VT: THE REBEL
AND THE REFORMER

CHAPTER 4
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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 Mangalodayam Press and his stay at Trikkur, 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 –

¹ Olappamaṇa points out that the rise of VT and Pāṇḍam to the leadership of the Sabha was very important since they came from ordinary circumstances and from a non-noble background. See Olappamaṇa, “Pazhūrili”, U/N. 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 Bhattachiripad. 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 Velithiruthi Thazham at Mezhathur 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. 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 Mezhathōrillam 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. But VT wrote that some

2 VT-yude Sampūrṇa Kritika, p.5. VT writes that he was born at Kidangūr Kaippily 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 Mutukuṟiśi 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 sapatnimalsaram 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 kanišṭan. 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 kanišṭan 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 “Sakhāväṇṇi” 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 Cherīyamma.
Nambūtiri family. This had generated a feeling of worthlessness in him and had made him selfish and greedy. 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. 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. 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. Since *samāvartanam* 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 *Othikkan*, he was taken to Pātākkara Mana near Perintalmanṇa for higher studies. Though the people of

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13 Kancha Ilaiyah 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 Hinduva Philosophy, culture and Political Economy*, Calcutta, 2002, p.15.
14 Though VT had criticized the very efficacy of the Vedic education (See his Ālathiyūr speech, in *Vt̄yudē Sampūrṇa Kritisal*, 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 Brahmadaththan Nambūtiriṇād, *Khilāfat Smaranyaikal*, pp.216-17.
15 *Othikkans* 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. His stay at Pātākkara lasted for two years and thereafter he moved on to Mutukurūsī *mana*. The place was a strong bastion of conservatism and the *mana* was the true lord of the area. At Pātākkara and Mutukurūsī VT came to experience the real power of both *janmitham* and *Brāhmaṇyam*; his memoirs present landlordism with considerable sympathy and respect. 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. In an attempt to tide over this difficult position, VT was asked to work as a priest in a temple at Muṇḍamuka near Shroṭūr, which he had to comply with, much against his will. After some time, when the condition at home improved, he decided to wind up the job of the temple śāṇīthi.

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16 *VTyudē Sampūrya Kṛtikāla*, 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 Sampūrya Kṛtikāla*, 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 *Sampūrya Kṛtikāla*. See “Aksarajnānathinu Vaikiyathenthe”, in *Karṇavipōkām*, Trissūr, 1988, pp. 402-407.
19 VT’s opposition to śāṇīthi was on account of two factors. First, his was not a priestly family traditionally; in fact priestly profession was not respectable among the Nambūtiśras 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 Nambūtiśras considered it beneath their dignity to take up the occupation. See M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, “A History of the Nambūtiśra 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 Sampūrya Kṛtikāla*, pp.180-81). VT also writes about his lack of devotion while doing priestly
In VT’s life his stay at Munjumuka 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 Malayalam 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 Malayalam letters. Doubts have been raised about the sincerity as well as the reality behind VT’s statement. 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 Brāhmanyam 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

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 Kunjukuttan 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 Kunjukuttan, op.cit, pp.32-33.

20 VT̓uyē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.194. The condition at home improved with his brother’s marriage and his father’s adhitvēdanam. He stopped śanithi 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, “Aksaraṇjanāṇathinu Vaikīyathenthē?” in Karṇavīpākam, Tjiśūt, 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. However, with the help of a railway officer at Sholapur he learnt some English.

Secondly, VT’s association with the Sabha had its beginning during this period. 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 Vejjinazhi in 1916. 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 Kūṟūr Namṟiṟipād 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.

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 Murajapam in 1918. He had considerable benefits from his stay at Thiruvananthapuram. He was able to collect a sizable amount from the various ceremonies of the Murajapam. 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.

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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. *Vdyē Sampaṟṟya Kṛitiyā*, 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.


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 Murajapam. 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 Murajapam or to the pamphlets issued by the Sanīgham 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 Thiruvananthapuram, VT joined the Perintalmana 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. 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. But he had to discontinue his studies due to the spread of a contagious fever in and around the area during the time.

VT was able to continue his studies when the new Nambūtiri School was started at Edakkunni near Trissūr in 1919, in the first batch in the third form. He was very active in the school and even edited a bi-weekly named *Vidyāṛthi*.

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29 See *ibid*, p.222.
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 *pāyasam* 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. Radhakṛishan, “VT Oru Apphan Nambūtiri”, *Mādhyañam Sunday Supplement*, Dec. 16, 2001.
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. 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 Kaniṣṭhavivāham, bhōgam and women’s education and was an exponent of Adhivēđanam. 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, 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. Thus,

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33 See, VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikā, pp.225-231.
34 A.P.P. Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.53; Mathramkōṭ Asōkan, op.cit, p.31.
35 VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikā, 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 Chālīssēri.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

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 Kunjukūṭtan, op.cit, p.146.


37 Mādamb Kunjukūṭtan, op.cit, pp.149-150. Those days only a few like Dēsamaṅgalam had entered into the field of business. According to custom, agriculture and trade were taboo for the Nambūtiris.
the captain of the Nambūtiri volunteers. Thereafter he became a full time Congress activist. 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.

At the Yōgakṣēmam Company

It was in the meantime that he got appointed as a clerk in the Yōgakṣēmam Company at Trissur in 1923. Trissur 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 BrahmaSwam Mata had made his life relatively easy. A more important result of his stay at Trissur 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 Mangalodhayam press. His work as a proof reader brought him immense opportunities to come in contact with notable writers of the time like Kunjukuttam Tampuran, Vāḷḷathōl, Nāḷappāṭṭ, etc. In fact it was his contacts with K.K. Vāriyar, the well known communist of later years, which sowed the seeds of radical thoughts in VT.

The proof reading of Nāḷappāṭṭ 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.

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 Sampūrna Kritikal, pp.240-41.
Association with the Reform Movement

At Trissur 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 Strī Vidyābhyaśa 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 Müss, Kuṟūr Nārayaṇan 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 Antarjanams 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 Kṣatriyas 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 Kṣatriya 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 Śāṅkarasmiṇī. Universalization of swajātivivāham would cause to increase promiscuity and immorality; women’s education and boycott of ghōśa would lead to wantonness. They started a journal called Sudarṣānam 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.

43 Kunnath Janardhana Menon was its editor.
Paṣupatam

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’. In fact its aim was to fight out reform and to retain the old order. Though Kunnath Janāḍhana Mēnōn was its editor, the real spirit behind Sudaṛśanam was Paschiman Rāman Nambūtiri. Paṣupatam started its publication when five issues of Sudaṛśanam came out. It was noticed that VT was the greatest spirit behind it. 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 Antarjanams 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.

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. Kittuṇi, Kaththwunna Thirikal, Triśūr, 1955, p.31. But this information is refuted by an Editorial in the UN which presents Kumuṇi Kṛṣṇa 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. 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 swajātīvivāham was taboo for them, the prevailing system of polygamy (Adhivedanam) 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. 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, the exigency of the shrinking population of the community as well as checking the erosion of property brought

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-matrilinieal 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.

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.\textsuperscript{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 Kuṟū’s “Kanyādānam” in which he had highlighted the sorrows of the Antarjanams both as wives and widows.\textsuperscript{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 Antarjanams 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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{52} The article was originally written in Sanskrit and was published in Mangalādayam. 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, Kurūṣ 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 Antarjanams, 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 (peṅkoda) 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 Malayāla Manorama 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 tarawāds 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.

54 Reproduced in UN, 1:3, Vrīchikam 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 Avinjikkāṭtu 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 *taṇḍavāds*. It also made the life of the Antarjanams hellish and intolerable; their lives tottered between life-long celibacy and the sorrows of *sāpatnyam* or widowhood. While children of the *illams* went astray, great amounts were spent on the siblings of the *sambandham* wife. The community would never prosper unless a solution could be found to put an end to this abusive, ignoble and heinous custom.

An editorial in the *UN* noted the increasing opposition among the young men towards *sambandham* and hailed the new development. 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.

