presentation of himself as a helpless victim was generally accepted as the true and authentic version of the episode by both his friends and biographers. He was the victim of circumstances; he was highly sensitive that he could not deny anything to his friends. But a careful study of his other narratives, which contain contradictory data, reveals that his position in this case was not perfectly transparent and that he had something to conceal about this episode which might run counter to his public image. Certain strong personal and communitarian interests had worked in concurrence in the issue of his remarriage which in many respects perfectly conformed to the ethics and dynamics of the *Sabha* movement.

VT in his memoirs has justified his remarriage in the name of his commitment to his family. He had to rescue the members of his family who were discarded by his *jyēṣtan*; there was nobody to look after them. If Mādhavikuṭṭy had been ready to accompany him, he would not have remarried.[199] But another narrative written by VT[200] presents the case in a different perspective. They provide two other reasons for the remarriage. First and foremost was his commitment as a social activist and the second was his desire for his 'own' family. VT explains the situation thus: One day Mūthiringōd and C.K. Nambūtiri

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[198] *Ibid.*

[199] V.T. Vāsudēvan maintained that had she been ready to follow VT, the remarriage would not occur. She refused; she held fast to her taṟawād and her to temple duties. (Interview, 25-04-2006). But it is clear that in the prevailing circumstances, it was unthinkable for a Vārasyāṟ to go and stay with her Nambūtiri husband in his home. Rules of pollution were still strong and she would not be able to serve the family members.

[200] See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit,* Calicut, 1992, pp.98-108. Nambūtiri reproduces 3 notes VT had written on his remarriage issue which is in contrast with his 'official' and recognized narrative. They are not included in *VTyudē Sampūṟṇa Kṛitikaḷ.*

brought in the question of his remarriage in the course of conversation. He expressed his helplessness on account of two reasons. First, he had no property; even the existing *illam* property was not a joint property but was the personal asset of his brother. His source of livelihood was the salary from *Mangaḷōdayam* but it was highly precarious; due to his high-handed radicalism, the directors of the *Yōgakṣēmam* had perceived him as a trouble-maker and hence at any time he would be dismissed. He had great difficulty in accepting any other vocation such as trade or agriculture and was not confident on living by wage labour. Since he was a dissident, the nobles would not allow him to find a livelihood; he would not be allowed to work even as a *śāṅthi*. Second, he was already married. Though the alliance was with a *vijāti* wife, it was not just to be unfaithful to her.[201]

The assurance of Mūthiringōd to provide VT a source of livelihood, in the event of an exigency, and the denunciation of VT by C.K. Nambūtiri for his namesake radicalism, plunged him into prolonged thoughts. He writes that his thoughts were regarding his commitment as a social worker and as a Nambūtiri; he had the moral responsibility to help emancipate the Antaṛjanams by setting up an example. He would be able to encourage his wife to reform her dress and to come out of *ghōṣa* and thus could inspire other women to do so; it would in its turn be a great service to the community. It might hurt his present wife, but that would be the personal sorrow affecting a single individual; she could remarry later. In fact the very continuation of the *sambandham* was a great betrayal of her community because it had not been a true marriage; he was not able to accept food from her publicly, treat the siblings affectionately as his own, and he would not have the liberty to accept a drop of water from her even at the time of his death. So, in course of time, even the divorce would turn out to be a blessing. He decided to give her up and to marry from within the community.[202]

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[201] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.99-102.
[202] *Ibid*, pp.103-104.

The greatest hurdle was to present the remarriage issue to his wife. VT writes that he was incapable of doing it on the day he first set out for it and when he actually did it on another day, she was shocked and collapsed on hearing it; he did not remember how he was able to tide over the nighttime. The crucial point here is that quite different from his main narrative, in which he is portrayed as seeking her willingness to become his partner at his home and as declaring his decision to remarry only on her denial to accede to his request, the second note reveals that he was declaring his remarriage decision firmly and abruptly to her.[203] The main narrative is also silent over his impression of the remarriage; but he writes about it in a surprisingly triumphant tone, the marriage bestowed upon him a respectable family life and a sweeping victory over his brother.[204]

The behaviour of VT in fact fully corresponded with the tempo of the Nambūtiri movement.[205] As soon as the movement was 'captured' by the *Apphan* Nambūtiris, the principal objective of the movement came to be the breaking down of the joint family and the creation of separate nuclear families in its place. The mode of achieving this aim was through *swajātivivāham* and *bhāgam* which would not only bring an independent identity for themselves but also would empower them in relation to the *jyēştans*. VT's writings evidently

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[203] It is equally important to note that he had received his mother's prior permission for his *Vēļi* before he approached Mādhavikuţţy for her permission and that she was pregnant by four months at that time. See *VTyudē Sampūrņa Kṛitikaļ*, p.291; A.P.P, *op.cit*, p.104. These pieces of confessions conclusively deny the popular notion that had she been ready to follow him, the question of remarriage would not take place.

[204] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.107. VT writes: "As an Apphan, I ousted my *jyēştan* from his position and occupied his place as the head of the family with the whole-hearted support of the other members of the family and the community and thus I started leading the life of a family man and householder. This was the moment of crowning success and it filled my mind with a sense of self-fulfillment..."

[205] 'Accountability' and responsible relationship to their followers was a marked feature of the new leadership; their position depended to a great extent on their capacity to represent and make good the association's claims. L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations" in Immanuel Wallerstein ed., *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, New York, 1966, p.450.

portray his power struggle with his brother;[206] disarming the *jyēṣtans* was a significant agenda of the movement which alone could bring about equality and democracy within the community. Thus VT's remarriage was not just for the sake of a social commitment, it had clear-cut material goals.[207] Family and property were the two components of power and both could only be attained through *swajātivivāham*; it was also meant to regain the image lost through *sambandham*; at another level, it was the foremost slogan through which the community could be rallied together against the Nair 'other'. As exponents of communitarian interests and as the products of a communitarian movement, one's identity was inextricably entwined with his identity as a member of his own community.[208]

There is a sequel to the main story. After his remarriage, VT's first wife went for a sojourn to Hyderabad. She told him that a brief stay away would bring her some relief and entrusted him with the care of their two daughters. However, she did not return; she died there soon.[209] The two daughters were looked after by her sister. We do not know how VT treated his daughters, but it is surprising

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[206] See his "Jyēṣtanum Kaniṣtanum", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.108-115; "Naṭyavum Vēṇda Nāṭakavum Vēṇda", *Ibid*, pp.259-269.

[207] A.P.P. Nambūtiri attests that for VT, Rs.5000 received as dowry was a great attraction during that time. A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.108. VT himself wrote: "Before the traces of the teardrops that ran down her cheeks vanished, I enticed a young Nambūtiri woman into agreeing to marry me for a dowry of five thousand rupees". *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.283.

[208] The 4th annual of the Travancore state *Sabha*, which was presided over by Kāṇippayūṛ, had taken a decision to the effect that those who were involved in *Sambandham* would not be elected to any responsible posts in the *Sabha* in future. See *YK*, 19:45 Feb 27, 1929. Supporting this decision, Kānjūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, the president of the Marriage Committee wrote that Nambūtiris married from other communities would not be allowed to express their views on community matters in the very future. See his "Vividhābhipṛāyaṅgal", *UN*, 11:39, March 28, 1930. We are not sure how far it had influenced VT's decision but the discussions on the Nambūtiri family regulation had made it clear that *sambandham* husbands would not get a share of the family property equal to the *swajati* married men and one of the reasons for the delay in the enactment of the regulation was the question as to what should be the criterion of partition for men involved in *sambandham* and in *vēḷi*.

[209] While hearing the news, VT wished that let it not be a suicide. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.282.

that their names are nowhere referred to in his memoirs. His friends and fans write that VT was very fond of them, but a recent piece of exposition revealed that not only did VT not neglect his daughters but even denied them a reasonable share in his property.[210]

Thus a careful scrutiny of VT's marriage issue replicates the marriage reform movement of the Nambūtiris. Apart from the personal interests and issues involved, his divorce and remarriage had strict communitarian overtones. Since *swajātivivāham* was the rallying point, both as a means of community building and as a check to the drain of property, *sambandham* was the chief target of opposition. E.M.S. Nambutirpad writes how the Apphan's daughter had been a villain for the Nambūtiris: "An alien woman who generated great fury among Nambūtiri social workers and social reformers till recent times. It was this buxom maiden of an alien community who, through her manipulations had appropriated the *illam* property and had robbed the *kāraṇavaṟ* of his love for the family..."[211] Naturally, barring a few exceptions, all the Nambūtiris wanted to get rid of them.[212] (This attitude continued even afterwards, as has been shown in

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[210] See Mādhavikuṭṭy, "Mādhavikuṭṭy Vārasyāṟude Pēramakaḷ Ezhuthunnu", *Mātṟubhūmi Weekly*, 82:43, Dec.26, 2004, p.4. I.C.P. Nambūtiri attests this information when he wrote that at his death bed, in 1982, in a hurriedly prepared will, VT set aside Rs.5000/- each to both his daughters. I.C.P. narrates the episode as an act of great magnanimity and sense of obligation towards his *vijāti* daughters. See *Malayāḷa Manorama Sunday Supplement*, March 24, 1996. V.T. Vāsudēvan, VT's only son, justified VT on the ground that while VT and his family was reeling under poverty, his vijāti daughters lived lavishly with the resource from their temple service. Interview with Vāsudēvan on 25.04.2006.

[211] E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "Avathārika", *Apphantē Makaḷ*, reproduced in *EMS-ntē Sampūṟṇa Kṟitikaḷ*, Sanchika-1, pp.148-149. This preface was written for the first edition of the novel published in 1931. It has been deleted from some later editions.

[212] We are surprised by a few exceptional cases. In 1925 A.K.T.K.M. Guptan Nambūtiripād (who was the President of the Family Regulation Committee, was educated and was an economist (graduated in economics from Madras University), was a trader, and was the member of the reputed Dēśamaṅgalam family) started *sambandham* with the family of the Zamorins at Calicut. See *YK*, 16:1, Sep.19, 1925. It created much hue and cry. In one of the meetings organized in protest of the *sambandham*, Kuṟūṟ Nīlakaṇṭan Nambūtiripād, the prominent Congressman and one of the leaders of the Vaikam Satyagraha, declared that if he was not allowed to marry from within the community in a brief period of time in future, he would go for *sambandham* and accordingly married from one of the Nair families of Tṟiśśūṟ. *YK*, 16:2, Sep. 23, 1925; *Kalākaumudi*, 319, 13 Sep. 1981, pp.7, 50. Mādamb

VT's case; and in his memoirs, written in 1984 but still unpublished, C.K. Nambūtiri laments that Nambūtiris have again started *vijātivivāham*. The same old concern appears to have haunted him; he says that it drains both progeny and property; if there was no question of drain of property earlier, today the case is different).

4:8. Yāchana Yātṛa

An important landmark, almost equal to the staging of the drama, in the career of VT was the *Yāchana Yātṛa* conducted under the joint leadership of himself and Pāndam. Starting from Tṛiśśūṛ and passing through the major Nambūtiri villages, the *Yātṛa* ended at Kānjirōde on the banks of the river Chandragiri after 38 days. Though it was chiefly intended to collect money and resources for the support of the Nambūtiri School at Tṛiśśūṛ, it had another important objective: making the community aware of the need of modern education and of timely changes.[213] The *Yātṛa* was a great success;[214] it raised VT to popularity and to the top of the leadership of the *Sabha*. Though it was organized under joint leadership, the exceptional oratory of VT put the second leader to the margins; in the popular narratives of the *Yātṛa* we are driven to believe that it was conceived and conducted by VT himself.

Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri denounced Kuṛūṛ for he had taken a vow at an annual meeting of the *Sabha* that he will be satisfied only with a *swajātivivāham* even if he would be forced to sustain his family through wage labour. See his *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitṛam*, unpublished document. There are reports of three protest meetings against the *sambandham* of A.K.T.K.M. in *YK* 16:2, Sep. 23, 1925. Pātiriśśēri Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād and Kāṇippayūṛ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād were *sambandham* married. Kāṇippayūṛ later discontinued his alliance in the Cochin royal family but lived as a bachelor thereafter. Interestingly, except Kāṇippayūṛ, all the others continued their alliance as if true marriage and built up their family over it. C.K. Nambūtiri writes about Pātiriśśēri's efforts for getting his *vijāti* daughter married to his brother's son which they tried to obstruct unsuccessfully. C.K. Nambūtiri, *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ*, unpublished document.

[213] It is observed that the *Yātṛa* was a measure meant to propagate the message of education among the Nambūtiris. See P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1969, p.117.

[214] VT writes that the *Yātṛa* represented a significant event in the transition of the Nambūtiri community. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.275.

Modern Education and the Nambutiri School

The history of the Nambūtiri School runs parallel to the Nambūtiri movement. Though it was founded only in 1919, right from the beginning of the movement modern education was a major demand of the *Sabha*.[215] The school was started after much deliberation and after a prolonged struggle with the conservatives. It was held that English education was taboo for the Nambūtiris[216] and was against custom and would destroy Nambūtiri-ness.[217] The word English was not used for a long time even by the reformers.[218] However, the indispensability of English

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[215] From the 2nd annual meeting onwards modern education was discussed in the *Sabha*. For details see C.K. Nambūtiri, *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1963, pp.12-13. The earliest votive of English education was Kūdallūr Kunjuṇṇi Nambūtiri who had sent a circular to many prominent Nambūtiris (and high-caste non-Nambūtiris) in 1872 calling upon them to meet together to discuss the issue of starting a school for the children of the Janmis who were not able to study in the government schools. See *Mangaḷōdayam*, 1:11, Kanni 1085, p.420. Also see Ālathūr Anujan Nambūtiripād, "Kūdallūr Kunjuṇṇi Nambūtiripād", *UN*, 4:6, Kumbham 1098, pp.294-95.

[216] *Śānkarasmṛiti* Ch.11, verse 7 contained an injunction against learning 'mḷēcchabhāṣa" and it was the ritual basis for opposition to English. But T.C. Paramēśwaran Mūssad, who interpreted the work in the light of the new age, opined that this was in fact absurd. Since other Brahmins elsewhere had accepted English and also since the term 'mlēcha' was very vague and more importantly because the lack of English knowledge had hastened the downfall of the community, the taboo should not be taken seriously. *Śānkarasmṛiti*, Trissivaperur, 1081/1906, pp.209-210.

[217] For such contrasting views see Mūthēdath N Puruṣōthaman Potti, "Maḷayāḷa Brāhmaṇarudē English Vidyābhyāsam", *UN*, 1:6, Kumbham 1095, pp.177-180. Vadakkumkūr Rājarājavarma Rāja condemned English education and attributed the decline of the community to the neglect of Vedic education. "Nambutirmārum Vedābhyāsavum", *UN*, 4:1, Kanni 1098, pp.7-11; 4:2, Thulam 1098, pp.80-84. Kodungallūr Kunjukuṭṭan Tampurān rejected the argument of Punnaśśēri Neelakaṇṭa Śaṛma advocating English education and advised the Nambūtiris not to opt for it. If English had become the official language, the exigency of learning it could be overcome either by making use of the English educated men of other communities or by pressing the government to make Malayāḷam as the official language. Learning English would do great harm to the Nambūtiris. See his "Nambūtirimārudē Vidyābhyāsam", *Mangaḷōdayam* 1:3, Makaram 1084. The article is reproduced in Prof. S.K. Vasanthan ed., *Kunjukṭṭan Tampurantē Gadya Lēkhanangaḷ*, Kottayam, 1983, pp. 120-124. Tampurān also identified modern education in the context of the Christianizing efforts of the British. See his "Mathasambandhamāya Vidyābhyāsam", *UN*, 2:10, pp.462, 464.

[218] The word used was *Navīna Vidyābhyāsam*, i.e., modern education. The opposition to English education had grounds in that secular education was seen as the best means for educating in Christian ways and the missionaries made use of two agencies – the school and the print – as methods of proselytisation. K.N. Ganesh, "Cultural Encounters under Colonialism: The Case of Education in Keralam" in K.N. Ganesh ed., *Culture and Modernity*, pp.167-68. A similar instance of uncompromising opposition to English

education in promoting, and in defending, community interests at last gave the reformist group an upper hand.[219] The 8th annual meeting of the *Sabha* in 1916 at Veḷḷinazhi at last endorsed the demand of English education.[220] Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād played a crucial role in bringing about this change of mind among the opponents through his arguments.[221] An 'English sabha' convened there with

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education was evinced by the Māppiḷas. English and Western Education were considered as 'passport to hell'. See U. Mohamed, "Moplah Education", *Farook College Silver Jubilee Souvenir*, 1974, pp.117-18. Even the study of Malayāḷam, especially by the females was opposed on the ground that it was an 'Aryan language'. See S.M. Mohamed Koya, *Mappilas of Malabar*, Calicut University, 1983, p.77.

[219] Pāṇḍam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri attested that the opponents of English education withdrew after getting convinced of its role in promoting community interests. See his "Oru Itivritham", *UN* 11:49, 13 June 1930. Jeffrey writes that by the 1890s the large majority wanted their charges to learn to read and write because of the profit that could be gained thereby. Commerce and business expanded irresistibly, bringing gain to those who had skills and qualifications – and foreshadowing disaster for those who had none. People could not ignore such changes: if you did not learn to deal with papers, papers would deal with you. Robin Jeffrey, "Governments and Culture: How Women Made Kerala Literate", *Pacific Affairs*, 60:3, Fall 1987, p.451.

[220] For details see P. K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku*, Tṛiśśūṟ, 1969, pp.49-52. The *Malayāḷa Manorama* (14 March, 1916) hailed the decision: "...The present meeting of the *Yōgakṣēmasabha* reflects the changed attitudes of the Nambūtiris to English. They were under the notion that Anglo-Saxon language was taboo for the Hindus. Now they took the firm decision to propagate English education..." *The West Coast Spectator* (16 March 1916) wrote: "Nambūtiri is awake, alive and kicking. From the report that has come to us of the proceedings of the 'Namboodiri Congress' and English Educational Conference' we are certainly glad to find that he has determined to work out his own salvation. We have always held that reform, so far the community is concerned, should come from within and without...God and Government help those who help themselves is a truism, the value of which the Namboodiris have realized". Cited in P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, "Charitṟathintē Pāṭam", *YK* 1:1&2, Sep-Oct. 1980, p.68.

[221] E.M.S. wrote that Kuṟūṟ could persuade the defiant group to endorse the proposal of English education only by convincing them of the great necessity of English awareness both for reviving the economic-intellectual primacy, which was gradually being lost through centuries of stagnation, and for safeguarding landlord interests in the context of the new legal system. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Kēraḷam Malayāḷikaḷudē Mātṟubhūmi*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p.220. But once the decision was taken in favour of English education, a powerful group of traditionalist Nambūtiris, who were called *Nivāriṇi Saṅgham*, came to oppose it. A memorandum against the Veḷḷinazhi decision, signed with 112 members, came out. They held a secret meeting at Sukapuram. A day before the meeting leaders under Kuṟūṟ, including A.K.T.K.M. Valiya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, Kariyannur Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri and Mathur Vāsudēvan Nambūtiripād, reached there and after hectic discussions a compromise formula was reached at. In a surprising speech Kuṟūṟ converted the opponents into supporters and at the end of the meeting the 700 strong meeting unanimously decided to endorse English education. See C.K. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.13-14.

50 English-educated men under C.S. Subrahmanian Pōtti was a special feature of the annual.[222] It was then argued that many students would not be ready to learn English. To counter this apprehension, applications of 32 students ready for education was presented at the 10th annual meeting.[223] Similar measures were taken to start a special school in Malabar also.[224]

When request for a special school was presented before the Cochin government, it appointed C. Mathayi, the chief instructor, to inquire into the issue, and upon his report permission was granted. It was decided to utilize the resources of the Nambūtiri endowment institutions like Chovvallūṛ and Bṛahmaswam Maṭams for educational purpose; but as government legislations to this effect would take time, the *Sabha* was asked to deposit Rs.8000/- with the government towards expediting the opening of the school. The school committee constituted for this purpose deposited the amount and started the school.[225] While the process of the endowment bill delayed, it was asked to deposit Rs.14000 for the second year and Rs.16000 for the third year; the total amount of Rs.30000 was adjusted from the *Vadakkē Maṭam Bṛahmaswam* upon the guarantee of the *Dewān*. In the meanwhile the *Maṭam* was confiscated by the government due to the infamous *Vādhyān* case.[226] At last the government

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[222] *Ibid*, p.13.

[223] *Ibid*, p.14.

[224] In 1917 the *Sabha* petitioned to the Govt. of Madras to help in founding a school for the Nambūtiris and to get the benefit of English education for them. Home (Education) Files, Ordinary Series, G.O. No.145, TN Archives, Madras, cited in K.S. Ramadevi, *Social Change Among the Nambutiris of Kerala*, p.239. Also see Editorial, *UN* 6:2, Thulam 1100.

[225] Details about Nambūtiri education are available in Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri's unpublished manuscript *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam*.

[226] Vadakkē Maṭam Bṛahmaswam, the property of the Tṛiśśūṛ Yōgam, was under the control of Chāngaliyōṭṭu Vādhyān. When the issue of English education surfaced, and when it was decided to utilize the Matam resources for the purpose, the Vādhyān tried to sabotage the measure. So long as the Vādhyān was powerful, educational progress was impossible. In the struggle that followed, the liberals got an upper hand and the Vādhyān was removed from his post. The importance of the event lay also in the fact that the Vādhyān, who was having the customary right to command the community, had been censured by the community and it introduced a new era of anti-traditionalism. For details see Kuṛūṛ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād, "Vadakkē Maṭam Bṛahmaswam: Charitṛa Samkṣēpam", *UN* 4:6, 1096 Kumbham, pp.322-

decided that resources of the charitable institutions could not be channelized towards the education of the Nambūtiris and the loan amount was asked to be repaid immediately (along with interest and court expenses). All the committee members were made liable to repay an amount of Rs.48000/-.[227] In the case of the Nambūtiris this was not an exorbitant amount, but since the case related to the Cochin state alone, Nambūtiris of other areas showed indifference. The lack of interest of the rich Nambūtiris towards modern education had also been a crucial factor;[228] at last the then school Secretary A.K.T.K.M. Cheṟiya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād had to clear the debt single-handedly.[229]

Special schools had already been started in Travancore and Cochin.[230] The *Nambūtiri Vidyālaya*, as a high school, was started at Edakkunni in 1919 in the Kirāṅgāṭṭ mana.[231] Students stayed at the *mana* along with the teachers, who

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330 & 4:7, 1098 Meenam, pp.381-88; Editorial, *UN* 1:6, Kumbham 1095, pp.189-190; E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, pp.59-60.

[227] The case against the school authorities was filed by the Dewan at the Tṟiśśūṟ District Court. See Editorial, *UN*, 8:3, Vrichikam 1102, pp.153-155. For more details see *YK*, 18:62, May 2, 1928. The actual amount was Rs.47957/- 8 anna and 4 paise. The *Sabha* summoned a special meeting to discuss the issue.

[228] The Sabha had asked Kuṟūṟ Nilakantan Nambūtiripād to consult with Gandhi a solution for the existing financial crisis. Kuṟūṟ enquired Gandhi of the feasibility of a Satyagraha to collect a sum of one Lakh rupees but Gandhi discouraged him by stating that it would be a violent act and advocated a Satyagraha for collecting the offered amount. (About 35000 rupees offered was pending). See Editorial, *YK*, 14:77; June 28, 1924.

[229] Through his diplomatic measures he later collected a major portion of the amount from the Cochin government. See Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṟam*.

[230] The interest in English education was clearly visible from the beginning of the *Sabha*. The Nambūtiris of Peringōṭṭukara had submitted a proposal for a school at the 3rd annual meeting of the *Sabha*. The first school was started at Maṇṇadi in Travancore in 1087 ME (1912), which was later shifted to Kuḷakkada and came to be known as 'Kuḷakkada special school'. Another Nambūtiri school was started in Travancore at Thōṭṭaṟa in 1090 (1915). Just before the 8th annual meeting two special schools were started at Peringōṭṭukara and Edappaḷḷi, both were in the Cochin state. See C.K. Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, pp.12-13. Efforts were made for a special school in Malabar, but it did not succeed because of the lack of interest shown by the Madras government on the ground that such a wealthy community like the Nambūtiris did not deserve any government favour in this respect. A representation submitted to the Madras governor was accepted but was rejected later on enquiry. See *YK*, 15:10, Oct.22, 1924 and 15:42, Feb.18, 1925.

[231] In spite of his great contributions, Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād was not live to see the opening of the school at Tṟiśśūṟ in 1919; he passed away in Mithunam 1093 (June or July 1918). See

were either Nambūtiris or Paṭṭars. Common mess, with special insistence on pollution rules, was arranged. Three years later it was shifted to Tṛiśśūṛ in the *Ūṭṭupura* of the *Bṛahmaswam Maṭam*. Separate building was later constructed and the school started functioning in it.[232] Even before shifting to Tṛiśśūṛ the school had been reduced to an upper primary school due to insufficient student turn out.[233]

The school was divided into two sections – one for the SSLC examination of Cochin and the other for the *Śirōmaṇi* examination of Madras University, the latter being called *Pāṭaśāla*. Sanskrit was compulsory and classes in *Bhagavat Gīta* also were given.[234] Most of the students were of the age of 12 and over; but double promotion was granted. A student admitted to the fourth form could pass the SSLC in five years. Rules were very strict and steadfastness to custom was compulsory.[235] But education was free, as also boarding and lodging.

In fact the special school became mandatory for two reasons. First, the obsession with Vēdic education necessitated a special scheme of education for the Nambūtiri boys which was not possible in a public school. A boy would be 16 by the time he completed his Vēdic education; so he would not be able to get admission into a public school. Secondly, a special scheme of education was necessary for maintaining *Brāhmaṇyam*; keeping up of custom and pollution rules cannot be practised in public schools. It was also necessary to satisfy the orthodox elements. Hence an alternate system for maintaining Nambūtiri

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M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttandinuḷḷil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangaḷ", *Māṭṛubhūmi Special*, 1936.

[232] Editorial, *YK*, 18:76, June 20, 1928.

[233] An editorial in *YK* wrote that the school would be forced to accommodate non-Brahmin students because it did not have the bare minimum 50 students. See *YK*, 14: 65, May 17, 1924.

[234] E.M.S. writes that the accommodation of Sanskrit into the curriculum was from strict communitarian considerations; it was intended to maintain Brahmin culture even while accepting modern education. See his *Ātmakatha*, p.35. C.K. Nambūtiri worked in the school as the Sanskrit teacher for more than 35 years. He was an active *Sabha* worker and was its secretary for 12 years.

[235] For a glimpse at the rules and regulations of the school see Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam* and Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, pp.115-118.

customs and exclusiveness was devised through the special school with a separate curriculum. The curriculum of the Nambūtiri School was developed with the intention of retaining the customs of the Nambūtiris intact; the school routine was strictly traditional; prayers were compulsory; and pollution rules were strictly enforced. The syllabus was a mixture of modern and traditional knowledge and Sanskrit continued to be taught.[236]

With the starting of the Nambūtiri School the question of girls' education also came to be discussed. Women were not provided any kind of education in the traditional system[237] but even when the issue of modern education surfaced, it did not include girls' education at all. The anxiety of the educated Nambūtiris to get their women counterparts too received education and the advancement of the women of other communities slowly brought the issue of girls' education to the fore.[238] This was the context in which the "Stṛī Vidyābhyāsa Commission"

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[236] But by about the middle of the 1920s several reformers began to advise Nambūtiris to enter public schools. See Mūthiringōd, Presidential Address, Kavaḷappāṟa NY Upasabha 9th annual, *UN*, 7:3, Vrichikam 1101, p.183.

[237] Gough writes that their education was confined to learning *slōkās* and proverbs, and few if any of them appear to have been literate. Kathleen Gough, "Literacy in Kerala" in Jack Goody ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies,* London, 1968, p.145. While girls from other communities were becoming educated, education of Nambūtiri girls was dismissed on the ground that it would obstruct their know-how in household duties; they had to enter into kitchen work as soon as they were got married and they would be forced to wind up education half-way. See "Nambūtirimārum Vidyābhyāsavum", *Rasikaranjini,* 4:11, Mithunam 1081 (June-July 1906), p.594. *Census of 1871, Madras*, Vol. I stated: "In Hindu opinion the only respectable position of a woman is that of wife, and the only education required by her in that station is the knowledge of the duties of a household. Female education practically means a revolution of the domestic life of the people. If women are to be educated they cannot be withdrawn from instruction at the age of 10 or 12 as at present and if girls are to be taught....the custom of burdening them at the age of 13 or 14 with cares of maternity be modified".

[238] "Demands for the education of women, therefore, addressed the male need for companionship and understanding, a need that surfaced because of the exclusionary and alienating British imperial state and the growing mobility in Indian society". Women's education was perceived necessary for bridging the gap between the levels of understanding of the males (both husband and son) who had the benefits of modern education, and the women of the family. Moreover, it was necessary for the success of social reforms – that is the regeneration of Indian society. Thus the requirements of modernization and the preservation of traditional roles came together in the justification of demands for women's education. Suresht Ranjan Bald, "From Satyartha Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the

with Mūthiringōd as the Secretary was appointed.[239] But even this committee recommended home education for girls; there was no reference of starting special schools for them or of accommodating them in the Nambūtiri Vidyālaya.[240] But in 1930 a special girls' school was started at Pāñjāḷ[241] and the Nambūtiri School at Tṛiśśūṛ began to admit girls from 1930 onwards.[242] In order to allay the fears of the community and to promote the number of girl students, a

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'Women's Movement' in India" in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., *Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment*, New Delhi, 1986, pp.196-97.

[239] It was the 19th annual meeting of the *Sabha* which appointed a committee to recommend on women education. (Resolution No. XIV). See *YK*, 17:29, Jan 5, 1927. But it is interesting to note that the *YK* continued to take a negative attitude on the issue as is evidenced by its editorial (17:41, Feb 16, 1927) which by citing reports from the west wrote that education was greatly eroding the sanctity of marital life and that a tendency towards going back to tradition was clearly visible there. In two other editorials (*YK*, 17:87, Aug 6, 1927; *YK*, 18:21, Nov 30, 1927) it warned the reformers against women education and cautioned them that it should not aim at enabling them to enter the public sphere or to empower them through career development; it should be oriented towards making obedient and chaste wives. However, by about the beginning of 1928 the *YK* had to accept the concept of women education upto the primary level. It justified the slow pace of development towards this direction on the ground that boys' education had not been settled yet and girls were not available as students. See Editorial, *YK*, 18:31, Jan 11, 1928.

[240] "Nambūtiri Stṛī Vidyābhyāsa Commission Report", *YK*, 18:57, Apr 11, 1928. For details see *Nambūtiri Stṛī Vidyābhyāsa Commission Report*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1928. The Report, after going through the deplorable condition of the Antaṛjanams, recommended that they should be given instruction in Malayāḷam literature, elementary mathematics, a sprinkling of English and Sanskrit. They should also be taught sewing, painting, music, pediatrics and midwifery (pp.12-13). The period of education should be in between 5-12 years (p.14). The mode of education should be home tuition; in areas where there were many *illams*, all the girl students could be taught at one of them. In other areas individual tuition would be sufficient. Lady teachers were compulsory (p.16). Even the *UN* was greatly disappointed by this Report. See Editorial, *UN*, 9:7, Meenam 1103, pp.406-407. However, the 21st annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Mavēḷikkara in Dec. 1929 endorsed the Report. See *YK*, 19:28 Dec. 26, 1928. (Mūthiringōd held quite different views on girls' education as is understood from one of his earlier articles, in which he strongly pleaded for special schools. See his article "Pūrvāchāram Athavā Kīzhnadapp" in *UN*, 7:12, Chingam 1101, pp.679-81. This might be a pointer to the fact that in the practical realm, every radical was a conservative.)

[241] It was inaugurated on 28th May 1930 by P.S. Kesavan Nambūtiri BA BL (the first law graduate among the Nambūtiris). See *YK*, 20:65, May 26, 1930. Also see *UN*, 11:47 May 30, 1930.

[242] C.K. Nambūtiri, *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, p.16. But there was news in the *UN* that a girl was admitted in thè School in 1929. See *UN*, 11:8, Aug 2, 1929. M.C. Nambūtiripād told in his interview that the decision to convert it into a mixed school was precipitated by the government decision that grants will be withheld in future if girls were not accommodated. Personal conversation, Tṛiśśūṛ, 10-11-2005.

girls' hostel named 'Nambūtiri Bālika Sadanam' was started in 1935.[243] But normally girls were not allowed to study after they matured physically; they had to end their studies there.[244]

The economic position of the Nambūtiri School was truly pathetic. The Government denied the utilization of *Bṛahmaswam Maṭam* resources for running the school and the rich and noble Nambūtiris refused to extend support to it.[245] To continue with a meager government grant was almost impossible. Efforts were made to spend the profit from *Yōgakṣēmam* bank and company for the school, but the onset of an economic depression made it difficult. Every year the school ran into a deficit of Rs. 1000/- and Chittūr Kuṅjan Nambūtiripād promised to give Rs.1000/- per year till a permanent fund for the school was created.[246] All the efforts at the creation of a permanent fund for the school also failed. While the condition of the school was thus pathetic, the lack of interest and support on the part of the *kāraṇavans* for their children's education made the position of the students more deplorable.[247]

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[243] C.K. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.16-17. C.K. Nambūtiri was the warden of the hostel for many years. Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd in her article recollects some of her experiences with the *sadanam* along with a description of its rules and regulations. See Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd, 'Sadanam', *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 83:20, July 17-23, 2005, pp 26-28.

[244] M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād (Premji)'s drama *Ṛitumati* brought this burning issue for discussion; after the drama no girl had to discontinue her studies just for having menstruated. See the preface of his *Ṛitumati*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1991. We are surprised to read an anecdote in the memoirs of P.R. Rāghavapaṇikkar that VT wrote him alerting him of getting ready for his marriage with VT's sister; she had been menstruated and could not be allowed to continue her studies. P.R. Rāghavapaṇikkar, *Ātmakatha*, unpublished document.

[245] This does not mean that everyone had given it up. A.K.T.K.M. Nambūtiripād, Kapḷingāt Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, Vēndṛakkāṭ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, Kōdanāṭṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, all had personally spent great amounts in somehow maintaining the school.

[246] A special meeting of the *Sabha* was summoned at Tṛiśśūṛ in order to discuss the condition of the school and a committee was formed to raise a permanent capital for it. It was in this meeting that Chittūr made his offer. Pāṇdam made a touching speech on the condition of the school. See *YK*, 19:96 Sep 4, 1929. It is interesting to note that the Yōgakṣēmam Company was making high progress due to the expanding interest shown by the shareholders. The shareholders received nine rupees as dividend for hundred rupees per year. See Editorial, *UN* 6:2, Thulam 1100.

[247] P.S. Kesavan Nambūtiri writes that about 100 Nambūtiri students were there in Tṛiśśūṛ. Several of them continued their studies with great hardships due to the lack of support from the *kāraṇavans*. Most of them also were living in Nambūtiri colonies with little contact with

Thus by 1930 the Nambūtiri school as a namesake institution continued much to the chagrin of the Nambūtiris.[248] While a large number of schools were run by individual Nambūtiris like the CNN School at Chērppu by Chittūr Kuńjan Nambūtiri, the community's failure in managing a single school was a matter of much disgrace.[249] In fact many Nambūtiris had the dream of moulding the Nambūtiri School into a model school, after the Śāńtinikētan or the Vēdic School of Dayānanda.[250] Not only had the dreams faded but even the very running of the school became a great burden.[251] This was a great agony to some of the former students of the school like VT and Pāndam.[252]

This was the situation in which some kind of effort at the allocation of resources for the survival of the school was felt necessary.[253] In his memoirs VT narrates the developments that had led to the launching of the *Yāchana Yātṛa*. He related it not just with the destitution of the school; rather it was an attempt to

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outsiders in fear of defilement. See his article "Tṛiśśūṛ Nambūtiri Vidyāṛthikaḷ", *UN*, 11:59 Aug 22, 1930.

[248] Two of the three Nambūtiri schools in Travancore had already been closed due to the unavailability of students. See Editorial, *UN* 6:2, Thulam 1100, p.96.

[249] An editorial of the *UN* pointed out that the decline of the school was due rather to the indifference of the community than to the lack of money. Se *UN*, 7:8, Medam 1101, p.448.

[250] See Editorial, *UN*, 1:1, Kanni, 1095, pp.15-16; Pāliyath Achan, "Kēraḷa Brāhmaṇarudē Brahmacharyāsṛamam", *UN*, 2:1, Kanni, 1096, pp.25-28; P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, "Charitṛathintē Pāṭam", *YK*, 2:1&2, Sep-Oct.1980, p.68. The editorial of *UN* posits even greater ideals, that of raising it to the level of a university. See *UN*, 2:2, Thulam 1096, p.55. The *UN* had published write-ups on Nalanda, Takṣasila and Sāntinikētan in its pages probably with this ideal in mind. See *UN*, 2:12, Chingam 1096, p.541; 3:11, Karkadakam 1097, pp.485-490. M.R.B. wrote that Kuṛūṛ wanted the school be developed into a Kerala University utilizing the resources of the Tṛiśśūṛ Maṭam. M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttandinuḷḷil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangaḷ", *Māṭṛubhūmi Special*, 1936.

[251] This is clear from the large number of editorials *YK* and *UN* wrote on Nambūtiri education and Nambūtiri Vidyālaya. See Editorials, *UN*, 8:10, Mithunam 1102, pp.543-545; 9:8, Medam 1103, pp.462-465.

[252] The school still exists at Tṛiśśūṛ as an upper primary school but it is not a special school now. Its condition is still bad and the number of students is very low. But all the teachers are still Nambūtiris. The school is now being run by Sri Śańkara Trust with M.C. Nambūtiripād as the President and Chittur Nambūtiripād as the manager. *Yōgakṣēmasabha*, which was revived in 1980, has been trying to bring the school under its control for some time.

[253] Within a period of two years VT argued against the continuation of the special school as if it was a waste of energy and resources. By this time several Nambūtiris had started Entēring public schools. See VT's speech at Ālathiyūṛ Upasabha, *UN* Ap.28, 1933, reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.548.

alert the community. The enthusiasm of the activists generated by the staging of the drama had already ebbed to the lowest level and the *Sabha* appeared lifeless in spite of the many crucial issues that were still pending.[254] Some kind of activity was necessary to galvanize the community, and to direct its attention to the many serious problems that awaited consideration. In fact rather than the revival of the Nambūtiri School, the journey meant to revitalize the movement.

The Episode of the Yātṛa

There have been disputes over the authorship of the idea behind the 'begging journey'.[255] VT claimed that it was his idea; when he presented it first before Pāndam he readily approved it. Both of them prepared a notice for being published in the *UN* for giving it publicity and to watch the responses.[256] The executive committee of the *Saṅgham* selected VT and Pāndam as joint leaders of the journey. VT says that it was the school authorities who had taken more interest in the *Yātṛa* than the *Saṅgham* activists. He acknowledged the special interest and efforts taken by C.K. Nambūtiri in arranging the *Yātṛa*.[257] During the time of the *Yātṛa* the *UN* was converted into a daily and special reporters accompanied it to report the daily developments.[258]

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[254] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.272.

[255] In his memoirsVT says that people were made to believe that Pāṇdam was the architect of the *Yātṛa* because when the statement was published in the *UN*, the name of Pāṇdam appeared at the top and that of VT only at the bottom. But he pointed out that it was a tactical measure; if people had come to know that it was a programme of VT many would not cooperate with it. *Ibid*, p.273. But *Yātṛas* were conducted earlier. K.V.M. writes about his participation in a *Yāchana Yātṛa* conducted under Punnasseri Nambi for the allocation of resources for the Sanskrit College at Pattambi in 1915 (*Ātmakatha*, pp.98-103). Mannam also had organized a similar begging march in 1920 for collecting funds for the NSS School at Perunna (*Entē Jīvita Smaraṇakaḷ*, p.280).

[256] *UN*, March 13, 1931. Repeated requests were published later. See *UN* March 20, 1931, April 3, 1931. In all these statements the journey is said to be arranged exclusively for educational purpose; education being the central plank of community reform and the chief means of progress for the community.

[257] At that time C.K. was the Sanskrit teacher of the school and the warden of the *Bālikā Sadanam*. He relates the *jātha* with the existing economic crisis which was the impact of the great depression. See his *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, pp.30-31.

[258] See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.274. I.C.P. writes that for four days, it was published as a daily. I.C.P. Nambūtiri, *Viplavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*, p.41. I.C.P. and M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād were the special reporters.

The *jātha* started its journey from Tṛiśśūṛ on April 5, 1931 with 26 volunteers the majority of whom were students of the Nambūtiri School. Many ex-students also took part in it. Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri functioned as the assistant. Midway in the journey E.M.S. Nambūtiripād joined it; he was also present at the last part. VT writes that the entire programme had been decided in advance including the nature and ideal of the *jātha*, the dress of the volunteers, code of conduct and all.[259] But volunteers had no special uniforms; they wore *khādi* dress. Each volunteer carried a sack on his back in order to collect any useful material (other than cash) that they might receive as contribution from the *illams*. No one wore sandals or carried an umbrella. While the *jātha* marched through the interior areas people gathered to watch it moving. The idea behind the *Yātṛa* was undoubtedly inspired by the Daṇdi March and it could be explained in terms of the great impact the Gandhian ideals had on VT and the Nambūtiri movement.[260]

Though the response to the *Yātṛa* was by and large encouraging, the conservatives fully disassociated with it.[261] Pūmully illam which had earlier offered Rs.5000 to the school at the Veḷḷinazhi *Sabha* flatly denied any help. Many Nambūtiris behaved in the same way; those who extended help did it only in a nominal sense; not more than Rs.5000 could be collected as a whole (including the value of the materials in kind).[262] But by the time it ended with 30

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[259] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.274.

[260] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, pp. 207-209. Mūthiringōd compared VT with the Gandhi of the Dandi March; he was truly surprised to see the volunteers reach his *illam* walking bare-footed in the scorching heat of the blazing sun. *UN*, May 1, 1931 cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.120-121.

[261] In his interview with the representative of the *UN*, VT admitted the response from some corners as extremely discouraging. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.595. He also said that the executive members of the *Saṅgham* were by and large passive to the *Yātṛa* which affected its course adversely. *Ibid*, p.596.

[262] For the management of the fund collected through the *YY*, a *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēma Vidyābhyāsa Trust* was formed later. A committee was constituted for its management; a few deserving students were given educational support from the fund. There is an interesting sequel. VT's sister Pāṛvathi studied at the school with the help of the fund. But for having her got married to Raghavapanikkar, VT discontinued her studies. The beneficiaries of the

volunteers on May 12, 1931, it had traversed a distance of about 500 kilometers and had visited about 200 *illams*.[263] But the real impact was not measurable in terms of material gains. In fact the amount that was collected was not insignificant against the background of the great economic crisis generated by the World Depression. Look at the way VT observed the impact of the journey:

"...The results yielded by this journey were far greater than all the benefits gained by the various activities undertaken by the *Sabha* over the long span of its existence. The participants of the journey aroused the community from deep slumber through their selfless endeavour, mobilized resources – money and children – to sustain educational activities, inculcated and propagated ideas of social development through speeches carried out in the midst of the journey, purified ideas and attitudes by conducting discussion and arguments in the camps during leisure hours and served the community through dedication and sacrifice. These were the valuable achievements of the journey. The message of the *Yāchana Yātṛa* reverberated all over, bringing children and money from all quarters to fulfill the educational ends of the community."[264]

In material terms the *Yātṛa* was not as successful as the enactment of the drama.[265] Despite the prevailing economic crisis the poor turn out of the *Yātṛa* cannot be justified by any standards; most of the Nambūtiri illams were immensely rich, an Oḷappamaṇṇa or Pūmully could run a school single-handedly. If they declined to offer help, it might be due to other reasons. The major factor was the prevailing power struggle between the *kaniṣṭans* and the *kāraṇavans*. Only a few *kāraṇavans* supported the English education efforts; they thought it would finally turn against themselves – against their own authority and privileges. The English educated were at the forefront to question

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fund had to enter into an agreement with the committee and the party (including both the student and the guardian) had to assent that in the event of discontinuing the studies, the whole amount would be refunded to the committee. Accordingly, the school authorities filed a case against VT and he had to repay the amount spent for his sister. Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam*.

263 A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.120.

264 *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.277.

265 But M.R.B. wrote that changes in the Nambūtiri community were brought about by 'his' (VT's) two movements, viz, the theatre and the *Yāchana Yātṛa*. See M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttandinuḷḷil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangaḷ", *Mātṛubhūmi Special*, 1936.

the old order and the dictatorship of the *kāraṇavans*; helping them would be suicidal. Since progeny and property were under the control of the *kāraṇavans*, no children were able to go for education without their permission. VT's repeated call for both monetary help and students for the school testifies to this fact. Though acquisition of knowledge in the English language was indispensable for the defense of the interests of the community, the other factors outweighed communitarian interests so far as the *kāraṇavans* were concerned. As in many other respects, it was the English educated *kaniṣṭans* who had understood the necessity of safeguarding community interests because in the emerging nuclear family structure they were going to suffer.

One of the very interesting aspects of the *Yātṛa* was the marked interest shown by the Antaṛjanams in it. There was little scope for women's participation in the programme; in the case of the drama they could at least be silent spectators; here they were not only not given a space and voice but the *Yātṛa* did not even address them separately. It did not incorporate their specific grievances, nor did it raise the demand for girls' education. Nevertheless, the Antaṛjanams showed exceptional interest towards the march; many of them handed over their ornaments, though not costly, to the volunteers.[266] They might have hoped that the educated generation of men would help emancipate them. VT writes that Antaṛjanams were keen to heed their speeches concealing themselves in the *illam* interiors.[267]

Though some people have noted the importance of the northward course of the *Yātṛa*, nobody has ventured to explain it satisfactorily.[268] The fact that Nambūtiris of northern Kerala were relatively backward in education than their

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[266] The list of the contributors published by the *UN* showed that several of them were Antaṛjanams. Cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.18.