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. 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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56 Ibid, pp. 55-56
57 Ibid, p. 57.
60 Ibid, p.102. Kumāramaṅgalass Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād in an article “Nambūtirimārudē Sāhiṭya Pariṣṭamam” (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 Nāyaṛs, Ambalavāsis and Kshatriyas. (p.12)
61 “Ṣtrīsikṣa”, 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 *ghōsa* 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 Śaṅkarasmṛti on *Kanistavivāham*. But it is argued that it not only prohibited *Kanistavivāham* 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 Śaṅkarasmṛti, the reformers turned to the grand Indian tradition as outlined in the *Manusmrīti* to substantiate their arguments. This is evident from the attack of Mūthiringōd on scriptures and on the *Vaidikar* who stuck to tradition.\(^{62}\) Though

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\(^{62}\) See his sweeping criticism on the *Vaidikar* in “Vaidikādhikāra Niyanṭraṇam”, *UN*, 8:1, Kanni 1102, pp. 66-72. His “Nālu Parivaṭanāṅgal” envisaged burning of Śaṅkarasmṛti as an agenda for ritual reform. See *UN*, 11:51, Sep.12, 1930. In another article he says that he had burnt Śaṅkarasmṛti. See “Prabhukkanmārūm Yuvajanaṅgalum”, 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 Nambūtiriṇād describing it as sheer wantonness. Referring to the Nāyaṛs as śūḍras, 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 svajāti marriage. Other smṛiti authors had categorically denied śūḍra 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 Kṣatriyas woman for kāma; but never a śūḍra woman. The concept that śūḍra marriage was recognized by Paraśurāma had no basis; in fact snātakaś were supposed to renounce contact with women; even when that was not possible, śūḍra marriage was not allowed. Till the beginning of the Perumāl rule, liaison was non-existent with non-Brahmans; thereafter it began to include women from the Kṣatriyas, then from the Nāyaṛ chiefs and finally from all Nāyaṛs.

Intervening in the issue of Kaniṣṭavivāham on behalf of the conservatives, Vadakkumkūr Rāmaṉarāja argued that sambandham had scriptural sanction. He justified tradition by quoting from Manusmṛiti and said that not only Manu but Gautama and Narada also had allowed snātakaś to enter into marital relations with Śūḍra women. Kēｒaḷölpatheri states that Paraśurāma

Kōdanāṭt Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiriṇād 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, “Nambūtirirāmūrūdu Oru Duṟṇadappu”, UN, 5:3, Vrichikam 1099, pp.164-176. The article was originally written in 1916 and was circulated as a pamphlet along with the Yōgakēram of 8-9-1091ME.

allowed *swajātiyīvāham* only for the eldest sons which the *Śaṅkarasmiṃūti* 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 Nambūṭiùiri 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. *Kaniśṭavivāham* would destroy the prevailing dharma.\(^{65}\)

An area where marriage reform sharply contradicted with scriptural sanction was that of *parivēdanam*. *kaniśṭavivāham* would not be successful unless scriptural ban against *parivēdanam* was removed. It was a great sin for a junior son to marry an Antarjana (swajātiyīvāham) provided any one of his elder brothers remained unmarried or was refusing to marry from within the caste. In such a situation universalization of *swajātiyīvāham* not only required sanction of *kaniśṭavivāham* 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 15\(^{th}\) annual meeting of the *Sabha* at Vaikam had passed a resolution for incorporating provisions for *swajātiyīvāham* and *bhāgam* in the Nambūṭiùiri Regulation. In his presidential speech, A.K.T.K.M. Valiya Nārāyaṇan Nambūṭiripāḍ cautioned the young men for their preoccupation with *Kaniśṭavivāham* instead of making an earnest effort to seek a source of

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\(^{65}\) This was what Paschimāna Rāman Nambūṭiùiri had been stressing as early as 1920. He argued that *Kaniśṭavivāham* might lead to increase in population, force the Nambūṭiùiris to wander, and thus weaken *dharma*. Cited in *YK*, 11:8, Nov.12, 1920. Pāṭirīśēri replied Paschimāna with a comment that the decline of the Nambūṭiùiris 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. “Pariśkārabahāḷam”, *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 Antarjanams 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 Nāyār Regulation in the legislatures, especially in Travancore.68 The Nāyārs 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

67 Presidential 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 tarawād 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 Nāyār Regulation made it (marumakkathāyam) virtually makkathāyam by making the widow and children of a deceased Nāyār male heirs to his separate or self-acquired property. It also sanctioned the partition of tarawāds, 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 Enters 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 Nāyār Bill in the Madras Legislature in 1890, Sir C. Śāṅkaran Nāyār 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 Nāyārs, 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 Nambiitiris came to the forefront in exhorting for *Kanistavivaham* and a royal statute for promoting it. Muthiringodd urged the Nambiitiris to retreat from *sambandham* since it was detrimental to community interests. He, however, identified that the efforts of the Nayaars towards framing a regulation vicariously benefited the Nambiitiris, since by making *sambandham* expensive and by attributing all the blame for the downfall of the Nayaars to the Nambiitiris, they in fact contributed to discourage the practice.\(^72\)

An editorial of the *UN*, written at the height of the discussions on the Nayaar Regulation in 1924, revealed this fact fairly clearly.\(^73\) It advised the Nayaars to give up *sambandham* rather than to demand a share from the Nambiitiri husband of a Nayaar wife. It would add honour to them than to continue with this humiliating practice.\(^74\) While the proposed Nambiitiri Regulation sought to deny proprietary rights to *sambandham*-married men, the Nayaar Regulation attempted to grab the property of the Nambiitiris. In fact *sambandham* was greatly detrimental to the Nambiitiris; 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 Nayaars declined day by day. Rather than discouraging an undesirable practice, the Nayaar Regulation sought to foster it. Another editorial on the same subject expressed dissatisfaction over the developments of the Nayaar 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 Nayaars had been taking for some time in fighting out *sambandham*. In the new age when

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74. T. Kumarapilla, the NSS leader, complained that for the Nambiitiri husband, his *sambandham* wife was polluting after the nighttime.
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. 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 grihasthans (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 kanisṭan to contract swajātierivivāham 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 Kṛṣṇa Nambūtiri, which is a review of P.C. Tampān’s work Ispade Rājākkamār, quoted Tampān’s opinion that it was the Nāyar Regulations in Cochin and Travancore that had compelled the Nambūtiris to turn towards swajātierivivāham. See YK, 20:81, July 23, 1930.
this disadvantage and reform the existing family structure. The family system ran counter to individualism and this could be corrected only by adopting swajātivivāham and bhāgam. Kaniṣṭhas 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 Antarjanams. 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 Antarjanams. 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.

77 M. Ramavarma Tampān, BA LT, “Nambūtiri Yuvākkaljōdu 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 Kṣatriyas. 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.
80 In three successive articles, Kāipippayyūr Saṅkaran Nambūtiripād denounced women’s education and liberation. In an article “Strīswāttantṛyam” (UN 7:5, Makaram 1101, pp.279-
Promotion of *swajāttivivāham* necessitated not only the encouragement of *Kaniṣṭavivāham* and *parivēdanam* but also the discouragement of *Adhivēdanam*. In an address Müthiringbd narrated how *Adhivēdanam* contradicted human emotions and humanitarian ideals. 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. The attention of the community was also called to the evil practice of the *grihastans* entering into *sambandham* relations in addition to *Adhivēdanam*.

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, “Srīsāmājam” (*UN*, 7:6, Kumbham 1101, pp.347-357), he refuted the call of Kōdanaṭṭ 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.


82 An article compared a Nambūtiri *Illum* with a brothel where the Māss lived with his many (pitiful) wives. “The house in which women are treated only as instruments of sexual gratification is a brothel”. See Balakṛṣṇan Vannéri, “Vēṣyālāyafgil”, *UN*, Oct 16, 23. 1931.

83 Strāvalḷi Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Presidential Address, 9th Annual meeting, NYJS, *UN* 9:4, Dhanu 1103, pp.275-286. In a later article, Kāṇippayūr Saṅkarān 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 Adhivedanam but also the joint family system had made a mockery of it. 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.

Mūthirīngōd developed his idea of marriage reform by calling attention to the peculiar system of seclusion of women that prevailed among the Nambūtiris.

Ghōṣa system was found to exist among the Muslim and the North Indian women, but the one found among the Nambūtiris was unique. 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 adhivedanam. Since polygamy is banned among all modern nations, those who engaged in it should be punished. See “Adhivedāna Nirōdhānam”, UN, 11:47, May 30, 1930.

84 See the second part of his article “Pūrvāchāram 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 Grihajyāvitam” only years later. YK, 20:18, 19, Nov.23, 27, 1929 reproduced in VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, pp.550-553.

85 See the third part of his article “Pūrvāchāram Athavā Kīzhnadapp” in UN, 7:12, Chingam 1101, pp.674-681. P.M. Manazhi in his “Antaţjanaţaļaḻum Avarudē Vēsābhuţanaţaļaḻum” raised a similar plea for dress reform and ghōṣa elimination. UN, 7:12, Chingam 1101, pp.713-716. M. Rāmavarma Tampān in his “Nambūtiri Yuvākkalē!” (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 Antaţjanams 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 Mūthirīngōd 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 Stīţ Vidyābhyaśa Commission Report. Tīţśūr, p.8. Mūthirīngōd 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 Antājanams 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 marakkuda 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 Cheṟumukku Vaidikan Cheṟiya 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 Strēkal”, 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 svajātīvivāham. See his Presidential Speech, 12th Annual Meeting of the Talappāḷḷi NY Upasabha, in UN 9:7, Meenam 1103, pp.482-483.

88 “Nālu Parivarthananga”, UN, 11:51, Sep.12, 1930. The four areas of change were educational, ritualistic, matrimonial and economic.

89 Three stories of Rajanirāngam viz., “Viṣukkēṭtam”, “Māyayō Manmathibhānthiyō” and “Enkīl” made pre-marital love as the theme of narration.


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 Adhvīdanam; 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. 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 svajātivivāham. 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 Antarjanams 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 svajātivivāham, but the Antarjanams were still in their old medieval social environment. Women’s education, ghōṣa

92 “Yuvajanaṅgaḷum Thozhilillāyayum”, 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 Antarjanams. A real picture of the pitiful life of the Antarjanams 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 Antarjanams. With every sambandham an Antarjanam 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 Antarjanams. Since all other attempts at discouraging sambandham had failed, an ultimate and desperate plea had to be made.

\(^93\) Mūthiringōd. “Abhivriddhikkuḷḷa Ēkāmārgam”, \textit{UN}, 8:7, Meenam 1102, pp.447-450. The demand for a “Strīsamājam” was first categorically raised by Kōdanāṭō Nārāyaṇān Nambūṭiripād in his Presidential Speech at the 7th annual meeting of the Sarigham in 1926. See \textit{UN}, 7:4, Dhanu 1101, p.242.

\(^94\) “Bandhu Samudāyangalē Mānya Sahōdarikalodu Orāpēkṣā”, \textit{UN}, 8:12, Chingam 1102, pp.679-694. They included all those communities with which the Nambūṭiris had marriage alliances.
In an article that reflected the same sentiments, Pātirissēri 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. 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 Antarjanams 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 Antarjanams 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. 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 Antarjanams, Pātirissēri 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, Kuṟṟ Nārāyaṇan Bhaṭṭathiripād explained how the cultural backwardness of the Antarjanams had been fostering sambandham. He points out that the present condition of the Antarjanams runs parallel to the fate of the untouchables. He

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95 “Antarjanamaḷam Bandhu Samudaya StriKalum”, UN, 9:3, Vrichikam 1103, pp.188-203.
96 This has been a general argument raised by all Nambūtiri reformers. But Pātirissēri argued that among the Nambūtiris females were lesser in number to the males. Ibid, p.196.
97 “Strividyābhāṣam”, UN, 9:3, Vrichikam 1103, pp.206-216. This Kuṟṟ is not the Kuṟṟ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, the strong votary of the Sudarśanam 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 Antarjanams 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, "Vivāhaḥḥintē 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. 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. 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. 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 –

101 “Antapurathil Ninu”, 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 “ Antarjanāṅgakku Avaśyam Vēṇḍa Chila Pariśkāranāṅga!”, 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 “Nammude Anantarākṛṣṇiyāṅga”, 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 Nambūtirī 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 Nambūtirī 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. VT has written an impressive account of it, claiming both the drama and the very idea behind it as his own. 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.

104 P.K. Aryan Nambūtirī noted that the drama was a missile, aimed not only at liberating the Antaṭjanams 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. Nālukkeṭṭil Ninnu Nūṭṭilekkku, Trissur, 1969, pp.96-97.
105 VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, pp.249-50.
The last part of the play was completed in just fifteen days. Though VT acknowledges the helping hand of M.P. Bhattathiripad 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 Sa ngham. 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. It was also considered to be absurd and humiliating to the community. In those days the annual meetings of the Sabha and the Sa ngham 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 Sa ngham would not conduct its meeting. 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


107 The detractors put Kaplingat Saṅkarān Naṅbūṭiri to the fore of the opposition; they alleged that it would humiliate the community before the non-Naṅbūṭiris. Chittoor Kunhan Naṅbūṭiripād, 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 Naṅbūṭiri, op.cit, pp.101-102. Also see M.P. Bhaṭṭathiripād, “Prēmjiyudē Ōṟmakal”, Pāṭabhēdam, November 1992.

108 VT writes that Chittur acquiesced on his threat. See VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, 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 Antarjanarnams 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 *Rajanīraṅgam*, 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 *Saṅghakkali* or *Pānēṅkaḷi*.\(^{110}\)

In an appraisal of the first staging of the drama, Kuṭṭikrīṣṇa Mārār wrote hopefully that the 22\(^{nd}\) 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.*


\(^{112}\) M.B.N., “Adukkaḷayil Ninnu Arāṅgathēkkku – Oru Sāmudāyika Prahasanam”, *Mangalōdayam*, 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 Antarjanams equal to the one the decade-long agitation through newspapers and meetings had brought about in the community. In a preface written to the third edition of the drama in 1957, Kēlappan compared it to an atom bomb of ‘those days’. Presenting VT as an exceptional personality and his drama as a revolutionary move, Kēlappan 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. 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 Antarjanams about the crucial issues of communitarian interest. In all the places where it was staged, special arrangements were made for the Antarjanams to watch it. The farce was published within a month of its 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.

E.M.S, Ātmakathā, p.117.
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.
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 Antarjanams. E.M.S. also attested that the impact created by the drama became the foundation for all the subsequent changes. See his Ātmakathā, 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, Viṭṭavathimmē Uṭṭhudippukal, p.34.
first enactment and all the copies were sold out within two months.\footnote{VTyudé Sampûrya Kritikal, p.254.} It made a great impact on all walks of life, especially in instilling a sense of enthusiasm in the Antarjanams. An editorial of *Unumi Nambûtiri* wrote:

"...While a drama or farce is generally looked upon as a mere source of entertainment, for the young Nambûtiris 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 Nambûtiri 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 Nambûtiris and brought them great satisfaction. For the last two decades, social change had remained an unfulfilled dream even to the great Nambûtiri stalwarts of social reform; but today a handful of young Nambûtiris 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 Antarjanams, 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 Nambûtiris".\footnote{UN, 11:47, May 30, 1930.}

A report of the staging of the drama at the Mûthiringôt Illam, in which more than a hundred Antarjanams participated, described it as a great event and praised it for the visible changes that it had created in the community.\footnote{Cherûliyl Kunjunji 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.} In a note of appreciation after seeing the drama staged at Chittûr Mana, Râmavarma Thampân 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 Antarjanams and would destroy conservatism within the community.\footnote{M. Rânavarma Thampân, "Oru Prahasanâbhinayam", UN, 11:31, Jan. 24, 1930.} He also observed that the *ghôsa* system was crumbling and would be swept away by the impact of the drama in the near future.
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 Panniyūr 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 Mangalōdayam 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 Mangalōdayam for the new job; he received an allowance of Rs.25/-, which was in fact lesser than his salary at Mangalōdayam. See *VTyudē Sampūrna Kritikal*, 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 Sampūrna Kritikal*, 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 Changanāssēri 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. Bhāṭṭathiripād attests the role of VT in the propaganda work. 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.

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 enrol new members. 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 Payyannūr, who were matrilineal, were looked down upon by others and were truly out of the deliberations of the community. Since Paḻḷam Kṛṣṇan 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

126 E.M.S, Atmakaiha, p.108. When VT started his Yāchana Yātra, E.M.S. had to take up the charge of the assistant proof reader.
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 VṬyudē Sampūrṇa 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, kanistāvivāham and bhāgām 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 kanistāvivāham and would terminate sambandham. 10th annual resolved for kanistāvivāham 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 swajītāvivāham. The committee for preparing the draft regulation was appointed in the 16th annual Sabha.
Kaniṣṭavitavāham slowly captured the attention of the community. 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. 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 kāranjavans 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, 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. 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 śmaṭtavicārām of Tātri 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 kaniṣṭavitavāham 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 Yōgakṣemasabhayudē 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). Ῥῑṣūr, 1100ME. Chapter 2 proposed to legitimize sajāтивāham 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. Some argued that partition was not good (bhāgam bhaṅgiyalla), some others held that partition was good (bhāgam bhaṅgiyāqu); but the vast majority argued that partition alone was good (bhāgamē bhaṅgiyāvū). In the prevailing custom of the kāraṇavar acting as the manager with the right of primogeniture


135 Kōdanaṭ Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, “Ālohari Bhāgam”, YK, 14:30, Jan.5, 1924. While accepting Kanistavivāham, 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. Ālathur Anuṣan Nambūtiripad opposed bhāgam on the ground that it would devastate the tārawād. “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 “Veḻiyum Bhāgavum”, Pāṭiriśēri argued that bhāgam was a necessary precondition for Veḻi. 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 Kōdanaṭ, and in support of Pāṭiriśēri, Mūṭhiringōd wrote in an article “Madhavavarthitvam” 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 Bhaṅgiyāvulu”, Mūṭhiringōd 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, Pāṭiriśēri in his article series “Bhāgamē Bhaṅgiyāvulu”, repeated his points in its favour. He said that it was absurd to argue that bhāgam would bring about poverty. Except a Pūmulḷḷa, Olappamaḷḷa or Deśamaṅgalam, 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 Antarjānams. YK, 15:84, July 18, 1925. Kāṇippayūr Śarīkaran Nambūtiripad 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 *kāraṇavar* 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 Dhāṛmaśastras with the translation for Dhāṛma as ‘sacred law’ which guided the Brahmans throughout India was recognized by the courts. However, the Dhāṛma 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*, *Kāraṇavar’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 *illams* 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 Antarjanams.\(^{138}\) 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 Sudarśanam 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. Kaplingāt Šaṅkaran Nambūtiri presented it in the Cochin legislature,\(^{141}\) Thuppan Nambūtiripād in the Travancore legislature and O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan

\(^{138}\) Intervening in this issue Pāṭīrīṣēri outlined the reasons why Mitcākṣari was not solicited. See his article “Mitcākṣari and Ājōhāri”. 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. Müthirīṇgōd rejected Mitcākṣari 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. Paschiman made a speech against the Regulation as if it ran counter to customs and scriptures. Supporters like Pāṭīrīṣēri, Kaplingāt and Pāṭīdām 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 Kūrūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād at Tṛiśūr in March 1927. Supporters participated in this meeting also. The resolution presented by Kūrūr 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 Kaplingāt 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 Kaplingāt, “Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation”, UN, 7:7, Meenam 1101, pp.392-403.
Nambūṭiripāṭ 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, the Cochin government withheld it for a long time and when passed in the legislature, it was rejected by the Mahārāja. This unprecedented situation forced the Saligundu 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 Antaṭjanams and apphans; members of other communities were invited to express their views on important issues 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; and the drama Ṝaṟṟkudakk[u]ţilē

142 By this time the bill had deleted both swajāṭivivāham 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 swajāṭivivāham or for providing material support to the kaniṭians. 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 Nambūṭiris to learn from the Christians; partition and individual share led to their prosperity. He also supported swajāṭivivāham as the timely reform. “If the present system continued, the Nambūṭiris might perish in a period of 2 centuries”. A.P. Varkey, “Pariṣkārathinte Mārgam”, 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 change 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 Nambūṭiris 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 Izhava member. See Editorial, YK, 20:23, Dec 11, 1929. Similarly, the 21st annual meeting of the Sabha at Mavelikkara in 1928, while discussing the progress of the Malabar Nambūṭiri Bill, expressed great discontentment over the lethargy shown by O.M. Nārāyaṇan Nambūṭiripāṭ 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 Pāţam”, YK, 19:62 May 8, 1929) urged the Nambūṭiris to be thankful to K. Ayyappan for
Mahānarpaka was staged exclusively before the Cochin legislative members in order to convince them of the plight of the Antarjanams.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{147} In his articles he argued for marriage reform in the name of the pitiful life of the Antarjanams 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 Mūthirinjod 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 Nāyaqs 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 raising a question of the Nambūtiri Bill in the legislature. The author wanted the Nambūtiris to reward it by fighting against pollution.

\textsuperscript{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.

embark on a new venture of reform, the staging of the drama. 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. 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 Taṅgal,

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148 *VTyudē Sampūṛa Kṛitika*, p.248. A brief history of the Bill up to its rejection is as follows. Presenting the bill in the Cochin legislature, Kaplingāt Saṅkaran Nambūtiri made a touching speech in which he emphasized the necessity of a bill for bringing about substantial changes in the community. (Kaplingāt, “Nambūtiri Kudumba Regulation”, *UN*, 7:7, Meenam 1101, pp.392-403). The Bill was soon handed over to a select committee, with Kaplingāt 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 Velḷūnāzhi *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, Vrīchikam 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).

who had wholeheartedly worked for getting it passed. He glorified the bill for it was more comprehensive and far-reaching than the Travancore and Cochin bills (the former had already been passed and the latter was still under consideration) since it enlisted the provision for individual share and partition.

One of the striking features of the Nambūтирі movement was the constitutional character of its agitation; it strictly adhered to democratic ideals and resorted to constitutionalism as the means of social change. While

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150 UN, 1932 November 11, also see VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikal, pp.607-608. It was with the election of Maṭṭanur Maḍhusūdhanan Taṅgal to the Madras legislature that hectic measures were taken to get it enacted.

151 The Travancore Nambūтирі 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 kāraṇavānu or other managing member shall sell Illam immovable property or execute kānam 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 kāraṇavānu unchanged.

152 The Cochin Act provided for swajāтивāham 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 Nambūтирі male can have only one Nambūтирі 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 Nambūтиріs 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 Nambūтирі 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 swajāтивāham 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 Nambūтирі 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, “Nambūтиріtyum Maṇuṣyanum”, Sāhityalōkām, 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. 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

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.  

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 Antarjanams. The first parivēdanam, that of Paḻathēri Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri, was reported in this year. Subsequently parivēdanams began to take place in large numbers. Though the conservatives, with the active support of

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157 Madamb 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 Paḻathēri Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri who was actually the second person. The first Parivēdanam was that of Madhavappalli Jayanthan Nambūtiri. Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Charitram, 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, June 15, 1927. There was the report of a parivēdanam even earlier, of Tūravūr Nārāyaṇa Mangalath Bhāṭṭathiri, in YK, 16:16, Nov 14, 1925.

158 Paḻathēri Śaṅkaran Nambūtiri with Maḻṭiyyūr Śāvīṭṭi; 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 Chandanaveli Kubēran Nambūtiri at Alathiyūr (UN, 11:54, July 18, 1930). We also get information of 2 Parivēdanams of Mangalath Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri and Vēṭṭṭ Kṛiṣṭṭ Nambūtiri, both at
the Vaidikar, could cause considerable difficulties to those who contracted parivēdanam through several measures including bhṛast, 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.\textsuperscript{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 Sāṅgham decided to resort to peaceful picketing at the entrance of the illam where the marriage was to take place.\textsuperscript{160} Majority of such picketings failed, because they were strictly non-violent; it emboldened the parties to take alternate measures to get them solemnized.\textsuperscript{161} Certain marriages, in order to avoid

\textsuperscript{159} An Editorial in UN entitled “Vaivāhika Parivarthanam” (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.

\textsuperscript{160} Edamana Vāmanan Nambūtiri in his “Picketing-nē Āvasyam” 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 Antarjanam called upon the Antarjanams to take part in the picketing against adhivēdanam along with men (UN, 11:57, Aug.8, 1930). The picketing of a marriage n Ālva 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).

\textsuperscript{161} E.M.S, Ātmakaitha, pp.122-23. The case of such a frustrated picketing at Perintalmanna was reported by the UN, 11:54 July 18, 1930. But Pāṇḍam Vāsudevan Nambūtiri wrote that the Perintalmanḍa 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 *Sāṅgham* 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 Kānjūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtipāḍ as the president and C.K. Nambūtiri as the secretary. 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 *tarawād* 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. 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.

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 *kaniṣṭavivāha*. In the context of

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162 Kānjūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtipāḍ was its president and C.K. Nambūtiri its secretary. Kānippayūr Śāṅkara Nambūtipāḍ, Talţiyl Rāman Bhāṭṭathiripāḍ and Tekkēdath Vāṣudēvan Bhāṭṭathiripāḍ were its members. See *UN*, 11:51 June 27, 1930.

impact among the Antarjanams. See his article “Paśu Chathitūm Mōrintē Puḷi Nillkkunu”, *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 Niyaṇanam”, *UN*, Nov. 10, 1933; reproduced in *EMS-ne Sampūrṇa Keṭitkal*, pp. 158-162.
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 kanistans; 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 grihastans; majority of the Nambūtiris young men had not been trained in any vocation other than śānti;165 and Antarjanams 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 Antarjanams. Primitive form of dressing, heavy ear-studs,169 ugly brass bangles, marakkuda, and strict ghōsa system all made the Antarjanams truly an unattractive lot. A

165 Rāmavarma Tampān had urged the Nambūtiris young men fairly early to accept śānti 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 Embrāntiris who are working in Kerala as temple priests and were sending a considerable amount to Mangalapuram, their native place. See his “Nambūtiri Yuvākajōdu Orapēkka”, UN, 6:9, Edavam 1100, p.499.

166 Kānjūr Nāraianan 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 vēli and a livēlihood. Wives could be educated even after marriage. “Vividhābhiprāyagal”, UN, 11:39 Mar 28, 1930. On the other hand, K. Kriṣpan Nambūtiripād replied Kānjūr that his observation as to the uneducated Antarjanams 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 parivedanam. How could they live by dharma? See UN, 11:40 Apr 4, 1930.

167 Kurūg Nīlakanṭan Nambūtiripād declared that he will go for sambandham if the Regulation gets delayed. See JK, 16:3, Sep.30. 1925.

168 V.T. got the share of his property years before the Madras Nambūtiris Act was passed. It was in September 1930. See V.T. Vāsudevan, “VT Ezhuthān Maṟanṇa Ātmakatha”, Samakāḷina Malayālam, March 18, 2005, p.17.