[267] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.276.

[268] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, p.205. He regretted over the inability of the *jātha* to continue to the south to complete its purpose.

southern counterparts must have been the causative factor. In the 4th annual meeting of the *Sabha* C.S. Subṛahmaṇyam Pōtti, who had passed BA degree,[269] was present and by 1928 C.S. Paṇdārathil had sailed to London to attend the ICS examination.[270] The general educational progress in Travancore had its impact on the Nambūtiris of that area in their attitude towards education; no organized attempt was necessary to motivate students towards education or guardians to support them. Though the southern Nambūtiris were equally conservatives in other respects, the prevailing social milieu had made their conservatism less determinant. In so far as Malabar was concerned, the Nambūtiris were not only educationally and politically backward, but the existing social environment was not conducive to end up their conservatism.[271] Prevalence of strong landlordism also had made the Nambūtiris less responsive to changes.[272] The great advancement of education among the tenant classes, especially the Nāyaṛs, and the decisive role they played in promoting tenant interests through legal and political measures also had been creating much concern among the Nambūtiri educated young men.[273] In such circumstances, antipathy towards modern education would further impair the interests of the Nambūtiris by accelerating their marginalization; chalking out a dominant space in the emerging public sphere needed English education; defense of economic rights was possible only through legal awareness and political maneuvering; maintenance of social

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[269] He later became the first post graduate in the community and one of the most radical thinkers and activists.

[270] See Editorial, *YK*, 19:91 Aug 17, 1929; Dr. M. Krishnadasan, "Mr. Pandārathilē Vidēśayātṛa", *UN*, 11:9, Aug.9, 1929.

[271] None of the wealthy *illams* like Oḷappamaṇṇa, Varikkāśśēri, Ēlamkuḷam or Pūmuḷḷy, had taken interest either in the progress of education or in venturing new economic enterprises.

[272] Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ*, p.234. He wrote that landlordism had made the Nambūtiris averse to changes; other Brahmins elsewhere progressed just because they did not have the monopoly of landed rights.

[273] See E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, p.37. It is also important that tenancy movement came to acquire vigour around 1930.

prominence was impossible in the old way.[274] So education was not an end in itself, community interests were inextricably entwined with it.[275]

VT must have been searching for new measures that would reach the grass root level, not directly under the aegis of the *Sabha* but with its sanction. Conventional type activities were fruitless, dominant groups would not allow any initiative, community had not yet registered any advance in the economic realm, educational progress was still not a significant goal for many, politically other communities were making great advancements, and education was the only means to find a space in the emerging civil society. VT's speeches stressed the overall backwardness of the Nambūtiris and the way the overemphasis on rituals not only hindered the progress of the community but even alienated other communities.

A point which VT continuously stressed was of the need of a spiritual revolution which was sought to be achieved through the *Yātṛa*. He said that Nambūtiris should not be satisfied with an external revolution; up to the present they were engaged in it. He must have been referring to the earlier activities on marriage reform which was focused against other communities. Educational reform was strictly internal, but it contained a paradox – the community itself stood against this most beneficent cause. By a spiritual revolution he might be referring to a change of mind of the elders;[276] there was the urgent need of a

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[274] An editorial of the *UN* explained the situation of Northern Malabar as very backward; wretched *Brāhmaṇyam* still dominated and efforts at reform were at very low ebb. See *UN*, 11:50, 20 June 1930.

[275] "As pensioners competing for authority with colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, capitalist entrepreneurs and English schools and colleges, the Nambūtiris entered a backwater and never regained the legal and moral dominance that had been theirs in feudal times". Kathleen Gough, "Literacy in Kerala" in Jack Goody ed., *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, London, 1968, p.143.

[276] In an interview with the *UN* reporter during the *Yātṛa*, VT pointed to this fact; since *kāraṇavans* were still distrustful of modern education, the *Yātṛa* was meant to win over them, and to bring about a change of heart. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.591.

compassionate attitude towards education of their own children.[277] The long and tortuous march was aimed at bringing about a change of mind, school children were recruited for the purpose; children and other volunteers walking barefooted in the scorching heat of the blazing sun carrying sacks on their shoulders was supposed to melt down the rock-like conscience of the *kāraṇavans*.

4:9. Temple Entry Movement

By the close of the 1920s VT had started showing great interest in the eradication of untouchability and the rules of pollution. Although the Nambūtiris were attracted to the nationalist movement by the beginning of the 1920s the initial interest was in the abstract ideal of nationalism and the Gandhian charisma; Gandhi's insistence on the Hindu, and the apparently upper caste, ideals like Ahimsa must have been a fascination. But the Malabar Rebellion was an eye-opener; it not only proved the inefficacy of non-violence but even revealed that at least in Kerala Gandhian nationalism was against Nambūtiri interests. This had the effect of dampening their interest in the national movement and even led to an antagonistic spirit which was reflected in their attitude to the Vaikam Satyagraha.

VT's attitude to Vaikam is not clear. Though he said that he had contacts with both Ayyākkuṭṭy and Ayyappan in the 20s there is no evidence to reveal that these either coincided or occurred immediately before the Vaikam Satyagraha. He had considerable sympathy towards the victims of pollution, but his attitude on the pollution appears to be determined by strict communitarian considerations. The antagonistic attitude taken by the Nambūtiris towards the Vaikam struggle had nearly isolated them from other communities; it was becoming clear that they would be totally isolated from the mainstream unless a

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[277] E.M.S. writes that the *kāraṇavans* were causing trouble to their children who wanted to be educated, or had started English education without their permission, by refusing to assist them financially or by exerting moral pressure on them. They had to face a lot of hardships. See his *Ātmakatha*, p.35.

change of policy was not pursued.[278] VT might have been influenced by this social exigency. The *UN*, which had continuously condemned the anti-pollution demands and went on writing editorials attacking the attitude of the Congress on the Vaikam issue, soon started supporting even the temple entry issue. During the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha, the *Sabha* passed a resolution in support of it and many Nambūtiris including VT actively participated in it.

In his Ālathiyūṛ speech VT linked his anti-untouchability measures with the united Kerala going to be formed soon and called upon the Nambūtiris to step down from their isolation and cultural exclusivity.[279] He also argued that it was the moral duty of the Nambūtiris to uplift other communities along with them. He wanted to lead the Nambūtiris to the mainstream of national life for which pollution rules were the main hindrance. In a message sent to the satyagrahis, P.S. Kēśavan Nambūtiri, as the representative of the *Saṅgham*, supported the struggle on his own behalf and on behalf of his organization, and made a call for the victory of temple entry.[280] Similarly, the *UN* wrote an editorial blessing the Satyagraha and urging the Nambūtiris to draft and send a memorial to the Zamorin as well as to the Rājas of Travancore and Cochin.

Since VT was not an active member of the Congress party, and as he was more intensely involved in the community reform activities than in politics, his name did not occupy a place of prominence in the accounts of the Guruvāyūṛ

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[278] In his letter, which was read at the 17th annual meeting of the *Sabha,* Gandhi urged the Nambūtiris to pass a resolution on pollution. Kesavan Potti & kunjuṇṇi Achan supported it and warned them that otherwise all other people would become antagonistic to the Nambūtiris. Opposing the demand, Paschiman Rāman Nambūtiri argued that pollution could not be eliminated by a resolution and that in this respect Nambūtiris should not follow the modernists. See *YK*, 15:63; May 6, 1925. A resolution which condemned pollution had to be withdrawn due to intense opposition from several Nambūtiris. See *YK*, 15:64; May 9, 1925.

[279] *UN*, April 28, 1933, reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.545; in his Harikanyākapuram Upasabha meeting he repeated the demand. See UN, Dec.22, 1933 reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.612-15.

[280] A.K. Pilla, *Kōngṛessum Kēraḷavum*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986, p.410.

Satyagraha. But he became active in it particularly at the close of the struggle.[281] In a statement issued by Kēḷappan for the *Congress Kṣēṭṛa Pṛavēśana Committee*, declaring the members of the satyagraha committee, VT's name was given as the fifth among the total six members.[282] VT was one among the few who were active in making speeches at the temple.[283] He is reported to have been deputed by the KPCC, along with Kēḷappan, Mannath Padmanābhan and Kuṟūṟ Nīlakaṇṭan Nambūtiripād, to lead a propaganda *jātha* all over Kerala.[284] In the propaganda *jātha* he is reported to have made speeches at Kānhaṅgād, Nīlēśwaram, Payyannūṟ, Taḷipaṟamba, Azhīkkōde, Kaṇṇūṟ, Peraḷaśśēri and Thalaśśēri in between the 14th and 22nd Oct. 1931.[285] In the Annual meeting of the *Saṅgham* held at Taḷipaṟamba on Dec. 28, he presented a resolution urging the Nambūtiris to support the Satyagraha wholeheartedly and it was unanimously passed by the *Saṅgham*."[286]

Apart from participating in the propaganda for creating a favourable attitude towards temple-entry, VT intervened in the decision-making process also as is evidenced by the resolution passed by him in the *savaṟṇa* meeting held at Guruvāyūṟ. When Manjēri Rāmayyaṟ brought a resolution requesting Kēḷappan

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[281] A.P.P. Nambūtiri strongly appealed for a just and respectable space for VT in the history of the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha; despite his active participation, mainstream history has not duly acknowledged him. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.126-27. But no contemporary records support the leadership role of VT in it. Even in the Referendum, VT had no supreme role as has been stated by some enthusiasts (A.P.P, Akkitham). The director of the Referendum was K. Madhavan Nāyar. In the reports of the referendum, VT's role is not seen acknowledged. (*Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 10:37, 5 Dec. 1932, p.8; 10:38, 12 Dec. 1932; 10:39, 19 Dec. 1932; 10:41, 2 Jan.1932, pp.14-15)

[282] *UN*, Oct 16, 1931.

[283] A.K. Gopalan, *Entē Jīvitakatha*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1980, p.39; N. Dāmōdaran, "Entē VT", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, p.107; N.P. Dāmōdaran, "Oru Satyāgṛahathintē Katha", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 1 Nov. 1981, pp.22-25. A.K.G. wrote that the Satyagraha began to acquire great popular sympathy – "Pāliyath Acchan and VT Bhaṭṭathiripād came to the scene together".

[284] C.K. Mūssad, *Kēḷappan Enna Mahamanuṣyan*, p.120.

[285] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.131.

[286] *Mātṛubhūmi* and *Sahōdaran* praised this move and the latter had asked the NSS (a resolution with the same effect had created much uproar in the NSS meeting) to learn from the *Sabha*: "That is the difference between organizations led by elders and youths". Cited in *ibid*, 131-32.

to stop his fast for the present since it was his leadership that society needed at the moment rather than his sacrifice, and when it was rejected in voting VT presented a new resolution supporting Kēḷappan and calling for the popular attention towards the cause.[287] The resolution which was seconded by Arya Paḷḷam was accepted by the meeting and a committee was formed for further measures. Later when it was decided to conduct a referendum under K. Mādhavan Nāyar, an 8-member committee including VT was put in charge of conducting it. VT had vacated his house *Rasikasadanam* for the purpose of the referendum and in fact it worked as the office for the purpose.[288] Kasturba Gandhi, C. Rājagopalachari, Urmila Ben and many others who were associated with the referendum stayed at VT's house till at the end of the process. The *UN* published a statement of the referendum committee about the results of the referendum and the details of the turn out.[289]

It was not his involvement in the Satyagraha but a subsequent episode that had raised VT to the heights of popularity and accorded him a place in history. This was his controversial statement about "burning down temples".[290] The attitude of the conservatives to the Satyagraha had considerably infuriated him; though the majority of the people who cooperated with the referendum supported temple entry, the Zamorin refused to concede. Burning with rage at the narrow-minded and anti-national attitude of the orthodox sections, VT lambasted the very institution of temple and denounced their role in impeding the progress of the society at large. He wrote:

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[287] *UN*, Jan.8, 1932, cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.132-33. *Mātṛubhūmi* reported that in the meeting presided over by Mattanur Madhusoodhanan Tangal, among others, VT , Arya Paḷḷam, Dēvaki Narikkāṭṭiri and M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād participated in the discussions. *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 10:28, 3 Oct. 1932, pp.15-16.

[288] Mannam, *Entē Jīvitasmaraṇakaḷ*, Kottayam, 1964, p.141.

[289] *UN* April 28, 1933, cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.133-34.

[290] *UN* 14:30, 28 April 1933, p.5. Almost in the same tone N.P. Dāmōdaran attacked the temples for the wealth amassed in them, for spending this wealth for useless purposes and for promoting the lazy and the privileged. He narrated the temple-oriented culture as anti-human, anti-poor and hence reactionary. See his "Ini Namukkathu Vēṇda", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 13:18, 15 July 1935, p.25.

"Everywhere in Kerala we find tall and majestic churches, mosques and temples. They have a haughty look of arrogance, because they tower above all other structures. This sight is really disgusting. We have to demolish these tombs of inequality and superstition. Yes, the domes of the temples have to be burnt down.

"Should we burn down temples? This idea may infuriate many hearts. It is the deep-seated fanaticism which lurks in our hearts that prompts us to question this idea.

"While we treat a Harijan as an animal, we rear a revere a piece of stone as a god. These rather sad but absurd beliefs that generate fanaticiam hav eto be given up. Let us accept things as they are: let a stone be treated as mere solid matter and let a human being be cared for with love and kindness.

"Let us not roll blind-folded around a superstition. Let us not make fanaticism an object of divinity by offering puja to it. Let us not make ourselves laughing stocks by speaking out foolish things openly.

"This is my exhortation to everybody: do not be perturbed about the burning of temples; do not be sad or frightened.

"If I were a priest, I would give away the food offered to the deity to the hungry and the needy. I would tear to pieces the costly robes worn by the deity and use them to cover the nakedness of those who go about without proper clothing. I would use the fuming incense to scare away the hog-rats – the social parasites like the Nambūtiris and the Pattars. I would use the ever burning lamp of the temple not to light up the black face of our stupidity but to burn down its very head. Such is my deep-rooted hatred of temples. If you want to bundle up all evil customs and destroy them, there is one easy method, Burn down the Temples".[291]

VT's statement has been interpreted as the high point of social radicalism and democratic idealism and as a step towards the espousal of strong secular and rational thought. Brushing aside the argument that it was brought about by over-excitement, A.P.P. Nambūtiri argued that the moral disillusionment created by the failure of the Satyagraha had provoked VT to make such a statement; that in the context of the Guruvāyūṟ Satyagraha, it ought to be seen that his attitude towards temples was that they were centers of stupid customs like (touch and distance) pollution.[292] It has also been pointed out that the statement was an

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[291] *UN* 14:30, Apr 28, 1933, p.5, reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p. 609. In a note strongly refuting VT's statement, Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam exposed the fallacy of VT's arguments and stated that with the change in the attitude of people, superstitions also would melt away and there is no need of burning temples down. But she supported him on his last point and called upon temples to become centers of charity and humanitarianism. See "VT Bhaṭṭathirippāṭṭilēkku Oru Maṛupadi", *UN* 14:31, 12 May, 1933, p.2. On the other hand, another article by one Muḷḷer (*UN* 14:32, 19 May, 1933, p.6) forcefully supported VT.

[292] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.135.

attack on temples as institutions that stood for the interests of a minority.[293] VT is reported to have clarified later that by the statement he really meant the burning down of superstitions and that it should not be taken in the literal sense.[294] VT himself later made it clear that he was only opposing custom and not religion as such.[295]

In a swift act of response, the Cochin government issued an arrest warrant against VT and ordered to confiscate the journal.[296] When VT escaped from Tṛiśśūṛ where he was working and from where the *UN* was published, rewards were offered to persons who would help capture him since he belonged to Malabar, which was in the British province of Madras. The Cochin government's request to the Madras government to help to arrested him was rejected on the ground that a 'patriot like him cannot be arrested". However, the incident turned out to be detrimental to VT's public activities. He could not actively associate with the deliberations of the *Sabha* as well as the publication of the *UN* and in fact he had virtually lost the very source of his livelihood. He

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[293] Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op.cit,* p.47. But Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan's *Abhivādayē* does not make any reference to this episode.

[294] M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "VT: Communisathinappuṛathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṛayilē Māṛgadaṛśakan" in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT,* p.80. M.G.S. writes that VT made this clarification in a reception meeting at the Department of History, Calicut University.

[295] VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Entē Yuktivādam", *Vivēkōdayam Special,* May 23, 1976. Deep faith in Gandhian ethic and a strong aspiration for Hindu unity appears to have captivated V.T. during this time; the statement was a desperate plea for the reinstatement of these ideals which were losing ground with the failure of the Satyagraha. Equally important is the fact that VT seems not to have understood the true dynamics of Congress politics. In fact the strategy of the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha did not differ from the basic strategy of the Congress to arrive at compromises. Two months after the launching of the Satyagraha, the CDM was started and attention was diverted from Guruvāyūr. VT's indifference to political agitations in general, and the CDM in particular, and the challenge posed by the no-tax campaign for the janmi interest of the Nambūtiris might have incited VT's social radicalism. For a debate see K. Gopalankutty, "The Guruvayur Satyagraha, 1931-32", *Journal of Kerala Studies,* Vol.8, 1981, pp.54-55.

[296] Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op. cit.,* pp. 47-48. The Nambūtiri movement was marked by radical rationalism bordering on atheism. This phenomenon has been explained with reference to the intensely religious and custom-ridden life of the Nambūtiris. Irrational conservatism could be countered only by radical rationalism. Interview of K.K. Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri cited in I.V. Babu, *Social, political & cultural Result of Nambūtiri Renaissance.* Ph.D Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1996, pp.193-94.

was not able to attend the annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Pērāmaṅgalam in December 1933. May be because of this fact he presented himself before the court (after some years) and was punished for simple imprisonment for a day.[297]

VT did not deal with his Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha experiences separately in any of his writings. There is reference to one personal event alone. During the time of the Satyagraha, he came home with two Īzhava activists of the Satyagraha who had been sent by Kēḷappan to discuss matters with him. He provided food and accommodation for them in his house disregarding the prevailing pollution rules. It seems that for VT temple entry was not an important issue, certainly it was a social problem that stood against general progress, but VT's immediate interest was the breaking of the pollution rules that had restrained personal relationships. May be there was another reason for this; by this time he had been attracted to rationalist thought and had become an agnostic.

4:10. Widow Marriage

The first widow marriage solemnized by VT raised him as a legendary hero[298] and boosted his image as the great emancipator of the Antaṛjanams. The event was celebrated in the context of the truly pitiful condition of the widows in the community and the conservative attitude of even the most radical of men towards the remarriage of widows.[299] By rooting out the last vestige of orthodoxy and tradition and by demolishing the strongest bastion of a patriarchal

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[297] *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 19:17, July 13, 1941, p.13. It is reported that VT was punished for Rs.40/- and for simple imprisonment till the court adjourned for the day. Also see C.K. Nambūtiri, *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ*, courtesy, C.K. Pāṛvathi, Kuḷakkāṭṭukuṛiśśi, Cheṛpuḷaśśēri.

[298] A.P.P. Nambūtiri writes that it raised VT to an immortal figure. See his *VT Oru Yugapuruṣan*, p.144. VT himself glorified the event by stating that if ever the Nambutiri had performed an act of human benevolence after establishing their supremacy in Kerala, it was at that time. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.300.

[299] The prohibition of widow marriage among Brahmins had its base on the notion that a wife belonged to her husband in the next world as well as in this, a theory which used to find expression in *sati*. F.J. Richards, "Some suggestions for the Study of Caste in South India", *Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1909, p.28.

institution, VT was in fact bringing the Nambūtiri movement to a natural close; it was the final act in a chain of programmes designed to make Nambūtiris human beings. Widowhood was no more a matter of 'social death'[300] for a Nambūtiri woman, the ruthless rules of Brahmanical patriarchy could not be put into practice any more; the *smārthan* and the *vaidikan* could no more obliterate the valuable lives of innocent women.

Widow in the Reform Discourse

The way the Nambūtiri movement took up the issue of the widow explains how male interests and priorities determined the reform agenda. In spite of the pitiful condition of the widows in the community, their sufferings were not a part of the discussion till at the end of 1927.[301] The dominant Hindu world-view about the widows seems to have determined the attitudes of even the reformers till this time.[302] For the first time the social position of the widow was discussed

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[300] Uma Chakravarti, "Gender, caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood" in Martha Allen Chen ed., *Widows in India*, New Delhi, 1998, p.64. "Widowhood in India among the upper castes is a state of social death. The widow's social death stems from her alienation from reproduction and sexuality, following the loss of her husband and her exclusion from the functioning social unit of the family". Once a woman ceases to be a wife, she ceases to be a person. She was physically alive but socially dead. "Widowhood is perceived as a disrupter of social order and a potential violation of the moral order. There are two modes of representing the social death of widows: one is intrusive where the widow is conceived of as someone who does not belong because she is an 'outsider'; the other is extrusive where the widow becomes an outsider because she no longer belongs. The widow is both simultaneously; in the affinal and in the natal home she becomes the outsider who no longer belongs and in this sense she shares the sense of being an outcaste".

[301] The unique character of the movement is that its agenda got expanded with the widening horizon of the Nambūtiri mind and with the pressures of the civil society. The widow was a matter of shame because the whole community was condemned for the cruelty involved in it, and hence became a matter of concern for the community. Great amount of vigilance was needed to maintain their chastity and the community's image of pseudo-morality.

[302] According to this view, in the best of all worlds, there would be no widows: all wives would die before their husbands, or would be widowed only at an advanced age when she has adult sons to support her. In real life, when these ideals are often challenged by the husband's early death, the dilemma was how to control the sexuality of the (young) widow and how to provide economic support to her. Orthodox Hindu tradition commanded them either to commit sati or lead a chaste, austere, ascetic lifestyle. She was expected to remain in perpetual mourning: to give up eating 'hot' food in order to cool her body (her sexual energy); to avoid auspicious occasions because she was considered inauspicious (as having

during the deliberations over the family regulation; there were strong arguments in favour of a share for them,[303] but references to them were marked by their state as being natural and no attempt was made to link their condition with the reform discourse. Even after it received attention, there were not many to take up the issue.[304] This silence is striking because the reform movements in northern India had taken up the emancipation of widows as the foremost agenda.[305] This indifference was justified in the context of the absence of child widows among the Nambūtiris,[306] of the barbarous custom of sati and of the openly humiliating treatment meted out to widows elsewhere in south India by the Brahmins.[307] But

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caused her husband's death); and to remain celibate, devout, and loyal to her husband's memory. See Martha Allen Chen, "Introduction" in Martha Allen Chen ed., *op.cit.*, pp.25-26.

[303] Mūthiringōd, "Stṛīkaḷkku Muthalavakāśam", *YK*, 15:5, Oct. 1, 1924.

[304] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri argues that it was just due to the inherent human nature and not because widow marriage was taboo. See his *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam*. In fact the decisive factor was the poor prospects for dowry in the case of such ideal marriages; not even radical Nambūtiris were ready to marry without dowry. A movement against dowry was strikingly absent in the whole reform episode; it had to be started by the Antaṛjanams in the 1940s. It is important that call for dowry-less marriages came from outside the community. Ayyākkuṭṭy in his speech at the 22nd annual meeting of the *Sabha* had made a strong plea against dowry (*YK*, 20:27, Dec 25, 1929) and M. Rāmavarma Tampān urged the Nambūtiri young men to live by labour and not by dowry (*UN*, 9:4, Dhanu 1103, p.248). It is interesting to note that the *Nambūtiri Vaivāhika Saṅgham* president Kānjūṛ Nārāyaṇan Bhaṭṭathiripād lamented over the unwillingness of the fathers to give dowry to their daughters while being married to *kaniṣtans* as *parivēdanam*. *UN*, 11:40 Apr 4, 1930.

[305] The 1891 census reported that one in three of Hindu women in Bengal were widows; that of 1911 found only 3% of girls unmarried in the 15-20 age-bracket. See Dagmer Engels, *Beyond Purdah? Women in Bengal, 1890-1939*, Delhi, 1996, pp. 41, 43. Similarly Census figures of 1921 for UP recorded that there were more than 1200 widows under the age of 5 and more than 12000 under the age of 10. Cited in Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community*, Delhi, 2001, p.302. Gupta argues that in the early decades of the twentieth century widow marriage was advocated for many important reasons other than humanitarian. It was linked with sexuality and reproduction; with the questions of Hindu-Muslim population ratios and increasing fears of a supposed decline in Hindu numbers. Widows provided an effective channel to censure Muslims as the 'other'. Widows were being married by Muslim men which led to an increase in Muslim numbers and which endangered Hindu religion. *Ibid*, pp.298-320.

[306] While discussing the question of widow marriage at the 22nd annual meeting of the *Sabha*, G. Śaṅkaran Potti argued that there were no virgin widows among the Nambūtiris, Nambūtiris should not be worried by Gandhiji's opinion on widows since he was talking about child widows. *YK*, 20:27, Dec.25, 1929.

[307] Such as those of the formal ceremony of degrading the widow when she had her head shaved by a barber. But barring this, their condition was almost equal to widows in other

the fact was that the condition of the Nambūtiri widows was not better than those of other areas; they usually were widowed at an early age and well before they had children or were they able to enjoy the pleasures of conjugal life.[308] The practice of *adhivēdanam* had made the condition of many Antaṛjanams wives for name-sake and their transition to widowhood was not practically and qualitatively different from that of a child widow. In fact polygamy, aged marriage of girls and the prevalence of numerous young widows had been factors encouraging adultery and immorality within the community; but only a few cases were subjected to *smāṛtavichāram*. The references by the reform leaders to the frequent occurrence of abortion in the community were pointers to the fact as to why the question of marriage reform gained prominence in the reform discourse.[309]

In one of the earliest references to widow marriage, Panarkkatt Bhaṭṭathiri invited the attention of the Nambūtiris towards Gandhi's attitude on

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parts of India. Campbell's description of austerities attached with the life of a widow is applicable to Nambūtiri widow as well. "...Ever after that she is condemned to sleep, not on a bed, but upon a mat spread on the floor; to have but one meal a day; and to be excluded very strictly from all festivities and family gatherings. Not only is the widow degraded and set aside, but her very presence on joyful occasions becomes an actual offence, and her mere shadow is in certain cases unpropitious". John Campbell Oman, *The Brahmans, Theists and Muslims of India,* Delhi, 1973, Reprint, p.193. Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōd's description of the state of the Nambūtiri widow perfectly matches with Campbell's narration. See her "Vipḷavathintē Kanalukaḷ Teḷiccha Ā Kālam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 15 Oct. 2004, pp.24-26; "Kuḷi", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 83:16, 19 June, 2005, pp.34-36.

[308] But in fact many were virgin widows, widowed at a very early age, at some 18 or 20. Laḷitāmbika gives three such instances which were caused by *adhivēdanam* where the husbands died soon after the marriage leaving their wives widows and childless. One of the cases was truly shocking; the husband died on the third day of marriage well before having had the first intercourse, which according to custom was fixed for the fourth day. See Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam, *Ātmakathakku Oru Āmukham,* Calicut University, 1997, pp. 80-81. E.M.S. also speaks about a widow at his own *illam* who was widowed at the age of 15 and had to live for a long period. See, E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, pp.27-28.

[309] Intervening in the marriage reform discourse, Pātiriśśēri Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād stated that there was rarely a Nambūtiri house where abortion cases were not reported. See his "Vēḷiyum Bhāgavum", *YK*, 14:25, Dec. 15, 1923. It is also argued that if normally a woman cannot be sexually gratified by 5 or 10 men together, how can she get sexual pleasure from her husband who keeps two more swajati wives and one or two sambandham wives? See Kuṛūṛ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād, "Kanyādānam", *UN* in 5:9, Edavam 1099, pp.441-443; M.K.B, "Nambūtiri Samudāyathintē Duṛdaśa", *YK*, 18:21, Nov.30, 1927.

widowhood.[310] He observed that Gandhi did not refer to the Nambūtiris because there were no marriages among them before the age of fifteen; it should be sometime before sixty. Nambūtiri women get ready for conjugal life at the end of their life. It is significant that Bhaṭṭathiri was not urging for widow marriage among the Nambūtiris but was speaking against old age marriages. Kuṛumūṛ Nārāyaṇan Bhaṭṭathiripād gave a transliteration of Gandhiji's speech highlighting the condition of the widows, especially child widows.[311] KNB stressed how Gandhi exposed the cruelty involved in the 'creation' of a widow since many child widows had come to know of it only when others informed them of it. They did not have any conscious involvement or 'role' in the tragic drama that led to her widowhood. He made a call for marrying widows. K.K. Vāriyaṛ also invited the attraction of people towards the suffering of child widows.[312]

Presenting widowhood as one of the chief sorrows of the Antaṛjanams, and denying the role of fate in bringing about it, the president of the *Saṅgham* in December 1927 attributed it to social factors, particularly to *adhivēdanam*.[313] He condemned aged marriage of *gṛihastans* for creating widows and requested them to take appropriate steps to save their widows. He suggested two remedies: first, in future marriage should strictly be arranged between individuals of agreeable age, and second, widows should be allowed to remarry. For the time being they should be sheltered in a rescue home; providing them with all facilities including education. They should be given in marriage as and when suitable alliances are found. A committee should be formed and a fund should be allotted for their welfare.

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[310] Pāṇaṛkkāṭṭ Bhaṭṭathiri, "Vaidhavya Niṛbandham", *YK*, 16:95, Sep 8 1926.
[311] K.N.B, "Vidhavā Vivāham", *YK*, 18:4, Sep 28, 1927.
[312] K.K. Vāriyar, "Vanithālōkam", *YK*, 18:11, Oct.26, 1927. Like Kuṛumūṛ, he too was talking about the case of North Indian widows.
[313] Śīravaḷḷi Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Presidential Address, 9th Annual meeting of the *Saṅgham*, Angādipuṛam, *UN* 9:4, Dhanu 1103, p.284.

There were no references to the condition of the widows or about efforts at their emancipation in any one of the articles in the year 1928 and 1929; the *Sabha* in its 21st annual meeting held at Mavelikkara kept silent over the issue. For the first time widow marriage issue was publicly debated in the 22nd annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Edakkunni in Dec.1929. During the course of the discussions on the Cochin Nambūtiri Bill, P.M. Manazhi introduced a resolution requesting to include a clause in it for legalizing widow remarriage.[314] Pāndam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri supported it in a prolonged speech. He stated that since it was going to be materialized within a period of ten years, why should it not be implemented right now so that the delay may be saved in granting a life to a large number of widows. G Śaṅkaran Pōtti opposed the resolution arguing that the case of the widows could be discussed only after that of the virgins was settled. Among the Nambūtiris there were no virgin widows; Gandhi was talking about them. P.S. Kēśavan Nambūtiri supported him and asked whether Manazhi was ready to marry a widow. In the meanwhile, another member brought an amendment to it on behalf of the *sapatnis* seeking permission for the right to divorce and remarriage. Both the resolutions were finally repealed.[315]

Forcefully presenting the plight of the Nambūtiri women both as *sapatnis* and as widows, M.R.B. described the truly miserable and humiliating life of the latter.[316] In one sense he put the state of the widows was better than that of the *sapatnis*: they did not have to tolerate the kind of torture that the other had to. He pleaded for their remarriage and wanted to be carried out to make the community understand that this was the crying need of the hour. Since the fear

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[314] *YK*, 20:27, Dec.25, 1929.

[315] Mādambi Cheṛiya Jātavēdan Nambūtiri revealed later that he introduced the amendment because widows did not deserve special attention; the condition of the *sapatnis* was not better than theirs; if widows were being rescued, so should the namesake wives called *sapatnis* too. He said that he was not opposed to widow marriage and that he repealed the resolution because he was sure it would not get support. See *UN*, 11:32, Feb.7, 1930.

[316] M.R.B, "Samudāyathilē Pāvaṅgaḷ", *UN*, 11:58, August 15, 1930. In an earlier article, he had referred to them. See "Nammudē Kudumba Jīvitam", *UN*, 11:56, Aug.1, 1930.

of sin attached to *parivēdanam* was gradually vanishing, opposition to widow marriage and *sapatni* marriage would also be weakened. But it needed a mighty revolution.

The most powerful argument in favour of widow marriage came from VT; in his speech at Ālathiyūṟ, he differentiated widow marriage from remarriage and strongly pleaded for both.[317] He started his speech with a confession that the topic of remarriage had not been taken up seriously because marriage reform was a gradual process and it could be materialized only stage by stage. Since the stumbling blocks across the path of the *kanyakās* and the *kaniṣṭans* had been removed, it was time to turn towards remarriage. He referred to the case of Bengalis who had taken up the issue of widow marriage a century ago.[318] Widow marriage and *sapatni* remarriage were short-spanned programmes since with the denial of *adhivēdanam* there would be no scope for *sapatnis* or young widows in future. As a stop-gap arrangement, he suggested that Nambūtiris should seriously think of remarriage; though he did not strongly plead for *sapatni* remarriage, he urged for widow marriage both on humanitarian and psychological grounds.[319] Later, in his account of the widow marriage, he tried

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[317] V.T, "Punaṟvivāham Athavā Vidhavāvivāham", *UN*, Nov.11, 1930, reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṟṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.580-582.

[318] Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India,* New Delhi, 1994, p.35.

[319] V.T's analysis of widowhood appears to have been determined by strong humanitarian sympathies but it is not an unmitigated ideal of plain human love anyway. As a strong upholder of female chastity, V.T. was advocating widow marriage probably as an efficient safety valve against unchastity or other immoralities associated with it. In his private memoirs, he justifies his efforts for the remarriage of Mrs. Nhalūṟ Śṛidēvi as a precautionary measure against such disasters. He also has argued that had Kuṟiyēdath Tāṭṛi been allowed to select a life-partner of her own choice, all that disgrace imposed on the community could have been avoided. *VTyudē Sampūṟṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* p. 627. In his account of the widow marriage he pointed at the danger of widows being seduced and thus justified the remarriage. *Ibid*, p.298. This seems to be a concern shared by reformers in general. Quoting the reformers, Meera Kosambi pointed out that widow marriage was advocated as an "efficient safety valve against unchastity and the horrible crime of child murder" or as a means to remove "a scandal and wrong" associated with it "which is a disgrace to any well regulated society". Meera Kosambi, "Women, Emancipation and Equality, Padita Ramabhai's Contribution to the Women's Cause", *Economic and Political Weekly,* XXIII: 44, Oct. 29, 1988, p.ws43.

to link it with the hypocrisy of men in problems relating to sexual freedom and morality. He wrote:

"If the one that has died is a wife, the husband will not hesitate to remarry even before her dead body loses its warmth and society, instead of reprimanding such a hasty remarriage, takes it as an auspicious occasion and showers its blessings on the couple. On the other hand, if it is the husband that dies, his widow is left destitute. She has to bear the blame of her husband's death all the rest of her life as though the unfortunate event happened because of her sins. She is deprived of her privilege to protect her virginity as a virtue. Brothers and sisters born and brought up in the same ancestral home, on reaching the threshold of a new life are made to part company. The brother breaks all chains and chooses his own way of life; whereas his sister's life is confined to the bounds of her household and her freedom is drastically curtailed. In short, woman is cruelly suppressed while man is given full freedom to lead a wanton life flinging all restraints to the winds. Women will never be free unless this stark inequality is put to an end".[320]

The resolution for widow marriage was again introduced in the *Sabha* in its 26th annual meeting held at Perāmaṅgalam in December 1933.[321] It had to face strong opposition,[322] but the supporters justified the issue on the ground that the Government of India had passed the widow marriage act and was applicable to Hindus all over British India. Thereafter, the resolution was passed by majority votes. The endorsement of the resolution was supposed to create no impact since the history of the *Sabha* had witnessed the passing of innumerable ineffective resolutions; the orthodox section of the Nambūtiris took little interest in this matter. However, a letter alleged to be drafted by the Antaṛjanams, recorded their resentment over the resolution endorsing widow marriage and called upon Nambūtiris to favour them than to go in pursuit of the widows.[323]

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[320] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.296.

[321] See Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitṛam*; C.K. Nambūtiri, *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ*. Also see *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 11:42, Jan.8, 1934, p.15.

[322] A letter from Athippatta Kṛiṣṇan Nambūtiri, Secretary, *Sanātana Dharma Samrakṣaṇa Samiti*, calling upon Nambūtiris not to turn to Perāmangalam because widow marriage resolution was going to be introduced there, described the attempt as extremely somber and blasphemous and anticipated the consequences as greatly harmful to tradition and the ideals of the community. Cited in Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *Abhivadayē*, pp.213-14.

[323] The letter reads thus: "...If the Perāmangalam Sabha resolves to sanction widow marriage our fond hopes will wither away. Your magnanimity to the suffering widows would only

Two important figures of the reform movement – Laḷitāmbika and Mūthiringōd – made widow marriage the central theme of some of their works. Two stories of Laḷitāmbika dealt with the sorrows of the widows[324] and her drama related exclusively with widow marriage.[325] Pointing out the merit of her drama over those of V.T, M.R.B. or M.P, E.M.S. wrote that while others were concerned with the sorrows of the Antaṛjanams in general, Laḷitāmbika highlighted the issue of the widows– especially child widows.[326] The subject matter of the play was the life of an Antaṛjanam, married to an old Nambūtiri, who became a widow three days after the marriage and soon before the first sexual intercourse (which according to custom is fixed for the fourth day). She was subjected to humiliation and torture by her mother-in-law and by other *sapatnis* for her alleged 'role' in the death of the Nambūtiri.[327] At last her childhood boyfriend saved her by remarrying her with the help of the *Sabha* activists. Soon after its first enactment, the widow marriage resolution was

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leave us in the lurch..." Cited in *ibid*, p.215. But the style and tone of the letter would presume that it was not written by women.

[324] Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam's stories 'Yātrāvasānam', 'Kuttasammatham' and 'Jīvitavum Maraṇavum' made widowhood the theme of narration. See her *Theranjedutha Kathakal*, Kottayam, 1966. (The story 'Jīvitavum Maraṇavum' was published also as 'Piśāchukkaḷē Māṛinilkin' in *Kēraḷōpahāram*, 1947, pp. 66-67).

[325] Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam, "Sāvitṛi Adhavā Vidhavāvivāham", *Grandhālōkam*, 49:3, March 1997, pp.39-44; 49:4, April 1997, pp.63-66; 49:5, May 1997, pp.64-68; 49:6, June 1997, pp.86-87; 49:7, July 1997, pp.71-73; 49:8, August 1997, pp.79-81; 49:10, Oct. 1997, pp.53-55. Laḷitāmbika recollected the story behind the writing of the drama in her memoirs. It was written in 1934 but well before the first widow marriage took place; it was written for being staged at the Kuḷakkada special school in association with the send-off function of the headmaster C.S. Subrahmanian Pōtti; it was also staged at a library anniversary in Kottārakkara, at the 35th annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Harippād and at the next annual at Tṛiśśūṛ. But it was not published, a mysterious fear prevented her from doing so; she says that the reluctance to liberate them out of their seclusion might have hindered her. See Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam, *Ātmakathakku Oru Āmukham*, Calicut University, 1997, pp.78-84.

[326] E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, "Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam Nāṭakakaṛtṛi Enna Nilayil", *Grandhālōkam*, 49:3, March 1997, p.7. It is also pointed out that though it was staged consecutively in the two annual meetings of the *Sabha*, this drama was not considered as a part of the corpus of plays known as 'Yōgakṣēmasabha plays' which included those of VT, M.R.B. and M.P. alone. R.B. Rajalakshmi, "Punaṛjanmam Thēdi Oru Sāvitṛikkuṭṭy", *Ibid*, p.36.

[327] Those days an Antaṛjanam prayed for the life of her husband; both his long life and his early death were 'dependant' on her virtue and chastity.

endorsed by the *Sabha* and it was staged at the two annual meetings that followed, at Harippād and Tṛiśśūṛ. In fact this was a paradox for the *Sabha* had not cooperated with the first widow marriage, and in spite of their professed radicalism most of the Nambūtiris were disinclined in the heart of their hearts to marry widows because such marriages would not bring them any material benefit. This is confirmed by the great infrequency of widow marriages – between 1934 and 1944 – only two such marriages were conducted. Yet this drama acquired great popularity and it was staged in the platform of the *Sabha* for two consecutive years.

In spite of being a firebrand radical, Mūthiringōd did not write a separate article on widow marriage nor did he uphold the issue in any of his speeches or articles. But he had written a story on the remarriage of a widow depicting her destitute condition and focusing on the humanitarian and philanthropic attitude of the man who comes to her rescue.[328] It is curious to see that in another story a widow is portrayed by him as denying the helping hand of an educated and well-placed man just because of her devotion to her deceased husband. The cruel and humiliating treatment at her husband's *illam* combined with the passionate entreaties of her suitor compels her to commit suicide.[329]

The First Widow Marriage

The spectacular incident of the first marriage of a widow in the history of the Nambūtiri community took place on 13th September 1934, between Uma Antaṛjanam and M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, at *Rasikasadanam*, VT's house at

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[328] "Eyyā Okkē Oru Polē Ā", *Mātṛubhūmi Special Issue*, 1934; also see Mūthiringōd, *Mūthiringōdintē Kathakaḷum Upanyāsangaḷum*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 2003, pp.45-53.

[329] "Vidhavayudē Vidhi", in Mūthiringōd, *Mūthiringōdintē Kathakaḷum Upanyāsangaḷum*, pp.68-75. Mūthiringōd was a short-lived genius (1902-44). Most of his stories were eulogies of death, especially those ones he wrote in his last years. His son told in an interview that at the close of his life he was suffering an acute fear psychosis. It had been predicted that he would not cross his 42 as per his horoscope and he came to know of it. So he became a complete believer, observing all kinds of religious rites including superstitious practices. Mūthiringōd Paramēśwaran Nambūtiri, Mannengod, Pattambi, 4-11-2005.

Tṛitāla.[330] A grand audience consisting of several prominent persons of Kerala participated in this historic event.[331] There were no customary or religious rituals associated with the marriage, it was perfectly secular, the bridegroom simply tied the *tāli* around the neck of the bride. In the marriage feast that followed, all men and women, irrespective of caste or creed, dined together in total disregard of the rules of pollution. The participants hailed the incident, especially the role of VT, for having dared to execute an act which was thought to be impossible, and for the most humane of all services done hitherto,[332] and in a public meeting summoned afterwards VT declared his decision to 'get out of the community' and urged people to start living as absolute men instead of as representatives of their respective community.[333]

In a later recollection, VT detailed the circumstances that led to the event and explained the kind of motivations that persuaded him to undertake such a risky venture.[334] His sympathies towards widows in general was tied up here with his concern for the well being of his sister-in-law and an admiration towards her for her bold nature and radical bend of mind.[335] He wanted her to be

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[330] The first widow remarriage in Bengal took place in early December 1856 under Vidyasagar and in Andhra in 1881 under the leadership of Virasalingam. See Asok Sen, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones*, Calcutta, 1977, p.59; Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India,* Delhi, 2000, p.24.

[331] It included among others, Nālappāṭṭ Nārāyaṇa Menon, Nilambūr Valiya Rāja, M.C. Joseph, Chengannūr C.P. Bhaṭṭathiri, Mannath Padmanābhan, K. Ayyappan, Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇa Mārāṛ, K.A. Damodara Menon, E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, Chovvara Paramēśwaran, Paṛvati Ayyappan and Arya Paḷḷam. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.300.

[332] In his appraisal of the event Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇa Mārāṛ praised M.R.B. for the courage he had shown and referred to VT as "a *kaṛmayōgi,* the root and sustaining force of all progress achieved by the Nambutiri community". He also assessed VT as a true Brahman since he invited men from all castes and communities to take part in the incident and dared to dine together with them disregarding the prevailing rules of pollution. See his "Nambūtiri Vidhavāvivāham" in *Nizhalāṭṭam,* Tṛiśśūṛ, 1945, pp.58-63.

[333] See *Māṭṛubhūmi Weekly*, 12:27, Sept.17, 1934, p.16.

[334] VT, "Vidhavayudē Jīvitam Taḷiraṇiyunnu", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.295-300. Puthuppaḷḷi Raghavan, who participated in the event, describes it as VT's retaliatory measure against the ultra-conservatives who had opposed him and the reform movement. See his *Viplava Smaraṇakaḷ,* Vol. I, Kottayam, 1992, pp.213-214.

[335] *Ibid*, 295-96.

renowned and also wanted his home to be the fountainhead of all revolutions.[336] In addition, he found it as an opportunity to remove a great blemish off the Nambūtiri movement, i.e., its failure to create an Indulēkha and to end the female emancipation agenda by extending an Antaṛjanam the right of self-determination in choosing her life partner.[337] He also linked it with morality; that it was highly probable that she might have gone astray had she not been remarried. VT thus made his position safe; a candidate was available in his own family and a suitable partner was ready in M.R.B.[338] With the endorsement of widow marriage by the *Sabha,* the opportunity for the social revolt had been at hand. Legally he would be redeemed by the Widow Marriage Act of 1856, technically he was safe because of the *Sabha* resolution and socially he would get the support of humanitarian and feminine sympathies.

In a touching reminiscence, Uma Antaṛjanam described how the event, and the intervention of VT, acted as a turning point in her life.[339] In certain details Uma's recollection contradicted with the accounts of VT; he attributed the decision to be entirely hers with his role being confined to that of a mediator.

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[336] *Ibid*, p.296.

[337] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.297-98.

[338] M.R.B. was a pre-fixed suitor because he had publicly declared to marry a widow if anyone was ready for it. In an *upasabha* meeting at Parappanangadi, presided over by E.M.S, when Parvati Nenminimangalam raised the question as to how many among the participants were ready to marry a widow, two of them, M.R.B. and M.P, declared their willingness through a note to the president. See M.P. Bhatatthiripad, "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam,* November 1992.

[339] Smt. Uma M.R.B, "Thalayilezhuthu Thiruthiya Kai", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly* June10, 1976, reproduced in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *VT Oru Itihāsam*, pp. 134-139. Surprisingly, M.R.B. did not write an account of his experience in the form of memoirs. Given the obsession of large number of erstwhile activists to find a space in the history of the movement through their recollections, M.R.B's silence is commendable but it happened to be a great loss to the academic world. A few, but scattered, glimpses of his experiences with the *sabha* movement are available in the collection of his articles. However, an anecdote is important in the context of the widow marriage. He makes a narration of a young but frustrated widow at his home; during a marriage function when all others were found busy and cheerful, she appeared gloomy and aloof. He was not able to understand the reason for her grief then, but it might have instilled in him great sympathy towards the plight of the widows and hence the anecdote justifies his later act. See M.R.B, *MRB-yudē Upanyāsangaḷ*, Calicut, 1987, pp.170-171.

But Uma stated that VT's persuasive role and his repeated encouragement had emboldened her to take a final decision, especially when she was disheartened by the kind of impact it would create on her parents and kinsfolk. His assurance of her parents adapting themselves to the existing reality in course of time and of the full support of the *Saṅgham* for the cause in fact greatly consoled her. Of course she does not refer to the great hardships they (the couples) had to suffer later; she took them as natural and as the result of her own decision; and this might have been what VT anticipated: the event, while bringing credit to him and his family, its consequences would not be too harsh as to mar the glory of the adventure.

In his memoirs, I.C.P. Nambūtiri recollects how he and his parents approached the marriage.[340] The news of the marriage was kept secret; otherwise, Uma might not have been allowed to get out of her home. Her father was informed of it only just before the marriage; he did not oppose it but requested I.C.P. not to participate in it. He had to please his parents, and to save them from the wrath of the conservatives. But the same afternoon he met the couples and greeted them. For three years they were not allowed to come home, but afterwards the situation improved.

The Reactions

The widow marriage provoked the conservatives and the wrath that it unleashed, created considerable hardships to all the persons involved in it.[341] The conservatives in Cochin, through the Nambūtiri husbands of the royal family, exerted pressure on the authorities to punish them. The Cochin Rāja was not simply a ruler but was the protector of dharma as well; the dharma was decided

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[340] I.C.P. Nambūtiri, *Vipḷavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*, pp.47-49.

[341] These responses compel a comparison with the experiences of Vidyasagar. His efforts for getting legal permission for widow remarriage created a situation in which on the Stṛīts of Calcutta he found himself insulted, abused, and even threatened with death. Asok Sen, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones*, Calcutta, 1977, p.59.

by his Nambūtiri advisors; accordingly all the participants were declared banished and denied temple entry. All the 42 participants, Nambūtiris and non-Nambūtiris, were excommunicated. It included the Nilambūṛ Rāja also. In Malabar, the Zamorin was able only to ban entry into Guruvāyūṛ temple, which he certainly did for the 42 participants, but compared to those of Cochin, their condition was better.[342]

The condition of the couple was truly pathetic because they could not find a source of livelihood. M.R.B. did not get his share of property and, as it was the second marriage, Uma did not bring a dowry.[343] The banishment prevented him from going to Ṭṛiśśūṛ, which was his centre of activity; and as a Nambūtiri he did not know any manual job. This situation created a virtual crisis and was the reason for the founding of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*. After the failure of the commune, M.R.B. and family had to live for many years in utter poverty.[344]

The marriage caused considerable commotion at the 27th annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Harippād which was held immediately after the event. The

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[342] E.M.S. has written about the consequences of *bhṛaṣṭ* on him. But his public life was in no way affected adversely except in that his eldest brother refused to cooperate with him. So he decided to live separately after getting his share of property. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha*, pp.172-73. It is reported that some of the participants of the marriage repented and underwent some acts of expiation. See Madamab Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam*. The participants had to face several forms of discriminations. They were treated separate at home, asked to dine separately and to clean their own vessels; ordered not to use common pond and well; a Nambūtiri, who had *sambandham* at the Kodungallur kovilakam, lost his wife; and the president of the *Sabha* who sent a letter of compliment had to expiate. A meeting convened by VT at Kodumuṇda on January 12, 1935 decided to file a suit against the decision of *bhṛaṣṭ*, but whether any decision was taken to this effect is not clear. *Ibid.*

[343] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri writes that many people advised VT to organize the marriage after M.R.B. got his share of ancestral property, but VT was not ready to wait; he was afraid he would lose the chance. *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitṛam*.

[344] Leela, Uma's daughter (Uma had a daughter at the time of the second marriage) described the hardships they had to suffer at Kodumuṇda; they were under the mercy of Kānjūṛ mana and led a virtually impoverished life until M.R.B. got a job at Shornur. The family continued to be banished; later when he became the editor of *Keli* he came and settled at Ṭṛiśśūṛ. But she attested that M.R.B. preferred to live in distress and refused to repent over his deed. Personal Conversation, Mulankunnath Kav, Ṭṛiśśūṛ, 10-11-2005.

participants of the marriage attended the meeting *en masse* and started speaking in favour of it. Finally a resolution congratulating the marriage was passed and it was decided to send hundred rupees as gift to the couples.[345]

The widow marriage experiment failed to inspire a chain reaction; only two more such marriages were reported later.[346] The second marriage was between Njaḷūṛ Nambūtiri and Śṛīdēvi Antaṛjanam, that too at the auspices of VT. It was not as eventful as the first one and did not last too. Njaḷūṛ Nambūtiri died soon and Śṛīdēvi again became a widow. Banished from the home and the community she had to suffer great hardships far more acute than M.R.B's family.[347] The third marriage was between M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād and Ārya Antaṛjanam; since this marriage took place somewhat later and as by this time the stigma attached to widow marriage had considerably waned, this couple did not have to endure much difficulty.[348] But no widow marriages took place thereafter; the great infrequency of them indicates that the Nambūtiris were generally not interested in it.[349]

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[345] C.K. Nambūtiri, *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ*.

[346] In the case of Bengal, neither the Act of 1856 nor the lifelong efforts of Vidyasagar to carry it into practice could mitigate much of conventional hostility of Hindu society to widow marriage. See Asok Sen, *op.cit.*, p.60. Chen notices: "Many widows express little interest in remarrying needs to be interpreted keeping in mind not only the influence of negative social attitudes towards widow remarriage, but also the low chance of conjugal happiness in second marriage". Martha Alter Chen ed., *op.cit.*, p.23.

[347] For the pitiful story of Njāḷuṛ Sṛīdēvi see P.M. Nārāyaṇan, "Oru Antaṛjanathintē Katha", *Kalāvīkṣaṇam*, Nov. 1997.

[348] It took place in September, 1947. Akkitham in an article narrated the event and the enthusiasm it generated among the Nambūtiris. But quite different from the first widow marriage, it was performed with all Vedic rites and was not a secular event. The absence of VT in the marriage also is striking. See Akkitham, "Vidhavāvivāham", *UN*, 1:5, Chingam 1122 (Aug-Sep. 1947), pp.315-319. M.P. Bhatatthiripad in his "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ" (*Pāṭabhēdam*, November 1992), points out that the marriage took place in August 1948 but this may be a mistake caused by his fading memories.

[349] While Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri explained it with reference to the normal human nature (*Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitṛam*), C.K. Nambūtiri attributed its unpopularity to the lack of men who were in demand of it as against *parivēdanam*. C.K. Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, p.21.

4:11. Ulbuddhakēraḷam

One of the significant landmarks in the public life of VT was the founding of the Gandhian commune, known as *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, in 1935.[350] The commune lasted for less than three years and there prevails a conspicuous silence on the episode in V.T's otherwise vivid memoirs. It is briefly surveyed in some of the many studies on him,[351] and is generally regarded as a noble experiment and a brilliant intervention in the contemporary social system. While some glorify it as an attempt at the creation of a casteless and classless society,[352] a few others see it as a great endeavor towards building up righteous and 'organic men' along Gandhian lines and a prototype experiment towards the creation of a role-model for the future social set up of Kerala.[353] Its role in linking the Nambūtiri reform movement with the rising nationalist struggle has also been noticed.[354] Admiration and eulogy apart, the experiment had to undergo severe criticism as well. The commune has been evaluated as basically a utopian project[355] and its failure is attributed to V.T's ideological inhibitions and his inability to identify the realities of the times.[356]

The Context

Communes attained a new socio-political relevance in modern India when it got linked to nationalist politics. Gandhian *āśṛam* at Sabarmati became the hub of Indian nationalism and the new cultural consciousness. For Gandhi, commune

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[350] Though most writers refer to it as a colony, some of the aged people of Kodumuṇda prefer to mention the spot at where it was founded as colony and there is still a bus stop named 'colony', the apt term for the project is commune since VT envisaged it in the model of a Gandhian commune.

[351] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *V.T. Oru Yugapuruṣan*, pp.148-51; Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *V.T. Ethirpilūdē*, p.56; Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op. cit.*., pp.224-29; M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "VT: Communisathinappuṛathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṛayilē Māṛgadaṛśakan" in A.V. Sreekumar *ed.*, *VT*, p. 79.

[352] M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, *op. cit.*

[353] Civic Chandran, "Enthukoṇdu VT?" *Māṭṛubhūmi Weekly*, Dec.26, 1999- Jan.1, 2000. (Also see his *VT Ividēyuṇdu*, Vatakara, 1999, which reproduces the article.)

[354] M.R. Manmathan, *op. cit.*, p.38.

[355] Puthupaḷḷy Raghavan, *op.cit.*, p. 217.

[356] I.C.P. Nambūtiri, "V.T-yude Kaṛmakāṇdam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, pp. 132-33.

was also the ideal form of human settlement, village reconstruction and self-government. *Āśṛams* were Gandhi's variants of civil society and public sphere. But Gandhi's important ideals in general, and the social ethic enshrined in the *āśṛam* in particular, perceived life in accordance with that typical reaction of the intelligentsia in many parts of the world to the social and moral depredations of advancing capitalism: romanticism. In Gandhi there seems to be the vision of a backward-looking utopia and an idealization of pre-capitalist economic and social relations.[357] The correlation of *āśṛams* with the Constructive Programme, functioning as the workshops and headquarters, on the other hand, gained special relevance in the context of the outbreak of large scale Hindu-Muslim riots in northern India in the 1920s and '30s and which resorted to a discourse that emphasized tolerance and the fundamental unity of the Indian people.[358]

In course of time, however, Gandhian *āśṛams* on the Sabarmati model began to sprout up all over India. Closely associated with the temple entry agitation and the Harijan upliftment programmes advocated by the Congress, there were attempts at starting similar ventures in Malabar by Kēḷappan in the 1920s.[359] In

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[357] Partha Chatterjee observes that "in the *theoretical* sense Gandhian ideology would be 'reactionary' since as Lenin pointed out in the case of the Russian populists, not only is there simply a romantic longing for a return to an idealized medieval world of security and contentment, there is also an 'attempt to measure the new society with old patriarchal yardstick, the desire to find a model in the old order and traditions, which are totally unsuited to the changed institutions'." In spite of conceding the 'democratic points', the Gandhian model is based on a false, indeed reactionary theory of the world historical process, or else that it refuses to acknowledge a theory of history at all. In either case it would be a variant of romanticism. Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the critic of civil society", in Ranajit Guha ed., *Subaltern Studies III*, New Delhi, 1984, p.173.

[358] Dick Cooiman, *Communities and Electorates: a Comparative Discussion of Communalism in Colonial India*, Amsterdam, 1995, p.45. The same motives moved Gandhi to make temple-entry one of the main planks of his socio-political platform. See, Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Changes in Travancore 1921-47*, New Delhi, 1994, p.56.

[359] Kēḷappan had founded a colony of Harijans at Gopalapuram near his native place Moodadi in 1921, during the Malabar rebellion, where he founded a school and a hostel for them. During the Vaikom Satyagraha, Kēḷappan launched another settlement near Payyoli in an eight-acre land, which came to be called 'Pakkanarpuram', for Harijan welfare activities. (C.K. Mūssath, *Kēḷappan Enna Mahāmanuṣyan*, Kottayam, 1982, p.104). Both were exclusive Harijan Colonies designed to settle and educate them and to provide them a

1932, just after the withdrawal of the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha, Kēḷappan attempted to invite public attention through an article towards the founding of an *āśṛam*, a congregation of individuals, who lay faith in Gandhian ideals, for the promotion of Harijan welfare.[360] In his famous speech at Ālathiyūṛ V.T stressed the need of starting a similar colony.[361] Two years after this speech, V.T. attempted to put his dream project into practice, but in an altogether different context.

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humane treatment; but the launching of both coincided with crucial points of time in the history of modern Kerala.

[360] K. Kēḷappan, "Harijanangaḷkku Oru Sankētam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 10:30, Oct.17, 1932, pp.6-7, 23. Certain portions of the article are reproduced in APP. Nambūtiri, *op. cit*, pp. 148-49. He further developed his idea in another subsequent article and linked it with the Gandhian concept of village reconstruction. "Grāmōddhāranam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 10:39, 19 Dec. 1932, pp.7-8.

[361] He underlined the basic ideals of it thus: "I used to have a dream. Extensive areas of arable land will be bought throughout the country. A farm and a workshop will be established in every countryside. All people irrespective of religion, caste and creed will be admitted to these establishments. Besides training them to be good farmers, they will be given sound education in order to strengthen their mental and cultural faculties and to improve their abilities in various arts. Education will be based on our ancient tradition - venerable sages and their disciples living under the same roof and Entēring into informal discussions on all conceivable matters of the universe. This method will be followed here too enabling teachers and pupils to be in constant communion. They will live and work together in the farm. Thus their life as farmers will be integrated with their endeavor to develop their mental and cultural faculties through proper education. Such establishments are the need of the hour. Our young people should take the responsibility of starting such institutions. *This is the only solution for the serious problems we confront; such as the economic crisis and our inability to work*". See *UN*, April 28, 1933, reproduced in *V.T-yudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.548-49. The italicized part, which appears to disagree with the main body of the speech, in fact links the concept of the commune with the emerging crisis in the Nambūtiri reform movement.

In the same year, EMS put forward the concept of a similar centre, with a focus on education. He wrote: "Starting of schools that can provide basic understanding and practical training in social, cultural and technical matters that affect the daily life of rural people is the crying need of the hour. In my view, the schools should be organized in such a way that a stay of five years at school should equip a boy to earn his livēḷihood on leaving the school. Basic communicative skills have to be developed in three languages, i.e., Malayāḷam, English and Hindi. Likewise, a good grasp of the essentials of history, politics and mathematics have to be attained. In my opinion all these can be attained in the short span of five years if there are competent teachers. Agriculture and the study of one of the industries should be made compulsory subjects. This would enable us to get rid of the 'aristocratic qualities' of monotony and inefficiency in work so manifest among the university graduates of the present-day. If we give more importance to broadmindedness and knowledge than to a university degree, in the selection of teachers, then dissemination of basic knowledge to the people at large will not be a difficult problem". EMS, "Malabar Nambūtiri Niyamam", *UN*, Nov.10, 1933, reproduced in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p.161.

The second half of the 1920s was marked by attempts on the part of the Nambūtiri young men to socialize the community by putting an end to the Nambūtiri exclusivity mainly by declaring fraternity with the Nationalist Movement. By the beginning of 1930 the environment for substantial changes was almost evident with the enactment of the Nambūtiri Bills. But the fulfillment of the communitarian demands was posing a new problem before the reformist section of the Nambūtiris by forcing them to find ways of fastening the movement with mainstream politics or to search for new arenas of action elsewhere. Due to the impact of the Gandhian politics, there had often been a strong tendency to link community-building efforts with the nation-building process. Religious reformation was also not an end in itself, it was for social comfort and political advantage.[362] Those who were attracted by the Nationalist Movement thus traversed between community reform and constructive work.

Founding of the Commune

In terms of sequence, the founding of the commune immediately followed the widow marriage. It was founded at Kodumuṇda near Paṭṭāmbi, on the model of the Gandhian Phoenix and Sabarmati Āśṛams, on a twenty five-acre-land taken on lease from Kāñjūr Rāman Nambūtiri.[363] The first settlers were five Nambūtiri families including that of V.T, and later some more individuals and families of Nambūtiris and non-Nambūtiris joined it.[364] All the activities, including farming, craft work and house construction, all were done as voluntary service. As the first step, a house with five rooms for five families was built and later many houses and a few public buildings also were constructed. The whole

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[362] K.N. Panikkar, "From Revolt to Agitation: Beginning of the National Movement", *Social Scientist*, 25:9-10, Sep-Oct. 1997, p. 33.

[363] The ruins of the colony are still visible on the site with a house constructed during the time in which the wife and son of Kāñjūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri now lives, the debris of the complex of buildings constructed there are seen as a small mound and the locality still is known as 'Colony' at least among the older generation.

[364] The five families were those of V.T, M.R.B, Kummiṇi Paramēśwaran Nambūtiri, Kuthuḷḷi Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri and Pēnangallūru. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

manual labour for construction was done by the inmates.[365] All the members of the commune were obliged to do some kind of work. Education for children and classes for elders were provided. The press of *Pṛabhātam* was arranged for starting a weekly journal named *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*.[366] V.T worked as the editor and the inmates themselves did the printing work.

While we have a lot of evidences on almost all other aspects of V.T's public life and personal career, there is a striking absence of them on the commune project.[367] The silence of V.T. on this episode is in fact surprising since he is a vociferous person and has written elaborately on many other less significant aspects of his life. In the complete works of V.T there are only a few references to the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* project.[368] Two of them are in the article which he wrote to justify his sister's inter-caste marriage with Rāghava Paṇikkeṛ. It is important to note that his reference to the commune experiment as a dismal failure corresponds with his private estimates on the inter-caste marriage as an extremely sorrowful event.[369] The third reference relates to the visit of Nālapāṭṭ Nārāyaṇa Mēnōn to the commune. Despite the commune being his dream project, V.T. refused to retrieve his experiences of it. He might have been frustrated by the incompatibility between the proposed ideal and the real experience. In a very important conversation about two years before his death,

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[365] *Ibid*, pp.150-51.

[366] Prabhatam Weekly was started as the mouthpiece of the Kerala Socialist Party in January 1935. E.M.S. Nambūtiripad, *Ātmakatha*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2005, pp.210-11. It was banned by the government in July 1935 for publishing seditious articles. It could again be started in September 1937 when the order passed on it was withdrawn. The hiring of the press for *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* is referred to only in Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op. cit.*, p. 56; VT Vāsudēvan, "VTyudē Ulbuddhakēraḷam Oru Swapnam Pole", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam*, Nov. 1, 2006, p.118.

[367] Those who wrote their accounts on the Yōgakṣēmasabha movement, like C.K. Nambūtiri, Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, or P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri declined to describe VT's commune experiment. This may be because they do not consider it as a part of the community movement. In his single reference to it, Aryan Nambūtiri writes that with the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, VT 'disappeared from the scene'. See his *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku*, p.154.

[368] *V.T-yudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 307, 309 and 407.

[369] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād's Diary, May 20, July 14 and August 3, 1940. Raghava Panikkar's unpublished autobiography substantiates V.T's perception on the marriage as a sad event.

V.T. briefly referred to the commune, but here again he stressed on the failure of the project and its impact on his life impelling him to wind up his public career.[370] V.T. seems to convince us that the failure of the commune was crucial in bringing about an end to his public life. But his refusal to assign the failure upon any person(s) other than himself agrees perfectly with the element of self-criticism evident in this disclosure. He also points to the fact that his staunch faith in Gandhism and his ideological disputes with the Communists were decisive in the course of his later life.[371]

Unfortunately no single volume of the journal *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* has survived to give evidence on any aspect of the programmes of the project. Almost all the comrades of V.T. in the commune later turned out to be communists and as left-wing politicians were opposed to the politics of the Gandhian constructive programme, the literature emanating from that side, either in the form of memoirs or of remarks, were conspicuously silent over the issue. However, we are fortunate to have a few anecdotes. Puthuppally Raghavan, the well-known Communist, in the first volume of his memoirs, gives a very brief description of his stay there in the first two months of the commune. He speaks about his enthusiastic participation in the construction works but, on the whole, observed the project as a utopian venture and attested that it was founded as a shelter for refugee Nambūtiris who were banished from the community for their participation in the reform programme or for getting married against the will of the patriarchs.[372] M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād (Premji) makes a hint at his stay at Kodumunda while recalling about his friendship with Puthuppally Raghavan,[373] but plainly refuses to give any other details of his commune experiences. In a

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[370] K. Gopalankutty, D.D. Nambūtiri, and Veluthat Kesavan, "Mukh ūēḷōāṣṛṇśīṭṅ mukham", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit.*, p. 244.

[371] *Ibid*, p.245.

[372] Puthupally Ragavan, *op. cit.*, pp.216-217.

[373] M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Prēmjiyudē Ōṛmakaḷ", *Pāṭabhēdam*, Nov. 1992. But V.T. writes that M.P. was a strong companion to him at *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*. See *V.T-yudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.423.

touching story of the pitiful life of Nhālūr Śrīdēvi Antarjanam, P.M. Nārāyaṇan quotes some of her life experiences at Kodumunda and attests to V.T's attitude on the commune.[374] The silence of others like I.C.P. Nambūtiri and M.R.B. are truly striking.[375] What is more important is the silence of M.R.B. over the issue, as the commune was started mainly for resettling outcast Nambūtiris like him.[376]

One of the very important pieces of information about *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* comes from the writings of E.M.S. Nambūtiripād. He links the founding of the commune with the internal dynamics of the Nambūtiri movement. He writes that as the major objectives of the movement were already achieved, some of the radicals began to demand the dissolution of the *Sabha* so as to enable the movement to get merged with nationalism: "...Social and cultural disparities have existed for centuries between Nambūtiris and the other castes. Haven't these disparities been vanishing very fast? What about future social and cultural reforms? Won't they be applicable to society as a whole irrespective of castes? Is it not time for us to discard our old and narrow aim of working for the social and cultural upliftment of the Nambūtiri caste alone? Shouldn't we adopt the broader view of aiming at the creation of a casteless society? Shouldn't we organize a new movement comprising of all social revolutionaries of all castes who are prepared to wage an uncompromising war against all superstitions and evil customs prevailing in the society? These were the questions raised by the younger generation of Nambūtiris. It was V.T. who gave a concrete form to their dreams and aspirations. He waged war against caste system by organizing

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[374] P.M. Nārāyaṇan, "Oru Antarjanathinte Katha", *Kalāvīkṣaṇam*, Nov. 1997, p.11. V.T. is also reported to have told her that *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* was founded for victims like her.

[375] I.C.P. Nambūtiri, *Vipḷavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*. I.C.P. was the brother-in-law of both V.T. and M.R.B. and was also the brother of the widow who first remarried among the Nambūtiris, but he does not make any references to the episode at all.

[376] In his evaluation of the Nambūtiri movement, M.R.B. made his only reference to the commune. He contextualized the starting of the commune with the completion of the community reform programme and with VT's ambition to found a modern and independent human society by eliminating caste and rules of pollution. See M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttandinuḷḷil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangaḷ", *Māṭṛubhūmi Special*, 1936.

various activities such as promoting inter-caste marriages. He encouraged people belonging to different castes and religions to live together and to interact with each other. They led simple lives in cottages resembling hermitages".[377] E.M.S. proceeds to account that despite the progressive elements involved in the commune experiment and the causative role it played in arousing new political forces, he kept away from associating with it since his field and method of action was different from that of V.T.[378]

Apart from these primary data we have evidences on the commune from the biographies of VT. They describe it as an essentially Gandhian programme designed to develop an ideal society: a casteless, classless, self-sufficient, cooperative, social system with particular emphasis given to simple life, dignity of labour, moral, ethical and humanitarian values and spiritual progress. It also is conceived as a source of human values indispensable for social life: love and compassion, harmony and equality.[379] Panegyric works apart, some more serious studies put the commune in terms of attempts towards the establishment of an *Aikya- Kēraḷam,* comprising of all castes and communities, and an egalitarian social order.[380]

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[377] E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha,* pp. 177-8.

[378] He however refuses to explain the areas of disagreement. The fact that E.M.S. does not highlight this aspect should be understood in the context of his strong sympathies towards his former Nambūtiri colleagues. Neither does E.M.S. criticize V.T. for any of his ventures or for his basic ideals. The reason for this strategic silence should also be sought in the kind of preceptor-pupil relationship that had prevailed between the two. (Akkitham points out that V.T. had the role of an elder brother in his relationship with E.M.S. See interview with Akkitham in M.R. Manmathan, *op. cit.,* p. 38.) The refusal of EMS to denounce VT may also be understood in the context of the argument that his attempts at the reinterpretation of the history of Kerala in the 1940s and '50s should be taken as a negotiation of Nambūtiri identity at a time when Brahmins were under siege in South India and, before his encounter with Marxism, he had come out of an involvement with the reform movement within the Nambūtiri community. Dilip Menon, "Being a Brahmin the Marxist Way: E.M.S. Nambūtiripād and the Pasts of Kerala", in Daud Ali ed., *Invoking the Past: the Uses of History in South Asia,* New Delhi, 1999, p. 61.

[379] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.,* pp. 148-151; Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op. cit.,*pp. 55-56; Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op. cit.,*pp. 224-227.

[380] I.V. Babu, "M.R.B-yude Pṛavaṛthanam Oru Vilayiruthal" in M.N. Vijayan ed., *M.R.B: Jīvitam, Kritikal, Darsanam,* Tṛiśśūṛ, 2004, pp. 89-90.

Disagreement prevails over the immediate circumstances leading to the founding of the commune. It is argued that as the Nambūtiri reform movement was in its final stage of completion, V.T wanted to secularize the Nambūtiris.[381] He also wanted to uplift the downtrodden. After every success, he was widening his vanguard position for the benefit of the society as a whole. VT was very active in the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha and continued to associate with temple-entry and anti-pollution measures. The founding of the commune is thus supposed to represent the culmination of his growing secular and democratic viewpoints which in other words was a natural and logical growth of the reform movement beyond its narrow sectarian boundaries so as to encompass the interests of the society at large.

A causal link between the widow marriage of 1935 and the starting of the commune has been generally noticed—but it is seen only as a spark that ignited the larger cause. So great was the repercussion of the event that even the radicals of the community and several comrades of V.T. dreaded to cooperate with the men who were associated with the marriage and who had been declared outcast. This was the critical situation which warranted an alternate home for all the outcasts to stay over and stay together. Now though excommunication was no longer a matter of 'social death'[382] as has so often happened earlier, it was still a powerful weapon at the hands of the ecclesiasts to deal with acts of heresy.[383] The fact that the first five settlers were well-known outcasts proves to show that the commune was envisaged as a haven for the banished and the radicals - that is, to protect the victims of ostracism. The Nambūtiris who were thrown out of their households for their involvement in community reforms were not even able to earn their livelihoods; they were in great distress and needed

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[381] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, pp.136-42.

[382] Robert. M. Hayden, "Excommunication as Everyday Event and Ultimate Sanction: the Nature of Suspension from an Indian Caste" *Journal of Asian Studies*, XLII: 3, 1983, p. 292.

[383] But it is important to note that I.C.P. takes the issue of *bhraṣṭ* rather casually. He and his family, as also E.M.S, were ostracized for their association with the event but he writes that they ignored it. See, I.C.P Nambūtiri, *Vipḷavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*, p. 49.

protection.[384] V.T's speech at Ālathiyūr makes it clear that he had anticipated a crisis-like situation within the Nambūtiri reform movement fairly in advance.

It is not much clear as to what kind of impact the commune had created upon the contemporary society. VT's biographers present it as a great event that had produced considerable enthusiasm among the enlightened sections attracting many notable figures of the period like Vaḷḷathōḷ, Nālappādan, Kuṭṭikṛiṣṇa Mārāṛ, K. Dāmōdaran, etc and inspiring them to maintain close and continuous contacts with the commune. Not only did they frequently visit the commune but they also blessed the pages of the weekly with their remarkable articles.[385] V.T also recollects that prominent figures of the time had assisted him in the publication of the weekly.[386] These scant evidences are extremely insufficient to prove the hypothesis of a heavy traffic to the commune nor to the impact it had produced on the contemporary society. Apart from having made an impact on just a fraction of the intelligentsia, it appears not to have attracted many of them; and the common people, by and large, seem not to have shown any interest in it or were not able to find a space in it at all.[387]

The Failure of the Commune

V.T's commune lasted for less than three years. Its continued existence was interrupted by a series of internal and external pressures. Of these the most important riddle was the mounting financial crisis. It is reported that lack of resources soon dilapidated its very existence making both the payment of the

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[384] Puthupally Raghavan, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-17; Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

[385] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, p. 151; Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[386] *V.T-yudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 307,407.

[387] A contemporary report reads that a meeting of about 100 people was convened in an open ground at "Ulbuddhakēraḷam" in order to protest against the Zamorin's decision to deny the right of worship to 42 people, including Nilambūr Rāja, at Guruvāyūr temple for their association with the widow marriage. The prominent men participated are VT, Kānjūṛ Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, Thadam Paramēśwaran Bhaṭṭathiripād, Kummiṇi Paramēśwaran Nambūtiri, Naripptta Kesavan Bhaṭṭathiripād, Mullappaḷḷi Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, MRB, Mrs. Chōlayil Umāben, Mrs.VT, Mrs. MRB, and Śṛidēvi Narippatta. *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 13:45, Jan.20, 1935.

rent, which had started falling into arrears, and the subsistence activities, almost impossible. V.T. was in sheer despair. He had to spend a major share of the income that he had received in the meantime from the partition of his family property towards the expenses of the commune.[388] Internal strife also began to surface in the meantime. Some of the inmates of the commune were slowly being attracted towards left wing politics. They had lost faith in Gandhian ideals and hence, in its perpetuation; the commune is said to have taken the shape of a communist camp and the weekly had become a medium of leftist propaganda.[389] Disputes also began to arise over the ownership rights of the property.[390] V.T explains the situation thus: "Meanwhile the atmosphere was vitiated by internal strife. All the assets were in my name. It was argued that these ought to be transferred to a committee. I could not agree to this suggestion because during this period we had witnessed the downfall of a large number of co-operative societies. I firmly believed that only a man of strong character would be able to take up a noble endeavour. I was adamant on this point, but I had to concede defeat".[391] The crisis took a new turn with the partition of the Kāñjūr *Illam*. The land on which the commune was situated was transferred to Kāñjūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri who was a radical among the Nambūtiris and later became a well-known Communist. He demanded the full clearance of the rent arrears overdue

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[388] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, p. 150; Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

[389] V.T. Vāsudēvan, Interview, 25th April, 2006. Vāsudēvan has written oft a conversation between VT and ICP in which VT told ICP that if he was able to meet P. Krishnapilla, he would ask him of what provoked them to destroy institutions like *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*. VT Vāsudēvan, "VTyudē Ulbuddhakēraḷam: Oru Swapnam Pole", *Samakālīna Malayāḷam Varika*, Nov.1, 2006, p.119.

[390] A contemporary report gives evidence of litigation among the inmates over the question of the proprietorship rights. It reads: "In response to the petition filed by some of the activists of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* at Kodumuṇda, requesting to forbid the destruction, sale or transfer of the properties of the institution, the Ottappalam Munsiff court has recently issued an injunction to this effect to VT Raman Bhaṭṭathiripād. The institution was established about three years ago. It came into being as the result of the hardwork and the generous contribution of the activists of the institution and the major properties held by the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* at present consist of two more or less big buildings, a compound of about welve acres and a big plantation." *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 15:6, April 26, 1937, p.17.

[391] K. Gopalankutty, et. al, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

or the termination of the existing contract. He also filed a legal suit against the commune.[392] V.T, finding that his endeavour had come to a dead end, finally decided to dissolve the commune.

Although there is some unanimity among the biographers of V.T. over the circumstances leading to the fall of the commune, there is an apparent disagreement over the prime factor. While some refuse to emphasize on a single factor,[393] some others are inclined to ascribe the responsibility solely upon the handiwork of the 'common enemies' but refuse to point out who they were.[394] It has also been observed that as every ideal is utopian and hence is destined to fail, there was nothing surprising if V.T's revolutionary utopia too met with the same fate.[395] But it is very interesting to note that V.T. explains it as due to a controversy over the property rights – his refusal to convert it into a common property and his insistence on the trusteeship doctrine that brought about the collapse of the commune.[396]

The collapse of V.T's experiment is observed to have brought inestimable damage to the society and politics of future Kerala. First of all, it led to the exit of an active and uncompromising social worker from the public sphere. The failure of the project and the overall hostile attitude, of not just the community but even of the larger society, towards his radical ideas caused a sense of frustration in him. It had shattered his mental and moral faculties, destroyed his faith in human virtues, ruined his economic potentials and forced him to lead a secluded life. He appeared on the public scene only on rare occasions.[397] Secondly, the failure of V.T's experiment adversely affected the development of social reforms along Gandhian lines in Kerala because with it perished the first

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[392] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
[393] *Ibid.*
[394] Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.
[395] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op. cit.*, pp. 226-227.
[396] K. Gopalankutty, et. al, *op. cit.*, p. 244.
[397] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

attempt to accomplish a socialist commune village.[398] Though it was the model most suited for the socio-economic structure of Kerala, social workers were deterred from carrying on experiments on those lines because they feared that like V.T, they too would end up in disaster.[399] It has also been argued that the communists played a decisive role in eliminating the Gandhian tradition in Kerala in general and the socio-political agenda of V.T. in particular.[400]

Commune as a Communitarian Project

Despite its lofty ideals, V.T's commune experiment revealed some of his basic ideological predicaments which in turn heavily contributed to its final breakdown. V.T's primary concern was the rehabilitation of Nambūtiri outcasts and radicals and to set up a community where the writ of the clergy would not run. His lofty dreams such as the creation of righteous men etc. through commune life were bound to fail because in the meantime social changes in Kerala were gaining in momentum making Gandhian concepts of social life obsolete and unacceptable to people at large. The 1930's were decisive in Kerala as the period of transition towards left-wing politics. Not only the economically depressed and socially discriminated sections of society but even a considerable section of the Nambūtiris was being attracted to it. All the erstwhile outcast Nambūtiris were traversing to left-wing politics, since it was seen as a new space for activism and power, and hence they lost interest in or found no need of being protected in a commune-type Gandhian shelter. The waning strength of the basic purpose combined with a steady erosion of support from within made the continuance of the project almost impossible. As it was

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[398] Mādamb Kunjukuṭṭan, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

[399] Civic Chandran, *op. cit.* Civic explains the failure of the project as a great tragedy causing incalculable damage to the prospects and progress of Kerala society and politics since this unfortunate collapse terminated the possibilities of a healthy dialogue between the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, which represented the cultural aspect of Kerala, and *Leftist Keralam* (under the leadership of E.M.S), which signified the political side. He also observes that although *Leftist Keralam* thrived at the cost of *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, what the Leftist legacy left behind was just empty claims and a fragmented soul.

[400] Civic Chandran, Interview, 5th March 2003.

envisaged as an exclusive group of the enlightened strata, and as the laity were by and large kept away from or were not been fascinated by it, it had failed to gain any popular appeal that would counterpoise the left-wing threat. Nor could V.T. link the commune with a larger social or political cause - except in relation to his constructive programme. Notwithstanding the fact of being an *Apphan* Nambūtiri, V.T nevertheless remained a Gandhian and a namesake Congressman.[401] In the land question too V.T. held fast to the Gandhian trusteeship doctrine.[402] In this new situation V.T. looked like moving towards orthodoxy. The position of V.T. was not appreciable to his fellowmen for, he who had fought valiantly for their material prosperity had now taken an altogether different position of renouncing possessiveness in life and rearing righteous men. This change of attitude only served to sideline him. That the collapse of the commune coincided with the upsurge of the left wing politics cannot be explained away as an accident, for both are interconnected.

It is also important to note that the launching of the commune coincided with VT's repeated call for the disbanding of the *Sabha*. He was trying to create a social disposition against the Nambūtiri organization as well as all other caste associations of the time. The outcry against caste associations has so often been linked with the disdain of caste politics because it played an extremely reactionary role in social matters. In the grossly unjust contemporary social situation it was natural that all caste associations sought upward mobility at the cost of the privileges of the dominant social groups. But for the Nambūtiris, association on caste lines was not a beneficial affair except in that it helped to bring about democracy within the community; in the emerging new era of mass politics where numerical strength counted more than anything else, they were unable to make headway. Moreover, the expansion of democratic principles

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[401] For him the attraction of the *Apphan* Nambūtiri to the left-wing was a natural reaction to his lack of claim on ancestral property in the traditional family structure. K. Gopalankutty, et. al, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

[402] *Ibid.*

beyond the limits of the community meant renunciation or erosion of traditional rights and privileges. This was the context in which V.T. found communal organizations as representing narrow partisan interests and hence harmful to the progress of the society at large.[403] Commenting on the same situation E.M.S. remarked that though rapid changes were taking place in social as well as cultural realms, he could not agree with the idea that the social relevance of caste associations were over; instead, it should continue to work among the Nambūtiris in order to coordinate these changes.[404] Nor was V.T's attitude towards caste associations accurate, in the pragmatic sense, because its "role has been seriously misunderstood and its positive contribution neglected".[405]

4:12. Later VT

By the beginning of the 1930s, and with the radical changes that had taken place in the community, a crisis began to develop within the *Sabha.* VT wanted to expand the movement to incorporate the whole people of Kerala, to work for the formation of a united Kerala by purging untouchability and by working for temple entry. He got himself actively associated with the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha.

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[403] See *V.T-yudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp. 251, 309. He made this statement forcefully in the meeting held to congratulate the Nambūtiri couples of the first widow marriage.

[404] E.M.S, *Ātmakatha,* p. 178. Nor does the denunciation of caste movements correspond with V.T's later personal association with the Nambūtiri revitalization movements, from 1944 onwards. He even collaborated with the Communists, despite all his ideological disagreements with them, in 1944 when the Sabha was revived under E.M.S. Some of the articles he wrote at the close of his life reflect his serious concern about the well-being of the Nambūtiris. See *V.T-yudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp. 625, 629, 633. He is also reported to have taken an initiative role, around 1980, in bringing the Nambūtiris together to discuss on the 'plight' of the community and to chalk out plans for its future progress. C.K. Nambūtiri, *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ.* C.K. Nambūtiri recollects that V.T. had suggested him to meet together to discuss on strengthening the *Sabha.* But in the meantime he fell ill and so the meeting could not be conducted.

[405] L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, "The Political Role of India's Caste Associations" in Immanuel Wallerstein ed., *Social Change: The Colonial Situation,* New York, 1966, p. 452. Although they press home the interests of their followers and they pursue a form of group selfishness which is deplored in the name of social duty and discipline, and caste patriotism above the public interest runs counter to both liberal and democratic values, caste associations "organize the politically illiterate mass electorate, thus making possible in some measure the realization of its aspirations and educating large sections of it in the methods and values of political democracy". *Ibid,* p. 449.

In the meanwhile, by entering Congress politics and because of participating in the civil disobedience movement, EMS was arrested and was imprisoned.

The 25th annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Kāṛalmaṇṇa became the venue for many uneven developments. Since by the time the Malabar Nambūtiri Bill was passed; more than 50 Antaṛjanams openly participated in the *Sabha*; and the *Sabha* had completed 25 years of its activity. In this context VT declared that the Nambūtiri movement was complete and the community should search for new areas of activity and new agendas. He urged the Nambūtiris to come down to the grass-roots level in order to uplift the downtrodden by creating an all-encompassing *Kēraḷa Sabha*, after eliminating all the existing sectarian *Sabhas*. He called upon the *Sabha* to work for an *Aikya-Kēraḷa* without clinging to caste issues which would only help circumscribe the Nambūtiris like the Paṭṭars.[406] While a resolution was introduced to express the resentment of the *Sabha* over the Cochin government's decision to stop free food facility at the *Bṛahmaswam Maṭam* for the students of the Nambūtiri School, VT argued that it was shameful to fight for cheap concessions.[407] The same session was noted for the failure for the first time to convene the annual meeting of the *Saṅgham*. It was decided by the executive of the *Saṅgham* to convene its annual meetings separate from the *Sabha* in future and on this technical ground some people argued the iniquity of the meeting; at last the *Sabha* ended without an annual meeting of the *Saṅgham*.[408]

VT's association with the *Sabha* was heading towards a crisis for another reason too. With his controversial speech to 'burn down temples' and the consequent warrant against him in the Cochin state, he was not able to attend its deliberations since all the later annual meetings were held in Cochin or in areas

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[406] VT's speech at Kāṛalmaṇṇa, *UN*, Dec.30, 1932 cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.138.

[407] *Ibid.* This is striking because VT had led the historic *Yāchana Yāṭṛa* in the previous year. The message is clear: VT wanted to eliminate the bad image created over the Nambūtiris as the privileged, state-sponsored community.

[408] *Ibid*, p.139.

south of it. The mounting infighting between the *Sabha* and the *Sańgham* also had created a situation of crisis which forced many radicals to retreat from the movement. Just before the Pērāmańgalam Sabha in 1933, in a speech at the Harikanyapuram *upasabha*, VT damned it as the foul play of Āddhyan Nambūtiris.[409] He repeatedly stressed the urgency of the Nambūtiris start working for the elimination of pollution and temple entry. The president of the *Sańgham* at Pērāmańgalam, Tēnezhi Paramēśwaran Nambūtiripād, banished VT from the *Sańgham* with a retort "out goes the smoking firewood" with which his association with the reform activities came to an end. Strongly condemning this statement, the Antaŗjanams who were present at the *Sabha* rallied behind VT and boycotted the deliberations.[410] Thereafter no meeting of the *Sańgham* was convened.[411]

The 27th annual meting of the *Sabha* at Harippad, presided over by Chittūr Kuńjan Nambūtiripād, is noted for a remarkable decision: it resolved to retrieve those who were banished from the community for various reasons including the *smāŗtavichāram* of 1905 and the forced conversion during Tipu's invasion and the rebellion of 1921. In the next annual at Ṭriśśūṛ under Pāṛvathi Nenminimańgalam, V.K. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭathiri, who was excommunicated for his involvement in the Tātṛi case, was elected as a member of the executive.[412] The last meeting of the *Sabha* was in 1939 at Ṭriśśūṛ and for many years annual meetings were not convened at all.

The public intervention of VT from the widow marriage onwards was marked by intense individualist concerns. It was popularly held that his growing

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[409] *UN*, Dec.22, 1932, cited in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.612-615.

[410] Arya Paḷḷam is reported to have declared at the *Sabha* before the boycott: "...I hereby declare war on the detractors of VT. We, the Antaŗjanams won't brook any criticism of our VT for we have enshrined him in our hearts. He is the basic source of our strength, both internal and external. I too am boycotting and wind up all my community reform efforts here". *UN*, Dhanu 14, 1109 (Dec.1933) cited in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.617.

[411] C.K. Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, p.40.

[412] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitṛam*.

radicalism was turning against community interests and that had led to his marginalization within the movement and which in turn provoked him to take recourse to more radical measures.[413] A reactionary trend had started to develop within the *Sabha* by 1933;[414] many hardcore radicals disappeared from public sphere as such while a few others started to turn their attention to other spheres of activity, especially politics or Gandhian constructive programme.[415] By the enactment of the Nambūtiri Bills, the reform within the community was almost over, the male agenda was almost achieved and the Antaŗjanams were nominally liberated and could adjust themselves without much difficulty with the new public culture; the intense norms of seclusion that marred their progress were smashed down.[416]

There was considerable debate over the nature of the movement thereafter, whether the Nambūtiris should continue with their caste movement just like others by exerting pressure for gaining sectarian interests or whether they should start working for the whole society or whether they should dissolve the movement with a view to work in the nationalist movement.[417] The Kāŗalmaṇṇa

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[413] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.143; Mathramkōţ Aśōkan, *op.cit*, pp.57-58.

[414] An editorial of *UN* wrote that the orthodox has become victorious in 'capturing' the majority Nambūtiris, who were normally neutral and peaceful, once the liberals began to show weariness. Marriage issue had almost been solved and the majority were least interested in either *ghōşa* elimination or anti-pollution measures. See *UN* 15:8, Dec.1, 1933, p.4.

[415] E.M.S. wrote that after the Kāŗalmaṇṇa annual meeting of the *Sabha*, there began to spread passivity in the reform movement. See "Ottappālam Sammēļanam", *UN*, Feb.2, 1934 (*EMS-ntē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaļ*, Sanchika I, pp.164-167). Premji also wrote that revolutionary changes within the community had forced many leaders to move towards other areas or to remain idle. It was the reason for the later stalemate in the movement. See, Premji, "Pāŗvathi Nenminimaṅgalam", *UN*, 1:2, Edavam 1122, (May-June, 1947), pp.69-70. Exemplifying Alathur Anujan Nambūtiripād and Pātiriśśēri, VT pointed to this trend in his famous Harikanyakapuram speech in December 1933. See *VTyudē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaļ*, p.613.

[416] See A. Bhavadāsan Bhaţţathiripād's open letter to K.N. and V.T, *UN* 15:9, Dec.8, 1933, p.3; also see Kuŗumūŗ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "Sabhā-Sanghangaļudē Ēkīkaraṇam", *UN*, 15:8, Dec.1, 1933, p.3. While the former one reminded KN and VT about so many problems that were still there to be dealt with, the latter one cautioned the radicals in general to take immediate and necessary measures to rejuvenate the movement; unless it would soon die down for the responsibility for which would go to the young men alone.