169 Among the Nambūtiris it was called Marakkorad. Mannath Padmanaibhan in his memoirs describes the great difficulty and pains involved in expanding the ear-lobes. See, his Entē Jivita Smaranakal, Kottayam, 1964, p.3.
very important agenda of the reform measure was what has been called ‘dress reform’ of the Antarjanams. 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 marakkuda and to come out of seclusion boycotting ghōsa. VT played a very important role in liberating the Antarjanams by bringing his own wife outdoors and by encouraging other women to come out to freedom defying publicly the custom of ghōsa. The day of VT’s housewarming at Alur witnessed a meeting of Antarjanams and the first public boycott of ghōsa under the leadership of Arya Pallam and Pārvathi Nenminimaṅgalam.170 Arya Pallam 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-

171 Cited in Mathrāmkōṭṭ 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 kōvīlakams helped to perpetuate the practice. See his “Nambūtiriyē Manūṣyanākkān”, in EMS-nte Sampūrṇa Kṛtitak, p.278.
Nambūtiri Brahmins of Mangalore or Coimbatore due to their incapacity to meet the exorbitant dowry demands. Women were reported to have said: “Earlier we were in search of a husband, now we are in search of dowry”. 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. The only source of livelihood (and perhaps the easiest) was dowry. It was in this background that the Antarjana Samājam began to discuss the question of dowry, their share of property and job opportunities for them. They even passed a resolution against dowry. This was the context in which the Sabha was revived at Ōngallūr in 1944 and measures were taken to help the Antarjanams 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 Vārasyār, who was his student and an inmate of the Vadakkē Vāryam at Trītāla. The alliance lasted for six years and in 1930 he abandoned her in order to marry Śrīdēvi Antarjanam, 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 Enter 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.


176 The Thōṭṭaṇa Antarjana 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 *swajātivyāham*. In fact the realization of *swajātivyāham* 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 *swajātivyāham* 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 Antarjanams 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 criticized for this issue recently; his humanism and feminism were nothing but pretensions. See K.S. Radhakrisṣan, "VT Oru Apphan Nambūtiri", *Mādhyamam Sunday Supplement*, Dec. 23, 2001. Radhakriṣṣan 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{tażawād}.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{178} A.P.P. Nambūtiri, \textit{op.cit.}, p.108.

\textsuperscript{179} N.V. Krišpavāriyār observed that like Gandhiji VT too was very particular that he should advise others only what he could do. See his “VT Enna Itiḥāsam”, in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.28.

\textsuperscript{180} Kadavanād Kuttiṅriṅaṅ, “VT-kku Oru Kaththi” in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan ed., \textit{op.cit.}, p.117. VT himself has argued along these lines. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, \textit{op.cit.}, p.103.


\textsuperscript{182} \textit{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 swajātvivāhām and had tried desperately to fulfil it. The prevailing custom and the autocratic powers of his jyātan foiled his attempts. It was unthinkable for a kaniṣṭan in those days to marry from within the caste without the blessing of the kāraṇāvar since in matters relating to marriage it was not the individual but the taravād that was counted. Being the custodian of the illam property and the undisputed authority of the illam, his brother refused to consent to kaniṣṭavivāhām 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. He presents it in the general context of the failure of the Sabha in materializing swajātvivāhām, with the family regulation still in the offering, and in his personal context where his brother took

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 vēlis and father's adhivēdanam in his old age. While the two vēlis 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 jyāstan argued that since it was with the amount received through his marriage that the property was recovered, he was having the sole proprietor of the illam property. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, op.cit, pp.101-102.
185 VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, 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.\textsuperscript{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”.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{188} Since he was working at Trissur 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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\item \textsuperscript{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 Ērmatkuriippukal”, Vivēkōdayam, Vol. 14, No. 5-6, May-June 1982, pp.22-23.
\item \textsuperscript{187} VVyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.286. VT also writes that the proposal for a sambandham was forwarded by his friend Pathiyil Nārāyaṇan Bhajjāthiripād and was discussed during a Vedivāṭam 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. \textit{Ibid}, pp.285-287.
\item \textsuperscript{188} \textit{Ibid}, p.288.
\end{itemize}
that a member would implement the decisions of the *Sabha* to the best of his ability. 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 behaviour was an act of indiscipline and ingratitude; he was not only violating the rules of the *Sarigham* 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 Nambiitiris 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. 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”. Answering to the criticism of Kāṇippayūr that it was not fair to attack other communities for the fault of the Nambiitiris, 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. Again intervening in the issue, another editorial of *UN* lamented: “As a *Yōgaśēmasabha* 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.
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".\textsuperscript{193}

Though he resented the alliance and refused to proceed with it for some time, he used to send her Rs.25/- every month.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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).\textsuperscript{196}

The situation was vitiated by certain new developments. With the staging of the drama, a new enthusiasm began to permeate the community and kaniśṭavivāham, 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.\textsuperscript{197}

\textsuperscript{193} UN, 6:2, Thulam 1100, p.99.

\textsuperscript{194} This information provided by VT himself (VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikaḥ, p.288) appears to be incorrect because his monthly salary at Mangalōdayam was around 12 rupees. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.59. When he was appointed as the organizing secretary of the Sangham in 1929, his allowance was just 25 rupees. See VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikaḥ, p.255.

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{196} One of VT's biographers wrote: Mādhavikūṭṭy 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. Gopālakṛṣṇan, 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.

In the meanwhile another important incident took place. I.C.P. Nambūtirī 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 Mādhavikūṭṭy 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 jyēstan; there was nobody to look after them. If Mādhavikūṭṭy had been ready to accompany him, he would not have remarried.¹⁹⁹ But another narrative written by VT²⁰⁰ 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. Nambūtirī

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 taṟavād and her to temple duties. (Interview, 25-04-2006). But it is clear that in the prevailing circumstances, it was unthinkable for a Vārasyār to go and stay with her Nambūtirī 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. Nambūtirī, op.cit. Calicut, 1992, pp.98-108. Nambūtirī 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 VTudē Sampūṇga Kritikol.
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 *Mangalodayam* but it was highly precarious; due to his high-handed radicalism, the directors of the *Yogakshemam* 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 *santhi*. Second, he was already married. Though the alliance was with a *vijati* wife, it was not just to be unfaithful to her.\(^{201}\)

The assurance of Muthiringod to provide VT a source of livelihood, in the event of an exigency, and the denunciation of VT by C.K. Nambutiri 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 Nambutiri; he had the moral responsibility to help emancipate the Antarjanams by setting up an example. He would be able to encourage his wife to reform her dress and to come out of *ghosa* 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.\(^{202}\)


\(^{202}\) *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 Nambūṭiri movement.205 As soon as the movement was 'captured' by the Apphan Nambūṭiris, 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 *jyēstans*. 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 *Veḷi* before he approached Mādhavikutty for her permission and that she was pregnant by four months at that time. See VTyudē Sampūrṇa Krītikal, 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. Nambūṭiri, *op.cit.*, p.107. VT writes: "As an Apphan, I ousted my *jyēstana* 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; disarming the *jyēstans* 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. Family and property were the two components of power and both could only be attained through *swajātīvivāham*; 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.

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. 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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207 A.P.P. Nambūtirī attests that for VT, Rs.5000 received as dowry was a great attraction during that time. A.P.P. Nambūtirī, *op.cit*, p.108. VT himself wrote: “Before the traces of the teardrops that ran down her cheeks vanished, I enticed a young Nambūtirī woman into agreeing to marry me for a dowry of five thousand rupees”. *VTydē Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, p.283.
208 The 4th annual of the Travancore state *Sabha*, which was presided over by Kāṇippayūr, 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, Kāṇjūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, the president of the Marriage Committee wrote that Nambūtirīs married from other communities would not be allowed to express their views on community matters in the very future. See his “*Vividhāhhippāyaṅgal*”, *UN*, 11:39, March 28, 1930. We are not sure how far it had influenced VT’s decision but the discussions on the Nambūtirī family regulation had made it clear that *sambandham* husbands would not get a share of the family property equal to the *swajātī* 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 *vēli*.
209 While hearing the news, VT wished that let it not be a suicide. *VTydē Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, 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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{swajātivivāham} was the rallying point, both as a means of community building and as a check to the drain of property, \textit{sambandham} was the chief target of opposition. E.M.S. Nambutiripad 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 \textit{illam} property and had robbed the \textit{kāraṇavaṭ} of his love for the family…”\textsuperscript{211} Naturally, barring a few exceptions, all the Nambūtiris wanted to get rid of them.\textsuperscript{212} (This attitude continued even afterwards, as has been shown in

\textsuperscript{210} See Māḍhavikūṭṭy, “Māḍhavikūṭṭy Vārasyāṟude Pēramakal Ezhuthunnu”, \textit{Māṭrubhūmi 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 \textit{vijāti} daughters. See \textit{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 \textit{vijāti} daughters lived lavishly with the resource from their temple service. Interview with Vāsudēvan on 25.04.2006.