[417] E.M.S. discussed this issue in detail in his presidential speech at the Ōngallūŗ Sabha in 1944. See his "Nambūtiri-ye Manuşyanakkan", *EMS-ntē Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaļ*, Sanchika I,

annual meeting of the *Sabha* became a venue of heated discussion over this issue and evident signs of discord developed.[418] By the Pērāmaṅgalam annual meeting, possibilities for a consensus faded, the *Sabha* failed to introduce a common programme on which all sections could cooperate. Consequently it fell into the hands of the reactionaries.[419] The last meeting of the *Saṅgham* was at Pērāmaṅgalam, though the *Sabha* continued to function nominally for some more years. Radicals withdrew from the *Sabha*; while some entered into the Congress party, the large majority retired to passivity and silence.[420] The movement was almost over, most Nambūtiris retired to personal and family life.[421] The politics of reform had started its course of dissolution in the 1930s in

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pp.268-275. He noted that the movement petered out at the point when large many issues affecting the community were still remaining unresolved.

[418] E.M.S. in a speech (*UN* 15:2, 20 October 1933, pp.2, 7) attested an evident collapse in the reform movement and found two reasons for it. First, the clash between individuals was dragged on to the realm of reform and second, the absence of a reform programme for the future (the old agenda stood finished). He pleaded for a three-point future programme such as 1) violation of custom (including widow marriage, inter-dining at home), 2) economic reconstruction and 3) educational progress.

[419] E.M.S. outlined three attitudes at Perāmangalam. D.H. Nambūtiripād, the president at the session, wanted to set aside reform of custom in order to give prominence to educational and economic development. VT insisted on reform of custom as more important; he also wanted measures to be taken to uplift the poor sections within the community. E.M.S. wanted to link the Nambūtiri movement with Indian nationalism which would include the two earlier programmes; but with a focus on elimination of caste. He writes that the possibility of a consensus failed because all these programmes were progressive (earlier, the fight was between radicalism and orthodoxy), and all the three stuck to their position steadfastly. It led to dissention and to inactivity. *Ibid*, pp.271-272.

[420] The typical case was that of K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, the firebrand radical and the editor of the *UN* whose retirement from all reform activities was really surprising and had manifested in manifold ways; first and foremost, the *UN* lost its radical vision that had marked its presence. An editorial of the *UN* lamented for the withdrawal of K.N. and V.T. and the void it had created upon its functioning especially in having wiped it of a vision and a programme. *UN*, 15:1, 29 September 1933, p.6. A. Bhavadāsan Bhaṭṭathiripād in an open letter to K.N. and V.T. described their withdrawal as extremely sorrowful and asked them to return to the sphere of community reform since many of the objectives of the movement were not achieved yet. *UN* 15:9, Dec.8, 1933, p.3.

[421] E.M.S. wrote that a lull in the movement had started to penetrate within the community due to the feeling that the movement had finished its agenda and due to the impact of the great wave of political and social struggles of the time. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Kēraḷam Malayāḷikaludē Mātṛubhūmi*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p.222.

manifold ways: through the way E.M.S. chose or through the way VT adopted (or else the way the conservative-turned radicals chose).[422]

An important factor that began to influence the course of the *Sabha* around this time was the rise of a new class of educated Nambūtiris whose class interests started outweighing the idealism of the old leadership.[423] They wanted to utilize the *Sabha* for furthering their class interests, to gain opportunities in the name of the community.[424] They did not want to take strong positions, to alienate anyone, especially those in power, and wanted to confine the focus always on the community.[425] Their moderate stand in relation to reform of

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[422] Manazhi explained the disappearance of the *Sabha* in the context of the fulfillment of its major goals; he also related it with the transformation that had been taking place in the political domain of Kerala – people were getting organized on a national basis. Most of the communitarian movements including the SNDP and the NSS also had become dormant during this time. P.M. Manazhi, "Nambūtirimārum Vargīya Sanghaṭanakaḷum", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 22:40, 17 Dec. 1944, p.8.

[423] *Ibid*, pp.270-271. E.M.S. pointed out that within a period of less than ten years, about 1000 Nambūtiri young men were able to get education from the Nambūtiri School. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Kēraḷam Malayāḷikaludē Mātṛubhūmi*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p.220. He also wrote: "Even higher castes like the Namboodiris who had a disproportionately greater share of landed and other properties and hence a greater pull on the bureaucracy, but were backward in the matter of modern education and hence in Government services, began to speak in terms of shares in Government services". E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *The National Question in Kerala*, Bombay, 1952, p.129. In an earlier article E.M.S. had pointed out how the interests of this new middle class would run counter to the interests of the whole community and the poor Nambūtiris in particular. He mentioned that, in the name of community interests, this section had started to take advantage in the new situation by demanding special reservation for the Nambūtiris in legislatures and government jobs. He cautioned the community that it would be suicidal to the general interests of the community. E.M.S, "Nambūtirimārum Prathyēka Prāthinidhyavum", *UN*, Feb.9, 1934, reproduced in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, pp.170-172.

[424] This is clear from a *UN* editorial published just before the Perāmangalam Annual Meeting. It stressed the point that in future foremost importance should be given to an economic programme with a focus on generating more employment opportunities for the educated. *UN* 15:4, November 3, 1933, p.4. A report about the Perāmangalam meeting in *Mātṛubhūmi* (republished in the *UN*) criticized the sectarian character of the proposed programmes such as special scheme for economic reconstruction, special school, separate library, separate agricultural farm, employment bureau, etc. See *UN*, 15:13, Jan.5, 1934, p.3.

[425] O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād in his article "Nāḷathē Nambūtiri", *YK* Silver Jubilee Special, 1944, pp. 26-27 supported this fact. He pointed out that the *Sabha* was going back to the revival of tradition in its new form: there developed a tendency to imitate other caste associations and to clamour for special rights for the Nambūtiris. It also brought about a situation in which they had to bow before the authorities and the rulers.

custom and entry into politics pacified the radicalism of the *Sabha* and greatly helped in its dissolution.

In fact the condition of the Nambūtiri community was unique and leaders like EMS and VT had clearly realized it. Since there was nothing for the Nambūtiris to gain from others, either by way of civic rights or economic interests, there was no need of continuing the movement as a mechanism of pressure, as in the case of other caste movements; rather it was better to talk of the progress of the society as a means for safeguarding community interests.[426] As the socially privileged group and the economically dominant class, they should rather champion the cause of the people as a whole and to work for eradicating social evils; meanwhile propping up their dominant position by strengthening themselves through education and by chalking out ways of protecting their landed estates.

After the failure of his *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, VT led an exclusively isolated life at Mēzhathūr retiring to subsistence farming. Intense economic deprivation had forced him to work even as a collection agent of a certain cooperative society.[427] From 1939 he worked in the Congress for some time, acting as the president of the Tritala Congress Committee. But he kept aloof from all political activities later and this has been attributed to intense factionalism that had started developing within the Congress with which he was never able to reconcile.[428]

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[426] Here the position taken by E.M.S. was certainly revolutionary. In one of his highly radical speeches, he urged for a total destruction of the community sentiments of the Nambūtiri as a prelude to the creation of a united Kerala. He ridiculed the unreal and unnatural community system that the Nambūtiris envisioned for the future disregarding alliance and cooperation with their Nāyar or Māppiḷa neighbours. But he supported caste organizations on the ground that people accept noble concepts only if they were presented in the guise of communitarian demands. See *UN* 15:2, Oct.1933, pp.2, 7.

[427] Having heard of the plight of VT, V.M. Nāyar used to send him fifteen rupees per month from Calcutta which he stopped only when VT persuaded him to do so. See Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, *op.cit*, p.57.

[428] See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.157. It is interesting to note that VT did not associate himself with party politics even when he started drifting away from the reform movement and his *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* coincided with the rise of left-right factionalism in the Congress.

The Inter-caste Marriage

A significant event that had taken place in VT's 'retired' life was the marriage of his sister with P.R. Rāghava Paṇikkeṛ, a person belonging to the Nāyaṛ caste. The idea of an inter-caste marriage within his family was first suggested by N.P. Dāmōdaran in the course of a casual talk and the project was postponed for being considered later because Pāṛvathi, his sister, was still studying and had not attained the age of marriage. The event, which took place in 1940, shook the community to its roots and highly exasperated the orthodox, both Nambūtiris and non-Nambūtiris. The concerted opposition hastened his isolation and for many years he followed a highly detached life.

Compared to his other radical measures we do not have many evidences about this incident. In an article VT described his venture as a preface for a future movement for inter-caste marriages and described the developments behind the event.[429] VT wrote that as on other occasions, the idea came from outside and when Dāmōdaran hinted him of it he was truly 'shocked'.[430] He tried to escape from getting involved in the matter by not only refusing to give any assurances but by telling him to consider it when 'age and circumstances ripen'. But he was highly motivated by Dāmōdaran's point that since no inter-caste *pratilōma* marriage had taken place in the Nambūtiri community yet, it should start from VT.[431] He consulted the issue with Nālappād and with his father and both consented to the idea.

As far as the suitor was concerned, he was the most suitable person since he belonged to a rich family of landlords, he was a degree holder, he had refused to

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He also kept away from the election campaigns of 1937. APP stated that VT was completely opposed to groupism and his resolute nature was unsuited for party politics. But A.P.P. did not consider the point that the reform movement was not free from factionalism; intense infighting had not forced him to keep aloof from it.

[429] VT, "Miśṛavivāha Pṛasthānathinu Oru Mukhavura", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.307-311.

[430] *Ibid*, p.307.

[431] *Ibid*, p.308. He repeats this point while narrating his consultation with his father, his father had cautioned him not to be allured by flattering. *Ibid*, p.310.

accept a government job due to his passion for the nationalist movement, he was a strict Gandhian and had the 'remarkable quality of refusing to comment on controversial issues'.[432] He used to come and stay with VT and was familiar with his attitudes and way of life. 'Hence' he was highly acceptable.

His sister Pārvathi was studying at the Nambūtiri School at Tṛiśśūṛ. She was his youngest sister, but the daughter of his father in his third wife. With partition and with the break-up of the family, she came under his guardianship. She was familiar with modern trends not just because she was educated but also because she had stayed at Calcutta for a year.[433]

VT placed the marriage in the context of both his characteristic radicalism and his destitute condition consequent to the collapse of the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* experiment. He said that he was gradually drifting away from 'Nambūtiri-ness' and he had publicly declared it at the function of the widow marriage. It had made him a rebel and a rogue; people had begun to upset him while he was active and to provoke his revisionist trends while he was quiet.[434] Thus he says that persuasion and pressure considerably enhanced his radicalism. He was leading an isolated life at Mēzhathūr and was almost deserted by his friends and colleagues. He says that it was in this period of intense deprivation and impoverishment that he took up the marriage issue seriously; but he refused to explain the factors behind it.

The marriage took place at his house on May 21, 1940[435] in the presence of many people including K. Kēḷappan and M.C. Joseph. VT's relatives did not attend the function as also the relatives of Paṇikkeṛ, including his parents and

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[432] *Ibid*, p.308.

[433] VT does not refer whether he had received the mandate of his sister for the marriage. At another occasion he makes a statement that the marriage did not have her consent. Panikkar's autobiography reveals that there was no affair between the two, he had not even seen her before, but he had received her prior consent for the marriage. P.R. Raghavapanikkar, *Ātmakatha*.

[434] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.309.

[435] Edavam 7, 1115.

members of his *taṛawād.* VT writes that this event had provoked the non-Nambūtiri people of the area as well; they tried to rebuke and harm him through various means.

VT seemed to have mixed motives behind conducting the marriage. The marriage relieved him of the burden of dowry and of giving his sister her share of property.[436] Since Paṇikkeṛ was immensely rich, and had fulfilled his ideal of a perfect gentleman, the alliance was not different from a *vēḷi.* The marriage was arranged hastily by discontinuing her studies.[437] But the marriage later turned out to be a great disappointment for VT. Since Paṇikkeṛ was neither accommodating nor practical, he could not adjust at home, and so he was forced to stay with VT. Later on Paṇikkeṛ lost almost all his landed property and had to lead a miserable life. VT's diary revealed his displeasure of Paṇikkeṛ's stay with him and the correspondence between the two disclosed the slow development of discord over the question of Paṇikkeṛ's neglect of domestic duties and his unconcern for his family.[438] In fact VT was opposed to the system of *marumakkathāyam* and this opposition he had expressed in his account of the marriage through the words of his father.[439] The failure of this marriage to rise to the level of an ideal union of

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[436] Panikkar writes that there was no question of dowry; he even contributed to the marriage expense. He also used to help him financially. See his *Ātmakatha.* His son, P.R. Aravindan told that even in destitution, VT did not help them. Personal conversation, Palakkad, 8-10-2005. T.K. Anandi places the marriage in the context of the enormous dowry demands of the Nambūtiri young men around 1940 when it had risen up to 10000 rupees. See T.K. Anandi, *The Impact of Changing Land Relations and Social and Political Movements of Nambūtiri Women*, p.193. VT himself has written of it though as a general statement: "... A sister, though she was scholarly and graceful, was not allowed to choose her husband. If any such inter-caste marriage took place it was just because of the economic interests or the radical political views of the bride's parents". *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.298. The fact that VT wrote his second drama *Karińchanta* at this time serves to prove his concern over the mounting dowry demands and the difficulties involved in *penkoda* during this time.

[437] Panikkar narrates an interesting anecdote. VT wrote a letter informing him that she had been menstruated; hence it was time to stop her studies and to think of her marriage. He also informed him that he discussed the marriage issue with her and had got her consent to consort with anyone from any caste he decided. See his *Ātmakatha.*

[438] VT's diary, courtesy: VT Vāsudēvan.

[439] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.310. It is surprising to note that VT could not acknowledge *marumakkathāyam* despite his ardent feminist position and the potential of the system as having "women's liberation with a vengeance" (Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the*

the husband and wife forced VT to add a word of caution to his narrative; he stated that inter-caste marriages may not succeed unless there is mutual respect between the couples and they possess conviction in social good.[440]

In an editorial, *Sahōdaran* wrote that inter-caste marriage was the correct step towards Hindu unity.[441] Since the *smṛitis* and the *śṛutis* had stood to divide the Hindus into watertight compartments, they were now seen as the greatest obstacles to social progress and Hindu unity. VT's bold attempt to conduct the marriage disregarding them was not only a correct understanding of the need of the times but a timely move towards Hindu unity. But this statement may be the point of view of *Sahōdaran*; how far VT had thought on those lines is not clear. Since VT had almost wound up his social activities and with the temple entry proclamation the issue had almost been settled, the question of social ideals had lost their relevance. Just as VT himself has revealed, he was highly motivated by the economic and political benefits of the measure.

The Ōngallūṛ Sabha

VT's re-association with the *Sabha* took place with the Ōngallūṛ meeting in 1944. The *Sabha* was revived in 1944 under the left leadership. The true forces and motivation behind the revival is not clear, however, as the programmes of the *Sabha* and as the main arguments of the opponents of the *Sabha* would reveal, it had two main objectives. One was to cleanse the community of the

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Maharaja, New Delhi, 1994, p.41). But his position perfectly conformed to the general attitude of the Nambūtiri reformers who held a low regard for *marumakkathāyam* for the alleged immorality and the space for female autonomy involved in it.

[440] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.311. More striking is the statement of Panikkar. He wrote that he was never an exponent of mixed marriages nor would he recommend it to others. He found it as an opportunity to unveil the myth of the Nambūtiris as the custodians of spiritual capital and to wreck vengeance on them for the wrongs they had done against their own women. See his *Ātmakatha*. Thus, for him the marriage was not an ideal, he did not want to popularize such marriages, nor was he an ideal husband and father. He was a renouncer; his ideal was mendicancy.

[441] *Sahōdaran*, May 18, 1940, cited in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.621-22. It reads: "Let those who clamour for nationalism and a Hindu organization learn from VT and others like him, as to the most appropriate path for the accomplishment of these aims. Men like VT are the real pioneers who are laying the foundation for Hindu unity and nationalism..."

vestiges of tradition that still marred the progress of the community and second, to get the community closer to the rising communist movement.[442] Two important issues still haunted the Nambūtiris. First, heavy dowry demands and the educational and cultural backwardness of the Antaṛjanams had been creating considerable impediments in the way of women's marriage.[443] Heavy dowry demands had revived the 'sale' of the Antaṛjanams. The educated and emancipated women, though only a few, were not ready to meekly succumb to this culture; the *Antaṛjanasamājam* strongly protested against it.[444] It was essential that their resentment could be given some kind of expression either by helping them to find some source of livelihood through self-employment or by assisting them to find ways of overcoming the marriage-centered life.

The second issue was more important. Most of the Nambūtiris continued to live their lethargic life with little interest in entering into agriculture, trade or industry. With the beginning of the partition of *illam* properties, fragmentation had set in; with the break-up of the joint families, nuclear families had become the recognized norm. Still, many Nambūtiris continued to live on feudal rent and the landless people tried to make an earning through dowry. The ardent spirit of

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[442] P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri observed that E.M.S. had clear political designs behind his measures to revive the *Sabha* since he had got out of community affairs ten years back. Though his ideas received wide recognition within the community and his call for the poor Nambūtiris to do wage labour and the rich ones to invest in trade and industry was generally applauded, the real intention was to intrude into the various institutions of the *Sabha* and to expand the hold of the party over the community. His strategy was to convert the Nambūtiris into communists. Through his slogan of 'making the Nambūtiri a human', E.M.S. designed to erase out all traces of 'Nambūtiri-ness' from them in order to get them raised to the level of 'human beings'. See his *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku,* pp.134-151. Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri identified the mission of E.M.S. on similar lines, but he situated it within the context of the Second World War. With the attack of Russia by Germany, the nature of the war drastically changed, the attitude of the communists towards the British also changed. They wanted to support the war efforts and to mobilize all available organizations under their fold. Nor was his call for 'making the Nambūtiri human' a timely slogan; it would have been appropriate if it was made two decades back. See his *Yōgakṣēmasabhā Chariṭṛam.*

[443] Census of India, 1931 Vol. XXI Cochin, Part I Report, pp.263-64 reported that only one among 1000 women were literate in English.

[444] By 1934, the number of *Antaṛjanasamājams* had risen to 100. See E.K. Swarnakumari, *Social Change in Malabar with Special Reference to Two Traditional Communities 1880-1933,* PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 2001, p.147.

the movement towards property and progeny was nowhere visible now. Communitarian interests thus necessitated a revitalization process.

The communist party had by now started expanding its roots among various caste organizations in Kerala. Since the social awakening in Kerala was marked by its caste-based grouping pattern and any growth of the party needed the mobilization of the exploited and materially backward sections of the population. Hence efforts were made either to capture these associations or to intrude into them. The *Sabha* was already dormant; its capture through revitalization was fairly easy. As most of the communist activists were freed from imprisonment due to the changed international situation, they could work openly and a focus on the social field would help to nullify the mistrust created about them in the official circles.

In his long article written before the Ōngallūṛ meeting, E.M.S. suggested a programme for the *Sabha* upon which the communist party would support the revitalization measures.[445] Brushing aside the demand that the Nambūtiris should claim representation both in the legislatures and in government jobs, he argued that they enjoyed larger than what they really deserved in terms of their population strength, and explained that the current political and social situation was not in any way harmful to their progress. He argued that an organization was necessary for the Nambūtiris both for the empowerment of the Antaṛjanams and for the economic revitalization of the community. Intervening in the current debate over whether the situation demanded the revival of the *Sabha* or the *Antaṛjanasamājam*, because the condition of the Antaṛjanams was extremely backward in relation to their men, he suggested that he would support the revival

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[445] "Nambūtirimāṛ Eṅgōṭṭu?" *YK, Silver Jubilee Special*, 1120 (1944), pp.20-24, reproduced in *EMS-nte Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, pp.256-266. Responding to the article of E.M.S. and to the factors that were stated to have necessitated the revival of a new *Sabha*, Manazhi observed that they were in fact trivial ones and did not need the revival of a communal organization to deal them with. In fact the only important matter of concern was the plight of the Antaṛjanams; what the time needed was an all-community forum and an all-Kerala women's meeting which would help resolve things. He condemned the new efforts at associating on communal lines. P.M. Manazhi, "Nambūtirimārum Vaṛgīya Saṅghaṭanakaḷum", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 22:40, 17 Dec. 1944, p.8.

of the *Sabha* since any progress of the Antaŗjanams needed the full support of the Nambūtiri men. He noted that efforts at women's emancipation produced only nominal progress. 95% families had not started sending girls to schools; though *adhivēdanam* had been stopped, *sambandham* and aged marriage still continued; dowry created great impediments to *peṇkoda*; in fact all these factors together put hurdles before the new marriage culture. The number of unmarried women equalled to that which had existed before the abolition of *adhivēdanam*. Boycott of *ghōṣa* also had not made any progress; its tempo had receded; instead of the *chēla-puthappu*, women covered themselves with sari. No more than two widow marriages had taken place yet. Thus the condition of the Antaŗjanams had not changed much. Education and employment were essential for their emancipation. In conclusion, E.M.S. justified the need of the *Sabha,* in relation to the *Samājam*, and urged for the cultivation of a new tradition of work and entrepreneurship, which alone would advance the community interests and promote the welfare of the Antaŗjanams.[446] He asked them to emulate the Christians of Travancore if they wanted to achieve progress.

In his long speech at Ōngallūŗ, E.M.S. justified the revival of the *Sabha* in the context of the setback in reform; the withdrawal of the radical sections from the reform arena had not only paralyzed the progress of the community but even strengthened the orthodox so as to unleash a reaction.[447] Now that all the customs and rituals were returning, even the fruits of reform were being threatened. There must be a common programme in order to unite all the liberals with a focus on removing the hurdles that stood against the marriage of the Antaŗjanams. The sale of the Antaŗjanams had been revived and there were reports of adultery. Dowry and lack of girls' education stood against *peṇkoda*,

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[446] He wrote: "Like the ill-fated Nair of Travancore, the Nambūtiri who decides to live exclusively on the rent received from his share of the property, is going to be pauperized. Depending entirely on the income from rent and without earning a living by the sweat of his brow, how can a Nambūtiri find a place for himself in the new social order? How can he face the problems of life?" "Nambūtirimāŗ Eṅgōṭṭu?" *YK, Silver Jubilee Special*, 1120 (1944), p.24, reproduced in *EMS-nte Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p.266.

[447] See, E.M.S, "Nambūtiri-ye Manuşyanakkan", in *EMS-nte Sampūŗṇa Kŗitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, pp.268-315.

men still preferred *sambandham* because they had no source of livelihood; all these were connected issues. The Nambūtiris were moving along the path of the Nāyaṛs: with his individual share the easy-giong Nāyaṛ continued to be lazy and in the long run became a destitute in relation to his Christian or Īzhava neighbour who prospered through dedicated work. The Nāyaṛs were now crying for government protection in their penury. The Nāyaṛ movement which started against the Brahmins at last ended in opposing all progressive tendencies in order to gain the support of the rulers. If the Nambūtiris wanted to escape the fate of the Nāyaṛs, they should start working, the rich should become industrialists or traders or farmers, the poor should work as agricultural labourers or other manual labourers. He reminded that landlordism was on the decline; hence Nambūtiris were about to collapse. The need of the hour was to show the courage to give up *Brāhmaṇyam* and to get ready to do any job at hand. The communist Nambūtiris were models to them for their pragmatism. Since the ideals of the *Sabha* and the communist party agreed with each other, there was no obstacle in cooperating over a common programme. In short, E.M.S. wanted the Nambūtiris to shun their lethargy and to develop entrepreneurship; to continue the reform of customs and rituals with the same force; to come forward in the social spectrum to greet the *Aikya-Kēraḷa* that was going to materialize in the immediate future; and to take up the leadership of future Kerala as they had done in the past. He did not urge them to become communists, but just to become human beings.

E.M.S. himself later wrote that the response to his programme was less than what was expected; many people mistook it as a movement for converting Nambūtiris into communists.[448] But it created a new spirit among many Nambūtiris; many people started cultivating their land by themselves and a few

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[448] E.M.S, "Ōngallūṛ Prasaṅgathinu Śēṣam", 1946, in *EMS-nte Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, pp.228-234. Also see P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku*, pp.138-141. He writes that the attitude of the new *Sabha* and its activists was brutal towards those who disassociated with it.

factories like the SIMCO at Shoṇūṟ were started.[449] The organs of the *Sabha* like the *UN* and *YK* were revived. The greatest impact was among the Antaṛjanams; they started a work centre at Lakkidi with the fund collected through a begging journey to the south.[450] Their efforts to mobilize fund for the centre also emboldened them to compose and stage a highly radical drama. But the starting of the work centre highly exasperated the orthodox and they unleashed a desperate fight against it at the behest of what they called the Nambūtiri Youth Congress.[451] It was condemned as a brothel and a recruitment centre of the communist party. What provoked the conservatives was the public entry of the Antaṛjanams at the center; they had participated in the Pāliyam

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[449] Though a few Nambūtiri families like the Deshamangalam had Entēred into the industrial field, it was with the Ōngallūṟ Sabha that it developed into a vision of the community. See Akkitham, "EMS-um Yōgakṣēmasabhayum", *Bhāṣāpōṣiṇi*, 21:12, May 1998, p.22. M.R.B. wrote that from the economic point of view, it shook the community; several Nambūtiris started companies, trade, agriculture, even rubber plantations. M.R.B, "Ennilēkkō Pinnilēkkō", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 15 Jan. 1989, p.20.

[450] Laḷitāmbika Antaṛjanam in her "Antaṛjanaṅgaludē Avaśatakaḷ", *YK Silver Jubilee Special*, 1944, pointed out the failure of the efforts of the *Sabha* in emancipating the Antaṛjanams and directly urged the Antaṛjanams to start a women's centre where they would be able to learn, work and find assylum. In fact the idea of a work centre originated with Laḷitāmbika. She asked them to raise fund for the centre by begging, by selling books or through the staging of a drama. She exposed the limits of the emancipation agenda of Nambūtiri men and observed that there was striking contrast between their public and private standpoints; at home, they lived as 18th century Nambūtiris. The idea of begging must have been from VT's *Yāchana Yātṛa*, and when it was made, it took its course to the south. This might be because people in the north were not sufficiently developed to acknowledge such an idea. In its editorial, the *UN* wrote that the activities in the proposed Work Centre included training in spinning and weaving, bee-keeping and first-aid apart from education up to the third form. It was just a beginning; the real explosive for ending the slavish life of the Antaṛjanams could be attained only by developing a more scientific curriculum. *UN*, 1:2, Edavam 1122, p.130.

[451] T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād was its leader and Kāṇippayūṟ Śaṅkaran nambutirpad, Palolli Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri and Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambutri were its active associates. They edited a weekly called *Pathaka* attacking the new *Sabha*. They also composed a drama *Sakhāavintē Parivaṛtanam*, which was staged at a few venues. See T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Samudāyadṛōhi", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, pp.47-48. *Pathaka* was published for a full year from January 1948. All the 51 issues are kept by T.S. Trinetran Bhaṭṭathiripād, the son of T.S, Erumappeṭṭi, Vadakkancheri. *Sakhāavintē Parivaṛtanam* was an anti-drama written against VT's *AA* in which Madhavan abandons Tēthi for her illicit relationships and winds up his association with the movement. See Nambūtiri Youth Congress, *Sakhāavintē Parivaṛtanam*, Panchangam Press, Kunnamkulam, 1123. T.S. wrote five short stories which were published into a collection with the title *Bleach*. All the stories except one (which is about Pazhassi Raja) ridiculed the communist Nambūtiris. T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Bleach*, Mangaḷōdayam, Tṛiśśūṟ, 1951.

Satyagraha,[452] they actively worked for the communist party. In the face of increasing criticism from the community and due to financial problems, the centre had to be shut down a year after it was started.

VT was very active in the Ōngallūṟ revitalization efforts. He was the editor of the *Uṇṇi Nambūtiri* and presided over the Pāzhūr annual meeting in 1946. He extended all his help for the Antaṟjanams to found the work centre.[453] He was elected as the secretary of the *Sabha* at Chēṟppu in the next annual meeting. By imbibing the Ōngallūṟ spirit, he wrote many short stories.[454] The initial enthusiasm that emanated from the Ōngallūṟ spirit was but short-lived; with the death of the *Sabha* VT again retired from community affairs.

In fact, VT's association with the Ōngallūṟ Sabha was surprising because in spite of his ideological stand against communism and the alleged role of the communists to convert the *Sabha* into a recruiting agency of the communist party, he wholeheartedly supported its programmes till its last annual meeting at Tṟiśśūṟ in 1948. Many of the associates of the *Sabha* like C.K. Nambūtiri and Chittūr Kunhan Nambūtiripād slowly withdrew their support to it and became its strong opponents.[455] VT's association with the *Sabha* could be justified only

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[452] P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku,* pp.142-143.

[453] Oḷappamaṇṇa presented a dramatic presentation of the deliberations of the Pazhur annual meeting of the *Sabha* in which VT presided. In his presidential address VT expressed his repentance for telling adieu to the *Sabha* and stressed on the immediate agenda of revamping the life of the Antaṟjanams for which nothing short of a work centre would suffice. He asked everyone to contribute towards it. In the meeting of the *Antaṟjana Samājam* he praised the venture of Kuṟiyēdath Tāṭṟi as a great revolt against male domination in the Nambūtiri community and called upon the Antaṟjanams to free themselves from the shackles of male domination if they wanted to be truly liberated. Oḷappamaṇṇa, "Pazhūril", *UN*, 1:2, Edavam 1122, pp.110-124.

[454] VT, "Utharam Kittātha Chōdyam", *UN*, 1:4, Karkidakam 1122, (June-July 1947); "Manakkalē Kāryasthan", *UN*, 1:6, Kanni 1122; "Chūṇḍippalaka", *Pōmvazhi,* Tṟiśśūṟ, 1948. All are reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.93-107.

[455] See E.M.S, "Paraśurāmantē Kēraḷathōdu Innathē Nambūtiri Nadathunna Dharmayuddham", *YK*, Dec.31, 1947, reproduced in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika II, p.78. C.K. Nambūtiri attributed his change of mind to the aggressive attitude of the new *Sabha* activists and to their attempts to capture the institutions of the old *Sabha* like the school, library, and their funds and to divert their assets for the work centre. See his *Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum,* pp.35-36, 40. Also see his *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ*. P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri gives details of the efforts of the new *Sabha* to capture the school fund in order to divert it for the expenses of the work centre of the Antaṟjanams which

with reference to a single factor: his commitment to the community outweighed all ideological differences.

The Moral Crusader

In the post-independence era we find VT to be almost passive except for giving vent to his emotions now and then through his speeches and writings. His strong condemnation of the developments in the present day politics including concentration of wealth and power in a few hands and the prevalence of corruption earned him the epithet of a 'moral soldier'.[456] He became the exponent of democracy and individual freedom and a strong proponent of the culture and tradition of the land.

In the 1950s VT was actively engaged in the activities of the Ponnāni Kēndṛa Kalāsamiti. Its prominent leaders were Idasseri, M. Govindan, Akkitham and N. Dāmōdaran. The movement highlighted radical humanism against communism and its literary variant known as 'Jīval Sāhityam'.

VT was also active in the rationalist movement led by M.C. Joseph, Kuttippuzha Kṛiṣṇapiḷḷa and others. In December 1968 he led a jātha organized by *Kēraḷa Yuktivādi Saṅgham* from Kānhaṅgād to Tiruvananthapuram for the propagation of mixed marriages. He solemnized many such marriages in the course of the jātha. He was reported to have made a call for utilizing the vast amount of resources accumulated in temples for the welfare of the people and asked people to accept humanism as the religion instead of the prevailing obnoxious feuds which are mistook as religion.[457]

In the last years of his life, VT participated and spoke in an RSS meeting at Pālakkād in 1972 and subsequently in many meetings of the *Tapasya*. Although his participation in them is explained in terms of his innocence and commitment

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Chittūr Kunhan Nambūtiripād vehemently and successfully resisted. See his *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkku,* pp.140-151.

[456] A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.160. Like Gandhi, VT too saw the political in terms of moral values. He spoke about duty, not of right. The society (i.e., community) would be ruled by custom and not by power. For details see Rajat Kanta Ray, *op.cit*, pp.10-11.

[457] *Ibid*, p.175.

to ideals, they unleashed much controversy. It has been argued that at Pālakkād he did not speak anything promoting communalism but just on the need of upholding the unique cultural identity of India and fearlessness in thought and action.[458] But the speech was not as innocent as we are urged to believe[459] and the immediate responses to the speech evidently revealed that the contemporaries of VT viewed it with great astonishment and fear.[460] In fact the speech was just a culmination of his gradually developing ideological stand, which in fact started from the early days of his public life; he has been an exponent of the interests of his community which he presented with a difference from many others.

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[458] *Ibid*, p.176. A.P.P. Nambūtiri also pointed out that VT was attracted to these organizations because they stood for individual liberty and freedom of expression during the highly crucial Emergency period (1975-77). VT's speech at the RSS meeting was not during the Emergency as shown by A.P.P. but it was in 1972.

[459] See how a study analyzed VT's speech: "The first doubt was whether it was said by VT himself because he gave leadership to the movement of humanizing the Nambūtiris years ago. The controversy arose out of the fact that, many of the critics could not grasp the meaning of what he had said. So they depicted it as a reactionary motto which requires the Nambūtiris to go back to their ancient customs and traditions. The fact that this assumption is a misconception is clear when we analyze the rest of his speech... Here, by the word Nambūtiri, VT meant 'Brahmin' not as a person born in a Brahmin family, but a person who becomes a Brahmin by his deeds. He may hail from any caste, not necessarily from the Nambūtiri caste. VTB gave importance to 'Karma' and the mental make-up. He never intended to preserve the age-old habits and observances. His aim was to change the Nambūtiris without losing the essence of Brāhmaṇyam". V. Asha, *Modernization among the Nambutiris in Kerala*, PhD Dissertation, University of Kerala, 1994, pp.261-262.

[460] A report in *Kēraḷa Kaumudi* dated 18th June 1972 had its caption "the new face of VT". A letter to VT from P. Vishnu Nambūtiri, Pārannāt, Sreekrishnapuram dated 15-06-1972 (which is copied by VT in his diary) also expressed great concern over his speech. Neither VT's speech nor the responses are included in his complete works. But a later letter (A.V. Jose, Tṛiśśūṛ, dated 11-04-1980) requesting VT to give a reply to two comments, one from Akkitham as to VT's present mission as being Nambūtiri-ising men and the other from P.A. Vāsudēvan regarding VT's recent increasing theistic stand, and VT's answer to it is included in the complete works. However, VT refused to give a clear reply, which may add substance to the criticism. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.631-32.

CHAPTER 5

FROM DISSENT TO CONSENT: THE IDEOLOGY OF VT

Any study of the ideology and career of VT would be incomplete unless it takes into account the major trends that marked the early decades of the 20th century. The period was noted for the fundamental changes brought about by the colonial system in the material conditions and the world outlook. The caste-cluster consciousness[1] developed during this period gave birth to community-building efforts and caste/community movements. Social movements had community interests as their focal point of mobilization and agitation; even the secular agenda of these movements were determined chiefly by sectarian considerations. While the lower castes tried to enhance their social status through caste mobility, for which sanskritization[2] along with modernization served as the medium, the upper castes were forced to relinquish several of their privileges and had to adapt themselves to the norms of the emerging civil society in order to retain their social prominence. Therefore, community-building measures were soon succeeded by political and religious measures; while an increased participation in the nationalist movement sought to forge a niche in the expanding political domain, a vigorous struggle for the construction of a new

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1 *Census of India, 1931*, Vol. XXI, Cochin, Part I, Report (by B.T. Śaṅkara Menon), Ernakulam, 1933, p.251 uses the term 'caste patriotism' for the growing sense of caste unity.

2 M.N. Srinivas, who developed the concept, explained it thus: "...A low caste was able in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and tea-totalism, and by Śānskṛitizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahmanic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden..." Śānskṛitization thus presupposes not only an assimilation of the practices of the dominant castes but also the acceptance of the Brahmanical view of society. M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, Calcutta, 1952, p.30. Aiyappan argues that the urge to move up culturally through imitation of the norms of the higher castes must have been present even before the political and economic base of the Kerala social system was disturbed by the British administration. A. Aiyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, Bombay, 1965, pp.125-25.

Hinduism by purging untouchability and universalizing temple entry provided the upper castes alternate means of religious domination.[3]

The Nambūtiri movement too was stimulated by similar trends. Starting from its extremely orthodox agenda, the movement expanded its programmes with the inclusion of fresh demands like English education, *swajātivivāham*, emancipation of women, elimination of sub-caste distinctions, accommodation of the banished, eradication of distance pollution and temple-entry to all. The attitudes and ideological position of the leaders also seem to have developed with the advancing agenda.

5:1. Reformism and Community-Building

For a generation of Nambūtiris including VT, reform was synonymous with survival. Society and economy were fast changing and to continue in the old order would mean increasing marginalization. Although the need for reform was felt equally by all Nambūtiris, its gravity was more intensely experienced by the less privileged and non-noble sections of the community.[4] In the emerging environment of social equality they (as *Apphans* and *Āsyans*) felt deprived of their right of equality of opportunity in the community and society. Their desire to find a space in the new society and in the collapsing joint family enforced a situation in which reform and revolt became inevitable.

VT justified the reform movement in his memoirs by referring to the long process of marginalization the Nambūtiris were subjected to in all spheres of life.[5] This marginalization was profoundly felt by Nambūtiris like him and this

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[3] By quoting Talcott Parsons that "Frustration, we must remember, is always relative to expectations. It is the circumstance which serves to explain why movements for radical change have so often centered in relatively privileged groups who, by commonsense standards, are well off", P.K. Gopalakrishnan observed that this had what strained the social system of the Nambūtiris and had impelled the younger generation to fight for changes. "Nambutiri Brahmins" in A. Aiyappan and L.K. Balaratnam ed., *Society in India,* Madras, 1956, p240.

[4] See the first chapter of his "*Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum*" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.131-134.

[5] VT introduces his memoirs *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum* against the growing marginalization and pauperization of the Nambūtiris. He writes that he grew up in such a situation when both

would explain the cause of their extreme radicalism. The dominant Nambūtiris could compensate their increasing social and political peripheralization through their control over vast landed estates; for others, deprivation was the naked truth of real life. VT has noted how the Nambūtiris, with their outmoded customs and their obstinate attachment to tradition, became objects of ridicule for others and how they stood in the way of the progress of their own community. In fact the obstinacy and indifference shown by the rich, conservative and noble Nambūtiris had not only affected them, but also had blocked the progress of the dispossessed and the needy. VT's speeches and articles indicate how he developed this anti-patriarchal position.

In so far as VT's involvement in the *Sabha* was concerned, he was not able to make headway into the leadership of the *Sabha*, till the close of the 1920s. This was mainly due to two reasons. First, the major issues of the '20s were marriage reform and enactment of the Regulation both of which had made considerable advance by the time he had entered into the reform arena. Second, he could not enroll into the group of the policy makers of the *Sabha* till the end of 1929 (when he was appointed as the organizing secretary of the *Saṅgham*) because of the strong opposition of the moderate sections due to his radical position.[6] In 1927 he had presented a resolution on the question of the increasing unemployment among the Nambūtiri young men and suggested solutions, including investments in agriculture and trade, but apart from the initial enthusiasm it created, it failed to make any lasting impact. Even in the women question, in which he was portrayed as the chief protagonist, his outlook and

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Brāhmaṇyam and *janmitham* had been dying out. For details see *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.127-130. He situated this phenomenon in the context of outmoded customs and the indifference shown by the Nambūtiris towards modern education and science. While the Nāyars and Tiyars rose up from their slumber and tenant and servile classes rallied behind the tri-colour flag, the Nambūtiri sat idle on the doorsteps chewing betel and no Nambūtiri was seen among them. *Ibid*, p.128.

6 P. Chitṛan Nambūtiripād, "VT- Kerala Charitrathile Oru Itihāsam", *Vivēkōdayam*, 14: 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.15. He had not been elected as the secretary of the *Sabha* before 1948 and of the *Saṅgham* never at all. In 1929 he was appointed as the Organizing Secretary of the *Saṅgham*.

vision did not traverse beyond the marriage agenda. Though he later emerged as an exponent of such ideals as equality within the sub-castes, accommodation of the banished into the community, subjugation of the *Vaidikar* and the elimination of distance pollution, none of them were his individual projects nor were they materialized under his leadership. In the 1930s he strongly pleaded for a *Kēraḷa Sabha* instead of the several caste associations and wanted to link it with the concept of *Aikya-Kēraḷa*.[7] This was a considerable advance in the policy of the *Sabha*, but VT was not able to convince the community of the viability of the measure and how it would benefit them. The majority of the Nambūtiris, who were moderates, began to treat VT's idealism harmful to the interests of the community. In this situation VT failed to alleviate the apprehensions of the community and could not lead the Nambūtiris towards the direction which he considered desirable for them.

In fact VT's success and fame as a reformer lies in his pragmatism. He knew how the movement could be radicalized, through unique methods, propagated through his vibrant speeches and clever interventions. His short stories were a brave engagement in the reform discourse and helped in highlighting the plight of the Antaṛjanams and in convincing them of the need of reform.[8] VT's was the brain behind the pamphlets which were circulated among the Antaṛjanams at the *Varikkāśśēri vāram*.[9] More productive was the drama which in fact radicalized

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[7] O.M.C. writes that VT, through the *Saṅgham*, tried to form a common platform by associating the *Sabha*, NSS and SNDP together. O.M.C. was the secretary of the *Sabha* then. O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "VT- Chila Smaraṇakaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam*, Vol. 14, No. 5-6, May-June 1982, p.32.

[8] There is disagreement over the real impact of the stories on the Antaṛjanams. In the prevailing environment of illiteracy and terrible system of seclusion, it would not have made tangible results. The observation of E.M.S. in 1944 that 95% of the Nambūtiri families had not started to send their daughters to schools ("Nambūtirimāṛ Eṅgōṭṭu?", *YK, Silver Jubilee Special*, 1120 (1944), p.24) and the fact that it was the inefficacy of the print media that had forced the reformers to switch over to the more effective means of the theatre support this presumption. But the recollection of Antaṛjanams like Uma M.R.B. reveals that it could arouse a few of them like her (in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.136).

[9] O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "VT-Chila Smaraṇakaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam*, Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.30.

the entire reform environment; VT was immediately appointed as the organizing secretary of the *Saṅgham* and in a very short time the whole marriage agenda was put into practice. The success of the drama and the subsequent enthusiasm it created in the reform process had led the *Sabha* to send a delegation to north Malabar under its five leaders viz., Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, Mūthiringōd, VT, Pāndam and Paḷḷam Krishnan Nambūtiri to spread the message of reform in those areas where an awakening was not so strongly felt.[10]

It is evident that in ideology and in practice, VT's position was much less radical compared to many others like Mūthiringōd, Pāndam or E.M.S. He always wanted the conservatives to be offered a chance for a change of mind (in the case of extreme conservatives the result was a foregone conclusion) by appealing to humanism and community interests; he had realized that the support of the majority community was necessary to perpetuate the results of the reform programme. He was also very particular in having a perfect coordination between the word and the deed. His wanted to become a leader like Kuṟūṟ, but he could neither emerge as the one and only leader of his community nor put his reform agenda into practice with its full support. In fact it was the death of V.S. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri,[11] who had emerged as the leader of the *Sabha* after Kuṟūṟ, that provided VT an opportunity to rise up in the community; however, the community refused to accept him as the undisputed leader as in the case of the former two.

One of VT's cherished ambitions was the linking of the Nambūtiri movement with the Nationalist and *Aikya Kēraḷa* movements. In the 1930s he made an ardent effort to achieve this end, but he had to face strong opposition

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[10] *UN*, 11:35 Feb.28, 1930.

[11] Vēndrakkātt Śaṅkara Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri was the editor of both the *YK* and the *UN* and was the power behind the Nambūtiri Regulation. He could lead the radicals and the moderates of the community together. His death in 1924 forced the community to search for a new leader; this was the context of the rise of VT into the leadership of the Sabha. See O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "Māṛiya Nambūtiri", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 34:1, 18 March 1956. Still, he could not become the single-most leader.

from the community which sidelined him on this issue. In fact, he could not convince the community of the benefits his proposals would bring to it nor was the community ready to accept his advice on this matter due to communitarian obstinacy and middle class pressures. The intentions were certainly implicit; the call was made in the name of Hindu unity and humanist ideals and by presenting things in the context of the Nationalist movement.[12] He wanted to expose the problems of the Nambūtiris before the general public, as is evident from the widow marriage incident, and to ally with members of other communities in dealing with the serious internal issues of the Nambūtiris. The *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* project too was an effort with a similar intention but with clear political designs. These were symbolic of putting an end to Nambūtiri exclusiveness and, in the latter case, there was an attempt to rally people under the Nambūtiri leadership.

VT's call for the winding up of community reform and to concentrate on Hindu social reform coincided with the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha and the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement; during this time EMS started associating with the National Movement. In fact VT's focus was on Hindu unity and it was not surprising in the context of the religious bent of the Nationalist movement. Since the movement collided with the Nambūtiri interests with its stress on the reform of customs and a pro-tenant disposition in Kēraḷa, VT's repeated call for harmonizing the two could not appeal to majority section of the community. The outcome was a complex of contrasts, the *Sabha* itself lost grounds and VT had to wind up his public activities soon.

It is extremely difficult to interpret VT's association with the *Sabha* after the Ōngallūṛ meeting; some ten years ago he had urged to conclude its activities.

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[12] The idea of an all-caste panel was first proposed by Kuṛumūṛ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād ("Aikyakēraḷam – Oru Samudāya Sabhayudē Āvaśyakatha", *UN*, 11:58 Aug 15, 1930). He made a strong plea for an all-community forum in the context of the developing caste tensions and of the future possibility of responsible governments. He pointed out that *Hindu Mahāsabha* would meet the requirements but since it is an association of individuals alone, another similar forum of communities was necessary. He suggested a model on the lines of the League of Nations representing 3 members each from different communities.

E.M.S. was really motivated by political designs to revive the *Sabha* though the focus was on communitarian issues; but VT was incited by community interests alone. The issues which the *Sabha* took up in the 1940s were not new; the matters were there but they were not addressed during the 1930s. In fact in the 30s VT might have been lured by the ambition to take up the leadership of the Hindu community and to reestablish the domination of the Nambūtiris. Community feeling was always strong in him; even in the 1970s he had blessed the *Sabha* in its revived form.[13]

This brings us to the question of ideology, the point of difference between VT's reform ideology and that of his contemporaries or of the earlier generation of reformers. Due to the influence of several factors, VT was forced to keep his communitarian interests hidden or to express them only in the general context of social interests.[14] His stay at Tṛiśśūṛ had brought him into contact with groups of diverse interests and the great influence of the freedom movement had created in him a fairly broad outlook. He had understood that the progress of the Nambūtiris was possible only in the context of general social welfare and that the retention of community interests needed the consent of other communities. So, he took special care in presenting a community interest as a social cause. It was justifiable in the context of the presumption that the reform of the Nambūtiri was a necessary prerequisite for the progress of the society. As the privileged,

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[13] See VT's message to the new Yōgakṣēmasabha, *YK Annual Number,* 2:1-2, Sep-Oct. 1980, p.1. VT expressed deep sorrow over the downfall of the Nambūtiris and urged them to take all possible measures to give birth to a new "Uṇṇi Nambūtiri" (Nambūtiri young man). He expressed great despair over the inability of the Nambūtiris to take up the murder case of Ammiṇi Antaṛjanam as a serious issue of communitarian interest for rallying the Nambūtiris together. (Ammiṇi Antaṛjanam was murdered at Mūvāttupuzha on 31st August 1979. It was alleged that there were conscious attempts at diverting the investigation. See P. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, "Ammiṇi Antaṛjana Case-um Yōgakṣēma Sabhayum", *YK* 1:1, Sep.1979, pp.9-15). His anxieties over the plight of the community is attested also by C.K. Nambūtiri in 1982 in his *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ* in which VT is said to have asked him to take measures to strengthen the *Sabha.*

[14] After his Ālathiyūr speech, the *UN* expressed a sigh of relief over VT's continued interest in community reform and consoled all the people who had come to believe that he had fallen from community reform to Harijan activities. *UN* 15:6, 17 Nov. 1933, p.6.

landowning segment of the society, community interests presented from a sectarian point of view would do more harm; alliance with the dispossessed on selected spheres would help retain some economic and social privileges.

Nor did modernity influence VT considerably. Even the dictum 'modern at work and pre-modern at home' could not be applied in the case of VT; he was a critical traditionalist from the very beginning. He had been an exponent of tradition and caste-based norms and practices which the radicals of the community had despised for their role in retarding the progress of the community.[15] The radical measures taken by the reformist Nambūtiris including VT to eliminate the external marks of caste identity like the thread and the *kuduma* were in fact symbolic acts of protest against the *vaidikar* as is evidenced by the fact that several of them soon reverted to accept what they had renounced.[16] Even otherwise, such acts were conformed to community interests because caste marks had impeded the free involvement of the Nambūtiris in the emerging civic culture. It is important to note that VT never compromised over the essentials of 'Nambūtiritham'. Never did he denounce either Śaṅkara or Paraśurāma nor did he try to subject the Nambūtiri tradition, which men like him wanted to reform, to a structural criticism. The community was never attacked and tradition was never repudiated; only the 'vices' and 'defects' were denounced for they had brought about the 'fall' of the community. The modernization of the community was envisaged not as the negation of tradition, but as the reorientation of tradition in accordance with the changing environment without sacrificing basic community interests.

VT's concept of a model society, or the means to achieve it, is nowhere specified explicitly, but an untheorized ideology of reform could be seen scattered throughout his speeches and writings. According to him, not all

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[15] See the Ālathiyūr speech of VT in UN 15:7 & 8, Nov.24 & Dec.1, 1933, reproduced in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.547.

[16] E.M.S, *Ātmakatha*, p.131.

traditional institutions and values should be replaced; some of them should be reformed and a few others should be retained. His ideal of a future society was based on nuclear family, equitable share in property, education to all and a rational religion. A cynic would find in his reform rhetoric mere verbalism since his later writings abruptly set aside his earlier radical views by making a strong appeal to an abstract ideal of *Brāhmaṇyam*, trusteeship in land ownership and a plea for a space for the Brahmins in social matters. The revivalist tendencies of radical thinkers of the reform movement like VT lent support to the presumption that radicalism was a means of community reform and was aimed at finishing the internal agenda within the shortest period possible so that they would be able to take up the leadership of the subsequent social movement.

5:2. Community and the Nation

VT's attitude towards the Congress and the nationalist movement perfectly conformed to the general attitude of the Nambūtiris and the *Sabha*. The *Sabha* had started showing considerable interest in the nationalist movement by the close of the second decade of the twentieth century but after the Malabar rebellion, and with the intensification of the tenancy movement, an abrupt passivity pervaded over its active association with nationalism.[17] In the 1920s it almost withdrew from its affiliation to the movement and even began to oppose it. By the close of the 1920s a revived interest started spreading but there was a considerable shift in focus: rather than involving in political issues, it concentrated on constructive programme, especially temple entry and eradication of distance pollution.[18] The *Sabha* supported the Guruvāyūṛ

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[17] Herring observes: "As importantly, the nationalist movement in Malabar necessarily included opposition to landlords and their agents who utilized the colonial state to enforce their power", Ronald. J. Herring, *Land to the Tiller: the Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia*, Delhi, 1983, p.159.

[18] See Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India,* New Delhi, 1994, pp.78-80. Jeffrey writes that for the Congressmen from Malabar district, the temple-entry campaign gave an opportunity to revive interest – at a safe distance – in a Congress that had suffered a severe setback with the Māppiḷa rebellion of 1921. For Travancore Nāyars, like

Satyagraha and many Nambūtiris actively took part in it. But only a few participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and most of them kept aloof from the later Congress-led political struggles. Meanwhile a section of the politically motivated Nambūtiris drifted to left-wing politics. While many were active in the communist party, the 1940s was marked by the absence of Nambūtiris as leaders of the Congress.

It is rightly observed that the role of the caste associations in the nationalist movement was rather meager and negligible; most of them took either a policy of indifference or an attitude in opposition.[19] This was because the nationalist movement was identified with upper caste interests; achievement of civic rights and upward social mobility depended on the support and patronage of the British. But a total detachment from the emerging nationalist culture was not altogether desirable. A considerable space helpful for harmonizing with the nationalistic ethic was availed by the various items of the constructive programme, especially the anti-untouchability measures, and in the context of Kēraḷa it expressed itself in the form of the temple-entry agitation. Other aspects of the programme like prohibition were not acceptable for many; such as the Īzhavas who had toddy-tapping as their traditional occupation. In fact the essential features of the Gandhian ideology like Ahimsa or cultural nationalism (which had its stress on upper caste values) had increasingly alienated the lower

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Mannam, *avarna* Hindus were potential junior allies in the competition with Christians for land, job, education and control of the legislature and government service. Disabilities enforced against *avarna* Hindus increased the possibility of their converting to Christianity. Only a consolidated Hindu community could stand against the growing Christian middle class. See Robin Jeffrey, "Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1869-1940 – The Temple Entry Movement" in Robin Jeffrey ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States,* Delhi, 1978, pp.153-54.

[19] Francois Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier, "Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 11, June 1978, p.7. The indifference of the caste movements towards nationalist politics has been explained with reference to their difficulty in taking class positions; associating with a particular organization meant acquiescing to its class position. The S.N.D.P. withdrew from political involvement for fear of internal split. See Georges Kristoffel Lieten, "Caste in Class Politics" in *Economic and Political Weekly,* Annual Number, 1979, p.323.

castes from the sway of nationalism.[20] The domination of the English-educated upper caste men in the Congress also gave the impression that it stood for elite class interests rather than for national considerations.[21] Moreover, mixing upper-caste interests with the nationalist cause made the situation all the more worse; the Nāyaṛs who had dominated the Congress had already converted it into a forum for the promotion of their caste interests, especially the tenants' cause, and this factor had been a matter of concern for both the upper and lower castes.[22] Since most of the caste associations had been based in Travancore, where anti-British politics had no scope at all; indifference to the nationalist movement was quite natural.

Against this background, the *Sabha* movement evinced considerable advance, not only did the *Sabha* incorporate the essentials of nationalism in its functioning right from its beginning but had responded to the ups and downs of the movement all through.[23] This can be explained with reference to two factors. Though the movement was based in Tṛiśśūṛ, a major share of the Nambūtiri population belonged to British Malabar where the nationalist movement had

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[20] C.V. Kunjurāman, "Swayambharaṇavum Īzhavarum" (Editorial) *Kēraḷakaumudi*, 3:19, 14 July 1921. Contextualizing the Vaikam Satyagraha, C. Kesavan wrote that for the Īzhavas the Congress was an organization affiliated to the interests of the Caste-Hindus and this factor had compelled them to align with the British against the Congress which represented nationalism. C. Kesavan, *Jīvitasamaram*, Kottayam, 1990, pp.255-56.

[21] "A broad group within the Īzhava movement stood for struggle against the savaṛṇa caste domination, but was willing to compromise with the imperialists whom they considered to be allies in their struggle. To a lesser extent, this was their attitude towards the monarchy also...the vacillations and compromises by the ssavaṛṇa national leadership had made Īzhavas suspicious of them. National freedom without the destruction of the caste system would be hollow". T.M. Thomas Isaac & P.K. Michael Tharakan, "Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore" in S.K. Sreevastava & L. Sreevastava eds., *Social Movements for Development*, Allahabad, 1988, p.169.

[22] Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ*, Kozhikkode, 1965, p.v. Similarly, Menon writes: "The leadership of the K.P.C.C. was largely Hindu and predominantly Nair". Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, New Delhi, 1994, p.104.

[23] Veluthat Kesavan, "Nambūtiriyum Manuṣyanum", *Sāhityalōkam*, March-April 2003, pp. 22-25. Veluthat also argued that right from the beginning the deliberations of the Sabha were strictly in tune with the Congress ideals of democracy and majority decision.

considerable roots by the second decade of the previous century.[24] Secondly, the ideals of the Congress perfectly harmonized with upper caste values; with the entry of Gandhi it had incorporated strong elements of cultural nationalism focusing heavily on brahmanical values like Ahimsa, vegetarianism, Ramrajya, Swadeshi and the trusteeship. The Gandhian ideals perfectly harmonized with the 'traditional' and exclusive but privileged life of the Nambūtiris.[25]

But in the political realm this harmony was greatly counterbalanced by the assault on the economic and social privileges of the Nambūtiris from the very nationalist movement. Since the Congress was by then captured by the English educated Nāyaṛ middle (tenant) class, which had the tenant issue as the major plank of its agitation, cooperation with the Congress created considerable difficulties.[26] The early interests of the Nambūtiris in associating with the Congress were evidently meant to counterbalance this agenda.[27] The conflict of interests came to a crisis during the first non-cooperation movement; it degenerated into the violent rebellion of 1921 during which the Māppiḷas took

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[24] One of the important developments that helped the growth of regionalism/nationalism beyond the narrow locality feeling was the play of several factors together such as the development of a print culture, growth of modern means of communication, access to common language and state intervention in cultural life. See K.N. Panikkar, "From Revolt to Agitation: Beginning of the National Movement", *Social Scientist,* Vol. 25, Nos. 9-10, Sep-Oct. 1997, pp.32-33. Locality consciousness was extremely powerful among the Nambūtiris till at the beginning of the twentieth century; it was with the community-building efforts and with the rise of the nationalist movement that they started coming out of this narrow outlook.

[25] An article by T.V. entitled "Nambūtirimārum Congressum", *YK,* 14:73; June 14, 1924; 14:74; June 18, 1924, while opposing the Congress, glorified Gandhi and opined that his ideals like truth, devotion, morality, courage, sincerity, light food habits, moderate speech, patriotism, compassion, etc are imitable for all. The *UN* in its Editorial glorified the *swadeshi* on the grounds of national interests and urged the Nambūtiris to follow the call of Gandhi on this point. *UN,* 2:6, Kumbham, 1096/1921, p.256.

[26] In an article, Kōdanāṭṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād questioned the Congressmen for misinterpreting the broad and noble objectives of the Congress for their selfish tenancy interests. See *YK,* 13:69, May 30, 1923. He also attacked the *Mātṛubhūmi* for supporting the Congress to strengthen the tenant cause.

[27] The first All Kerala Conference of the Congress was attended by Nambūtiri representatives including Paśchiman Rāman Nambūtiri, Kuṛūṛ Kunjuṇṇi Nambūtiri and Cheṛumukku Cheṛiya Vallabhan Nambūtiri. When a resolution seeking to solve the grievances of the tenants was placed for discussion, the Nambūtiri representatives wanted it to accommodate the grievances of the *janmis* too. See *YK,* 11:29 Apr. 29, 1921.

the opportunity to settle their class interests against the landed aristocracy, especially the Nambūtiris. The Nambūtiris had to face considerable hardships and material losses.[28] Though it was at the hands of the Māppiḷas, Congressmen were denounced for instigating them in the name of non-cooperation and thus victimizing them.[29] But the Nambūtiris in general held the view that the rebellion was not a tenant uprising but only a riot of plunder.[30] The rebellion brought about a very strong feeling of animosity towards the Congress[31] and created a setback in the tempo of the nationalist movement in Kēraḷa in general leading to the spread of political passivity and intellectual bewilderment.[32] Of course the alliance of the Congress with the Māppiḷas came to an end and it "aroused

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[28] K. Madhavan Nair, *Malabār Kalāpam,* Calicut, 2002, p.151; Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ,* Kozhikkode, 1965, pp.58-59.

[29] An editorial of *YK* wrote that the speeches of the non-cooperators incited the foolish Māppiḷas, drained them away the fear of the authority and emboldened them to rise in rebellion. "Māppiḷa Lahaḷa", *YK,* 11:47, Sep.9, 1921. Also see Kāṇippayūṟ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād, "Malabar Lahalayum Congressum Janmikaḷum", *YK,* 13:65, May 16, 1923; Karuvatt Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, "Malabar Lahaḷayum Congressum Janmikalum", *YK,* 13:68, May 26, 1923. (It is interesting to note that an earlier editorial of the *UN* had praised the Congress decision to take up the Khilāfat cause and had urged people all over Kerala to sympathize with the Muslim brethrens. *UN,* 2:2, Thulam 1096, p.56)

[30] The Congressmen were criticized for attributing the tenancy question as the root cause of the rebellion and to get support for their tenancy agitation. Intervening in the discussion over the Malabar tenancy bill, Mūthiringōd rejected this presumption on the ground that if tenancy issue had been the real cause, the rebellion would originate as a tenant uprising and would spread over the whole region of Malabar; it did not affect north Malabar at all. See his "Oru Vimarsanam", *YK,* 14:71; June 7, 1924. In fact, the general attitude taken by the Nambūtiris was closer to the theoretical position proposed by Stephen Dale. See his "Mappilla Outbreaks: Ideology and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Kerala", *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. XXXV, No. 1, Nov. 1975, pp.85-97.

[31] The article by one T.V. entitled "Nambūtirimārum Congressum", YK, 14:73; June 14, 1924; 14:74; June 18, 1924, cautioned the Nambūtiris in their association with the congress. Since the Nambūtiris were a minor community, backward in education, employment and politics, least influential and quite untrained in English language which had been empowering other communities, and since the Congress had been opposing the government, it was better for them not to cooperate with it. The Congress was also encouraging the tenants who were trying to seize the Nambūtiri property and was accusing them for the outbreak of the Māppiḷa revolt. The protection of the Nambūtiris lay only with the government. Though Gandhi was good, Congress was not truly Gandhian. Therefore the Congress was unfavourable for the interests of the Nambūtiris.

[32] This sense of bewilderment was evident during the Salt Satyagraha of 1930; the marchers were careful to avoid the Māppiḷa tracts. See Robin Jeffrey, "Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940, *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, November 1978, p.85.

hostile communal passions and disturbed the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims as no other previous incident".[33] Gradually, efforts were started to chalk out Hindu unity through various measures.[34] This was the context in which Gandhian constructive programme came to occupy a place of prominence with an emphasis on the eradication of distance pollution.[35] Still the *Sabha* and the Nambūtiris in general, opposed the Vaikam Satyagraha.[36] Though the point of

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[33] Roland E Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala,* Madras, 1992, p.142. Swai alerted that though the Moplah tenants' disturbances have been regarded as religious, since those who participated in them were predominantly Muslims who believed that they were involved in a jihad, it has to be noted that their jihad was not aimed at proselytization but was intended to abolish exploitation, notwithstanding the fact that the janmis were largely Hindus. Bonaventure Swai, "Notes on the Colonial State with reference to Malabar in the 18th and 19th Centuries", *Social Scientist,* Vol. 6, No. 12, July 1978, pp.60-61.

[34] K.P. Kesava Menon, *Kazhinja Kālam,* Calicut, 1986, p.128. It is also observed that the sullen Muslim community presented a fertile soil for seeds of future Muslim communalism. Only deep inter-caste tensions amongst the Hindus prevented a similar Hindu communal consolidation. T.M. Thomas Isaac, "The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala", *Social Scientist,* Vol. 14, No. 8-9, Aug-Sep. 1986, p.61.

[35] "The possibility of unifying the diverse caste movements under the umbrella of the Congress seemed possible only if Hinduism could be purified by the abolition of untouchability and everyone could Entēr it as equals... in the retreat from secular political activity after the Mappila Rebellion, the role of arbiter between castes presented the Malabar Congressmen with a programme". Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India,* New Delhi, 1994, p.80. An editorial of the *UN,* before the launching of the Satyagraha, praised the decision of the prominent individuals of Travancore to discuss the temple-entry issue but cautioned that its success lay in gaining the consent of the 'respectable' sections of the (Hindu) society. *UN,* 3:3, Vrichikam 1097, p.91.

[36] An editorial of the *UN* condemned the Satyagraha. While supporting the issue behind the agitation, it called upon the Satyagrahis to make use of other methods, especially a consensus of opinion, to solve the issue. It wrote: "We firmly believe that even today the best way to reform orthodox customs and obsolete practices is not to resort to Satyagraha or non-cooperation but to obtain the sanction of religious leaders to bring about salutary changes with the concurrence of the Maharaja. Forgetting this valuable path some overenthusiastic and intolerant people have imported men and money from British India into our country and have instilled animosity against our pure-hearted Maharaja by unjustifiably rebuking him and his government and by resorting to Satyagraha they have brought notoriety to Vaikam. We are greatly distressed at this event". (*UN,* 5:9, Edavam 1099, pp.398-99). In a few more editorials, the *UN* repeatedly scorned the Satyagraha. See *UN,* 6:3, Vrichikam 1100, pp.149-151; 6:5, Makaram 1100, pp.262-64; 6:6, Kumbham 1100, pp.317-20. It is really surprising to note that the *YK* wrote not less than 16 editorials against the Vaikam Satyagraha. See *YK,* 14:53, Apr.2, 1924 to 15:49, Mar 14, 1925. In an article, Paśchiman Rāman Nambūtiri praised the stand taken by the *YK* over the Vaikam issue and explained it as perfectly conforming to community interests. See his "Congressukārum Vaikam Satyāgrahavum", *YK,* 14: 68, May 28, 1924. After the withdrawal of the Satyagraha, the correspondent of *YK* reported that it was becoming difficult for the

opposition was the method adopted by the agitators, the realization that the national movement was antagonistic to Nambūtiri interests had persuaded them to take such a strong attitude.[37]

An important factor that forced the Nambūtiris to take a cautious attitude towards the nationalist movement was their commitment to the British rule due to their position as landlords. It was not possible for them to alienate the British since their landed rights depended on the consent of the British and it was all the more expedient in the context of the strong pressures from the tenants for legislation. Though the Congress position on landlordism was not an imminent menace, the peculiar situation in Malabar was a cause of concern. Tenancy legislations had already been passed and there were demands to effect necessary amendments. This was the reason why the Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar turned out to be strictly political and not economic.[38] Cooperation with the Congress was thus a difficult exercise; but to keep aloof from it involved the danger of being marginalized in the emerging public sphere.[39]

Nambūtiris to pass through the three roads of the temple, except the eastern one, for fear of defilement. *YK*, 15:78; June 27, 1925.

[37] From its third volume, which was in Sep-Oct, 1921, i.e., the next issue after the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion, the *UN* stopped its column named "Samrajya Sandarsanam" (which was a review of the political situation in India and an evaluation of the major developments of the nationalist movement) and started its editorial column. A statement declared that they were forced to stop the column due to the prevailing political situation; thereafter they would concentrate on issues of communitarian interest. *UN*, 3:1, Kanni 1097, pp.2-3. The editorial of the same issue called upon the Hindus to find a solution to the problem of pollution and stressed the need of reconverting the Hindus who were forcefully converted to Islam. *Ibid*, pp.3-4.

[38] In Malabar, the peasant proprietors or tenant cultivators did not pay land revenue to the government. The assessment was made with the janmis who paid the land revenue. In such a situation a no-tax campaign could be launched only by the landlords, but since most of the janmis were loyalists, a no-tax campaign was not possible. Strongly influenced by the Gandhian ideology, the Congress leaders in Malabar were not inclined to start a no-rent campaign. See K. Gopalankutty, "Mobilization Against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26:4, 1989, p.476.

[39] This dilemma came to the fore in the context of the visit of Simon commission. The *Sabha* submitted a memorandum to the Commission for specially considering the Nambūtiris in spheres like education, employment, representation etc. When some protested against this (for fear of the Nambūtiris being branded as anti-national), an editorial of the *YK* justified

The educated Nambūtiris had realized that keeping away from the nationalist movement would adversely affect the political prospects of the Nambūtiris. Their exclusiveness in the past had already sidelined them in the public sphere. Their privileged position in the political realm had been fading out with the development of the new political culture and civil society. All those communities which were already politicized had started to reap benefits by gaining representation in the legislatures and by furthering their community interests through political maneuvering at the cost of the privileges of the dominant castes. In the prevailing social situation in which the Nambūtiris constituted only a microscopic minority,[40] the defense of their rights needed concerted and wholehearted political intervention but through quite different measures taken by the lower castes. They should act as the representatives of the whole society and should capture the leadership of the entire population. Their late entry in community reform and in political affairs had made their task extremely difficult.[41] Owing to the peculiar character of their customs and

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the act on the ground that the Nambūtiris had always been the supporters of the monarchy. (*YK*, 19:47, Mar 6, 1929). Justifying the memorial, Pātiriśśēri wrote that all communities were trying to protect their interests and since the constitution of the *Sabha* was against the ideals of the Congress, any change in its policy needed an amendment in the bylaw. (*YK*, 19:64, May 15, 1929). He added that the kind of political freedom promoted by the Congress was unsuitable for the interests of weaker communities like the Nambūtiris because they have not been availed of a respectable space in the political world. The participation of the *Sabha* in politics was strictly for the sake of the *Sabha* alone. (*YK*, 19:70, June 5, 1929). Protesting against the memorial to Simon, OMC Nambūtiripād argued that in no distant past India would become independent. A change in the structure of the *Sabha* was hence necessary for associating it with the Congress. (*YK*, 19:69, June 1, 1929).

[40] This factor had been a serious cause of concern for the Nambūtiris and had expressed itself through various forms. One of them was the denunciation of democracy as majority opinion; the other was an indictment against parliamentary system, both of which meant the capture of the traditional and legitimate rights of the Nambūtiris. This theory was applied to the tenancy issue and the temple entry agitation. See Kunhimangalath Manayil Vāsudēvan Tirumumb, "Cōngressukārum Janmikaḷum", *YK*, 14:43, Feb.23, 1924; Editorials, *YK*, 14:93; Aug 27, 1924; 15:99, Sep 16, 1925; TV, "Nambūtirimārum Cōngressum", *op.cit.*

[41] In his article "Nāmiṭṭayum Adhappathikkān Kāraṇamenthu?' (*YK*, 15:27, Dec.20, 1924), Mūthiringōd observed that late entry into the field of reform had made the progress of the community very difficult; other communities had gone too far. In the preface of his "Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum" (*VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.128) VT too shared this fact. He wrote: "The cock had already crowed twice heralding the new era of transformation. The crimson tint of the emerging dawn had painted the Kerala hill-top with saffron. Everyone –

institutions, they were forced to work more ardently and for a longer period than the other communities the success of their reform. Prolonged preoccupation with community reform was also a major cause for their belated entry in the political field. However, the 1930s saw a marked progress in the reform measures and several Nambūtiris became active in politics and they took the initiative in fostering unity between the community and the nationalist movement.[42] The *Sabha* supported the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha and VT actively participated in it. Meanwhile E.M.S. moved on to the political sphere by entering into the Civil Disobedience Movement. However, may be because of the traditional lethargy to personal enterprise, or because of the difficulty in mingling with lower caste groups or due to the embarrassment in associating with the Congress as a second partner, many Nambūtiris were forced them to keep away from the national movement. The striking contrasts between the community movement and the nationalist movement also might have been a decisive factor; while the former was aimed at achieving formidable goals, like gaining family and property, the latter demanded the sacrifice of material pleasures for the sake of nation-building.

A new development that appeared in the political domain of Kēraḷa provided the Nambūtiris scope for a respectable space and an upper hand in politics. By the middle of the 1930s the left wing gained dominance within the Congress and the K.P.C.C. itself came under its control. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād emerged as the leader of this group and men like Pāndam, I.C.P, M.R.B, M.P, Arya Paḷḷam and many others began to associate with it actively. The factors which endeared the Nambūtiris to the communist party have been a matter of considerable debate; the radical character of the Nambūtiri movement may have been a very

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the Nayar, the Thiyya and even the lowest among all, whom we had kept aloof as the scum of society, the Adiyān and the Kudiyān – had risen up and had lined up under the tri-coloured banner of freedom. The Nambūtiri alone was conspicuous by his absence. He was sitting on his door-step chewing betel leaves and arecanut".

[42] For a list of Nambūtiri participants in the nationalist Movement see K. Karunakaran Nair, *Who is Who of Freedom Fighters in Kerala,* Thiruvananthapuram, 1975.

important factor.[43] Still, V.T. continued as a Congressman and a Gandhian.[44] He observed that the absence of legitimate and individual claim on the joint property of the illam might have created an ideological environment for the *Apphan* Nambūtiris to align with other dispossessed classes and got attracted towards communism.[45] However, not all radicals were attracted to communism; several of them continued to be Congressmen. He also noted that not just poor Nambūtiris were attracted towards communism; both the poor and the rich, and even intellectuals, were attracted to it.[46] But the attraction of the Nambūtiris

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[43] Jeffrey noted that a vigorous Communist Party grew out of earlier movements for basic civil rights. Radicalized by the campaigns of the previous years, growing number of people began to reject the attempts of their middle class castemen to use them as canon fodder in communal pressure groups. Robin Jeffrey, "Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1869-1940 – The Temple Entry Movement" in Robin Jeffrey ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States,* Delhi, 1978, p.136. Elsewhere Jeffrey suggested that the structural and ideological props of society were destroyed by the reform movements of modern Kerala and men and women were unsettled and displaced against their will. Marxism in Kerala came to fill an ideological void keenly felt by thousands of literate, alienated people. Given glaring class divisions, high rates of literacy and heavy population density, what was crucial in directing Malayalis toward communism was the breakdown of the social system. Robin Jeffrey, "Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940, *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, November 1978, p.78. In a similar way Mayer explained the fascination of young Nambūtiris and Nāyars to Communism the result of a frustration and boredom which was spreading among them because they had left their taṛawāds and had no proper jobs. Adrian C. Mayer, *Land and Society in Malabar*, Bombay, 1952, p.136. In a dissenting note to Jeffrey, M.P.S. wrote that the leadership of the communist movement in its early stages was provided by men who came from well-to-do families with a strong educational background. Some of them, moreover, hailed from patrilineal Nambūtiri and Christian families. M.P. Sreekumāran Nair, "Decline or Revitalization?" *Journal of Kerala History,* Vol. IV, Part II, 1977, p.497.

[44] Responding to the question why V.T. did not become a Communist, P.G. remarked that basically he was not opposed to Communism and that on many occasions he had cooperated with them. Even his association with the Congress and the rationalist movement was a revolutionary measure. P. Govinda Pillai, "VT Oru Kalāpakāri", *Mānava Samskṛiti Annual,* June-July 2005, pp.13-14.

[45] Gopalan Kutty et.al, "Mukhāmukham", in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT,* p.244. Elsewhere Zagoria has argued that the combination of landlessness and literacy is the major factor for the attraction towards communism. Donald. S. Zagoria, "A Note on Landlessness, literacy and Agrarian Communism in India", *Archives europeenes de sociologie*, Vol. XIII (1972), p.328 cited in Robin Jeffrey, "Governments and Culture: How Women Made Kerala Literate", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 3, Fall 1987, p. 468.

[46] Gopalan Kutty et.al, *op.cit,* p.244. May be from his own experience, VT observed that it is unfair to conclude that the rich Nambūtiris sided with the Congress and the poor with the

towards communism stands justified by the dynamics of the Nambūtiri movement, that in the 1930s the Nambūtiris were looking out for a commanding position in the public sphere, and the political domain, which they found very difficult to achieve in the given circumstances; a shift to communism would enable them to gain an upper hand.[47] The fact that even the communist Nambūtiris were considerably motivated by communitarian interests is revealed by the revival of the *Sabha* at Ōngallūṛ under the auspices of the communists. They cautioned the community of the danger of being lethargic and proposed a programme to achieve an economic revival with a focus on protecting the property they were holding.[48]

VT's association with the nationalist movement started with his participation in the Ahmedabad annual conference of the Congress in January 1921 when he

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Communist Party. He also pointed out that those who sided with the Congress were generally passive; but the Communist Nambūtiris intervened in popular issues.

47 Dilip Menon observed that it was more an organizational move than an ideological one. The discipline that Marxist/socialist ideology provided allowed the communists to take over the political organizations of the Congress by 1939. They became 'communists' first and then discovered Marxism. Dilip Menon, "Being a Brahmin the Marxist Way: E.M.S. Nambūtiripād and the Pasts of Kerala", in Daud Ali ed., *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 57. Menon also suggests that the Communist Nambūtiris had an inclination towards communitarian interests since their entry into politics was preceded by an active involvement with the reform movement within their own community. Even the attempts of E.M.S. at the reinterpretation of the history of Kerala in the 1940s and '50s may have been a negotiation of Nambūtiri identity at a time when Brahmins were under siege in South India. *Ibid*, p.61. Even a known communist like MRB later expressed considerable doubt over the reason behind his affiliation to the movement. He writes: "Was I gradually becoming a follower of Communism? I cannot say... Was Communism really good for the world? I didn't know. But I was sure that servitude in whatever form was a scourge...Nowhere except in Communism could I visualize a concerted effort to exterminate the evil forces of repression. It was not the rosy dream of the formation of a communist ministry that led me to dedicate myself for the emancipation of the world". MRB, "Ennilēkkō Pinnilēkkō", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 66:45, 15 Jan. 1989, p.20.

48 Personal conversation, K.C.K. Nambūtiri (aged 90), Ōngallūṛ, 25 Sep. 2005; M.C. Nambūtiripād (Active participant of the Ōngallūṛ Sabha and younger brother of Mūthiringōd), Ṭṛiśśūṛ, 11 November 2005. K.C.K. Nambūtiri told that Nambūtiris were attracted to Communism because it was not opposed to the Nambūtiri interests. Factors such as the leadership of E.M.S, radical bent of the Nambūtiri movement and the fact that the leadership and the agenda of the Congress organization was decided by men from other communities stimulated the process. The revival of the *Sabha* at Ōngallūṛ considerably promoted this transformation. Personal Conversation,

was a school student.[49] He also attended the first Conference of the All Kēraḷa Congress Committee at Ottapplam in April 1921.[50] Thereafter till the beginning of the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha, V.T. did not associate himself with the congress activities but had shown considerable interest in Gandhian ideals and in the anti-pollution measures. VT's indifference to political nationalism has been explained with reference to his preoccupation with social reform engagements; for he had realized that political involvement should necessarily be preceded by an urgent social reform; that it was futile to demand political freedom unless the prevailing evils of his community were eliminated; that with the reform of the Nambūtiris the reform of the society would be considerably easier.[51] VT himself argued that he found social reform as an integral part of the nationalist movement and hence he felt the Sabha as 'Congress in its miniature'.[52] It is highly probable that like most other Nambūtiris of the period, VT's active association with the Congress was interrupted by the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion and the devastation it caused to the morale of the community enforcing the Nambūtiris to rethink on the efficacy of unrestricted involvement in the national movement.[53] Though being a product of the community

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[49] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.225.

[50] APP Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, p.55.

[51] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Kannerum Kinavum*, Kottayam, 1970, pp.12-13; N.V. Krishna Variyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., *op.cit*, pp.31-32.

[52] See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.526. VT claimed his role in the social reform movement equal to the role of the freedom fighters. He explained that though he was not ready to face lathi-charges or to face imprisonment by getting involved in political struggles, the hardships and distress attendant to social reform activities were not basically different since it involved painful alienation from relatives and neighbours. Devika observed that men like VT considered their work to be 'nationalist' in the sense of preparing the members of their castes to become subjects of the nation, full participants in a pan-Indian culture. See J. Devika, "En-gendering Individuals: the Project of Nambūtiri Brahmin Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-August 2004, p.85.

[53] His negative references to the Māppiḷas and the Malabar Rebellion may serve to substantiate this point. His first story "Vishukkettam" was written in the context of the Malabar rebellion and against the material and moral wounds it had created on the psyche of the community. See *Ibid*, pp.55-58. E.M.S. wrote that the rebellion had a two-way impact. One was the feeling that Māppiḷas could not be trusted. Second, it caused to create a strong attitude against Gandhi, non-cooperation and the Congress. *Ātmakatha*, p.43. But his personal experience was different; Māppiḷas were entrusted to guard his *illam* during the uprising.

movement and equally concerned over the plight of the Nambūtiris during the days of the reform, the writings of EMS are marked by highly radical views and the absence of this prejudice.[54] Even after the initial success of the community reform measures and of his repeated urge to the Nambūtiris to participate in the national movement to hasten the formation of a united Kēraḷa, VT did not involve himself in any political struggle but rather busied himself with his commune project.[55] He was never active in the Congress afterwards; he was not a party to the *Aikya Kēraḷa* movement and in the post-independence era he emerged as a strong critic of party politics of all variety.[56]

Ibid, p.42. May be because of the lack of such an experience or an undue reliance on the community version of the rebellion, or due to a complex of other factors, VT had developed a rancour against the Muslims.

[54] He wrote: "It is to the illiterate backward Moplah of the Ernad and Walluvanad taluks that the honour goes of having raised the initial voice of protest against the oppression of the Janmi". (*A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala*, Bombay, 1943, p.1). He gave two explanations for the question why the revolt was confined to Māppiḷa peasants. First, the Māppiḷas as a community had a much higher sense of organization than the Hindus. Second, they had more reason to rally round the Congress and Khilāfat than the Hindus (*Ibid*, p.10). Though these are not sufficient to explain the communal, anti-Hindu turn to the later stages of the Rebellion, the class analysis provided by him greatly outstripped the highly emotional perception of VT. On the basis of the observation that majority of the Māppiḷas did not participate in the rebellion and that communal violence was only marginal and negligible compared to the volume of the rebellion, VT's approach appears greatly prejudiced. See Robert. L. Hardgrave, Jr, "The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar" in *Modern Asian Studies,* 11:1, 1977, pp.97-98. Moyarath Śaṅkaran in his memoirs treated the revolt as a purely political act. See Moyarath Śaṅkaran, *Entē Jeevithakatha,* Kozhikode, 1965, pp.161-62.

[55] There is an interesting anecdote. I.C.P. wrote that E.M.S, before his departure to Calicut, for his participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, handed over his gold wrist-watch to VT and requested him to stick on to social reform and to utilize the price of the watch for the same. (*Vipḷavathintē Uḷthudippukaḷ*, p.50) Some people explain VT's indifference to party politics with reference to this story; that his commitment to E.M.S. forced him to stick on to the social domain. See Civic Chandran, "Enthukoṇdu VT?" *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, Dec.26, 1999. The episode is also referred to by C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, "Kṣōbhikkunna Manuṣyasnēhi", *Vivēkōdayam,* Vol. 10, No. 27-28, May 23, 1976. Vaidyar maintains that it was a sort of binding agreement between E.M.S. and VT.

[56] O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "VT-Chila Smaraṇakaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam,* Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.32. VT's political attitudes run strikingly parallel to that of Kēḷappan. His preference to Gandhian constructive programme, liberal communalist stand (his involvement in the Angādipuṛam temple issue and opposition to the formation of Malappuram district, for instance), strong hostility to communism (he was very active in the "Vimōchana Samaram") and his aloofness from politics in the post independence era, all would compel a comparison with VT. For details see, M.P. Manmadhan, *Kēḷappan,*

Those who present VT as a great nationalist and a true Gandhian have missed the point of the total absence of a critique of colonialism in his works.[57] Though he had placed himself in the context of the communitarian reform and the emerging nationalism, he refused to link them with the colonial situation. This may not be surprising in the prevailing condition of the British patronage of the Nambūtiris and as a 'minority' looking towards them for 'protection'. VT's indifference to politics of the post-independence era also might have induced him not to refer to the colonialism/nationalism binary.[58] Even in the 1930s when he repeatedly pleaded to the Nambūtiris to be active participants in the nationalist movement, he was directing them to enter into the social struggle, particularly in the anti-pollution agitation. As priests and the custodians of custom, the attitude of the Nambūtiris had been a great impediment to the development of a civil society which in turn was harmful for the Nambūtiris too. While it obstructed their own material progress, it made them the targets of popular opposition. Therefore, VT's crusade against pollution had in fact benefitted his own community since, by rescuing the Nambūtiris from the wrath of the lower castes, it simultaneously saved them from being the chief agents promoting conversion of the lower castes to other religions.

Kottayam, 1984, pp. 188-92; 339-46. Similarly, Mūthiringōd was strongly opposed to all kinds of politics, in spite of him being a strong nationalist. See O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "Avathārika" in Mūthiringōd, *Apphantē Makaḷum Mattu Kṛitikaḷum,* Kottayam, 1984, p.16.

[57] This is in sharp contrast to the autobiography of E.M.S. where he placed himself in the wider context of the declining Nambūtiri community, the dominant colonial system and the emerging Nationalist Movement. With reference to his earlier works, this lacuna might be justified since "even in the 1930s the Congress leaders in Malabar did not attempt a rigorous analysis of the British rule". (K. Gopalankutty, "Mobilization Against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 26:4, 1989, p.460). But it is surprising to notice the absence of a colonial critique even in his memoirs which appeared in the post-independence era.

[58] Despite politics being the new civil medium through which popular issues like social equality and empowerment of the downtrodden could be materialized, VT's opposition to it is really disturbing. In fact VT stood for finding temporary solutions for the immediate grievances; he was not in favour of a restructuring of the social system.

VT's political ideology is explicit from his *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* experiment; it reveals his attitude: he preferred to concentrate on the social sphere neglecting political struggles.[59] But even his engagement with the social issues was marked by a note of caution regarding the course social change had to take. It also explained the nature of the impact of the nationalist movement on his thought process. He was highly influenced by the Gandhian utopia and the model of the feudal village life. Rather than solving the existing social and political issues through modern methods of social transformation, VT tried to bypass them through an imaginary model of a commune which from the theoretical perspective was a withdrawal from the civil society.[60] It was also noted for its exclusive character since it accommodated only the socially and politically enlightened sections. Even in the historical sense it was not progressive; the colony started by Kēḷappan as early as 1921 was meant for Harijan welfare; we have no evidence of Harijan presence at *Ulbuddhakēraḷam.* The claim of the commune as a step towards the formation of *Aikya Kēraḷa* is flimsy because of its exclusive character; it excluded not only the Harijans but the non-Hindus as well.[61] Nor was there any attempt to link the commune with the contemporary political developments.[62]

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[59] Chatterjee writes: "Gandhism finally reconciled the contradictions between the utopian and the practical aspects of its political ideology by surrendering to the absolute truthfulness and supreme self-sacrifice of the satyagrahi. It had gained its strength from an intensely powerful moral critique of the existing state of politics. In the end it saved its truth by escaping from politics". Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in *Subaltern Studies,* Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p.189.

[60] It explained VT's inability to come out of the feudal vision. Undue emphasis on family, morality and traditional values and the nostalgic ideal of a self-sufficient village life have been identified as the greatest impediments to social progress and to the liberation of the downtrodden. See K. Dāmōdaran, *Manuṣyan,* Thiruvananthapuram, 1951, pp.105-06.

[61] It has been argued that since VT had been speaking about the possibilities of a united Kerala for some time, the commune was a step towards achieving this goal. See I.V. Babu, "M.R.B-yude Pravaṛthanam Oru Vilayiruthal" in M.N. Vijayan ed., *M.R.B: Jīvitam, Kṛitikaḷ, Daṛśanam*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 2004, pp. 89-90. Babu takes the same position in his PhD work *The Social, Political and Cultural Results of the Nambūtiri Renaissance,* University of Calicut, 1996.

[62] It is noted that Gandhi's conception of politics did not envision a bourgeois civil society or a modern state with a representational form of government. Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, New Delhi, 2000, p.220.

VT's outlook on politics in the post-independence era substantiated his general negative attitude to popular politics and representative government and displayed striking similarities with the position of Gandhi on the issue.[63] He observed the new political culture from the point of view of mounting violence and immorality including corruption. For him democracy was a farce; a play of the 51% against the 49;[64] and a mockery by the power-hungry politicians.[65] The alternate ideal he presented was really utopian and reactionary – the temple-centered agrarian village life directed by dharmic values.[66] He did not refer to the place that would be occupied by various social classes in such a civil society nor how the feudal dharmic values could be made use of for the promotion of a modern social order. He also refused to acknowledge how modern politics provided the non-privileged a say and a space in their own governance and the way it promoted their welfare. In fact what disillusioned many people like him was the development of a new culture in which politics was conducted "not in landlords' houses but in the streets and fields".[67]

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[63] Parliament, for instance, Gandhi called 'a sterile woman and a prostitute', the first because despite being a sovereign institution it cannot enact a law according to its own judgment but is constantly swayed by outside pressures, and the second because it continually shifts its allegiance from one set of ministers to another depending on which is more powerful. But basically Gandhi objects to an entire structure of politics and government in which each individual is assumed to have his own individual interest, individuals are expected to come together into parties and alliances in terms of those self-interests, these combinations of interests are then supposed to exert pressure on each other by mobilizing public opinion and manipulating the levers of the government machinery, and legislative enactments are then expected to emerge as choices made on behalf of the whole society. Gandhi refused to accept the argument that if effective combinations are formed among individuals and groups sharing a set of common self-interests, then the institutions of representative democracy will ensure that the government will act in ways which are in the common interests of the entire collectivity. Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in *Subaltern Studies Vol. III,* New Delhi, 1984, pp.163-64.

[64] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.506, 529, 641. VT observed that significant issues like prohibition, forced religious conversion or ban on cow slaughter should never be decided by the balance of 51%-49% votes; rather they ought to be decided by true democracy (i.e. by seeking the majority opinion of the total (Hindu) population).

[65] See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.501, 521 and 529.

[66] See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.448-51; 455-58; 529-31.

[67] Robin Jeffrey, *Politics, Women and Well-Being – How Kerala Became a Model,* New Delhi, 1993, p.33.

If VT was a conditional partner of the Congress and the Nationalist movement, he was stubbornly opposed to Communism.[68] In his manifesto of anti-communism, he branded it as foreign, dogmatic, rigid and hypocritical.[69] He found that the element of servitude involved in it ran counter to the cherished ideal of individual liberty; in his appraisal of Gandhism he found the absence of this factor as providing it an added value and as extending a space for his ideal concept of the 'absolute' and 'dharmic' man.[70] But his preference to Gandhism was more due to its insistence on tradition than to its appeal to true human love or individual liberty.[71] Elsewhere he had stated that Gandhism was conveyed to him as a purely religious doctrine[72] and its ideal of trusteeship captivated him because of its close similarity with the Nambūtiri tradition.[73]

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[68] In a note of extreme disdain, VT wrote: "Sometime ago, E.M.S. Nambūtiripād conducted a *Saptāham* at Ōngallūr in order to humanize the Nambūtiri. For E.M.S, humanizing the Nambūtiri meant making him a communist. In order to accomplish this aim, he started a Work Centre for the Antarjanams. Though it had the innocent name, it was really a centre for baptizing Nambūtiris into communists. Despite these efforts, had the Nambūtiris been humanized at all?...The hammer and sickle entrusted to us by E.M.S. is not to be used to chop-off the head of other people but should be used to destroy one's own ignorance and conceit". *Mātṛubhūmi* Daily, 4-11-1970, cited in A.V. Sreekumar, *VT*, p.236.

[69] See his "Sakhāvuṇṇi" in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.312-21. He refused to consider the socio-economic roots of the communist movement, how the limitations involved in the Congress programmes and the compromising nature of its functioning forced Congressmen themselves to search for a political alternative. T.M. Thomas Isaac, "The National Movement and the Communist Party in Kerala", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 14, No. 8-9, Aug-Sep. 1986, pp.60-65.

[70] *Ibid*, p.480-81. VT's friend Dāmōdaran maintained that VT was depressed over the decline of the 'dharmic' man. Both the capitalists and the communists rallied behind 'economic' man causing to bring about a moral decay. See N. Dāmōdaran, "Entē VT", in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.111.

[71] Kēḷappan opposed socialism for its denial of individual liberty; nor was equality possible in a society where the scope for individual liberty does not exist. Equality was anti-natural too because individual capacities differ greatly. K. Kēḷappan, "Sāmyavāda Siddhāntam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 12:17, 9 July 1934, pp.4-5. He later explained his indifference to the socialists in their opposition to truth and non-violence. *Mātṛubhūmi*, 26 May and 14 Sep. 1938. Similarly, Vaḷḷathōḷ opposed Communism on account of its appeal to violence. C. Govinda Kurup, "Vaḷḷathōḷum Communisavum", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 44:23, 21 Aug. 1966, p.32. It is observed that rather than seeing non-violence as a form of struggle, the Congress leaders including Kēḷappan elevated it to an ideal which for them was more important than the struggle itself. K. Gopalankutty, "The Task of Transforming the Congress: Malabar, 1934-40", *Studies in History*, 5:2, n.s, 1989, p.184.