\textsuperscript{211} E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, “\textit{Avathārika}”, \textit{Apphamṭe Makal}, reproduced in \textit{EMS-nte Sampūrṇa Kṛitikal}, 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.

\textsuperscript{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 Dēsamaṅgalam family) started \textit{sambandham} with the family of the Zamorins at Calicut. See \textit{YK}, 16:1, Sep.19, 1925. It created much hue and cry. In one of the meetings organized in protest of the \textit{sambandham}, Krūṭ Nilakaṇṭa 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 \textit{sambandham} and accordingly married from one of the Nair families of Tṛiṣūṭ. \textit{YK}, 16:2, Sep. 23, 1925; \textit{Kalākaumudi}, 319, 13 Sep. 1981, pp.7, 50. Māḍamb
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 Yāṭra*

An important landmark, almost equal to the staging of the drama, in the career of VT was the *Yāchana Yāṭra* conducted under the joint leadership of himself and Pāndam. Starting from Tṛiśṣūr and passing through the major Nambūtiri villages, the *Yāṭra* 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 Tṛiśṣūr, it had another important objective: making the community aware of the need of modern education and of timely changes.213 The *Yāṭra* 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 *Yāṭra* we are driven to believe that it was conceived and conducted by VT himself.

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Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri denounced Kuṟu for he had taken a vow at an annual meeting of the *Sabha* that he will be satisfied only with a *swajātīvivāham* even if he would be forced to sustain his family through wage labour. See his *Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitram*, 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. Pātirissēri Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād and Kāṇippayūr Śaṅkaran Nambūtiripād were *sambandham* married. Kāṇippayūr later discontinued his alliance in the Cochin royal family but lived as a bachelor thereafter. Interestingly, except Kāṇippayūr, all the others continued their alliance as if true marriage and built up their family over it. C.K. Nambūtiri writes about Pātirissēri’s efforts for getting his *vijāti* daughter married to his brother’s son which they tried to obstruct unsuccessfully. C.K. Nambūtiri, *Oṃmakurippukal*, unpublished document.

213 It is observed that the *Yāṭra* was a measure meant to propagate the message of education among the Nambūtiris. See P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilekku, Tṛiśṣūr*, 1969, p.117.

214 VT writes that the *Yāṭra* represented a significant event in the transition of the Nambūtiri community. VTyudē *Sampūṭṭha Kritikaḥ*, 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.\textsuperscript{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\textsuperscript{216} and was against custom and would destroy Nambūtiri-ness.\textsuperscript{217} The word English was not used for a long time even by the reformers.\textsuperscript{218} However, the indispensability of English

\textsuperscript{215} From the 2\textsuperscript{nd} annual meeting onwards modern education was discussed in the Sabha. For details see C.K. Nambotiri, \textit{Nambotiri Yógakṣemāsabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum}, Trissur, 1963, pp.12-13. The earliest votive of English education was Kūdallūr Kunjuṇṭi Nambotiri who had sent a circular to many prominent Nambotiris (and high-caste non-Nambotiris) 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 \textit{Mangalādayam}, 1:11, Kanni 1085, p.420. Also see Alathūr Anjjan Nambūtiripād, “Kūdallūr Kunjuṇṇi Nambūtiripād”, \textit{UN}, 4:6, Kumbham 1098, pp.294-95.

\textsuperscript{216} Śāṅkarasmṛiti Ch.11, verse 7 contained an injunction against learning ‘mlecchabhāṣa’ 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 ‘mleccha’ 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. Śāṅkarasmṛiti, Trissivaperur, 1081/1906, pp.209-210.

\textsuperscript{217} For such contrasting views see Mūthēdath N Puruṣōthaman Potti, “Malayāḷa Brāhmaṇarudē English Vidyābhyāsām”, \textit{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. “Nambūtirmārum Vedābhāṣavum”, \textit{UN}, 4:1, Kanni 1098, pp.7-11; 4:2, Thulam 1098, pp.80-84. Kodungallūr Kunjuḷṭti Tampurāṇ rejected the argument of Punnaśāri Neelakanta Śarma 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 “Nambūtirimāru Vidyābhyāsām”, \textit{Mangalādayam} 1:3, Makaram 1084. The article is reproduced in Prof. S.K. Vasanthan ed., \textit{Kunjukṭṭan Tampurántē Gadya Lēkhanangal}, Kottayam, 1983, pp.120-124. Tampurāṇ also identified modern education in the context of the Christianizing efforts of the British. See his “Mathasambhandhamāya Vidyābhyāsām”, \textit{UN}, 2:10, pp.462, 464.

\textsuperscript{218} The word used was Navīṇa Vidyābhyāsām, 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., \textit{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. The 8th annual meeting of the Sabha in 1916 at Veljinaazhi at last endorsed the demand of English education. Kuriyil Uppi Nambutiri played a crucial role in bringing about this change of mind among the opponents through his arguments. An ‘English sabha’ convened there with

219 Pändam Vásudevam Nambutiri 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 Nambutiri, Nālukeṭṭil Ninnum Nāṭṭilēkkku, Trissur, 1969, pp.49-52. The Malayaḷa Manorama (14 March, 1916) hailed the decision: “…The present meeting of the Yōgakṣēmasabha reflects the changed attitudes of the Nambutiris 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: “Nambutiri 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 Nambutiri, “Charitrathinte Pāṭam”, JK 1:1&2, Sep-Oct. 1980, p.68.

221 E.M.S. wrote that Kuriyil 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. Nambutiri, Kēṟalām Malayāḷikaḷudē Māṟṟubhūmi, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p.220. But once the decision was taken in favour of English education, a powerful group of traditionalist Nambutiris, who were called Nivārini Sangham, came to oppose it. A memorandum against the Veljinaazhi decision, signed with 112 members, came out. They held a secret meeting at Sukapuram. A day before the meeting leaders under Kuriyil, including A.K.T.K.M. Valiya Nārāyan Nambutiripād, Kariyannur Vāsudeva Nambutiri and Mathur Vāsudeva Nambutiripād, reached there and after hectic discussions a compromise formula was reached at. In a surprising speech Kuriyil 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. Nambutiri, op.cit, pp.13-14.
50 English-educated men under C.S. Subrahmanian Potti was a special feature of the annual.\textsuperscript{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 10\textsuperscript{th} annual meeting.\textsuperscript{223} Similar measures were taken to start a special school in Malabar also.\textsuperscript{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 Chovvallūr and Bṛahmaswam Maṭams for educational purpose; but as government legislations to this effect would take time, the \textit{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.\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Vadakkē Maṭam Bṛahmaswam} upon the guarantee of the \textit{Dewān}. In the meanwhile the \textit{Maṭam} was confiscated by the government due to the infamous \textit{Vādyān} case.\textsuperscript{226} At last the government

\textsuperscript{222} Ibid, p.13.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid, p.14.
\textsuperscript{224} In 1917 the \textit{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, \textit{Social Change Among the Nambūtiris of Kerala}, p.239. Also see Editorial, \textit{UN} 6:2, Thulam 1100.
\textsuperscript{225} Details about Nambūtiri education are available in Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri’s unpublished manuscript \textit{Yogakṣēmasabha Čhariṭam}.
\textsuperscript{226} Vadakkē Maṭam Bṛahmaswam, the property of the Trīṣūr Yōgam, was under the control of Chāṅgaliyōṭtu Vādyān. When the issue of English education surfaced, and when it was decided to utilize the Maṭam resources for the purpose, the Vādyān tried to sabotage the measure. So long as the Vādyān was powerful, educational progress was impossible. In the struggle that followed, the liberals got an upper hand and the Vādyān was removed from his post. The importance of the event lay also in the fact that the Vādyān, 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 Kurṭūr Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād, “Vadakkē Maṭam Bṛahmaswam: Charitṛa Sanskṛēparī”. \textit{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/-. 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; at last the then school Secretary A.K.T.K.M. Cheṛiya Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād had to clear the debt single-handedly.

Special schools had already been started in Travancore and Cochin. The Nambūtiri Vidyālaya, as a high school, was started at Edakkunni in 1919 in the Kirāṅgātt mana. Students stayed at the mana along with the teachers, who

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227 The case against the school authorities was filed by the Dewan at the Triśṣār 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 Kuṟṟ Nilakantan Nambūtiripād to consult with Gandhi a solution for the existing financial crisis. Kuṟṟ 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 Charitram.

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 Edappalḷi, 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, Kuṟṟ Uṟṟi Nambūtiripād was not live to see the opening of the school at Triśṣār in 1919; he passed away in Mithunam 1093 (June or July 1918).
were either Nambiitiris or Pāṭṭars. Common mess, with special insistence on pollution rules, was arranged. Three years later it was shifted to Trissur in the Uttupura of the Brahmaswam Maṭam. Separate building was later constructed and the school started functioning in it.\(^{232}\) Even before shifting to Trissur 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 Pāṭasāla. Sanskrit was compulsory and classes in Bhagavat Gītā 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 Nambiitiri 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 Brāhmaṇam; 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 Nambiitiri

\(^{232}\) 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. Nambiitiri 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 Nambiitiri, Yōgakṣemasabha Charitram and Mādamb Kunjukkutţan, Ābhivādayē, 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 system237 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 "Stī Vidyābhyāsa Commission"

236 But by about the middle of the 1920s several reformers began to advise Nambūtiris to enter public schools. See Mūthiringōd, Presidential Address, Kavaḷappāra NY Upasabha 9th annual, UN, 7:3, Vrīchikam 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 Müthiringōd as the Secretary was appointed. 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. But in 1930 a special girls’ school was started at Pāñjal and the Nambūtiri School at Trīssūr began to admit girls from 1930 onwards. In order to allay the fears of the community and to promote the number of girl students, a

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 up to 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 Strī Vidyābhyaśa Commission Report”, YK, 18:57, Apr 11, 1928. For details see Nambūtiri Strī Vidyābhyaśa Commission Report, Trīssūr, 1928. The Report, after going through the deplorable condition of the Antajanams, recommended that they should be given instruction in Malayālam 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 Mavelikkara in Dec. 1929 endorsed the Report. See YK, 19:28 Dec. 26, 1928. (Müthiringōd 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 Yögāksəmasəbhyədē Mumbum Pimbum, p.16. But there was news in the UN that a girl was admitted in the 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, Trīssūr, 10-11-2005.
girls' hostel named 'Nambūtiri Bālika Sadanam' was started in 1935. But normally girls were not allowed to study after they matured physically; they had to end their studies there.

The economic position of the Nambūtiri School was truly pathetic. The Government denied the utilization of Brahmāswam Maṭam resources for running the school and the rich and noble Nambūtiris refused to extend support to it. 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 Chittiūr Kuṇjan Nambūtiripād promised to give Rs.1000/- per year till a permanent fund for the school was created. 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.

243 C.K. Nambūtiri, op.cit, pp.16-17. C.K. Nambūtiri was the warden of the hostel for many years. Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōḍ in her article recollects some of her experiences with the sadanam along with a description of its rules and regulations. See Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōḍ, ‘Sadanam’, Mātrubhūmi Weekly, 83:20, July 17-23, 2005, pp 26-28.
244 M.P. Bhāṭatḥiripāḍ (Premji)’s drama Ritumati 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 Ritumati, Ṭriśūr, 1991. We are surprised to read an anecdote in the memoirs of P.R. Rāghavapāṇiṅkkaṇ 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. Rāghavapāṇiṅkkaṇ, Atmakathā, unpublished document.
245 This does not mean that everyone had given it up. A.K.T.K.M. Nambūtiripāḍ, Kapjīṅgāt Śaṅkaraṇ Nambūtiripāḍ, Vēṇḍrākkāt Śaṅkaraṇ Nambūtiripāḍ, Kōdaṇṭṭ Nārāyaṇa Nambūtiripāḍ, all had personally spent great amounts in somehow maintaining the school.
246 A special meeting of the Sabha was summoned at Ṭriśūr 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 Chitṭūr made his offer. Pāḍam 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. Kesava Nambūtiri writes that about 100 Nambūtiri students were there in Ṭriśūr. 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 Kuñjan 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 Śāntinikētan or the Vedic 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 \(Yāchana Yātra\). He related it not just with the destitution of the school; rather it was an attempt to

outsiders in fear of defilement. See his article "Tṛiśūr Nambūtiri Vidyārthikāl", \(UN, 11:59\) 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. See \(UN, 7:8\), Medam 1101, p.448.

\(^{250}\) See Editorial, \(UN, 1:1\), Kanni, 1095, pp.15-16; Pāliyath Achan, "Kēraḷa Brāhmanarude Brahmacaryāṣramam", \(UN, 2:1\), Kanni, 1096, pp.25-28; P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, "Chariṭathintė Paṭam", \(YK, 2:1&2\), 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, Takāsila 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 Kuṇur wanted the school be developed into a Kerala University utilizing the resources of the Tṛiśūr Maṭam. M.R. Bhāṭṭathiripād, "Kāl Nūttandinūḷḷi Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangal", \(Māṭrubhūmi\) 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 Tṛiśūr 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 Śāṅkara 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 Entering public schools. See VT’s speech at Ālathiyūr Upasabha, \(UN Ap.28, 1933\), reproduced in \(VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitiṇal\), 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. 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 Yatra

There have been disputes over the authorship of the idea behind the ‘begging journey’. 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. The executive committee of the Sanāgham 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 Yatra than the Sanāgham activists. He acknowledged the special interest and efforts taken by C.K. Nambūtiri in arranging the Yatra. During the time of the Yatra the UN was converted into a daily and special reporters accompanied it to report the daily developments.

254VTyude Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.272.
255In his memoirs VT says that people were made to believe that Pāndam was the architect of the Yatra because when the statement was published in the UN, the name of Pāndam 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 Yātras were conducted earlier. K.V.M. writes about his participation in a Yāchana Yātra conducted under Punnasserī Nambi for the allocation of resources for the Sanskrit College at Pattambi in 1915 (Āmakatha, pp.98-103). Mannam also had organized a similar begging march in 1920 for collecting funds for the NSS School at Perunna (Entē Jivita Smaranakal, p.280).
256UN, 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.
257At 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 Yōgākṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbum, pp.30-31.
258See VTyude Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.274. I.C.P. writes that for four days, it was published as a daily. I.C.P. Nambūtiri, Kiplavahintē Uṭṭhudippukal, p.41. I.C.P. and M.P. Bhāṭṭathiripād were the special reporters.
The *jātha* started its journey from Tṛiśūṛ 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. Mādamba 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. 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 *Yātra* was undoubtedly inspired by the Dāndi March and it could be explained in terms of the great impact the Gandhian ideals had on VT and the Nambūtiri movement.

Though the response to the *Yātra* was by and large encouraging, the conservatives fully disassociated with it. Pūmully *illam* which had earlier offered Rs.5000 to the school at the Veḷḷinazhi *Sabhā* 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). But by the time it ended with 30

259 VTuṭa Seampūrṇa Kriśīkal, p.274.
260 Mādamba Kunjukuttan, *Abhivādayē*, pp. 207-209. Müthiringōd compared VT with the Gandhi of the Dāndi 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. VTuṭa Seampūrṇa Kriśīkal, p.595. He also said that the executive members of the *Saṅghām* were by and large passive to the *Yātra* which affected its course adversely. *Ibid*, p.596.
262 For the management of the fund collected through the *YY*, a *Nambūtiri Yōgākṣēma Vidyābhīṣṭa 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 Pārvathi 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 ilams. 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 Yatra reverberated all over, bringing children and money from all quarters to fulfill the educational ends of the community."\(^{264}\)

In material terms the Yatra was not as successful as the enactment of the drama.\(^{265}\) Despite the prevailing economic crisis the poor turn out of the Yatra cannot be justified by any standards; most of the Nambūtiri ilams were immensely rich, an Oḷappamaṇṇa or Pūmullā 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 kaniśṭans 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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263 A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op.cit.* p.120.
264 *VTyudē Sampīrṇa Kritikāl*, 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 Yātra. See M.R. Baiṭathirīpād, “Kāl Nūttandinu[il Nambūtirikkku Vanna Māttanga]”, *Māṭrubhāmi 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 kanistans 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 Yātra was the marked interest shown by the Antarjanams 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 Yātra did not even address them separately. It did not incorporate their specific grievances, nor did it raise the demand for girls’ education. Nevertheless, the Antarjanams showed exceptional interest towards the march; many of them handed over their ornaments, though not costly, to the volunteers. They might have hoped that the educated generation of men would help emancipate them. VT writes that Antarjanams were keen to heed their speeches concealing themselves in the illam interiors.

Though some people have noted the importance of the northward course of the Yātra, nobody has ventured to explain it satisfactorily. 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 Antarjanams. Cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.18.
267 VTyudé Sampūrṇa Kriitika, p.276.
268 Mādāmb Kunjākuṭtan, Abhivādayē, p.205. He regretted over the inability of the jāha 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. Subrahmanyan Potti, who had passed BA degree, was present and by 1928 C.S. Pandarathil had sailed to London to attend the ICS examination. 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. Prevalence of strong landlordism also had made the Nambūtiris less responsive to changes. The great advancement of education among the tenant classes, especially the Nāyaṭs, 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. 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. Pandarathilē Vīdēšayāṭra”, UN, 11:9, Aug. 9, 1929.

271 None of the wealthy illams like Olappamappa, Varikkasseri, Elamkulam or Pūmully, had taken interest either in the progress of education or in venturing new economic enterprises.