[72] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.479, 526. Gandhi's opposition to communism was more from the cultural and nationalist standpoints. He wrote: "...Let us study our Eastern

In analyzing the attitudes and ideology of VT, a factor of considerable importance is the volume of his intellectual capacity. VT's close friends have acknowledged his own statement that he was rather an emotional being and not an intellectual being[74]. VT's writings are marked by the absence of a theoretical perception and he appears to have missed a clear ideology and philosophy; he was highly influenced by certain abstract ideals but within the framework of a strong communitarian vision. Even Gandhism was not his ideal. This intellectual bewilderment differentiated VT from E.M.S.[75] His later attachment to tradition and emphasis on cultural revivalism may have been accentuated by the frustration created out of this intellectual incapacity.

5:3. Secular Ethos and Sectarian Concerns

VT is generally treated as a great secularist. His appeared in the public with a commitment to the ideals of the civil society as early as the 1920s; he had freed himself from the traditions of his caste, had abandoned all caste symbols and had championed the cause of the whole society. It was not a mere verbal exercise; he worked in association with the S.N.D.P. activists, disregarded the prevailing rules of pollution and dined them at home. He frowned at the outmoded rituals and fought against the clergy. He attacked caste/religious orthodoxy and had been forced to live as an outcast in his community. He was very active in the temple-entry movement and Harijan welfare measures and strongly pleaded that the *Sabha* should be disbanded and the Nambūtiris should start working for the

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institutions in that spirit of scientific inquiry and we shall evolve a truer socialism and truer communism than the world has yet dreamed of. It is surely wrong to presume that Western socialism or communism is the last word on the question of mass poverty". Again, "Class war is foreign to the essential genius of India which is capable of evolving a form of communism broad-based on the fundamental rights of all and equal justice to all". CW, Vol. 58, pp. 219, 248 cited in Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in *Subaltern Studies,* Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p.192.

[73] K. Gopalan Kutty et.al., "Mukhāmukham" in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, p.245.

[74] See VT's statement to this effect in *ibid.* Personal conversation with VT's close friend N. Dāmōdaran, Vaḷānchēry, June 18, 2000 confirms this fact.

[75] I.C.P. wrote: "...We became communists and daringly marched forward. VT faltered; his hesitation to make a breakthrough limited his activities to that of a mere humanist". "VTyudē Kaṛmakāṇdam", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, p.37.

uplift of the downtrodden. He worked enthusiastically in the nationalist movement and was highly influenced by the Gandhian ethics of communal harmony and *Sarvōdaya*. He got his sister married to a low caste man, led a *jātha* to propagate mixed marriages and even declared his willingness to become a Muslim if it would benefit that community.[76] He was highly motivated by radical humanism and rationalism. He denounced superstitious religion and urged for a rational religion. He could not have chosen any ideology other than secularism.[77]

Of course VT was 'ultra-secular' when compared to many of his contemporaries.[78] In the 1920s he created strong personal and organizational ties

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[76] Personal conversation, V.M. Koṟāth, Farook College, 8-4-2003.

[77] In his ideology and political outlook, VT was highly indebted to Kēḷappan and he duly acknowledges his obligation. Kēḷappan, in his article on the Vaikam Satyagraha, justifies the struggle in the context of the increasing tendency of the lower castes, especially Īzhavas, to renounce Hinduism. (K. Kēḷappan, "Vaikam Satyāgraham", *Mātṛubhūmi Onam Special*, 1925, pp.42-45). In another article written around the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha, he expressed great concern over the harms caused by conversions. This article is specially noted for Kēḷappan's assessment of Muslims as the 'other'; they are seen as a threat to the nation and national unity; this was mainly for the organized structure of the Muslim community and their stress on international brotherhood. (K. Kēḷappan, "Mathavum Samudāyavum: Mathaparivaṛthana Śṛamam Koṇduḷḷa Dōṣam", *Mātṛubhūmi* Weekly, 10:17, 18 July 1932, pp.7-8). In the second part of the article ("Mathavum Samudāyavum: Oru Swarājya Government Cheyyēṇdathenthellām?" *Mātṛubhūmi* Weekly, 10:20, 8 Aug.1932, pp.4-5, 10) he emphasized the need of relegating personal religion to the background to promote national interests. He expressed doubts over the social utility of temples and mosques (churches too?) and identified them as institutions of exploitation and divisiveness and for impinging individual liberty. He suggested a 12-point programme to control religion and to make it conform to national interests. At the end of the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha, Kēḷappan urged to found a memorial for the struggle combining a rescue home for children, a hostel for Harijan girls and a home for the aged and the insane. ("Agathikaḷkku Oru Rakṣāmandiram", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 10:43, 16 Jan. 1933, pp.8-9, 20). In all these articles Kēḷappan appear as a strong exponent of nationalism, humanitarian and rational sentiments but in a subsequent article he questioned the infallibility claims of rationalism. He wrote that human knowledge was defective, scientific theories were periodically altered, and rationalism was based on the 19th century science. He concluded that it was absurd to deny God; after all one can only be agnostic and rational in religious faith. K. Kēḷappan, "Yuktivādam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 12:27, 17 Sep. 1934, pp.4-6. He clarified later his position by stating that he was opposed to rationalism because it was becoming a kind of religion. (*Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 12:27, 29 Oct. 1934, pp.9-10, 30)

[78] Tampan wrote that the period was marked by intense radicalism; everyone was vying with the other to excel in it. It was not confined among individuals but even communities were competing to become rationalistic. This trend was due to two factors: the sweeping impact

with Ayyākkuṭṭy and Sahodaran Ayyappan[79] and at *Mangaḷōdayam* he treated even his Īzhava subordinates on equal terms, with utmost sympathy and understanding. He had an array of friends from all castes and communities. As an activist of the *Sabha*, VT wanted its outlook to be broad enough not only to instill the spirit of secularism in the Nambūtiris but also to forge an understanding in them of the various problems of other communities. He urged the Nambūtiris to renounce their caste exclusiveness or else they would be socially alienated as in the case of the Tamil Brahmins of Kēraḷa.[80] He wanted the Nambūtiris to accept the new system of education, to enter into a profession or job, to modernize customs and rituals, to liberate the Antaṛjanams enabling them to adapt to new situations and to interact with women of other communities, to enter into the nationalist movement and to contribute to the nation-building process.[81] His drama was a manifestation of all these ideals. He wanted the Nambūtiris to emulate other communities in the realm of education, employment and in organizational matters.

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of nationalism and the rising radicalism of the lower orders. He reveals sufficiently clearly that, in this respect, communities and individuals were driven by their selfish interests. M. Rāmavarma Tampān, "Kēraḷathilē Samudāya Pariṣkāram", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 9:8, 7 March 1932, pp.4, 25.

[79] Ayyappan played a very decisive role in instilling secular and nationalist ethos among the Īzhavas. See M. Sahadevan, *Towards Social Justice and Nation-Making*, Palakkad, 1993, pp.64-70. However, Ayyappan opposed the religious conversion agenda of C.V. Kunjurāman and C. Krishnan and, just like T.K. Madhavan, was a strong votary of the Hindu faith. See C. Kesavan, *Jīvitasamaram*, Kottayam, 1990, pp.254-55.

[80] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ, p.*547. They have been keeping up their exclusivity and did not show any interest in in social or political movements.

[81] The Nambūtiris were attracted towards the anti-untouchability movement by their community interests. Cooperation with the constructive programme was an extension of the community reform agenda because the norms of ritual pollution had been retarding material progress of the community. Kolenda noted that it was practically impossible to maintain pollution rules in modern occupational contexts. The need for 'ritual neutrality' in the public places forced many to strive for relaxation of pollution restrictions. See Pauline Kolenda, "Caste in India Since Independence" in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson ed., *Social and Economic Development in India-A Reassessment*, New Delhi, 1986, p.116. Similarly, Shea observed that among the traditional barriers to economic development, the most serious were the lack of effective social communications and their discouraging influence on entrepreneurial morale. See Thomas W. Shea, Jr., "Barriers to Economic Development in Traditional Societies: Malabar, A Case Study", *Journal of Economic History*, XIX: 4, December 1959, p.509.

In the beginning of the 1930s when the community reform measures made a breakthrough and when he started getting closer to the issues of Harijan welfare and temple-entry, VT justified it as the moral duty of the Nambūtiris to uplift the downtrodden.[82] The 1920s were notable for the great debates on pollution and caste inequality and the rhetoric of the Īzhavas on conversion as the means of social emancipation.[83] "If the problem of 'untouchability' caused such a fierce controversy in Hindu society", observed Nirmal Verma, "it is because the *shudras,* though an assimilated part of the caste system, always remained very much on the periphery of the society, not really outsiders like the *mlechchas,* but not exactly 'insiders' either".[84] Although the debates over conversion were focused on Buddhism, and not to Christianity or Islam, it was a threat to the

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[82] VT's story "Chettachāḷa" was a forceful statement of his faith in philanthropy; an upper caste man is portrayed as helping a Cherumi and her son by giving her cloths and by financially assisting the boy for his education. Perhaps the story would help explain his ideology of Harijan upliftment. See *UN* 15:13, Jan.5, 1934, p.2. Sankarji's story 'Nambūtiriyudē Bhūtadaya', *UN* 11:18, Oct. 25, 1929 also deals with a similar theme.

[83] See C.V. Kunjurāman, "Thīyaṛkku Nallathu Buddhamatham Thanneyāṇu", *Mitavādi Special,* Vol. II, No.2, 1925, pp.6-24. He wrote many similar articles encouraging conversion as the means to social liberation. See his "Ī Gathikeṭṭa Ābhāsa Matham Namukku Vēṇda", in P.K. Balakrishnan ed., *Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru,* Kottayam, 1969. C. Kesavan observed that C.V's 'bomb' was decisive and had enforced the Travancore government to make the Temple Entry Proclamation. C. Kesavan, *Jīvitasamaram,* Kottayam, 1990, pp.254-55. But others like Ayyakkutty, Ayyappan and Kumāran Āśān opposed conversion (See *ibid*). Kumāran Āśān stated that he was not a votary of religious conversion but stood for religious reform. N. Kumāran Āśān, *Mataparivaṛtana Rasavādam,* Thonnakkal, 1123. Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru also opposed conversions. "Swamy stemmed the tide of conversion by arguing that all religions were the same and it was the individual who had to lift himself up. He showed how one could do this by remaining a Hindu with the different ethic which he had legitimized". M.S.A. Rao, "Changing Moral Values in the Context of Social-Cultural Movements" in Adrian C. Mayer ed., *Culture and Morality,* Delhi, 1981, p.204. Mannam is reported to have participated in the Vaikam Satyagraha mainly for finding a means to check conversions to Christianity. See Loius Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in Travancore 1921-47,* New Delhi, 1994, p.59. Similarly, it is argued that the presence of the Christian missionaries and the fear of mass conversions were decisive in bringing about social reform measures in Travancore by the caste-Hindus as well as by the government. Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore 1858-1936,* New Delhi, 1988, pp.149-218.

[84] Nirmal Verma, "India and Europe – Some Reflections on Self and Other", in Fred Dallmyr & G.N. Devy ed., *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity,* New Delhi, 1998, p.330. Houtart and Lemercinier also observed that pollution practices visibly excluded most of the castes from the religious practices proper to Hinduism. Genevieve Lemercinier and Francois Houtart, "Social Functions of Religion in Pre-Capitalist Societies – the Case of Kerala", *Social Scientist,* Vol. 23, Nos. 1-3, Jan-March 1995, p.101.

dominant position of the caste-Hindus.[85] The experience of the Vaikam Satyagraha and the later developments had led to great political and social maneuvering which made it very clear that Nambūtiris were becoming the targets of social criticism and attack.[86] The Malabar Rebellion and the Tṛiśśūṛ revolt[87] had earlier revealed how conversions would affect the interests of the upper castes adversely.[88] This had been the reason behind an increased interest over the future of Hinduism.[89] The invitation extended to hardcore radicals like

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[85] "Conversion to Buddhism was just an adoption of an ideology that is non-hierarchic. By becoming a Buddhist, one is not trying to raise one's caste status, but is identifying with a non-caste ideology". See Bernard S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, New Jersey, 1971, pp.140-41. Jeffrey explains the situation differently. A court decision of 1885 had ruled that converts in Travancore would not have any inheritance rights over their ancestral properties. While this difficulty of property and inheritance deterred prosperous Īzhavas from conversion, the rigorous missionary view of marriage discouraged the poor and self-seeking. Moreover, as many Īzhavas prospered, they were able cautiously to imitate the manners of Nāyars. A respected place in Hindu society was a more desirable goal than a doubtful Christian role between contemptuous Syrians and polluting Pulaya converts. Robin Jeffrey, "The Social Origins of a Caste Association, 1875-1905: The Founding of the SNDP Yōgam," *South Asia,* Vol. 4, 1974, p.48. A report in the *Sahōdaran* supported Jeffrey's argument. But it added that Hinduism was preferable to any other religion for the kind of religious freedom it afforded. Therefore rather than going in for a change of religion, the Īzhavas should work for the reform of Hinduism. See *Sahōdaran,* 2:11-12, Menam-Medam 1095 (March-May 1920), pp.290-94.

[86] The progress the Īzhavas had made in the previous few decades under Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru did not in any great measure mitigate their grievances, as the Guru's *advaita* philosophy found no acceptance among caste Hindus, and his establishment of Īzhava temples only helped to ghettoize them from the mainstream of Hindu life, thus in a way magnifying their distress. Thus they found themselves in a situation where they were totally disillusioned with Hinduism itself. It was understandable, then, why some of their leaders thought that the only way out of their misery was mass migration to non-Hindu religions. Cyriac K. Pulapilly, "The Īzhavas of Kerala and Their Historic Struggle for Acceptance in the Hindu Society", *Journal of Asian and African Studies* XI: 1-2, p.41.

[87] In February 1921, a meeting of Congress-Khilāfat volunteers was summoned at Tṛiśśūṛ to protest against the arrest and imprisonment of four leaders of the Khilāfat-Non-cooperation movement which resulted in clashes between the local Christians and the agitators. The Christians, who supported the government, tried to sabotage the meeting and it ended in a week-long riot in the town. See Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ,* pp.5-12. Mōzhikunnam narrated the incidents from the reports of the *Yōgakṣēmam.*

[88] It troubled the caste-Hindus because it reduced their rhetorical constituency. See Robin Jeffrey, "Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1869-1940 – The Temple Entry Movement" in Robin Jeffrey ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States,* Delhi, 1978, p.143.

[89] The *Sabha*, right from its beginning, had started showing concern over the future of Hinduism in the context of conversions to Christianity and Islam and the resultant declining

C.V. Kunjurāman, Ayyappan and Mannam to the annual meetings of the *Sabha* was also accentuated by this factor. In order to solve the crisis created by pollution and temple-entry issues, some kind of a realignment of caste-ties was necessary;[90] compromises were possible and justifiable in the name of nationalism and humanism.[91] Still, the voice of the Harijans were not heeded, there were no efforts to associate either Ayyankali or any other Pulaya in the *Sabha* deliberations.

Thus in the 1930s VT was highly captivated by the ideal of Hindu unity and, in the contemporary socio-economic environment, this was accentuated by the highly threatened Nambūtiri caste interests. In fact this was what that made the Nambūtiri radicals to cooperate with the constructive programme of the nationalist movement. The same factors might have inflamed VT's radicalism during the Guruvāyūṛ Satyagraha;[92] it was an opportunity to prove the

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number of Hindus. An article in *Mangaḷōdayam* identified two reasons for this phenomenon – uncommon deaths and conversions. But conversions were seen as due to persuasion or for selfish ends. It recommended education to discourage conversions since it would convince various sections of people of their 'swadharma'. See "Hindukkaḷudē Gathi", *Mangaḷōdayam*, 1:2, Dhanu 1084, p.41-48. In the post-1921 period, rather than attempting to dispel the fears of the nationalist Muslims, some of the Congressmen were more concerned with those Hindus who had been converted to Islam and wished to reconvert them. In the Hindu Conference convened at Tirunavaya, which was sponsored by the Hindu Mahasabha, many prominent Congressmen participated and in the 43-member committee formed to 'eradicate evils in the Hindu community', 17 were Congressmen. See K. Gopalankutty, "Mobilization Against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26:4, 1989, p.473.

[90] It was highly necessary too: "The Christian teaching was a challenge to Hinduism, and the best of Hinduism accepted the challenge. Relatively few of the students in the mission high schools and colleges became Christians – the main groups of converts were always from the depressed classes..." Loius Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in Travancore 1921-47*, New Delhi, 1994, p.52.

[91] The Harijan welfare measures have been explained with reference to the ongoing Hindu-Muslim struggle in British India and the voting strength of the sixty million untouchables. Dick Cooiman, *Communities and Electorates: a Comparative Discussion of Communalism in Colonial India*, Amsterdam, 1995, p.45; Louis Onwerkerk, *op.cit.*, p.56.

[92] The basic limitation of the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha has been noted. Temple entry "continued to be seen within the paradigm of the 'purification of Hinduism' and the 'conversion even of the most orthodox' effectively limiting the political potential as well as the participation of anyone other than the upper castes. The untouchables were to be the admiring audience in this show of self-sacrifice and high ideals arranged for them...The political aspect of

credentials of the Nambūtiris on the issue of temple entry. But the failure of the Satyagraha frustrated him; its failure corresponded with the victory of the orthodox and was capable of hindering the cause of temple entry and the scope of Hindu unity, and would help to enliven the conversion issue. VT continued his temple-entry measures for some time more but lost interest in the issue once the temple-entry proclamation was passed.[93]

In the 1960s he began to associate with the rationalist movement.[94] He found temples as centers of corruption and superstition and during the *jātha* conducted to propagate mixed marriages he urged the people to follow a rational religion. Still, VT was not an atheist, nor was he opposed to religion.[95] He wanted to eliminate superstitions, to make religion rational and to make it idealistic as is seen from his attack on idolatry and superstitions.[96] Like Gandhi, and Kēḷappan, he too renounced temple-worship but he surpassed Gandhi in his rationalist and agnostic position.[97]

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untouchability had been 'settled' by the Poona Pact; only the religious aspect remained. This necessarily meant that those who were not Hindus could not 'interfere' with what was now defined as a 'deeply religious movement'..." Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India,* New Delhi, 1994, p.115.

[93] There was a report of a new temple being thrown open to all Hindus at the efforts of men including VT and at the presence of other Guruvāyūr Satyagrahis. *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 10:46, Feb.6, 1933. Though he was active in the *Sabha* after Ōngallūṛ, he did not cooperate with the Pāliyam Satyagraha which was aimed at opening the road to the Pāliyam House for all people. The Satyagraha was led by the communists and the Sabha actively supported it. See Payyappaḷḷi Bālan, *Pāliyam Satyagraha,* TVM, 1997. But his earlier comrade Pāṇḍam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri was very active in it. See *Dēśābhimāni*, March 6, 1948 cited in Cherayi Ramadas "Pāliyam Samaravum Vivaraṇaṅgaḷum", *Kēraḷapatanangaḷ,* Vol.6, Jan.1997, p164.

[94] Ālankōd Leelakrishnan, "VTyudē Manuṣyane Tēdumbōl", *Kalākaumudi,* April 25, 1993, p.10.

[95] In his article "Entē Āstikyavum Nāstikyavum", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.507-08, VT blatantly refused to state whether he was a believer or not for, according to him, no saint was able to tell the last word on it. In spite of his rationalism, he believed that only great men are able to make conclusive statements. Interestingly, he revealed that he used to pray but not for himself. In another article ("MC", *Ibid*, pp.429-30), VT called for a rethinking on the main focus and basic ideals of the prevailing rationalist movement. He wrote that it should not simply be confined to issues such as religion and god, but it should develop as an outlook, an attempt to explore into things from a non-mechanical perspective.

[96] See his article "Entē Yuktivādam", *Vivēkōdayam Special Issue,* May 23, 1976.

[97] In a discussion involving the prominent persons of the period as to how they perceived God, VT defined Him as "A fear-inspiring, blind figure in eternity, shrouded in darkness".

Though he was a skeptic and detested temple-worship, he was neither against caste nor against religion.[98] He did not deny caste or religion in the same way he had denied god and temples.[99] VT's ideal of social equality or his secular posture did not mean a casteless or non-religious society as is evident from his later articles.[100] His opposition to conversions[101] is more striking particularly in

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Mātṛubhūmi Weekly, 11:39, Dec. 18, 1933. (At the same time, Mūthiringōd defined God as "the lover of the sigh of frustration". *Ibid.*) On the question 'Can Religion and Science co-exist?' VT answered: "Yes, if the blind and mad fascination for God is got rid of, religion can become the science of spiritual knowledge. When? On the disappearance of Ignorance". *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 11:38, Dec. 11, 1933. But VT was not even an agnostic, in its true sense. He is reported to have prayed "Guruvāyūrappā, Nārāyaṇa" at his death-bed. See P. Chitṛan Nambūtiripād, "VT- Kēraḷa Charitṛathilē Oru Itihāsam", *Vivēkōdayam,* 14: 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.14.

98 O.M.C. writes that VT was a good Hindu and had been respectful and zealous towards Indian culture. O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "VT-Chila Smaraṇakaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam,* Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.31. Even Rammohan is reported to have defended *Varnasramadharma*. See Bruce Carlyle Robertson, *Raja Rammohan Roy: The Father of Modern India*, Delhi, 1995, p.179.

99 During this period, Mannam and Kēḷappan deserted their caste surnames (Mannath Padmanabha Pilla as Mannath Padmanabhan and Kēḷappan Nair as Kēḷappan). Kēḷappan also resigned from NSS in an attempt to keep aloof from casteism and to promote social and political reform. See D.D. Nambūtiri, "Caste and Social Reform Movement in Kerala", in P.J. Cheriyan ed., *Kerala State Gazetteer* Vol. II, Part II, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.481. Mūthiringōd renounced his surname Bhaṭṭathiripād and replaced it with Nambūtiripād (he was one of the greatest votaries of a monolithic Nambūtiri community). There was no move from the side of VT towards this line. But his son does not have any such caste surnames (V.T. Vāsudēvan). Sons of most of the reformers are known by their first names without having any caste-surnames.

100 The highly radical and philosophical contemporary interpretation of caste was made by Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru. Guru reinterpreted *jati* as biological species. In his encounter with Gandhi, he vehemently challenged *chaturvarna*. He also argued that since semen from any human male can impregnate any human female proves that 'human' is a species or *jati*. Caroline Osella and Philippo Osella, "Īzhavas and the Micro-politics of Caste, or the Political in the Personal", *Journal of South Indian History,* 1:2, Mar-Aug.2004, p.42. The radical Nambūtiri version of caste may be the one represented by the position of Mōzhikunnam. He wrote that he did not want to renounce caste or to be circumscribed by it; he wanted an independent identity within his own caste. See his *Khilāfat Smaraṇakaḷ*, Kozhikkode, 1965, pp.212-13.

101 VT's resentment to religious conversion is clear from his reference to two events. He vehemently opposed Uma Ben's conversion to Islam and her remarriage to a Muslim and quarreled publicly with the man. The Ramasimhan case was more problematic. One Khan Saheb and his brother Ali Bappu were converted as Nambūtiris with all formal rituals. Khan Saheb married an Antaṛjanam. But he and his wife were murdered. The culprits were acquitted on appeal. For a brief description of the event see T. Madhava Menon ed., *A Handbook of Kerala*, Vol. II, TVM, 2000, P.785. Khan Saheb's father-in-law became a pauper due to the litigation. He used to visit VT. See VT Vāsudēvan, "VTyudē Lokam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.145. In an interview Vāsudēvan told that VT had thought of writing a novel on this event, but he did not. Personal Conversation, Mēzhathūr, 12-2-2003.

the context of the radical position taken by many reformers advocating conversion of Antaṛjanams so that they may be emancipated from their hellish living conditions.[102] In fact VT wanted to replace caste and religion with culture,[103] as has been done by 'Neo-Hindus' like Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda, Aurabindo and Gandhi.[104] In his later articles, he glorified many aspects of the feudal tradition which he had attacked earlier with a very strong sense of nostalgia. His controversial speech at the RSS meeting also is noted for its focus on 'culture' and cultural nationalism and it has been absolved of sectarian outlook because of the 'absence' of any communalist element in it.[105] VT himself explained that Hinduism was not a religion but a cultural tradition and a way of life.[106] To glorify a culture which had its roots in caste-based hierarchy and in the total absence of a democratic tradition, the replacement of religion with culture does not make any advance. Though VT is treated as a hardcore secularist and anti-caste by conviction, he had retained a highly casteist and elitist social outlook sufficiently helpful in promoting cultural nationalism. This sort of an intellectual position is the most fertile environment that could be used by the exponents of communalism.[107]

Vāsudēvan also wrote about a Nambūtiri-turned- Muslim who used to visit VT; but before he reached VT's house he put out the Muslim hat and the two indulged in night-long Vedic recitation and *Vedivaṭṭam* (casual discussion). See V.T. Vāsudēvan, "VTyudē Lōkam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.145.

[102] E.M.S, "Nambūtirimāṛ Eṅgōṭṭu?" *YK* Silver Jubilee Special, 1944, in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p.265. VT never shared this idea nor responded to it anywhere. Equally important is the point that though opposed to conversions, Sri Nārāyaṇa Guru respected the ideals of other religions. See K.S. Radhakrishnan, "V.T: Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement*, Dec.16, 2001.

[103] P.K. Balakrishnan wrote: "...VT's religion was nothing but the framework of a culture..." See his preface to the article of Mūthiringōd in his own edited work *Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru*, Kottayam, 1969, p.314.

[104] See Paul Hacker, *Aspects of Neo-Hinduism as Contrasted with Surviving Traditional Hinduism*, Weisbaden, 1978, p.20.

[105] K.S. Ramadevi. *Social Change Among the Nambūtiris of Kerala*, PhD Dissertation, University of Kerala, 1989. p.262; Akkitham, "Manuṣyane Nambūtiriyākkān" in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, Sukapuram, 1984, pp.36-45; also see Akkitham, *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 58, Ap.2, 1999, p.16.

[106] VT's Palakkad Speech cited by Akkitham in "Manuṣyane Nambūtiriyakkan" in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal*, pp.36-38; VT's Diary, courtesy, V.T. Vāsudēvan.

[107] For instance, Akkitham argued that though VT was not an RSS activist, he sympathized with it and some of his attitudes, like vegetarianism and tea-totalism, perfectly matched with

VT's concept of secularism cannot be understood without a reference to the kind of rationalist thought current in those days.[108] It was neither anti-religious nor totally anti-traditional; it envisaged a religion free of irrational customs and blind superstitions.[109] Hinduism was taken as a set of values and ideals which were rational and hence eternal. Though these (Hindu) values and ideals had decayed considerably in course of time, the Nambūtiris were still considered to be the fountainhead of them which other castes were supposed to emulate.[110] When heated discussion over *nambūritham* arose and many radicals observed that it was the chief factor that hindered the progress of the Nambūtiris,[111] VT did not refer to it at all but later on gave it a new interpretation.[112] For many

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its ideology. See M.R. Manmathan, "Charitṛam Oru Piriyan Kōṇiyāṇu", *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 9:44, Aug.25, 2006, p.37.

[108] No reform movement of the period was able to ignore the powerful rationalist thought which was getting popular. The first rationalist movement in India, namely *Sahodarasangham*, originated in Kerala under Sahōdaran Ayyappan in 1917 and the first rationalist publication, *Yuktivadi,* appeared in 1929, under M.C. Joseph. U. Kalānādhan, "Kēraḷathilē Yuktivāda Pṛasthānam", *Dēśābhimāni Supplement*, 5 July 2000.

[109] In his article "Samyavādavum Mathavum" (*Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 12:26, 10 Sep.1934, pp.7-8), Kēḷappan defended Hindu religion by arguing that there is no connection between caste and Hinduism and denounced the tendency to repudiate religion in the name of caste disparities. He argued that anything, including religion, would decay gradually and referred to the case of the Muslim priests who used to exploit believers in the name of religion.

[110] In many respects, VT seems to share the position held by Rammohun Roy on Hinduism. The basic outlines of Roy's reconstructed Hinduism consisted of the rejection of idolatry, Brahman priests and rituals; for him God and His existence were proven by the complexity of reality. The rational and highly ethical vision of Hinduism had been lost over the centuries through the unfortunate influence of Brahman priests. Roy would return Hinduism to its past purity. Once proper belief was re-established, erroneous customs would disappear. For him, religion could not be judged solely on its own internal scriptural evidence, but it must also be measured by reason and shown to be free of contradiction and functioning to uphold a beneficial social order. See Kenneth W. Jones, *Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India,* New Delhi, 1994, pp.31-32.

[111] VT's son recalls that VT used to speak of humanism as the ideal, which he held nobler than Nambūtiriness. V.T. Vāsudēvan, "VTyudē Dhaṛma Sańkaṭańgaḷ", *Malayāḷa Manorama Weekly,* 45:2, 8 Jan. 2000, p.3. Humanism was in fact taken as a higher form of *Nambūtiriness*. In his welcome speech at the 21st annual meeting at Mavēḷikkara, Subrahmaṇyam Pōtti asked the Nambūtiris not to be trapped by words like *swadharmānuṣṭānam* and *Nambūtiritham;* since no one had defined them satisfactorily; it was an orthodox subterfuge to counter the reform process. See *YK*, 19:29 Jan. 2, 1929. In his Ōngallūṛ speech, E.M.S. called upon the Nambūtiris to abandon at least that amount of *Brāhmaṇyam* sufficient enough to instill in them the essential ideals of work and labour. See "Nambūtiriyē Manuṣyanākkān", *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.291-92.

[112] In his speech VT urged the Nambūtiris to refashion the existing *Nambūtiritham,* which was rotten, in order to revive its real virtues. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.546-47. Methab

Nambūtiri reformers, the rhetoric on *Nambūtiritham* might have been a strategy of reform; but for VT it was different, he wanted to retain certain (Nambūtiri) values which he truly believed to be eternal and emulative.[113]

VT's eulogists have absolved him for his liberal *Hindutva* position by attributing it to his intense emotionalism; he often responded rather sentimentally and instantaneously and not from a rational or theoretical point of view.[114] Though this argument could be put forward as an excuse in the case of an orator who starts to lose his self-control as his speech advances, the case was not so harmless in VT. All of VT's speeches during the reform days reveal that they were made after considerable home work and even his speech at Palakkad was well thought out. So far as his articles were concerned, he used to write and rewrite them before them being published.[115] And even the charge that VT did not attempt at theorizing or that he was indifferent to ideologies does not hold good since even in the absence of an apparent ideology, a vague but untheorized

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cites VT's overt gratification over the comment of the Parayas of Mēzhathūr describing him as the Agnihōtṛi of modern times. See Methab, "Vararuchi Muthal VT Varē", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 55:4, April 10, 1977, pp.22-27.

[113] Personal conversation, P.K. Muhammed Kunhi, Perumpilāvu, 10-09-2005. It has been observed that with the loss of rituality, a large part of the 'support system' of caste has collapsed. The feeling of belonging to a caste is now expressed more in the nature of *community consciousness* than in hierarchical terms. DL Sheth, "Caste and Secularization Process in India" in Peter Ronald de Souza ed., *Contemporary India - Transitions*, New Delhi, 2002, p.244.

[114] There is a notion that VT was unable to say no to people who loved him. He was persuaded to participate in many public functions with which he did not share his views. N. Dāmōdaran, an associate of VT in the 1950s and after, observed: "VT was not a peaceful thinker. He was a burning enthusiast. This enthusiasm may provoke him to speak of undesirable things. In fact he was not an RSS nor was interested in making men Nambūtiris. I had reached his house some ½ an hour later he left home for Palakkad to attend the meeting. Had I reached there on time, he wouldn't go for it. After return he told me that he spoke only of morality and humanism and nothing in favour of the RSS. 'I told only what I was supposed to'. He lamented that he would rather not attend it. When people dear to him request, he couldn't deny". Personal Conversation with N. Dāmōdaran, Valanchery, 18th June, 2000. Another friend of VT justified him by quoting his famous phrase, "If I were a woman, I would become a prostitute". See P.K. Muhammed Kunhi, "VT Enna Vismayam", in his own work *Dukhathintē Sugaṅdham*, 1994, p.55. Conceding this point VT may be absolved; but his revivalist tone as found in his Palakkad speech was not an exception, he had been building up such an inclination from the '60s and was expressed through his articles and speeches.

[115] N.V. Krishna Variyar, "VT Enna Itihāsam" in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, *op.cit*, p.30.

ideological paradigm evidently gets manifested in his social interventions and thought-processes.[116]

The concept of the 'other' had been integral to the approach and ideology of VT. He viewed religious communities other than the Hindus as outsiders and looked down upon them, especially upon Muslims, for their missionary zeal and religious exclusivism.[117] He viewed Islam and Christianity as foreign and denounced them for their intrusion into the national body through invasion.[118] They stood detached from the nation and stood as independent cultural segments incompatible with the national culture.[119] His reservations against the Muslims may have been accentuated by their aloofness from the mainstream politics,[120]

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[116] Mādamb holds that VT's ideology could best be compared with that of Sri Aurobindo. See Mādamb KunjuKuṭṭan, *Abhivādayē*, Kottayam, 1989, p. 223. For Aurobindo, nationalism was a religious phenomenon. He criticized Muslims for treating nation secondary to their religion and for their refusal to get assimilated into the national body. See Jyothirmaya Sharma, *Hindutva: exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*, New Delhi, 2003, pp.66-68.

[117] Nirmal Verma noted that Islam and Christianity failed to arouse interest or curiosity among the Hindu traditionalists because they were 'other' in the absolute sense of the term. Nirmal Verma, "India and Europe – Some Reflections on Self and Other", in Fred Dallmyr & GN Devy ed., *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity*, New Delhi, 1998, p.329.

[118] Conrad Wood speaks of the British official perception of the Malabar Muslims as 'Jungle Moplah'. See Conrad Wood, "The Moplah Rebellions between 1800-02 and 1921-22", *Indian Economic and Social History review*, Vol. XIII, 1976, pp.105-06. VT approached conversions only from the religious, and hence sentimental, point of view. He was unwilling to link conversions with the caste system or the agrarian system. Wood remarks that conversion was an important weapon in the struggle against the *janmi* as the caste-superior and the peasant-exploiter. For details see Conrad Wood, "Historical Background of the Moplah Rebellion: Outbreaks, 1836-1919", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 3, 1974-75, pp.23-24.

[119] Even Gandhi viewed the Muslims as 'the other' as is evidenced by his comparison between the Chauri Chaura and the Malabar Rebellion. "The casual conjunction of 'other Indians' and 'other Mussalmans' in Gandhi's comment underlines this point: Indians and Muslims are separate, if not contradictory, categories". M.T. Ansari, "Refiguring the Fanatic: Malabar, 1836-1922" in *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. XII, Delhi, 2005, p.77.

[120] Wood pointed out that the aloofness of the Māppiḷa from the political movement was not surprising when the self-proclaimed objectives of the first Malabar District Conference of the Congress at Palakkad in 1916 were considered. For a community with an enduring history of boldly asserted grievance towards British rule, the anxious declarations of loyalty to the foreign connection cannot have been alluring. For a denomination for which the sharpest social and economic antagonism was cast in communal terms the pervasive Hindu allusion and symbolism of the Congress would have been positively repellant. Above all it was clearly dominated by the high-caste Hindu *janmis* and *vakils* whom the Māppiḷa had for so long identified as the source of his ills. Conrad Wood, "The Ernad Moplah and the

but other factors were equally important.[121] Besides, sPōtting the 'other' was certainly intensified by social and economic interests; these religious communities were outside the caste system and caste-based dharma; they dared to question traditional caste privileges and hierarchically arranged social order.[122] The Christians were looked upon with admiration during the days of reform due to their industry and their attachment to modernism, but were perceived also with fear because they were capable of threatening caste hierarchy and dharma. The 'decline' of the Nambūtiris corresponded with the progress of the Muslims and the Christians who, as they were not bound by tradition and caste rules, ventured into all areas of economic activity, especially cultivation and trade, and prospered swiftly. Their increasing population strength and economic power were perceived with fear because these were capable of threatening the dominant position of the Nambūtiris. Their missionary zeal was

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political Movement in Malabar, 1916-21", *Journal of Kerala Studies,* Vol. II, Part II, 1975, pp.249-50.

[121] Overt evidences supporting VT's disgust with the Muslims is not available but considering the fact that the Nambūtiri movement had shown great concern over the Census reports, an increase in Muslim population clearly reflected in them must have been a desturbing factor. Based on the census data, Miller gives us details of this population increase. Over the 50 years from 1891-1941 while general population increased by 46% in the Madras Presidency, the Māppiḷas grew by 89%. In between 1871-1961, Muslim population of Malabar grew by 250% and that of the Hindus by 136%. During 1891-1941, percentage of Hindus decreased by 7.3% per 1000, while Muslim population increased by 12.9%. The enlargement of the Māppiḷa population may be attributed to two factors: natural increase and increase by conversion. See Roland E Miller, *Māppiḷa Muslims of Kerala*, Madras, 1992, pp.34-35. The growing awareness of the role of conversions in strengthening Muslim population and in endangering the interests of the Nambūtiris might have forced VT to take a strong attitude against the issue of religious conversions.

[122] It is observed that among the higher castes in particular, the attitude towards Islam was coloured by the way in which Islam impinged upon their interests. Amalendu Misra, *Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India,* New Delhi, 2004, p.20. Chatterjee suggested that the tendency to view Islam and Christianity as outsiders is an entirely modern, rationalist and historicist idea. Its appeal is political and the framework of its reasoning is entirely secular. Even anti-Vedic and anti-brahmanical religions like Buddhism are counted as Hindu and are claimed as part of the Hindu *jati.* Thus, the criterion for inclusion or exclusion is one of historical origin. Religions originated outside India are, therefore, foreign. Here, India is the generic entity, with fixed territorial definitions, which acts as the permanent arena for the history of the *jati.* Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism", in Vasudha Dalmia & Heinrich Von Steitencron ed., *Representing Hinduism: The Contradiction of Religious Traditions and National Identity,* New Delhi, 1995, p.126.

also a serious menace to the interests of the community.[123] Tipu became a villain because it was with him that large scale conversions[124] and organized attack on traditional privileges started to take place.[125] The Māppiḷa riots also were remembered with dread as cruel attacks on Hindu dharma. (It is very important to note that with the Malabar Rebellion marked discussions on the future of Hinduism took place and a desperate call for Hindu unity ensued.) Though the Nambūtiris did not support Vaikam Satyagraha, they became convinced of the necessity of a refashioning of social relations and of the relaxation of pollution rules.[126] Thus concern over culture and tradition was not simply an emotional and national question; it was closely associated with social and economic interests.[127] The same factor had persuaded the Nambūtiris in general and VT in

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[123] He wrote that issues like forced conversion and ban on cow slaughter should never be decided by a majority vote of 51-49 percentages in an assembly but should be resolved by majority opinion outside it. He found these as the most important issues and his attitude explains how he evaluated the role and relevance of popular bodies. See his "Adhamarē" in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* p.529.

[124] While narrating the story of Uma, VT showed considerable intolerance over conversion of Nambūtiris to Islam in his typical 'cultural' way. He wrote: "I know a few families who were socially ostracized because they had been converted to Islam during the time of Tipu's invasion. None of them dresses the Māppiḷa way. Nor have they given up the Hindu rites and customs. This is the first time a Nambūtiri girl turns up before me in a typical Muslim dress". Quoted from the transliteration of VT's article by V.C. Harris, "The Story of Uma", *Haritham,* No.17, 2005, pp.60-61. Re-accommodating the Nambūtiris who had been converted to Islam by Tipu was a matter of serious debate during the Nambūtiri movement.

[125] Dale observed that taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the Mysorean invasion, the Māppiḷa tenants became *de facto janmis* and after the defeat of Tipu refused to surrender their lands to their ancient *jenmakkars*. This was the most common reason for what Jonathan Duncan described in 1793 as the "bitterness of enmity between the two sects". Stephen F. Dale, "The Mappilas During Mysorean Rule: Agrarian Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Malabar", *South Asia,* Vol. 6, 1976, p.10.

[126] When a resolution endorsing the freedom of movement was introduced in the Travancore Legislature, all the Nambūtiri legislators voted against it. Editorial, *Kēraḷakaumudi*, 6:46, 13 February 1925. It is interesting to note that most of the Nambūtiri reformers did not oppose the demand raised by the Vaikam Satyagrahis but they denounced the path chosen for achieving the goal.

[127] Dilip Menon writes: When phrases like tradition are used there is an implicit and unquestioned assumption that all have equal access to and equal status within these nebulous monoliths. But what solace can untouchables find within Hindu tradition, if they are buffeted by the winds of colonial change? The simple dichotomy of inner and outer, tradition and modernity collapses since lower castes are excluded from the inner spaces of tradition itself. Heir access to colonial modernity is mediated through their entrapment in the domain of a tradition within which they can only be subordinate or outcaste. On the other

particular to perceive even the Nāyaṛs and Īzhavas as outsiders.[128] His later conservative position on caste and opposition to social equality reveals that the secular credentials of VT in the 1920s and 30s were dictated mainly by communitarian considerations.

5:4. Lure of Modernity and Fetters of Tradition

The ideological foundation of the Nambūtiri movement was modernity; it aimed at refashioning the community in tune with the essentials of modern values. Modernity was expressed both as an outlook and as an attempt at restructuring old institutions in tune with new ideals. Every aspect of tradition including customs and practices were reevaluated in accordance with scientific and rational paradigms and their continuity was decided according to their utility and reliability. Though there was continuous discourse on 'fall', 'golden age' and 'revival', what in fact envisaged was not the blind revival of the past as such, but past glory, the glory of Nambūtiri superiority.[129] So reform was justified in the name of reviving the glory, in all spheres including the intellectual, social, economic and the political. The status of the Nambūtiris as the 'dominant caste' had to be reinstated and the means of restoration was reform of the old as new. This could be achieved through modern education and by modernizing the economic institutions – including feudal landownership – and also by reorganizing the family structure and power relationships. All these

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hand, it is this very modernity that allows them access to the knowledge of that which subordinates them. Tradition for them is, otherwise, not only a scarce resource but an inaccessible one. Dilip Menon, "Caste and Colonial Modernity: Reading Saraswatavijayam", *Studies in History*, 13:2, n.s., 1997, p.292.

[128] In fact VT's social position was defined by the notion of the 'Dominant Caste', the members of which were having a privileged position, wielding considerable power over other local castes, having command over resources and organizing local activities. For details see M.N. Srinivas, "The Indian Village: Myth and Reality" in J.H.M. Beattie and R.G. Lieuhardt, *Studies in Social Anthropology: Essays in Memory of E.E. Evans-Prichard*, London, 1975, pp.69-72.

[129] Kuṛumūṛ Nārāyaṇan Bhaṭṭathiripād transliterated the famous anti-revivalist speech of Ranade and it was published in the *UN*. Ranade opposed the tendency to revive the outmoded customs and traditions since they contradicted with 'true Brāhmaṇyam'. See *UN*, 8:4, Dhanu 1102, pp.221-24.

were supposed to convert the Nambūtiris into a model community grand enough for others to emulate: a community based on rational thinking, utilitarian outlook and humanitarian ethos.[130]

In the first decade of its origin the *Sabha* was not able to promote these ideals in a powerful way; but from the beginning of the 1920s they began to dominate the reform agenda and the overall outlook of the community. They also considerably succeeded in influencing at least the upper echelons of the community, especially the active workers and the enthusiastic followers. But, these were lofty utopian ideals extremely difficult to be accomplished in life and there were considerable disputes as to the modes to be adopted in realizing them. By the beginning of the 1930s, following the era of radicalism, the conflict between the ideal and the practical began to take an opposite course towards a strong reactionary and revivalist trend. This was due mainly to two reasons. First, with the fulfillment of the highly challenging agenda, i.e., the marriage reform, the movement failed to put forward a common programme powerful enough to unite the various segments of radicals. Disputes over objectives and methods of future reform led to the decline of the movement and soon gave the conservatives an upper hand. Secondly, in matters relating to community interests, like the tenancy issue, approach to the Congress, etc, even a large section of the radicals held a moderate view which was closer to the orthodox outlook than to the radical. Hence well before the ideals and institutions of modernity took their roots, the movement dispersed and tradition got a lease of life, though without its old and tyrannical authority. The essence of modernity was threatened and this was expressed as a post-reform reaction in the form of the revival of several customs which were rejected (such as the high importance attached to rituals in life and the negative attitude towards educating and

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[130] V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kudumba Regulation: Ūṛjitha Pariśṛamaṅgaḷ", *YK*, 17:19, Nov. 24, 1926.

uplifting women)[131] and a flood of penances taking place even for trivial acts of deviation from tradition like dining with the lower caste people or for abandoning the *ghōṣa*.[132]

The forces of reaction had created decisive results: except the first generation of women who appeared in public, others stayed back and even many of those who had boycotted the *ghōṣa* withdrew to seclusion;[133] men lived idle lives and married with the intention of obtaining heavy dowry;[134] *sambandham* and aged marriages continued;[135] only two widow marriages had taken place till 1944;[136] by and large Nambūtiris were not active either in politics or in other areas of public life.[137] In fact the lasting results of the movement were the outlawing of *adhivedanam* and the recognition of secular education for boys. The ideological impact of modernity was only faintly felt among the common Nambūtiris. This was mainly because women continued to be backward and landlordism held its sway.

However, even the process of reaction was marked by the adoption of a modified form of the old customs and not a return to the old tradition as such. Being the priesthood and the landed aristocracy, the Nambūtiris were inclined to stick to tradition which caused to leave them behind in material progress. Educational backwardness retarded their professional advancement; their low numerical strength and their waning economic privileges incapacitated them in their fight for the special rights of their community through bargaining from a

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[131] E.M.S, "Nambūtiriyē Manuşyanākkān", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p. 275.
[132] Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri's *Yōgakşēmasabha Charitṛam* gives details of this orthodox reaction and the surprising tendency of many erstwhile radicals to succumb to penances.
[133] E.M.S, "Nambūtirimāṛ Eṅgōṭṭu", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p. 262.
[134] "Nambūtiriyē Manuşyanākkān", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p.278.
[135] *Ibid*, pp.277-78; 300-302.
[136] E.M.S, "Nambūtirimāṛ Eṅgōṭṭu", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p. 262. The attitude of the community towards Mrs. MRB was a clear instance of this reactionary position. E.M.S. wrote that even in 1944 the community in general treated her as an outcast. See "Nambūtiriyē Manuşyanākkān", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, p. 291.
[137] *Ibid*, pp.312-315.

position of strength. Demands for special representation also arose in this context against which leaders like E.M.S. warned the community that such measures would boomerang on the community.[138] In the context of the cessation of reform halfway, and the slow erosion of the reform ethic, and because of the disparity between the high expectations and the utter incapability of realizing them, attachment to tradition became an unavoidable necessity. Meanwhile traditional forms of subsistence such as ritualism and priesthood provided less challenging professions. Thus ritualism, traditionalism and casteism dominated the Nambūtiri world in the late 30s and early 40s which greatly intercepted the community's further engagements with modernity.

The silence of VT during this period was not altogether casual or inadvertent; in the beginning he did not respond to the critical issues that marred the progress of the community, and the society at large, and when he started responding he had become very selective. He focused his attention on two objectives; one, against the ruthless system of dowry and the consequent 'sale' of Antaṛjanams, and two, attracting the Nambūtiris towards farming. His stories written during this period were directed towards this end; though he associated with the 'work centre' he seemed not to have been motivated by the concept of women empowerment. He was alarmed by the growing immorality among the Antaṛjanams and its probable impact on the image of the community.[139] As far as the second area of interest was concerned, he wanted the Nambūtiris to retain

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[138] In matters of government jobs, he observed that Nambūtiris were occupying more than what they really deserved in terms of their population strength. *Ibid*, pp.310-311; "Nambūtirimāṛ Eṅgōṭṭu", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, pp.258-259; "Nambūtirimārum Pratyēka Prātinidhyavum", in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, Sanchika I, pp.170-172.

[139] His memoirs keep silence over the Ōngallūṛ episode. He also later condemned the 'work centre' model alleging it as a plot by the communists to recruit women into the party. See his "Nambūtirimārudē Kūlippaṇi Saptāham", *Mātṛubhūmi* Daily, 4-11-1970, reproduced in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *VT*, p.236. Nowhere in his memoirs or articles other than this he had referred to the 'work centre' nor did he recognize the kind of women empowerment envisaged through it.

their *janmam* property by entering into agriculture as real farmers. He wanted to contain the tenant claims. This is clear from the two stories written by him during this period.[140]

In the post-independence era VT's public interventions revealed that he had considerably retreated from his obsession with modernity. Though he continued his attachment with humanism and rationalism, to him these concepts had acquired different dimensions, especially as a confrontation with communism and as a focus on individual liberty and philanthropy. He also took up the role of the moral reformer crusading against political corruption and nepotism.[141] His agitation was commendable in the context of the increasing vices in party politics but the alternative model he suggested was the feudal order with 'dharmic' foundations.[142] In the articles which he wrote during this time,[143] he glorified a utopian temple-centered village life, the trusteeship system and the dominant place of the Brahmins in the social and ethical domains. More surprising was his attempt to justify and glorify caste and to present it as a 'scientific' system.[144] Evidently he presented himself as a Nambūtiri and

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[140] See "Manakkalē Kāryasthan" and "Chūṇdippalaka", in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.99-107.

[141] In fact obsession with morality was a Victorian relic permeated among the colonial subjects through modernity. "Feeling guilty about the loss of their religious faith, suspecting that that loss might expose them to the temptations of immorality and the perils of nihilism...they were determined to make of morality a substitute for religion – to make of it, indeed, a form of religion". Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Marriage and Morals among the Victorians and Other Essays*, London, 1986, p.21.

[142] M.G.S. argued that VT's outlook was prophetic; by not being attracted to Communist politics, which had its base on violence and unreason, he had truly foreseen Gandhism as the true ideal for the future and had realized how illusive and short-lived would the fascination towards it be. See M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "VT: Communiṣathinappuṛathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṛayilē Māṛgadaṛśakan" in A.V. Sreekumar, *op.cit*, pp.75-83.

[143] See the collections of articles in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.433-541.

[144] *Ibid*, pp.459-64; 534-35. In modern times we have several exponents of caste. For instance, Coomaraswamy defended the pre-modern caste system because he found it more human than the modern class system. Gandhi also did so but went further, i.e., he sought to reorder the hierarchy of skills – to re-legitimize the manual and the unclean and delegitimize the Brahmanic and the clean. Ashis Nandy, "Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A

disclosed the secret behind his attraction to Gandhism, its revival of 'Āṛṣhadhaṛma' and its focus on individual merit and scope for self-realization. VT used plenty of Nambūtiri symbols and cultural forms in all these articles both as similes and metaphors.

The tendency towards cultural revivalism might have been triggered by the frustration in VT in his later years and which might have been brought about by his, as also his community's, increasing marginalization. It greatly differs from what has been described as 'critical traditionalism' which developed as a choice to the advancing and alarming westernism;[145] VT's association with the RSS and Tapasya revealed that his infatuation with cultural revivalism had clear political dimensions.

In a tradition-bound community like that of the Nambūtiris, to be modern in the true spirit was extremely difficult. The radical reformers had challenged tradition and had broken its symbols (like abandoning the sacred thread, cutting the tuft of hair, smoking, drinking coffee, wearing shirts, using wrist watch, taking food outdoors and traveling in train) in order to provoke the orthodox; provoking the orthodox was a reform strategy in those days,[146] it was necessary to win the hegemonic struggle against the opponents of reform. Where tradition

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Credo", in Fred Dallmyr & G.N. Devy ed., *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's Search for Identity,* New Delhi, 1998, pp.253-54. Bateille has suggested that even intellectuals have been greatly sensitive in their approach to caste – a kind of indifference or even hostility – especially when it comes to marriage. See Andre Bateille, "Caste in Contemporary India" in C.J. Fuller ed., *Caste Today,* Delhi, 1996, pp.162-63. It is because caste is not merely a form of identity, arising from birth in a particular group, it is also a matter of consciousness. Andre Bateille, "Varna and Jati", *Sociological Bulletin,* 45:1, March 1996, p.16.

[145] Bhikku Parekh, *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse,* New Delhi, 1999, p. 42. He defined critical traditionalism as the mobilization of indigenous resources, borrowing from Europe whatever was likely to supplement and enrich them.

[146] P.S. Kesavan Nambūtiri termed it as "Muṣippikkal", which was the third method (the first being the ideal of the '4 changes' of Mūthiringōd and the second, Satyagraha). See his inaugural speech at the Pānjāḷ Girls' School, *YK,* 20:65, May 26, 1930.

was strong and deep-rooted, attempts to overcome it required an all-out struggle against its symbols and authorities. But for most of the Nambūtiris, it was only a makeshift arrangement; it did not mean an end in itself. Once orthodoxy was weakened and when its power of resisting reform had exhausted, the recalcitrance of the reformers too started melting away and they themselves became the exponents of tradition in relation to the new generation. Among the Nambūtiris, instances of reformers turning into reactionaries were not uncommon.[147] Though VT appeared to be a staunch radical in comparison to several of his contemporaries, his word was not the final one with regard to radicalism. In fact, he wanted to retain the essentials of tradition right from his early days of public life and it was not surprising to observe that he made a retreat from his earlier stand of embracing modernity. This change of outlook gained considerable momentum once the chief agenda of the reform movement was achieved and the necessity of linking the movement with a wider social movement became apparent. Since the Nambūtiri movement had a strict communitarian agenda, any future and secular agenda could only be built upon the foundation of the Nambūtiri tradition.[148] This could best be understood from the case of VT's *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*. Therefore, the gradual development of a

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[147] In his presidential address at the 13th Annual meeting of the Perāmaṅgalam NY Upasabha, (*YK*, 20:58, Apr. 30, 1930) Pātiriśśēri condemned the young radical Nambūtiris for their high-handed measures in reform which were crossing the limits of community interests and ethical boundaries. He remarked that, except a few, all Nambūtiris would become 'Sudarsanites' in the near future. He repeated these points at the Aṅkamaly NY Upasabha meeting (*YK*, 20:63, May 21, 1930). Pātiriśśēri was severely criticized for his growing conservatism and he was accused of becoming the next Paśchiman. See E.M.S, "Nambūtiri Samudāyathintē Innathē Nila", *UN* 11:44, 45 & 46, May 9, 16 & 23, 1930. Similarly hardcore radicals like Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, Kāṇippayūṛ Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād and Pāluḷḷy Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri later cooperated with the reactionary Nambūtiri Youth Congress and its organ *Patāka* led by T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād in 1948. See T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Samudāyadṛōhi", *Dēśābhimāni Weekly*, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, p.47.

[148] It was not surprising since the Nambūtiri movement was greatly influenced by the national culture which the national movement launched most powerfully as its historical project to fashion "a 'modern' national culture that is nevertheless not western". See Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and postcolonial Histories*, Delhi, 1995, p.6.

crisis in his fascination towards modernity was neither surprising nor mysterious. VT's steadfastness to Nambūtiri values and social ethics, uncompromising vegetarianism,[149] opposition to parliamentary politics and the concealed faith in the social utility of the caste system, all prove that his obsession with modernity was short-lived or was imposed by the compulsions of the circumstances.[150] Even his avowed faith in rationalism was just an opposition to superstitions or a reaffirmation of the ancient Indian rationalist tradition. In the 1970s he started drifting away from his rationalist position alleging that it was becoming institutionalized.

5:5. Landlord Interests and Land-reformist Pretensions

One of VT's most reactionary stands was on the land question which, however, evidently harmonized with the attitude of the *Sabha* and the Nambūtiri movement. Nambūtiris were the biggest landlords of Kēraḷa and the very founding of the *Sabha* was meant to defend the *janmi* interests against the

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[149] In a study of the food habits prevalent among the Assamese upper caste Hindus, Audrey Cantlie noted the importance of regulations surrounding food in the daily life of the orthodox Hindu and the critical role of food transactions as an index of caste status. Their food habits are based on three assumptions. First, food is held to be imbued with moral qualities which affect the mind and disposition of the eater such that certain categories of food cool the blood and dispose to virtuous thoughts while others inflame the passions and brutalize the character. Second, the cooking of food opens it to contagion from outside. Raw whole foodstuff carries no pollution and is freely purchased in the market from an untouchable or a Muslim. Third, moral qualities are transmitted by contact with cooked food and internalized by the eater. So, to accept food from a man of lower caste is to acquire lower caste status. 'According to the quality of his food', it was said, 'the eater possesses his mind. His habits and character become as his food'. Restrictions on diet are socially significant as an assertion of spiritual status so that the higher the rank of a caste, the more limited are the types of food it does not consider impure. Audrey Cantlie, "Moral Significance of Food among the Assamese Hindus" in Adrian C. Mayer ed., *Culture and Morality,* Delhi, 1981, pp.42-44. Also see Bernard S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 113-34. While VT broke some of these rules, his steadfastness to vegetarianism revealed that he retained some others.

[150] It is argued that the continuation of the symbols and institutions of tradition is an index to the failure of the institutions of civil society to take root and gather strength in independent India. Old forms of collective identities have not only held their ground but become increasingly assertive. Andre Bateille, "Varna and jati", *Sociological Bulletin* 45:1, March 1996, p.26.

advancing tenancy movement.[151] It was the *Janmi Sabha* that was transformed into the *Yōgakṣēmasabha*. In all the three political divisions of Kēraḷa, tenancy movement had taken strong roots by the end of the 19th century. Though the Mysorean invasions and the Māppiḷa revolts had considerably threatened the privileged position of the Nambūtiris as landed magnates,[152] the establishment and consolidation of the British power helped them to recoup their position though as junior partners and dependants of the colonial government.[153] But the advancing tenancy movement actively supported by the English educated native bureaucracy and intelligentsia put the Nambūtiris again on the defensive.[154] The fading out of the traditional patronage of the governments, which had its singular focus on the protection of the Nambūtiris,[155] demanded united and concerted efforts on the part of the *janmis* to defend their rights and privileges. The deliberations of the *Sabha* rightly prove this fact.[156]

Two important developments created great concern for the Nambūtiris on their prospects as *janmis*. First one was the slow disappearance of princely

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[151] C.K. Nambūtiri, *Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum*, pp.21-22.

[152] Dharma Kumar writes that traditionally revenue in Malabar was very low; in fact the landowners of Malabar claimed that they had paid no land tax at all before the Mysorean invasion. *Land and Caste in South India,* New Delhi, 1992, p.23. Panikkar says: "What the Mysore Sultans did during their short period of rule was to absorb either the whole or a part of the janmi's share as revenue". K.N. Panikkar, "Peasant Exploitation in Malabar in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Kerala Studies,* Vol. 11, 1984, p.174.

[153] The Colonial State had a double-edged impact: while it strengthened the locally dominant land controllers, it simultaneously undermined their legitimacy. Francine R. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao, *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order,* Vol. I, New Delhi, 1989, p.8.

[154] In an editorial criticizing the new tenancy bill, the *YK* observed that most of the government servants in Malabar came from the tenant families. *YK*, 14:70; June 4, 1924.

[155] An editorial of *YK* lamented that with the British rule the Nambūtiris lost their political privilege; though they were still the lords of the society, nobody recognized them. *YK*, 14:67, May 24, 1924.

[156] As Jeffrey noted, this was mainly because in the 1930s ritual status roughly coincided with economic power and caste with class. Robin Jeffrey, "Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party, 1930-1940", *Journal of Asian Studies,* XXXVII: 1, Nov. 1978, pp. 80-82.

patronage in the states of Travancore and Cochin[157] and the shift in governmental support in favour of the tenants' cause.[158] In fact new forces had started to work and even the governments were greatly concerned with promotion of entrepreneurship and economic progress towards capitalist development; the idle and backward looking *janmis* could not be the potential forces of development.[159] The second one was the formidable advance of the tenancy movement with the strong backing of the Congress. The tenants were presenting their issue in terms of democratic rights; because they were the majority, they had the legitimate right to get their demands fulfilled. This had been creating panic among the *janmis* for in future, in the event of the rule of the majority, they would suffer; thus the exigency of *janmi* interests forced them to turn against the Congress and the very concept of majority rule enshrined in democracy.[160]

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[157] While describing the decline of the community in the context of the reform movement, VT referred to the helplessness of the Cochin Raja in opposing the Tenancy Bill. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.129.

[158] This desperation had forced the *Sabha* to urge the Nambūtiris to worship Paraśurāma vigorously. NYJS pamphlet No. 15, quoted in *YK*, 14:29, Jan.2, 1924, called for observing Paraśurāma puja, as had been resolved by the *Sabha*, as a means to strengthen the hands of the Nambūtiris to withstand the mounting tenancy pressures.

[159] This does not mean that the tenant cause was without grounds. K.V.M, despite him being the editor of the *Vasumati* (the organ of the *janmis*) and a strong associate of the *Sabha*, sympathized with the tenants. His family too was *kāṇam* tenants. He maintained that the condition of the *kāṇam* tenants was the most precarious, in relation to *Veṛumpāṭṭakkār*, since they had to meet the exorbitant levy demands from the *janmis* and the high amount needed for the resettlement at every 12 years. Hence he justified the movement of the tenants for fixity of tenure. K.V.M, *Ātmakatha*, pp.50-53.

[160] See Kunhimangalath Manayil Vāsudēvan Tirumumb, "Congressukārum Janmikaḷum", *YK*, 14:43, Feb.23, 1924. P.C. Thampān in "Janmikaḷudē Sukhajīvitam", *YK*, 14:92; Aug 23, 1924, identified educated Nāyars (despite they being educated by their *sambandham* fathers!) as the tenant agitators. He criticized the *Māṭṛubhūmi* for supporting the partisan tenant cause. An editorial of the *YK* (14:93; Aug 27, 1924) denounced the decision of the Madras government to forward the Malabar Tenancy Bill to the Select Committee as a 'betrayal by the majority' and pointed out the inconsistency of taking decisions concerning 42.6 million people in an assembly of 126 members with a meager support of just 56 of them. It also opined that representative assemblies thus fall short of reflecting real public opinion. When the Bill was finally passed, the *YK* in its editorial again attacked the concept of majority decision as envisaged by modern democracy. *YK*, 15:99, Sep 16, 1925.

Throughout its history the *Sabha* had struggled vigorously to protect the landed interests of the Nambūtiris.[161] The *Janmi Sabha* and publications like *Vasumati* and *Janmi* worked exclusively for the promotion of the landlord interests.[162] In his famous speech before the *Janmi Sabha*, Kuṟūṟ Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād articulated how the tenant version of the tenancy issue was unjust and conflicted with the 'legitimate' interests of the *janmis*.[163] In a sweeping condemnation of the tenancy movement Kāṇippayūṟ warned the tenants that their demands were not different from plunder of others' properties.[164] Discourse on the *janmi-kudiyān* issue gained momentum when the Malabar tenancy bill was introduced by Krishnan Nāyaṟ in the Madras legislature in 1924. Opposing the bill, the *janmi* representative Prabhakaran Tampan argued that it favoured the *kāṇam* tenants alone who were just middlemen and had been exploiting the real peasants.[165]

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[161] "The main issues that were discussed by the Nambūtiri reformers all the way to the late 1920s were those of taṟawād reform, education and the relationship between landlord and tenant". G. Arunima, "Multiple Meanings: Changing Conceptions of Matrilineal Kinship in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Malabar", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 33:3, 1996, p.302.

[162] *Vasumati* was a weekly journal published from Calicut for promoting *janmi* interests. See K.V.M, *Ātmakatha*, pp.155-57. M.R.K.C. was its editor and after him K.V.M. worked for some time as the editor. Its manager was Pāṟayil Rāman Nambūtiri who had edited the work *Nambūtirimār*.

[163] *UN*, 3:10, Mithunam 1097, pp.458-68; 3:11, Karkidakam, 1097, pp.502-11. Panikkar supported the *kāṇakkāran's* independent rights on the soil which implied permanency of *kāṇam* tenure. The practice of the renewal of *kāṇam*, after every twelve years, with the payment of a *kāṇappaṇam* by the *kāṇakkāran* to the *janmi*, was a sort of advance, either a loan of rent or a security for the payment of rent. The perception of the British government identifying the *janmi* as the *raiyats* in whom the "exclusive right to the hereditary possession and usufruct of the soil was vested" was in fact impelled by the political expediency of creating a rural gentry loyal to them. K.N. Panikkar, "Peasant Exploitation in Malabar in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. 11, 1984, pp.174-78.

[164] "Janmisabhayudē Chumathala", *YK*, 14:22, Dec.5, 1923. He argued that the *janmis* were extremely sympathetic to the tenants and had been satisfied with what the tenants paid them; they had been holding the lands as their own; instead of showing gratitude for these they were growing more and more aggressive.

[165] *YK*, 14:56, Ap.5, 1924. An editorial of *YK* alleged that Krishnan Nair was trying to convert *kāṇam* tenants as second *janmis* by requesting the government to divide the produce of the land into three portions to be enjoyed as equal shares among the *janmi*, the *kāṇam* tenant and the farmer. *Ibid.*

Some of the Nambūtiris like Kuṟūṟ had realized the trend of the times as is understood from his efforts towards starting capitalist farming and the cultivation of commercial crops. But this trend was confined to a few and that too only to those who were settled in the neighbourhood of the enterprising Christian cultivators. The vast majority with their dread for the new and the unknown, held fast to the old world. In fact the transformation of an age-old tradition could not be possible by merely creating an awareness of the situation; it needed basic and structural changes. The existing property relations and family structure with primogeniture and ban on *Kaniṣṭavivāham* had to be replaced with individual partition and the universalization of *swajātivivāham*. Marriage reform and promotion of English education gained currency in the circumstances of increasing concern over *janmi* interests.

In the 1920s the concern over landed rights gained momentum with the appearance of the new class of English educated Nambūtiris who associated the question of land alienation with the tenancy movement, the existing family structure and nature of property relations. The traditional customs of primogeniture and ban on *Kaniṣṭavivāham* was designed to retain property intact without being fragmented and to maintain the nobility but it nurtured only lethargy and brought about the ruin of the Nambūtiris. In the prevailing system of joint property, the junior sons grew indifferent to the management of property and custom did not allow them to interfere in its management. They roamed aimlessly and entered into *sambandham* relations. Hence property could not be protected of without altering the marriage practices and the system of inheritance. Since vast estates could not be managed by a single person, partition was the only viable alternative.[166] Concepts like *Nambūtiritham* and dharma

[166] There is a striking contrast. Most of the *janmis* and the *janmi* organs approached the tenancy movement and the demand of the Nambūtiri young men for *bhāgam* with equal apprehension since both were capable of threatening their autocratic powers and privileges. See K.V.M, *Ātmakatha*, pp.163-64. On the other hand, the Nambūtiri young men were equally conservative as far as landlord interests were concerned because tenancy movement

would not save property, it needed enterprise and enthusiasm. Thus marriage reform was not simply a means to modernize the community but was aimed to revitalize it economically.[167]

In the 1920s the discourse on the security of feudal property became serious with the threat of bringing a tenancy bill for Malabar. While the earlier attempts of the Māppiḷas were through armed insurrection and by assassinating unscrupulous *janmis*, the new method was peaceful and constitutional; the government was persuaded to enact laws to provide fixity of tenure and security from arbitrary eviction. The measures taken towards statutory reform brought about a panic-like situation because as a minority community the Nambūtiris could not present their case forcefully in the legislatures and as an extraordinarily orthodox landed aristocracy they could not get the support of other social classes.[168] Even the governments were in favour of the tenant classes; they had to pacify popular discontentment and to initiate measures of economic progress. Thus while the existing customs incapacitated the majority of the Nambūtiris to defend their property, the advancing political culture hindered them from promoting their class interests.[169]

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was going to threaten their economic interests in future when partition would become a reality. However, this clash of interests considerably weakened the *janmi* position.

[167] "...landlord interests were being represented as the community's welfare. The younger elements within landed families supported such ideas, as these would enable them to inherit or divide property". G. Arunima, *There Comes Papa,* New Delhi, 2003, p.172.

[168] The Bill introduced in the Madras legislature was passed in September 1925 against all the claims of the *janmis*. It sanctioned permanent occupancy right to all *Kāṇam* tenants and incapacitated the *janmis* from increasing the rent and from enforcing resettlements (*Polichezhuthu*). See *YK*, 15:98, Sep 12, 1925. It was observed that the position taken by the Select Committee was completely opposed to the interests of the *janmis*.

[169] The long process of tenancy legislations has been greatly detrimental to the rights and privileges of the janmis. The powers of the janmi were considerably reduced; he was no longer able to evict at will, to receive renewal fees, or to cultivate all the land if he wanted to do so and his revenue from rents had been reduced. Instead, the *kāṇakkār* benefitted considerably; the Act of 1930, which has been called a Kāṇamdar's Bill, rewarded them mainly by fixing a ceiling in the renewal fee. See Adrian C. Mayer, *Land and Society in Malabar*, Bombay, 1952, pp.87-91.

The entire course of the Nambūtiri reform movement was characterized by its defensiveness. As the landed aristocracy and as the privileged community, the emerging social order was extremely harmful to their collective interest. Most of the programmes of the movement were basically oriented towards safeguarding their existing rights and privileges. Though marriage reform and partition of joint property were meant to provide the junior sons a space within the family and the community by helping to empower them, it incorporated a defensive agenda.[170] Though the demand for English education was severely opposed by the conservatives, it finally received their consent because they realized that English education was absolutely necessary to safeguard community interests.[171] All communities which had prospered achieved it through English education – by entering into the bureaucracy and the legislatures and by gaining legal awareness. For promotion of community interests they had to pursue the path followed by other communities who had prospered. Even the reform of custom and modes of behaviour were aimed at removing the obstacles for an easy entry into the public sphere.

As an advocate of community interests, VT too was guided by these considerations. He was a strong votary of the traditional landed rights of the Nambūtiris.[172] His articles on the Nambūtiri regulation revealed his intense concern in safeguarding property and progeny by reforming customs through state legislation. He strongly pleaded for a family regulation, with provisions for

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[170] An editorial of the *YK* ("Malabar Kudiyān Bill", 16:81, July 14 1926) alerted the elders, after the enactment of the tenancy bill, that if they continue to stand divided, property would thus go on looted by other sections orcommunities in this way.

[171] See Pāṇḍam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri, "Oru Itivṛitham", *UN*, 11:49 June 13, 1930.

[172] It is highly probable that his contacts with M.R.K.C. and his job at the *Yōgakṣēmam Company* had helped to promote strong *janmi* attitudes in him. M.R.K.C. was appointed as the manager of the *Yōgakṣēmam Company* with for converting the *YK* into a strong organ of *janmi* interests. The Company was owned and managed by shareholders who were mostly *janmis*. See K.V.M, *Ātmakatha*, pp.117-19. VT's work at the company would certainly have demanded loyalty to the *janmi* cause. But surprisingly VT did not belong to a rich *janmi* family. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.181.

both *parivēdanam* and *bhāgam,* since it was the only means to check the ruin of property.[173] In fact his first serious article was an evaluation of the tenancy problem[174] in which he lamented over the drain of property through the *kāryasthans* (managers) and expressed great concern over the tenancy bill going to be passed in the Madras Legislature which was meant to provide legal protection to the tenants. He suggested that this great menace could be overcome only by creating an awareness in the *janmis* about the gravity of the problem and condemned all the Nambūtiris, who refused to educate their children, for accelerating the alienation of *taṛawād* property. Some of his earliest stories also were written in the context of the declining economic situation due to the chaotic life condition within the community and to the assault from outside.[175] These were not simply a strategy of reform intended to arouse the community from their lethargy is well attested by his later stories in which he not only urged for the spirit of entrepreneurship and enthusiasm but also blamed the tenants and the *kāryasthans* for hastening the pauperization of the Nambūtiris.[176]

VT's statements on the land question as found in his memoirs may confuse people to think that he was strongly opposed to landlordism and stood for the interests of the real peasants.[177] He had never refused to praise those *janmis* who

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[173] VT Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation (Committee Reportum Karadu Regulation-um)", *YK,* 15:75, 1925 June 17; 15:76, 1925 June 20; 15:77, 1925 June 24; 15:79, 1925 July 1; 15:80, 1925 July 4; 15:81, 1925 July 8.

[174] V.T. Tṛitāla, "Chila Kudiyānmārudē Krūrakṛityaṅgaḷ", *Yōgakṣēmam,* 15:54, 1925 April 1.

[175] See his "Viṣukkēṭṭam", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* p.57; "Athikaṭinam", *ibid,* pp.59-62.

[176] His two stories of the Ōngallūṛ era clearly convey this message. "Manakkalē Kāryasthan", *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.99-104; "Chūṇḍippalaka", *ibid,* pp.105-107. In his later articles, VT strongly attacked them and even argued that they were instrumental in bringing about the downfall of the community by playing between the janmi and the tenant. They emerged as the new intelligentsia, as the new bureaucrats and as the new politicians. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.450-51, 506.

[177] See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* p.147. He wrote: "Even today the extremely slouthful and indifferent landlordsd ride on the shoulders of the real tillers of the soil. A social order that brings only starvation to the working people, but provides sumptuous feasts to for the lazy, should be wiped out". Even in 1980 he maintained that his fight was against landlordism

were particularly strict to their tenants[178] and to denounce those who were lenient for their careless life.[179] He later openly justified landlordism on the ground that the ancestors had acquired these properties suffering considerable hardships. It was the foreign rule that had made the *janmi* a mechanism of exploitation and oppression; the earlier system was true trusteeship conforming to Gandhian Grama Swaraj.[180] One of the prominent individuals VT acknowledged to have greatly influenced him was M.R.K.C. who was a strong exponent of landlordism and a strong opponent of the tenancy movement.[181] In

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and the Brahmin nobility. See V. Muraleedharan Nair, "VT, Aṅgu Innu Nirāśanāṇo", *Kalākaumudi Weekly*, 241, April 6, 1980, p.25.

[178] *Ibid*, pp.173-74.

[179] *Ibid*, p.426.

[180] *Ibid*, pp.456-58, 464, 529-31. Swai supports VT's argument: "Land system in Malabar before 1792 was based on the rights which tenants and the janmis had to the land. The surplus extracted from the tenants was based more on the janmis' control of their labour by coercive means rather than land ownership as property. The imposition of the administration of the company which was based on bourgeois ethics as well as the declaration that forest-land, waste-land and the like belonged to the company, which meant that tenants no longer had open land for cultivation in case they disagreed with the janmis over extortionate rent extraction, forced the former to be overdependant on the latter. This gave the janmis the chance to violate the former rights which tenants had on the land. The janmis supported their violation of the former "moral economy" by appealing to the new laws imposed by the Company which regarded land as property and labour as a commodity to be sold for wages. He who went hungry, it was now believed, was lazy. By the 1830s land in Malabar was being sold on the market. The tenants were no longer assured of their livēḷihood as it had been under the "moral economy" of pre-British Malabar". Bonaventure Swai, "Notes on the Colonial State with reference to Malabar in the 18th and 19th Centuries", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 12, July 1978, p.60.

[181] *Ibid*, pp.245-47. Though A.P.P. Nambūtiri believed that contact with K.K. Variyar was greatly decisive in shaping VT's thought processes, (APP Nambūtiri, *op.cit*, pp.61-62) in fact it was lesser in degree compared to that with MRKC. While narrating his contact with Variyar, VT refused to disclose his personality and did not specify what kind of influence Variyar was able to make upon him. (*VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ* pp.240-41). But his reference to MRKC is emphatic and personalised; he specially noticed the impact of his ideas and attitudes on both the movement and himself. But the picture of MRKC as narrated by VT does not conform to reality. MRKC's articles and stories reveal his strong conservatism. He was an opponent of the Nationalist and the tenancy movements and was inimical to bureaucrats and lawyers. He used to read *Madras Mail* and *Kēraḷa Patṛika*, both were opposed to the Nationalist Movement. In an article, "Paraśurāman" (*UN*, 2:2, Thulam 1096, pp.60-69) MRKC urged Nambūtiris to choose Paraśurāma as their real mentor on account of his contributions to their community. His "Cheṛuppakkārudē Utharavādithwam" (*UN*, 3:4, Dhanu 1097, pp.141-45) cautioned the young men involved in radical reform to follow the advice of the aged people because all the Indians had started to look back to

fact VT was not in favour of either tenancy reform or land reform; his statement to the effect that there was no feudal exploitation in the past explicitly denied the social relevance of the tenant cause.[182] What really he wanted was to convert the feudal estates into capitalist farmlands and the rent-receiving *janmis* to be enterprising cultivators. He wanted to remove the blemish cast on the Nambūtiris as non-producing parasites. A change to that effect was essential for the progress of the community as well. He had clearly placed the *Sabha* in the context of this changing social vision and found its mission the transition from landlordism to capitalism.[183] In fact the movement, which called upon the Nambūtiris to be human, was directed to exhort them to be capitalists; even the famous speech of E.M.S. at Ōngallūṛ had conceived a capitalist programme in order to make them as 'humans'.

VT's *Ulbuddhakēraḷam* commune experiment implicitly revealed the way he approached the questions of landlordism and private property. The farm was started on a rented land[184] with VT as the patron. He vehemently opposed the

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tradition. In another article "Pṛakṛiti Virōdham" (*UN*, 4:5, Makaram 1098, p.258-270) he declared women should not to be freed and they should not be treated as equals just because such demands ran counter to the laws of the nature. His story "Siddhamoorthiyude Sukradasa" (*UN*, 5:2, Thulam 1099, pp.141-154) put lawyers as villains and denounced them for raising the tenancy issue simply for professional interests. He condemned the new education for creating lawyers; it was with their entry that the traditional dharma collapsed. More reactionary was his "Udanthadi Allenkil Sati" (*UN*, 5:12, Chingam 1099, pp.605-611) in which he justified the practice of *Sati* in the name of the sanctity of conjugal relationship.

[182] VT's argument has been discredited by E.M.S. (*Ātmakatha*, p.37) and by K.N. Panikkar ("Peasant Exploitation in Malabar in the Nineteenth Century", *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol. 11, 1984, pp.155-85).

[183] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.246. Shea identified the traditional system of agrarian economy as the greatest barrier to economic development in Kerala. "In Malabar, rent-receiving landlords could not, as a rule, effectively reinvest their income in agricultural operations because of taboos discouraging both their personal participation in cultivation and close physical contact with cultivating castes. Since the pursuit of agriculture as a calling was deprecated, no incentive stimulating the resource-owning classes to make systematic studies of the technical needs of their cultivators existed, and cultivators had no motivation to work toward systematic improvements in cultivation techniques". Thomas W. Shea, Jr., "Barriers to Economic Development in Traditional Societies: Malabar, A Case Study", *Journal of Economic History*, XIX: 4, December 1959, p.509.

[184] K. Gopalan Kutty et.al, *op.cit*, p.244.

demand for converting the land into a trust on the ground that cooperative enterprises would not last; the success of a noble venture depended on the leadership of a noble individual.[185] He was not simply arguing but was taking a firm decision. In fact VT's attitude was not just an espousal of the trusteeship theory but a strong defense of the concept of private property. He was uncompromising on his position despite it being a social cause.[186] VT wanted it to be an individual concern, in the model of a traditional Nambūtiri *illam*, which itself was a kind of trust managed by a *kāraṇavan.*[187] VT wanted a traditional system remodeled according to the new ideals of social good and on a secular basis. But the patron-like role of an individual was indispensable even for a social establishment, the concept of trusteeship was assigned to justify private property, and a Nambūtiri tradition was retained in a secular institution.[188]

VT's attitude towards the tenancy and land reform issues was determined by his predilection over landlord interests and his unflinching faith in the sanctity of private property.[189] His writings are conspicuous for a total absence of references to land reform, by way of negative or positive statements.[190] But this silence is

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[185] *Ibid.*

[186] VT's obstinacy cannot be justified in the context of the alleged Communist pressures designed to capture the commune; he was not circumscribed by any such reservations when he associated with the communists in the community reform measures after 1944.

[187] "The Nambūtiri title to property was not absolute ownership, but more in the nature of trusteeship, entailed to the performance of certain sacred duties." T. Madhava Menon ed., *A Handbook of Kerala*, Vol. II, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 789. Later on V.T. explained that it was his attachment to tradition that had led him to lay faith in the Gandhian ideal of Trusteeship. See K. Gopalankutty, et. al, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

[188] In an interview with N.K. Bose in 1934, Gandhi explained that the ideal of property as a trust was 'true in theory only'. Cited in Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in *Subaltern Studies Vol. III,* New Delhi, 1984, p.191.

[189] Gandhi rejected a proposal to work for the improvement of starving peasants instead of serving the Harijans and denied the efficacy of forming peasant organizations which would naturally include Harijans in so far as their economic condition is concerned, on the ground that the plight of the Harijans required special treatment. CW, Vol. 58, pp.80-81 cited in Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in *Subaltern Studies,* Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p.190.

[190] Still, there are a few indirect but revealing observations. He wrote: "Seizing land from big landowners in order to distribute it to the landless is just like butchering high-yielding milch

nullified by his frustrating observations on the destitution of the Nambūtiris in the post-independence era[191] and on the advance of the hitherto marginalized communities in the cause of democracy but at the cost of 'dharma'.[192] The same factor heavily contributed to determine his political affiliations; his attraction to Gandhism and opposition to Communism were highly dependent on his position on the land question.[193]

5:6. Emancipation Through Wedlock: The Gender Perceptions

The notion about the Nambūtiri movement as having had women emancipation as its foremost agenda seems to have gained a general consent; the superiority of the movement over others is attested by stressing this aspect. For instance, it has been observed: "Seeing that women had to bear all injustices on their tender shoulders, this movement realized that the first step towards social change lay in the improvement of their condition. And VT was the word and sword of this movement".[194] Or again, "His movement can aptly be described as a male dominated women's liberation movement. For all reform movements of the 20th century, other than that of V.T's, women's emancipation was only a marginal issue; but for the Nambūtiri movement, it was the central problem, the very hub of its activities".[195] It is also observed that what motivated the

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cows for providing free foot wear for the poor. Only short-sighted political workers with an eye on votes indulge in such activities. A right should be bestowed upon a person only if he really deserves it". *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.520. He was more agitated over the attitude of the extremists (possibly Naxelites). He wrote: "To break a house at midnight and rob all the valuables in it is an act of barbarism. Influenced by the movement of economic equality, many people are prompted to do things which they presume would bring about equality in society. They consider these acts as sacred". *Ibid*, p.519.

[191] *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.464, 517-18.

[192] *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.514. He also opined that the new *Janmi* is more dangerous than the old one. V. Muraleedharan Nair, "VT, Aṅgu Innu Nirāśanāṇo", *Kalākaumudi Weekly*, 241, April 6, 1980, p.25.

[193] In a very interesting study which compared the mass bases of Communism in Kerala and West Bengal, Zagoria noticed that the landholders of Kerala who supported the Communists were mainly those with three acres or less of land. Donald S. Zagoria, "Kerala and West Bengal", *Problems of Communism*, Jan-Feb.1973, p.22.

[194] K.C. Nārāyaṇan, "Avathārika", *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.19.

[195] *Ibid*, p.15.

reformers was "women's natural right to acquire freedom from male supremacy..."[196] Not only is the movement portrayed as having had gender parity as its primary agenda but VT is identified as having played an instrumental role in providing this new dimension to the movement.[197]

Of course it was a fact that no other reform movement in Kēraḷa had taken up gender issue as strongly as the Nambūtiris, that their grievances were made a part of the reform agenda and sought to be solved through separate and radical measures.[198] But it is equally important to note that it was a male led emancipation programme and as such its agenda was moulded strictly according to the interests and priorities of the male segment of that community.[199] The miseries of the Antaṛjanams had surfaced chiefly because of two reasons. Firstly, women in no other community were subjected to such extreme subordination as among the Nambūtiris.[200] Secondly, the emancipation of the

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[196] *Ibid,* p.18.

[197] The 13th annual meeting of the *Sabha* in May 1921 rejected even the demand for a discussion of the grievances of the Antaṛjanams. K. Kesavan Potti in his article "Antaṛjanangaḷ" lamented that resolutions which were submitted in the *Sabha* to this effect were discarded. See *YK,* 11:43, Aug.12, 1921.

[198] C.S. Chandrika, *Kēraḷathile Stṛī Munnēttangaḷudē Charitṛam,* Tṛiśśūṛ, 1998, p.11.

[199] Toshie Awaya argues that obvious tension existed between the liberatory aspirations of the Antaṛjanams and the interests of modern community-builders. The advocacy of *swajātivivāham* of *kaniṣtans* was seen to be stemming from economic, not liberatory political interest. Toshie Awaya, "Women in the Nambūtiri Caste Movement" in T. Mizushima and H. Yanagisawa eds., *History and Society in South India,* Tokyo, 1996, pp.51-54.

[200] A report in *Calcutta Guardian* on the Antaṛjanams ("The Nambūtiri Women", reproduced in *YK,* 19:87 Aug 3, 1929) while sketching out their pathetic condition, showed the great concern over their plight. Repressive form of patriarchy prevailed among all traditional communities, even among matrilineal. But in terms of marriage and property rights, matrilineal women were relatively free from the kind of deprivation that those among patriliny had to face. They continued to live in their natal home even after marriage and did not want to depend upon their husbands either for their sustenance or for the care of their children. Divorce and remarriage was neither taboo nor much difficult. Freedom of movement also was not much restricted. Although the powers and the role of the *kāraṇavan* inflicted great restraint upon their autonomy and independence, the position of women was far better in the case of matriarchal *taṛawāds*. Marriage was the life ideal for matrilineal women too, as was shown by the case of Indulēkha, but by the beginning of the 20th century a large number of women had entered into the public sphere as professionals and writers. The 1931 Census Report of Travancore read: "The high degree of education attained by the women of Travancore... have contributed not a little to make the women of the country self-

Antaŗjanams was an essential prerequisite for the reform of the community and for the universalizing of the reform ethic.[201] It is observed that the Antaŗjanams, who were confined indoors, and the *Apphans* who wandered about outside without having a roof over their heads, together constituted the true 'internal proletariat' of the community.[202] The success of the reform agenda, including *swajātivivāham*, equitable partition of *illam* property and the right to create nuclear families, was dependent upon the awareness created among the *Antaŗjanams* and their strong support in opposing them. Therefore, the women's emancipation agenda of the reform included the male grievances of the *kaniştans* and it is not surprising that the leadership and ideology was determined by them.[203] Premji confirmed this fact, fairly clearly, though decades later, when he said: "It was man's fight to gain his own ends that resulted in the benefits reaped by the Nambūtiri women in the realm of social reform. The triumph of women was not the result of their own struggle."[204]

Since *sambandham* had to be fought out, for which primogeniture and scriptural ban on *Kaniştavivāham* stood as obstacles, it was essential to create

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reliant and self-dependant..." *Census of India 1931*, Vol. XXVIII – Travancore, Part I, Report (By N. Kunjan Pillai), Trivandrum, 1932, p.170.

[201] M.R. Bhaţţathiripād, "Kāl Nūttāndinuļļil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangaļ", *Mātŗubhūmi Special*, 1936.

[202] K.C. Nārāyaņan, *op.cit*, p.17.

[203] These reformers viewed women as their subjects – to be changed as a consequence of persuasive arguments, social action, education and legislation. Sumit Sarkar has argued that they were concerned primarily with modifying relationships within their own families and sought only 'limited and controlled emancipation' of their womenfolk. Sumit Sarkar, "The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid eds., *Women and Culture*, Bombay, 1994, p.106.

[204] Bhanuprakash, "Malayāņmayudē Sūryasānnidhyam", *Dēśābhimāni Sunday Supplement*, 13 Sep. 1998, p.4. The entire process of Indian social reform had treated women as mere objects of reform: "In the case of women, the reformers determined what was responsible for 'the present deplorable condition of Indian womenhood', and how the situation could be remedied. This was not considered unusual, for it fitted the traditional role of men as 'protectors' and women as 'dependants', men as initiators and givers and women as passive recipients. It thus perpetuated the system while supposedly attacking it". Suresht Ranjan Bald, "From Satyartha Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the 'Women's Movement' in India" in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., *Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment*, New Delhi, 1986, p.196.

awareness among the Antaṛjanams of the necessity of marriage reform in order to encourage them to resist the prevailing practices. Equally important was the kind of disgrace that the primitive life conditions and the public appearance of the Antaṛjanams brought about on the educated Nambūtiris. The replacement of feudal patriarchy by the ethos of modern nuclear family necessitated conditions in which the wife would accompany the husband in his public life and would manage their home in his absence. This exigency called for a realignment of women's position and role in accordance with the new circumstances but strictly in tune with the norms of male supremacy.[205] The system of patrilocal residence, the status of women as house-wives, the concept of domesticity in tune with the nationalist discourse, all revealed the stereotypic ideal of female emancipation.[206]

This was the context in which special care was given to the physical appearance of the Antaṛjanams and to make them enlightened wives.[207] An educated husband needed an educated wife, his public engagements demanded his wife to be his companion and be capable enough to manage household affairs; his social relationships would entail his friends coming home with him and they should be treated well by his wife; and a sound knowledge in health and child care was essential for nurturing a powerful and intelligent new

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[205] Mūthiringōd, "Bhayankaramāya Bhāvi", *YK*, 19:87 Aug 3, 1929. He wrote that while men were on the path of reform, Nambūtiri women were still in the 10th century. If they continued to be so, in future, men would not turn towards them at all.

[206] If the colonial discourse domesticated, depoliticized and subjugated the colonized, the nationalist discourse reclaimed the domestic as the site where a resisting, liberatory, self-identity took form. Anupama Roy, "The Domestic, Domesticity and Women Citizens in Colonial India", *Conetmperary India,* Vol.2, No.3, July-Sep.2003, p.128. It was in this sovereign space of the domestic, where Partha Chatterjee identified the 'most powerful, creative and historically significant project' launched by nationalism i.e., the construction of the reformed, national tradition with the 'woman' as its repository. Partha Chatterjee, *op.cit*, 129.

[207] Priyadatha Kallāt observed that the women emancipation agenda of the *Sabha* was limited to dress reform alone; any further steps beyond this position was taken by the leadership after Ōngallūṛ. Conversation with I.V. Babu cited in *Social, political & cultural Result of* Nambūtiri *Renaissance*. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1996, p.202.

generation.[208] All these warranted women's education and a controlled emancipation.[209] A famous article and a speech of VT dealt in detail with these male concerns.[210] Elsewhere he explained the dynamics of the liberation of the Antaṛjanams from another angle fairly clearly: "This liberation struggle against orthodox Brahmanism was really a hoax meant to serve male interests for the organizers of this movement had hardly any respect for the cause of women's emancipation...If the *kaniṣtans* organized themselves for *swajātivivāham*, they had two reasons: one, a *vijāti* woman will not meekly submit to her Nambūtiri husband's onslaughts against her. Two, their whim for heavy dowry and a slavish wife ..."[211] In fact VT's statement reflected the strictly marriage-oriented agenda of the female emancipation programme of the Nambūtiri movement.[212]

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[208] It is interesting to note that women had started to realize the implicit agenda of female emancipation proposed by men. For instance, Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam in an article "Stṛītvam" (*Stṛī*, 1:1, Edavam 1108 (May-June 1933), pp.15-16 in J. Devika ed., *Her-Self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938*, Kolkota, 2005, pp.149-50) cautioned women not to give too much importance to either attire or adornments or to misunderstand women's duty as seducing men. She urged women to earn their livēḷihood just like men and take it as a matter of dignity.

[209] Demands for education of women addressed the male need for companionship and understanding, a need that surfaced because of the exclusionary and alienating British imperial state and the growing mobility in Indian society. It was good for the country, good for the husbands, and for children. It was good for women only because it helped them become good wives and mothers and trained them to perform their roles more effectively in the modern context. Women's education was not seen as a means to career advancement. Even a staunch exponent of women's education, like Dayananda Saraswati, eloquently defined women's role thus: "The woman should do the domestic duties in obedience to her husband. The work outside should belong to the province of the man's duties". See Suresht Ranjan Bald, "From Satyartha Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the 'Women's Movement' in India" in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., *Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment*, New Delhi, 1986, pp.196-98.

[210] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.556-565; 566-579.

[211] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.298.

[212] Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam in her speech at the 17th Annual meeting of the Ālathiyūr Upasabha lambasted at the indifference of the male reformers towards the grave issues of the Antaṛjanams. She said that women who boycotted ghōṣa started accepting it again. She pointed out that by and large liberals had started showing indifference to gender issues and many were returning to a conservative position saying that they had not expected this much. She attacked men for their hypocrisy; they were professing revolution without any sincerity and had little interest in practicing them in personal life. Dēvaki Narikkāṭṭiri in her speech at the same meeting lamented over the inability of women to go forward if men had abandoned

Reform was regarded as the chief means by which such 'defects' could be rectified, and one of the issues that received considerable attention was the condition of the Antaṛjanams, generally treated as the 'reformer's burden'. In this process, the Antaṛjanams came to be conceived of as objects of reform, not its agents and were "portrayed as victims who needed to be 'led' out of their plight, as if passivity were a necessary attribute of the oppressed".[213] Reforming Antaṛjanams was an intense concern among the Nambūtiri reformers, which gained considerable momentum by the end of the 1920s. Many Antaṛjanams discarded *ghōṣa*, liberated themselves by entering into the public sphere and worked actively in the reform movement along with male reformers.[214] Though reforming the Antaṛjanams was the centre of the debate, male reformers differed over the conception, the means and the priorities to be kept in mind and the

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them halfway. See *UN* 15:6, 17 Nov. 1933, p.6. In an article ("Antaṛjananga!", *Mātṛubhūmi Special*, 1934), Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam attacked the male reformers (except VT & Kē!appan) for abandoning the women's cause as and when they gained their goals. Even in 1940 she enlisted the sorrows of the Antaṛjanams but expressed satisfaction in two respects viz., for having obtained opportunities for girls' education and for outlawing *Adhivēdanam* through the enactment of Nambūtiri bills in the three legislatures. Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam, "Nambūtiri Strīka!", *Kēra!ōpahāram*, 1940. In fact the lamentations of the Antarjanms are substantiated by the assessment of the male reformers who present the reform movement as having finished its course. See M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttāndinu!!i! Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttanga!", *Mātṛubhūmi Special*, 1936.

[213] J. Devika, "Engendering Individuals: The Project of Nambutiri Brahman Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-Aug.2004, p.87. But Devika cautions us that modern literature and theatre also provided the space in which such constructions were challenged. Both these possibilities are found fulfilled in the writings of La!itāmbika Antaṛjanam who was a critical participant in the reform movement. Some of the most persuasive constructions of the dreary existence of women in illams and their sheer powerlessness are to be found in her early short stories, and also, some of the most strident critiques of male-oriented reformism.

[214] The Annual Meeting of the *Sabha* at Taliparamba was presided over by Pāṛvathi Nenminimangalam and the name of Ārya Pa!!am was proposed as the next Satyagrahi candidate to replace Kē!appan at Guruvāyūr. See Mūthiringōd, "13-ām Thīyathi", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 9:2, 1 Feb. 1932, p.7; M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Vip!avathintē Orēdu", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 14:1, 23 March 1936, pp.8-9. But, except in the case of a few, majority of the Antaṛjanams who had come out in the public did it on coercion from the part of their husbands. See A. Bhavadāsan Bhaṭṭathiripād, "K.N, V.T Ennivaṛkku Pṛathyakṣa Katth", *UN*, 15:9, 8 Dec. 1933, p.3. This was the reason why except a few, the majority soon withdrew into seclusion.

limits to be imposed in the process.[215] Male reformers had started showing concern over the Antaṛjanams' efforts because they wanted to expand their own platform of liberation.[216]

A significant factor behind the Nambūtiri agitation for marriage reform was the increasing concern over *sambandham* as a non-manly practice. It worked as a crucial factor in promoting *swajātivivāham* and was very decisive in bringing the Antaṛjanams to the reform arena. *Sambandham* alliance was a partnership of two independent individuals almost on equal terms in both conjugal and economic relationships.[217] The reform literature stands testimony to the great respect shown by the Nambūtiris towards their *sambandham* wives; even a *mūss* with three Nambūtiri wives preferred to stay with his liaison.[218] This was because they were educated and fashionable. But once the concept of marriage and partnership started to be viewed from the new moral point of view, where wife was supposed to be the junior and obedient partner of the husband, *sambandham* was frowned upon as non-manly and ridiculous.[219] The role of the

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[215] There was considerable fear that Antaṛjanams would misuse their newly acquired freedom and this apprehension began to develop as a serious matter of concern and started disturbing many reformers around this time. See Maniyan, "Stṛī Swātantṛyathintē Pōkku", *UN*, 14:38, June 30, 1933, p.2; M.S. Krishnan Nambūtiri, "Antaṛjanam", *UN* 14:36, 16 June, 1933, p.2. Krishnan Nambūtiri urged the Nambūtiri men to impose some necessary restraint over the the Antaṛjanams and to keep control over their radicalism.

[216] It was a general belief that 'too much of this women's lib' would upset the serenity and tranquility of the family which was considered to be the shock absorber of disquiet and turbulence in the outside world. See Saradamoni, "Women, Nation-Building and Indian Renaissance" in *In Search of India's Renaissance*, Chandigarh, 1992, p.73.

[217] VT's narrative on his marriage and remarriage explains how respectfully he approached his *sambandham* wife. The alliance was purely sexual and therefore was free from power relationships. This had made *sambandham* a casual relationship but capable of retaining freshness all throughout. (But it is very important that VT openly described the physical features of his *sambandham* wife and his sexual relations with her as in the case of an illicit relationship. But nowhere does he make a description of either the physical features of any of the Antaṛjanams or of his sexual relations with his Nambūtiri wife). See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.288-290.

[218] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.571.

[219] To adapt it to the new concepts of paternity, marriage had to be converted into a 'contract' with the concept of the 'protection of the wife' and sexuality had to be redefined, restraining women's sexual freedom. Praveena Kodoth, "Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, Sambandham and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth Century Malabar", *Modern Asian Studies*, 35:2, 2001, pp.374-77.

husband in *sambandham* was devoid of manliness and was perceived to be similar to that of a wife – passive, submissive and casual – and was also feminine because he did not have the roles commonly held to be that of a husband – as the lord and the judge at home. Repeated references to manliness appear in the context of the discussion over *sambandham*.[220] Treating *sambandham* as devoid of manliness evidently meant that the role of the husband and wife in *swajātivivāham* was that of the master of the house and his subordinate partner respectively. These were justified by the concepts of modern patriarchy; but a shift to *swajātivivāham* presupposed that the *swajāti* wife be culturally as advanced as the *vijāti* wife.[221]

The dynamics of the women emancipation agenda of the Nambūtiri movement has been summed up thus: "The moderates among the Nambūtiris did not completely and fundamentally unseat the traditional concept of domesticity, but the inner quarters were completely redefined. The daily routine of the women within the *illams* which was traditionally a highly regimented series of ritualistic observances, was partially or fully replaced by a new routine that stressed domestic management, child-care, entertainment of guests etc. The place assigned to women – the inner quarters – seemed undisputed, but the function attributed to home, the power relations traversing it, the practices of domestic life and the agency of women, are all different. Secondly, the number of authors sought to locate the ideals in tradition and history so that they seemed to be not alien at all but part of a long-lost golden age, merely a rediscovery of one's own lost legacy. A third strategy was to present the project of

[220] The notion of *Paurusham*, which formerly meant not just manliness but also bravery of fantastic proportions, was now linked with thither-worldly, concrete forms of power and authority circulating in the modern public domain. J. Devika, "Imagining Women's Social Space in early Modern Keralam", *CDS Working Paper Series No.329*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002, p.9. It was not simply an agenda of the social reform movements; recovery of masculinity was a part of the nationalist agenda too. See Radhika Singha, "Nationalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Masculinity", *Studies in History*, 14:1, n.s, 1998, p.139.

[221] It is argued that the challenge to the old order was made in terms of an image of society in which gender difference figured as the fundamental principle of ordering human beings, as the alternative to the established social order that privileged birth and inherited status. J. Devika, "Imagining Women's Social Space in early Modern Keralam", *CDS Working Paper Series No.329*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002, p.2.

modernization as more or less a process of selection. The gap perceived between the existing arrangements and the ideal, it seemed, was not to be filled by importing solutions from the West. Rather, it seemed to lie in a careful process of selection, of isolating elements of socio-cultural life that were amenable to modern self-building and community-building and blending them to actualize the imagined modern order".[222]

VT's contribution towards the Nambūtiri ideal of female emancipation was great and commendable; his legacy to the movement has been explained with reference to it.[223] Unlike many other male reformers, he did not view women as mere objects of reform but wanted them to be active subjects.[224] When he got an opportunity, he proved his credentials through his remarriage. He put his ideals into practice first at home and then in the wider field of his community out not only by making his wife a companion but also by setting a precedent. But in real life V.T's concept of the position of women in society did not differ greatly from the view held by the moderate Nambūtiris; it ran parallel to the ideals of modern domesticity.[225] His address to the Antaṛjanams and his thoughts on his remarriage issue revealed how he envisaged their position in the emerging new society.[226] As a person who had laid great stress on morality and sanctity of family, he could not have advanced too far on the women question. In fact, the

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[222] J. Devika, "Imagining Women's Social Space in early Modern Keralam", *CDS Working Paper Series No.329*, Thiruvananthapuram, April 2002, p.9

[223] P. Chiṭṛan Nambūtiripād, "VT- Kēraḷa Chariṭṛathilē Oru Itihāsam", *Vivēkōdayam,* Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.14.

[224] "Unlike the 19th century social-religious reformers, Gandhi did not view women as an object of reform; he saw them as active subjects". Sadan Jha, "Charkha, 'Dear Forgotten Friend' of Widows", *Economic and Political Weekly,* July 10, 2005, p.3134.

[225] Devika holds the view that this was the attitude of the moderate Nambūtiris. But VT's stand on the women question show that even the radicals did not have an advanced vision in practical life. See J. Devika, "Imagining Women's Social Space in early Modern Keralam", *Working Paper*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, April 2002, p.9.

[226] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp.556-565; 566-579; APP. Nambūtiri, *op.cit,* pp.99-104. VT's political guru, Kēḷappan had high reservations on the role of women in society. He wrote that what the nation wanted was not women who fought for power and position but ideal women who were ready to suffer and sacrifice and to serve the nation. See K. Kēḷappan, "Strīdhaṛmam", *Śṛīmati Special,* 1935.

concept of the "perfect wife" continued to be the reformer's ideal.[227] But the concept was redefined in accordance with the changing times: first, there were modifications in the appropriate activities for a female at different stages of her life; second, the appropriate area for female action was expanded; and third, there was a new and growing approval of individualism.[228] As early as 1930 VT had started laying strict boundaries on feminine freedom; in his longest speech ever delivered,[229] V.T. spoke about an imaginary meeting of the *Antarjana samājam*, in which he was also a participant, and which was presided over by an *Antarjanam* married to a Christian; he got provoked by the overconfident, assertive and highly westernized attitudes of the women who had gathered there.[230] Even in his earlier works a cautious note was visible in his approach to women's problems. In many of his short stories he described the miseries of the *Antarjanams*, but his real intention was to arouse in them the emotion of love towards young Nambūtiris so that *Kaniṣṭavivāham* might he encouraged. His drama, which is popularly acclaimed as an epic of women's emancipation, laid strict boundaries on feminine freedom. At the end of the drama the hero warned: "Let woman be a weakling that man may dominate her, but the great institution that we call 'family' rests on her stooping shoulders. To sustain the growth of

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[227] It is more surprising to notice a similar vision even in the works of Laḷitāmbika. While trying to emancipate women from the existing deplorable conditions, she aimed at a renaissance of 'true Indian women'. She did not propose gender equality or economic self-sufficiency. Nor was there any attempt to question religion which sanctioned customs and social evils. She was only protesting against evils and injustices in order to realize a social reform. P. Sumalatha, *Malayāḷathilē Vanithā Nōvalistukaḷudē Feminist Samīpanam*, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 1995, pp.84-85.

[228] Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India,* Delhi, 2000, p.28.

[229] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* pp. 577-79. His Ālathiyūr speech, Oct. 29, 1930.

[230] Finally, when a resolution congratulating another mixed marriage was passed, he bursted out in extreme orthodox fury and decided to wind up his whole reform activities. His presentation of the real story of the remarriage of Uma *Antarjanam* to a working class Muslim (*Ibid,* pp.322-330) is even more reactionary. His strong opposition to conversions, even as a means of liberation or empowerment, stands in sharp contrast to the position taken by many other Nambūtiri reformers. (E.M.S, "Nambūtirimāṛ Engōṭṭu?" *YK Silver Jubilee Special*, 1944, in *EMS-ntē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* p.265). This obstinacy reminds us of Tarabhai Shinde's cry for equality, her reproach of male reformers who wanted to help women but not accord them equal status. See Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India,* Delhi, 2000, p.22.

society her heart should be full of motherly tenderness; her robes will have to be torn up to cover the bleeding wounds of the nation..."[231] V.T's role model was Indulēkha.[232] Though shaped by colonial modernity, the personality of Indulēkha could not transgress the limits of feudal identity and values.[233] Her life-vision was greatly circumscribed by the ideal of marriage.[234]

Against this greatly restricted and highly selective nature of the Nambūtiri agenda on the emancipation of the Antaṛjanams, VT's involvement was certainly decisive. Since VT was invested with excellent literary capacities his stories, drama and speeches attracted popular attention and could contribute considerably to arouse the Antaṛjanams. His high concentration on the feminine issue also caused to promote the issue substantially and to build up his image as the exalted emancipator of the Antaṛjanams. But VT was neither the pioneer nor the only champion of female emancipation in the Nambūtiri community; his articles and speeches were relatively less radical too compared to those of many of his contemporaries like Mūthiringōd or Pāndam; in fact his renown originated from his high enthusiasm to make a niche in one of the specific spheres of the movement[235] and was aided by his inimitable style and literary caliber.

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[231] *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku,* in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ, p.391.* Two later dramas, which were also the products of the reform movement, had introduced the gender issue in an entirely different perspective. Premji's drama written in 1940 presented the concept thus: "women's destiny is in their own hands. They must fight for and win their own freedom. No one will show the moral courage to set the caged parrot free. It has to beat its wings on the bars of the cage and break them" (M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Ṛitumati*, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1991, p.8, 72). Another drama, written and presented by the *Antaṛjanams* of the work centre at Lakkidi in 1948 contained highly radical feminist ideas. The preface of the drama stated: "In yester-years, V.T's farce *Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arangathēkku* set fire to the arsenals of orthodox Brahmanism. Today, the play *Tozhil Kēndṛathilēkku* aims a heavy blow at male domination" (M.C. Nambūtiripād, Preface, *Thozhil Kēndrathilēkku*, Antaṛjana Samājam, Tṛiśśūṛ, 1948, p.iii).

[232] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ,* p. 298.

[233] Sarah Joseph, "Kannīrum Kināvum Vimōchanavum" in M.N. Vijayan ed., *Nammudē Sāhityam, Nammudē Samūham: 1901-2000,* Tṛiśśūṛ, 2000, p.266.

[234] "Though well-educated in modern fashion, the heroine makes forceful intervention precisely in a matter that falls clearly in the domain of the modern domestic, namely marriage and marital fidelity". J. Devika, "Imagining Women's Social Space in Early Modern Keralam", *Working Paper*, CDS, Thiruvanathapuram, April 2002, p.3.

[235] In his letter to the Antaṛjanams, VT expressed his ambition to gain a personal reputation by upholding a single and specific cause as had been done by Kuṛūṛ in the education issue, V.S.

In the 1940s when VT again entered into the public sphere he became actively involved in rescuing the Antaṛjanams from their miserable plight. He attacked the custom of dowry and arranged the first dowry-less and inter-caste marriage.[236] He cooperated with the *Ōngallūṛ Sabha* and worked for the uplift of the Antaṛjanams. He emboldened them to take up independent positions and helped them in the formation of a work centre at Lakkidi.[237] But a few years later he came down with a scathing criticism on the "work centre model" and glorified an alternate project.[238] He did not approach gender issues with the same sympathy all throughout; his position was dependent on the nature of politics involved in it; he also retreated considerably from his earlier radicalism in later years.[239] His patriarchal limitations and his vacillating position on the gender issue can be properly understood only if we distinguish his reminiscences and other later writings from his speeches and works of the reform days. In most of

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in the marriage issue and Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād in the family regulation issue. *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p.562.

[236] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, p. 311. But he evaluated the marriage of his sister as a part of his anti-caste propaganda and not as an act of recognition of the self-determination of women. Later he opposed the remarriage of Uma Antaṛjanam on the ground that law forbade divorce in the case of Nambūtiri women and strongly condemned her inter-religious marriage with a Muslim. *Ibid*, pp.322-330.

[237] O.M.C. writes that the work centre was started under the leadership of VT. O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, "VT-Chila Smaraṇakaḷ", *Vivēkōdayam*, Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.31.

[238] It was a new wage labour movement of the Nambūtiris and Antaṛjanams which was piloted by the *Nambūtiri welfare society* of Puthilōt unit. See V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtirimārudē Kūlippaṇi Saptāham", *Māṭṛubhūmi* Daily, 4-11-1970, reproduced in A.V. Srekumar ed., *VT*, p.236. (It is not included in *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*). This article is noted for VT's scathing criticism on the work centre at Lakkidi and for his observation that it was meant to convert the Nambūtiris into communists.

[239] This runs parallel to the characterization of Raja Rammohun Roy. Despite being a 'champion of women's rights' and a feminist, his personal relationship with women were far from ideal. He was married three times. There is no evidence that he looked to his wives for companionship; there were rumours that his adopted son, Rajaram, was the child of his Muslim mistress. After Rammohun's father's death he argued with his mother and in anger left the family home with his wives and children. "Examined from this perspective Rammohun seems less than an ideal champion of women's rights". Geraldine Forbes, *The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India*, Cambridge, 2000, p.10.

his later writing he is found to have taken an attitude quite contrary to the one that he took during the reform days.[240]

In a sweeping criticism on VT and on his panegyrists, K.S. Radhakrishnan attracted the attention of the public towards the hypocrisy of VT on the women question; he argued that for VT women meant just Nambūtiri women and hence he does not deserve to be praised as the emancipator of women in general. A part of the criticism reads thus: "Though VT stood for the cause of women, we do not have any proof to show that he felt the pulse of women in general. In fact there is substantial evidence to show that he was insensitive to the sufferings of at least the Vārasyāṛs".[241] The criticism is valid not just for VT's indifference to the sufferings of women in other communities but also for his tendency to compromise on the issues of women of his own community.[242] V.T's retreat was more meaningful because he was well informed of the varied aspects of modern feminism even as early as the 20's.[243] This may lead to the premise that his radicalism was simply a mask to hide his male agenda behind his feminism; or it was rather a reform strategy. The fulfillment of the male agenda needed the Antaṛjanams to be activated and this was possible only by presenting before them a wonderland of great opportunities.

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[240] As a Gandhian, probably VT was greatly captivated by Gandhi's position on gender. For instance Gandhi wrote: "The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other's labours...Nor do I see in this any invasion of women's rights or suppression of her freedom". Cited in Suresht Ranjan Bald, "From Satyartha Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the 'Women's Movement' in India" in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., *op.cit.*, p.203. It has been observed that Gandhi held *emancipation* to be more appropriate than *empowerment* or that the goal of empowerment can be realized only after emancipation. He also rejected undue importance attached to politics in transforming the social system. See K.P. Misra, "Gandhian Way of Women Empowerment", *Gandhi Marg*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Apr-June 2004, p.84.

[241] K.S. Radhakrishnan, "V.T: Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam* Sunday Supplement, Dec. 23, 2001.

[242] It is surprising to note that VT in his autobiographical writings addressed all Nambūtiri women (including his wife and Uma Antaṛjanam) by the respectful plural term 'they' while his *sambandham* wife is referred to as mere 'she'. See *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp.282-91; 323-24; 337.

[243] *VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitikaḷ*, pp. 549, 568, 569, 573. He had hinted at women's self-realization, single life as spinsters, their entry into any domain of public life, etc, etc.

5:7. Summing Up

Any study of VT will be incomplete unless it takes into account his historic mission, that of rescuing the community from insularity and exclusiveness and to bring the Nambūtiris as partners in the modern civil society.[244] But even this communitarian mission was not completely free from personal interests.[245] Of course humanism and secularism had influenced him and his public dealings in a powerful way, but they were just concomitants of the basic objective and did not act as decisive factors in leading him to expand his platform.[246] The Nambūtiri reformers had been disturbed by the incompatibility of traditional customs and the emerging social order, and the movement was aimed at removing those hurdles that stood in the way of their collective interests and thus hindered their entry into the new civil society. Hence communitarian interests dominated their reform discourse; English education and marriage reform were identified as the foremost means of achieving them.

In fact the reform movement had fulfilled its agenda around 1930, and so new ideals were incorporated into the movement by the politically motivated radical groups in order to gain an upper hand in the political domain and to revive the bygone Nambūtiri dominance in a new way. It included programmes such as the elimination of distance and touch pollution and the removal of obstacles that impeded their free involvement in the secular civil society. A

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[244] See M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "VT: Communisathinappuṟathēkkuḷḷa Yāthṟayilē Māṟgadaṟśakan" in A.V. Sreekumar ed., *op.cit*, p.78.

[245] V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, *Kaṇṇīrum Kināvum*, Kottayam, 1970, p.14. He writes that while he worked for the liberation of all people, who were smarting under the shackles of customs, he was in fact doing it for his own sake.

[246] Moreover, VT and his close associates shared a common concept of humanism. Nālappāt believed that the base of Indian humanism was *dharma* which was nobler than the concept of modern justice. Justice (*nīti*) should be rewritten as *dharma* because while justice can fasten the capitalist only, *dharma* can act as a social and ethical restraint on both the capitalist and the labourer. See Akkitham, *Ponnānikaḷari*, Kottayam, 1998, p.19. Similarly, Govindan held that the entire cultural capital, i.e., human values, which men have acquired over a period of the past 5 lakh years, is on the verge of extinction. This imminent danger could not be avoided through a simple economic struggle; a moral and ethical struggle alone can save humanity. M. Govindan, "Anwēṣaṇathintē Ārambham", in *M. Gōvindantē Upanyāsangaḷ*, Kottayam, 1986, p.27.

strong movement in favour of the formation of a monolithic, rationalistic, enterprising community was also being pursued with such programmes as the elimination of sub-caste differences and induction of all the banished groups (for various reasons including *Smārtavichāram*, forced conversion into Islam or violation of custom); reform of customs and practices in accordance with the ideals of modern science and reason in order to make the Nambūtiris a model community; and instilling in them a strong capitalist spirit to convert them into an economically vibrant and dynamic segment of the society. Thus all the programmes of action, both sectarian and secular, had community-building as their chief target.

The petering out of the movement immediately after achieving the foremost goals has to be explained in this context. Most of the activists were satisfied with the fulfillment of the immediate objectives; the expansion of the programme to include the general grievances of the civil society meant hardships and renunciation of privileges which many found difficult to accept; the ultra-radicals were not able to convince them of the possible benefits of such a wider horizon. The traditional lethargy and conservatism circumscribed expansion into new arenas; even the radical aspects of the movement like female emancipation were given up half way. Thus the advance of the movement came to a turning point once the immediate communitarian and male-oriented agenda was met; with the enactment of the tenancy legislations and Nāyaṛ Regulations, organized external pressures on the community also had faded away; the question of the eradication of pollution and enunciation of temple entry involved the consent of all the *savaṛṇa* castes, on which the Nāyaṛs were equally conservative. Thus the defensive agenda of the movement had vanished and the fuel had run out making the forward journey impossible.

The Nambūtiri movement was characterized by group leadership; the absence of a sole leader of authority was a cause of concern throughout the

1920s, in its decisive phase.[247] Nambūtiris aspired for a leader of Mannam's calibre;[248] unfortunately they failed in producing such an undisputed leader. This may be because they lacked a common programme of action, incorporating all sections of the community, and, more importantly, they missed a common enemy. Even in the case of *sambandham* and tenancy issues, which involved people other than the Nambūtiris, they could not bring the community together. In all these issues against which they fought, there were strong votaries within themselves who supported the other side. Factors generating serious discontent were also absent; before the partition of the joint property and the later land reforms, the community was never in economic distress; and in social life they never experienced dishonour.

Against this background the Nambūtiri movement represented a defensive response to erosion of property and privileges. The dawn of the modern age had unleashed new forces and new developments and had led to the empowerment of traditionally marginalized groups. These were possible only at the expense of the traditionally privileged groups, especially the Nambūtiris. The rise of other sections of society brought the Nambūtiris down in the social scale in a relative sense. They were still privileged and propertied but signs of downfall were clear and visible. The old values were also being replaced by new ones; the system of family, moral values and vision of life were all being refashioned according to western models. In a traditional society based on caste and its obligations, the changing value system created considerable hardships for the Nambūtiris who were dependent on others at all points of life. They had to adjust with the changing value system and to defend their privileges against the onslaughts of

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[247] After the death of Kuṛūr, the Nambūtiri movement lacked a supreme leader which was clearly reflected in the discourse of the 1920s and 30s. See, for instance, Editorial, *YK*, 16:93, Sep 1, 1926 and Pātiriśśēri's plea for a leader in *YK* 16:94, Sep 4, 1926.

[248] C.K. Nambūtiri lamented that what the Nambūtiris needed was a leader like Mannam with a strong community feeling and leadership quality. *Ōṛmakkuṛippukaḷ*, unpublished document.

the lower orders of the society. This needed new forms of caste unity and organizational structure; the reform movement was thus born with a strictly defensive programme.

VT was the product of this movement. In fact there is a great disparity between his prevailing image and his real life and mission as reflected by contemporary evidences. Born and bought up in an orthodox Nambūtiri family and being engaged in the communitarian movement for a long period, he could not shed off the strong communitarian sentiments in spite of his radical involvements and his radical postures. Nor did any of his later involvements provide him an image sufficiently capable of outweighing his communitarian inclinations; his later articles and speeches run counter to the development of a civil society. The failure of his aspirations on the role of his community and himself in the public sphere of the up and coming Kēraḷa might have frustrated him.

Community, family and the individual were very much dear to VT; he looked at social problems from these paradigms. For him society was only secondary to the individual; the abstract ideal of the 'absolute man' was his fascination. Hence he preferred Gandhism for Marxism.[249] He also eschewed party politics for it involved slavish subordination. He was never ready to compromise his individualism even for a social cause howsoever great it might be, but there were many instances of compromise on issues of communitarian importance. While glorifying the RSS, he was not bothered about its authoritarian and anti-individualistic structure. Those who dismissed his increasing conservatism as a consequence of ageing[250] did not notice the thread

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[249] It is interesting to note that Marx ridiculed the notion of the abstract Human. Vasant Kaiwar, "Silences in Postcolonial Thought", *Economic and Political Weekly,* August 20, 2005, p. 3733.

[250] M.R. Manmathan, "Charitṛam Oru Piriyan Kōṇiyāṇu", *ādhyamam Weekly*, 9: 34, August 25, 2006, p. 38.

of continuity that ran through his thoughts and attitudes from his radical days to the days of his frustration.

Of course VT had played a very decisive role in the history of 20th century Kēraḷa through his involvement in the community reform; his contributions in transforming his community so as to enable it to adapt the changing social environment had considerably helped in bringing about a new social system and in the development of a new civil society.[251] His great contribution in changing the marriage system and the family system, in bringing the Nambūtiri women outdoors, in fighting out pollution, in making the temple-entry movement successful and in discarding irrational customs and rituals that retarded the progress of the community, all had been crucial in the process of what has been called 'making the Nambūtiri human' and in clearing the way for the future social progress of Kēraḷa. Reforming the Nambūtiri was the first necessary step towards reforming the whole society and in that respect the Nambūtiri movement, with all its defensiveness and communitarianism, deserves to be appreciated.[252] The movement also contributed much to recast Hinduism on modern lines with its struggle against irrational customs and rituals and by instilling elements of rationalism in religious outlook. Some of the earliest women activists of the communist party came from the Nambūtiris.[253] In that sense the movement played its role in the empowerment of women in Kēraḷa.

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[251] The Nambūtiri movement allows space for a study in accordance with the Weberian thesis on the Lutheran Reformation. Although Weber's thesis on Luther's role in instilling a spirit of capitalism among the Europeans has been questioned, the Nambūtiri movement furnishes evidences to argue that it promoted the Nambūtiris to relegate ritualism and tradition to the background and to advance along capitalism and entrepreneurship. For a discussion see Frank Parkin, *Max Weber,* London, 2002, pp.40-70.

[252] It is argued that his greatest legacy was to end the exclusiveness of the Nambūtiris and thus redeem them from the wrath of other communities. It was due to his activities, along with that of many others, that the Nambūtiris started Entēring the public sphere in the modern period. T.K. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, *VT Kṛitikaḷ: Oru Paṭanam,* PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 1995, p.53.

[253] Devaki Vāryar noticed that all the Nambūtiri women activists came from well-off families. Conversation with I.V. Babu, cited in *Social, political & cultural Result of* Nambūtiri *Renaissance.* Ph.D Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1996, p.200.

Of late there have been serious discussions over the slow replacement of the reform values by revivalist trends.[254] Rituals and superstitions are on the return; priestly vocation has become the lucrative profession for most of the Nambūtiris; and the new *Yōgakṣēmasabha* is discussing issues of trivial value.[255] It is lamented that the most dynamic and secular-minded movement has fallen into the depths of sectarianism and retrogression and has ceased to be progressive and realistic.[256] But the history of the Nambūtiri movement may reveal that this is not an alarming situation, the *Sabha* was always responding to pressures and forces from outside. Ritualistic faith is on the return and rituals, ceremonies and even superstitious beliefs provide a lot of job opportunities. For the Nambūtiris these are very prosperous fields of employment; as the priesthood they have an undisputed prerogative in the religious domain. As M.R.B. has rightly observed, the society as such has become un-intellectual.[257] The Nambūtiris are taking advantage of this situation; a curious mixture of ritualism, irrationalism and professionalism provides them a new vista of life and the social dominance which they had lost during the age of reform and reason.

Even in the discussions on the recent revivalist tendencies, VT is the reference point as if he was the harbinger of all modern values in the community and his legacy as being threatened by the forces of revivalism.[258] In fact it is a paradox that VT, who stood for the Nambūtiri values in the reform era and later, has been identified as the exponent of a secular and civil culture. The false

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[254] K. Kannan, "Ādyan Kūlikaḷudē Kazhuthakaḷi", *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 147:3, Dec.15, 2000, pp.15-24; N.P. Vijayakrishnan, "Nambūtiri Samudāyam Vīṇdum Mahānarakathilēkkō?" *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 82:47, Jan.23, 2005, pp.8-13; VT Vāsudēvan, "Ī Vaḷakkilukkam Enthinu Vēṇdiyāyirunnu?" *Samakālīna Malayāḷam*, 20 May 2005, pp.97-101; Nambūtiri, "Chaṇdi", *Bhāṣāpōṣiṇi*, December 2004, pp.40-43.

[255] I.C.P. ridiculed it as "Plastic Yōgakṣēmasabha". He said: "Now-a-days people belonging to the old *Yōgakṣēmasabha* make a lot of fuss about 'Puṇyāham' and they bemoan the lack of enough Nambūtiris to perform this purificatory rite. These are the plastic yōgakhemites". *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 147:3, Dec.15, 2000, p.24.

[256] P.M. Nārāyaṇan, "VT Oru Parājayam?" *Kēsari*, 24 Makaram 1180/6 Feb. 2005, p.12. Artist Nambūtiri shared the same view. See N.P. Vijayakrishnan, "Varayudē Sangītam", *Mātṛubhūmi Weekly*, 85:1, March 4, 2007, pp.12-13.

[257] *Mādhyamam Weekly*, 147:3, Dec.15, 2000, p.23.

[258] K. Kannan, "VT-yē Kāvi Puthappikkumbōḷ", *Mādhyamam Weekly*, Ap.2, 1999, pp.14-17.

identification of VT as the leader of the movement and also as the fountainhead of the radical and secular spirit continues to dominate both popular and academic perceptions.

Of late there emerged a debate over the revivalist affiliations of VT in his later life. It has been argued that the tendency of most of the political parties to deny tradition frustrated him to ally with the forces of revivalism and thus he was playing a crucial role in linking the Nambūtiri movement with Hindu revivalism. He resigned from the Congress and refused to associate with the communists. Finally he collaborated with the RSS because it was the true representative of nationalism, patriotism and tradition.[259] On the other hand, there were simultaneous attempts to oppose the tendency to suffronize VT and to assert his strong secular affiliations. It is held that VT, who stood for making Nambūtiris humans, could never be otherwise and that he had denounced attempts at misinterpreting him during his very lifetime.[260] In fact all these debates are based on the presumption by both parties that VT was the uncompromising champion of secular interests and values; while the former argue that the unethical politics of the mainstream parties had forced him to make a rethinking of his ideology and attitudes and to ennoble the Hindutva forces, the latter deny any changes in his attitudes at all. Reality lay between the two positions; VT was the champion of the causes of his community and its interests; he could not traverse much beyond that; however, his communitarianism did not develop into full fledged communalism.

Nor was VT the sole representative of the Nambūtiri movement. He was only one among its many leaders till 1932 and ceased to be a representative of the *Sabha* thereafter. By the early 1930s the movement had nearly come to an end, and after 1932 VT could not associate with the movement owing to many reasons. Thereafter the movement dispersed and dissolved into many streams.

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[259] B. K. Rajesh, "VT yudē Vipḷavam", *Janmabhumi*, Feb.28-Mar.8, 1999.
[260] K. Kannan, "VT-yē Kāvi Puthappikkumbōḷ", *Mādhyamam Weekly*, Ap.2, 1999, pp.14-17.

VT busied himself with the *Ulbuddhakēraḷam*, EMS and many others entered into politics, and a few continued in the Sabha which was facing its extinction. Some of the erstwhile *Sabha* activists became Congressmen, some others Communists and a vast majority became inactive. VT's writings and speeches after the 1950s indicated his personal attitudes and reflected his growing frustration; his opinions were not that of the community or that of the movement as a whole or that of other Nambūtiris who associated with other forums or those prospered through modern vocations. The nature of VT's reaction conforms to a typical feudal backlash. But the society did not heed him much; it accepted only his radical image and not the reactionary one.[261]

The discussion on revivalism acquired special importance in the context of the growing disillusionment among the new generation of Nambūtiris due to their marginalization.[262] This disillusionment created a sense of deprivation in them in relation to other communities who were held to have benefitted unduly through their pressure tactics which led the Nambūtiris to be sidelined.[263] The revival of the *Sabha* is justified in this context.[264] The old movement is severely

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[261] This is clear from the response to his articles. Even his most aggressive article "Adhamarē" (*Kalākaumudi Weekly*, 219, Nov. 19, 1979) evoked little response either from the side of the intelligentsia or from the readers.

[262] P.K. Āryan Nambūtiri, "Charitṛathintē Pāṭam", *YK* 1:1&2, Sep-Oct. 1980, pp.67-69. By comparing the pre-reform days with the present condition, he found both as having marked by marginalization and identity crisis. If the Nambūtiris were able to recoup under an able leadership in those days, no scope for such a revival and no similar enthusiasm are visible today. He writes: "Even in those days, the problem encountered by the Nambutiri was that of his existence itself. He had to attain modern education lest he should be isolated or rejected from the mainstream of society. Today the problems have changed, but the danger to his existence still looms large. The Nambutiri is being neglected, marginalized and isolated in every field of social activity. He has lost his hereditary assets and the rich legacy of Nambutiri culture and tradition. He is denied the opportunity of employment and rehabilitation. In the vast canvas of society, the most distorted portarait is that of the Nambutiri..." *Ibid*, p.69.

[263] The Nambūtiris are now engaged in an effort to recapture caste symbols (which they had earlier renounced in order to adapt to a secular social life) to organize on communal lines and to retain caste-exclusiveness. These ventures are evaluated as efforts aimed at community-building enabling the Nambūtiris to function as a pressure group and as a search for self-identity. See Supriya VC, *Nambūtiri Pariṣkaraṇa Samrambhangaḷ Malayāḷa Sāhityathil*, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 2002, p.284.

[264] See Editorial, *YK*, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, pp.3-5.

criticized for its 'deconstructive agenda' and for neglecting community interests in the name of 'universal humanism'.[265] It is a debatable issue whether there is a general decline in the condition of the community and if so what are the real reasons for the phenomenon. Even the land reforms measures of the post-independent era did not affect the Nambūtiris adversely much.[266] Another tendency that has been developing recently is to ally with all those communities culturally closer to the Nambūtiris, like the *Ambalavāsis*, and to incorporate them in the new *Yōgakṣēmasabha*, in order to strengthen the bargaining power vis-à-vis other communities and their associations.[267] One of the solutions recommended for the existing deprivation of the Nambūtiris is to urge the government to recognize Vedas as a subject of study at the university level.[268]

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[265] *Ibid*, pp.4-5. "There is not a single Nambūtiri family left unaffected by the land legislation". Nambūtiris are therefore urged to exert pressure on the government to form a corporation in order to resettle all those who were afflicted by the land legislation.

[266] P. Chitṟan Nambūtiripād, "VT: Oru Kaṟmayōgi", in *VT-yē Kaṇdethal,* p.3. Marriage reform, partition of family property and the subsequent population increase had contributed much in weakening the feudal system well before the introduction of the the land reforms; such changes in fact rescued the community from a probable ruin that might have been caused by the land reforms.

[267] It was advised to be formed as a 'savaṟṇa federation". M.P. Ilayath, "Oru Savaṟṇa Federation", *YK*, 2:1 & 2, Sep-Oct. 1980, pp.94-95. C.K. Nambūtiri, while supporting this move for the sake of political and economic interests, cautioned the Nambūtiris to retain exclusivity in community matters. He also suggested two offices for these two different purposes. C.K. Nambūtiri, "Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Parapp", *YK*, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, pp.14-15. Azhvancheri Tambṟākkaḷ scorned at these efforts aimed at the creation of a collective identity at the expense of the Nambūtiri self. Personal conversation, Athavanad, 11-10-2005.

[268] Akkitham, "Vēdasamskāramenna Ātmavatha Uyarthippidikkuka", *YK*, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, pp.39-40. Mādamb urged the Nambūtiris to regain the intellectual tradition of the Nambūtiris and to make researches on the key concepts of the Nambūtiri heritage. Mādamb KunjuKuṭṭan, "Nambūtirimārōdu Orapēkṣa", *YK* 1:1&2, Sep-Oct. 1980, pp.8-9.

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GLOSSARY

Āddhyan	Nambūtiri of noble birth; Nambūtiris belonging to one of the eight exalted families.
Adhivēdanam	Polygyny practiced by the senior-most Nambūtiri sons.
Aikya-Kēraḷam	United Kerala incorporating the three geographical divisions of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore.
Āḷōhari	Individual share of the *illam* property.
Antapuram	Harem of the *Illam/Mana.*
Antaŗjanam	Nambūtiri woman.
Antaŗjanasamājam	Association of the *Antaŗjanam*s.
Apphan	All the younger brothers of a senior Nambūtiri/all junior sons of a Nambūtiri illam.
Āsyan	Non-noble Nambūtiri; against *Āddyan.*
Ayitham	The custom of pollution (caused by touch or distance) practiced by various Hindu castes, especially upper castes, towards the inferior castes.
Bhāgam	Partitioning or individual share of joint family property.
Dāsi	Maid-servant of an *illam.*
Ghōṣa	*Purdah* system practiced by Nambūtiri women.
Gŗihastan	The Nambūtiri who is married from within the caste and who has a legitimate family – *Mūss* or *Kāraṇavan.*
Illam/Mana	Nambūtiri homestead.
Janmi	The customary term for landlords in Kerala.
Janmitham	The janmi system.
Jyēṣtan	The senior-most son among the Nambūtiris/*Mūss*; Against *kaniṣtan.*
Kaniṣtan	Junior son in a Nambūtiri family; also called *Snātakan.*
Kāraṇavan	Senior-most male member of an *illam/taṛawād.*
Kāryasthan	Managers of the Nambūtiri *illams,* oftentimes Nāyars.

Kēraḷōlpathi	The chronicle which describes the legendary history of the land and people of Kerala with a clear Nambūtiri bias.
Kuduma	Tuft of hair.
Mangaḷōdayam	The printing and publishing company owned by the Nambūtiris.
Maṛakkuda	Cadjen umbrella used by the Antaṛjanams to hide themselves from the public when going out.
Marumakkathāyam	System of matriliny practiced by the Kshatriyas, Ambalavāsis and the Nāyars of Kerala.
Matam	Monasteries from where education was imparted to Nambūtiri boys.
Mitākṣari	The system of inheritance followed by Brahmins in other parts of India.
Mitavādi	Journal published by C. Krishnan from Calicut to promote radical social reform.
Mūss	The senior-most son in a Nambūtiri *illam*.
Muṛajapam	The royal ceremony conducted every six years at Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of the princely state of Travancore. It was originally started by Mārthānda Varma for the expiation of sins he had committed during the process of the expansion of his kingdom.
Nambūtiri	Malayāla Brahman.
Nambūtiritham	Essential traits of Nambutiri culture and values/ Nambutiri caste pride.
Ōthikkan	Teacher who imparted Vedic knowledge to Nambūtiri boys in accordance with the *Gurukula* system; he also had other ritual duties, during marriage functions etc.
Parivēdanam	*Swajāti* marriage of a junior son in a Nambūtiri family even if any of his senior brothers were being left unmarried or *sambandham* married.

Pāśupatam	Ultra-radical journal started by the reformist Nambūtiris to oppose *Sudarśanam* and the conservative faction.
Patāka	The weekly journal ran by conservative groups in 1948 to oppose the alleged attempts to convert the Nambūtiris as Communists.
Pattaṛ	Tamil Brahmin settler of Kerala.
Peṇkoda	Literally, giving away of girls in marriage. Generally, the marriage of a girl and its attendant ceremonies.
Pṛabhātam	The mouthpiece of the Congress Socialist party published from Shornūr in 1935.
Pumsavanam	The ritual ceremony performed by the Nambūtiris after conception for the expected child to be a male
Rasikasadanam	VT's house at Tritāla which witnessed many historic events including the widow marriage.
Sahōdaran	Radical journal started by Sahōdaran Ayyappan to spread the message of brotherhood and social equality among the people of Kerala.
Samāvaṛtanam	Formal ceremony which marked the end of the Vedic study of a boy at the age of 15 or 16.
Sambandham	Liaisons of junior Nambūtiri sons with Kşatṛiya/ Ambalavāsi/Nāyar women.
Śānkarasmṛiti	Normative text of the Nambūtiris of Kerala. Allegedly written by Sankara, it regulated the life of the Nambūtiris in accordance with the 64 *Anāchārams*.
Śānthi	Priest of a temple/ priestly profession.
Sapatni	Second or third wife of a Nambūtiri.
Sapatnīmalsaram	Infighting among many wives of a Nambūtiri.
Sāpatnyam	The state of many wives of the *mūss* living together.
Ṣōdaśa-kṛiyās	The sixteen life-cycle rituals of a Nambūtiri.
Smāṛtavichāram	Ritualistic trial of an Antaṛjanam for conjugal infidelity.

Smṛitis	Hindu religious scriptures.
Sudaṛśanam	The conservative journal started by Nambūtiris of the anti-reform faction.
Swajātivivāham	Marriage of junior Nambūtiri sons from within the caste; against *Vijātivivāham*, i.e., *sambandham*.
Taṛawād	Joint family of the Nāyars.
Tozhil Kēndṛam	The work center started for the Antaṛjanams at Lakkidi in 1948 to empower them through education and vocational training.
Ulbuddhakēraḷam	The Gandhian commune settlement founded by VT Bhaṭṭathiripād at Kodumunda in 1935/the weekly journal published from the commune.
Uṇṇi Nambūtiri	The first born boy of a Nambūtiri/the radical organ of the Nambūtiri young men of the reform movement.
Upanayanam	Initiation ceremony among the Nambūtiris; the boy starts wearing sacred thread and becomes a *dwija*.
Upasabhas	Regional units of the *Yōgakṣēmasabha*.
Vārasyār	Women of the Vāriyar (Ambalavāsi) caste.
Vāriyam	The house of the Vāriyars.
Vedivaṭṭam	Lengthy time-pass talks among the Nambūtiris at home and at other public places like temples.
Vēḷi	*Swajāti* marriage of a Nambūtiri attended by all religious sacraments.
Vivēkōdayam	The official journal of the SNDP.
Yāchana Yātṛa	The begging journey organized by the *Sabha* in 1931 under the leadership of V.T. and Pāndam from Tṛiśśūr to Kāsaṛgōd to allocate resources for the Nambūtiri School at Tṛiśśūr and to spread the message of education.
Yōgakṣēmam	The mouthpiece of the Nambūtiri *Yōgakṣēmasabha*.
Yōgakṣēmasabha	The Nambūtiri caste association formed in 1908 to modernize them.
Yuvajana Sangham	Youth wing of the *Yōgakṣēmasabha*.

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