272 Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, Khiṭāfat Simarayakaṭ, 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. So education was not an end in itself, community interests were inextricably entwined with it.

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 Yāṭra. 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; there was the urgent need of a

274 An editorial of the UN explained the situation of Northern Malabar as very backward; wretched Brāhmaṇam still dominated and efforts at reform were at very low ebb. See UN, 11:50, 20 June 1930.
276 In an interview with the UN reporter during the Yāṭra, VT pointed to this fact; since kāraṇavans were still distrustful of modern education, the Yāṭra was meant to win over them, and to bring about a change of heart. VTyudē Sampūrya Kritika, p.591.
compassionate attitude towards education of their own children.\textsuperscript{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 Ayyākkūṭṭy 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

\textsuperscript{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 Aimakatha, p.35.
change of policy was not pursued. 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 Guruväyür Satyagraha, the Sabha passed a resolution in support of it and many Nambūtiris including VT actively participated in it.

In his Ālathiyūr 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. 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. Kesavan Nambūtiri, as the representative of the Saigham, supported the struggle on his own behalf and on behalf of his organization, and made a call for the victory of temple entry. 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 Guruväyūr

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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 Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.545; in his Harikanyākapuram Upasabha meeting he repeated the demand. See UN, Dec.22, 1933 reproduced in VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, pp.612-15.

Satyagraha. But he became active in it particularly at the close of the struggle. In a statement issued by Kēḷappan for the Congress Kṣētra Pravēśana Committee, declaring the members of the satyagraha committee, VT’s name was given as the fifth among the total six members. VT was one among the few who were active in making speeches at the temple. He is reported to have been deputed by the KPCC, along with Kēḷappan, Mannath Padmanābhan and Kūṟṟ Nilakaṇṭan Nambūtiripād, to lead a propaganda jātha all over Kerala. In the propaganda jātha he is reported to have made speeches at Kāṇhaṅgād, Niḷēśwaram, Payyannūr, Talipaṟṟamba, Aḻhikkōde, Kaṟṇūr, Peraḻassēri and Thalaassēri in between the 14th and 22nd Oct. 1931. In the Annual meeting of the Sārīgham held at Talipaṟṟamba on Dec. 28, he presented a resolution urging the Nambūtiris to support the Satyagraha wholeheartedly and it was unanimously passed by the Sārīgham.

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 savarṇa meeting held at Guruvāyūr. When Manjēri Rāmayyaṟ brought a resolution requesting Kēḷappan

281 A.P.P. Nambūtirī 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. Nambūtirī, 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. (Mātrubhūmi 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.


284 C.K. Miissad, Kēḷappan Ėnna Mahamanṣyyan, p.120.

285 A.P.P. Nambūtirī, op.cit, p.131.

286 Mātrubhūmi 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 Kēlappan and calling for the popular attention towards the cause.\textsuperscript{287} The resolution which was seconded by Arya Paḻlam 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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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”.\textsuperscript{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:


\textsuperscript{289} UN April 28, 1933, cited in A.P.P. Nambūtiri, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.133-34.

\textsuperscript{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 “Inī Namukkathu Vēnda”, Māṭrubhūmi \textit{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 fanaticism have to 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.”

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 Guruvāyūr Satyagraha, it ought to be seen that his attitude towards temples was that they were centers of stupid customs like (touch and distance) pollution. 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 VTudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p. 609. In a note strongly refuting VT’s statement, Laññāmbika Antājanam 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 Bhaṭṭathirippaṭṭilekku Oru Maḍupadi”, UN 14:31, 12 May, 1933, p.2. On the other hand, another article by one Müller (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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{294} VT himself later made it clear that he was only opposing custom and not religion as such.\textsuperscript{295}

In a swift act of response, the Cochin government issued an arrest warrant against VT and ordered to confiscate the journal.\textsuperscript{296} When VT escaped from Trissur 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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Mathramkőt Aşőkan, \textit{op. cit.}, p.47. But Mādamb Kunjukuţan’s \textit{Abhivādayē} does not make any reference to this episode.
\item M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, “VT: Communisathinappurathēkkuḷa Yāthrayível Mārgadārśakan” in A.V. Sreekumar ed., \textit{VT}, p.80. M.G.S. writes that VT made this clarification in a reception meeting at the Department of History, Calicut University.
\item VT Bhaṭṭathiripāḍa, “Entē Yuktivādām”, \textit{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 jamni interest of the Nambūtiris might have incited VT’s social radicalism. For a debate see K. Gopalankutty, “The Guruvayur Satyagraha, 1931-32”, \textit{Journal of Kerala Studies}, Vol.8, 1981, pp.54-55.
\item Mathramkőt Aşőkan, \textit{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. Vāsudeva Nambūtiri cited in I.V. Babu, \textit{Social, political & cultural Result of Nambūtiri Renaissance}. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1996, pp.193-94.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
was not able to attend the annual meeting of the Sabha at Pérāmaṅgalam 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 Guruvāyi 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 Ịzhava activists of the Satyagraha who had been sent by Kelappan 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 hero298 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
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' 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. The dominant Hindu world-view about the widows seems to have determined the attitudes of even the reformers till this time. For the first time the social position of the widow was discussed

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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, 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. This silence is striking because the reform movements in northern India had taken up the emancipation of widows as the foremost agenda. This indifference was justified in the context of the absence of child widows among the Nambūtiris, of the barbarous custom of sati and of the openly humiliating treatment meted out to widows elsewhere in south India by the Brahmans. But

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.


Mādam Nārāyaṇa Nambūṭirī argues that it was just due to the inherent human nature and not because widow marriage was taboo. See his Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitram. In fact the decisive factor was the poor prospects for dowry in the case of such ideal marriages; not even radical Nambūṭirīs 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 Antaṇjanams in the 1940s. It is important that call for dowry-less marriages came from outside the community. Ayyākkūṭṭy in his speech at the 22nd annual meeting of the Śabha had made a strong plea against dowry (YK, 20:27, Dec.25, 1929) and M. Rāmavarma Tampān urged the Nambūṭirī young men to live by labour and not by dowry (UN, 9:4, Dhanu 1103, p.248). It is interesting to note that the Nambūṭirī Vaivāhika Sangham president Kāṇţjūt Nārāyaṇa Bhāṭṭhathiripād lamented over the unwillingness of the fathers to give dowry to their daughters while being married to kaniţans as parivēdanam. UN, 11:40 Apr 4, 1930.

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.

While discussing the question of widow marriage at the 22nd annual meeting of the Śabha, G. Saṅkarāṇ Potti argued that there were no virgin widows among the Nambūṭirīs, Nambūṭirīs should not be worried by Gandhiji’s opinion on widows since he was talking about child widows. YK, 20:27, Dec.25, 1929.

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 Nambŭtiri 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. The practice of \textit{adhivēdanam} had made the condition of many Antarjanams 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 \textit{smārtavichāram}. 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.

In one of the earliest references to widow marriage, Panarkkatt Bhaṭṭathiri invited the attention of the Nambūtiris towards Gandhi’s attitude on 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, \textit{The Brahmans, Theists and Muslims of India}, Delhi, 1973. Reprint, p.193. Dēvaki Nilayaṅgōḍ’s description of the state of the Nambūtiri widow perfectly matches with Campbell’s narration. See her “Viplavathinte Kanalukal Tejiccha Ā Kālam”, \textit{Māṭrubhūmi Weekly}, 15 Oct. 2004, pp.24-26; “Kuḷi”, \textit{Māṭrubhūmi Weekly}, 83:16, 19 June, 2005, pp.34-36.

But in fact many were virgin widows, widowed at a very early age, at some 18 or 20. Ālajitāmbika gives three such instances which were caused by \textit{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 Ālajitāmbika Antarjanam, \textit{Ātmakathakkukku Oru Amukham}, Calicut University, 1997, pp. 80-81. E.M.S. also speaks about a widow at his own īlam who was widowed at the age of 15 and had to live for a long period. See, E.M.S, \textit{Ātmakatha}, pp.27-28.

Intervening in the marriage reform discourse, Pāṭirissēri Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripāḍ stated that there was rarely a Nambūtiri house where abortion cases were not reported. See his “Vēljyum Bhāgavum”, \textit{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 Kūṟur Uṇgi Nambūtiripāḍ, “Kanyādānam”, \textit{UN} in 5:9, Edavam 1999, pp.441-443; M.K.B, “Nambūtiri Samudāyaṭathintē Duṟḍaṣa”, \textit{YK}, 18:21, Nov.30, 1927.
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 Bhattathiri was not urging for widow marriage among the Nambūtiris but was speaking against old age marriages. Kuṟumūr Nārāyaṇan Bhattathiripād gave a transliteration of Gandhiji's speech highlighting the condition of the widows, especially child widows. 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.

Presenting widowhood as one of the chief sorrows of the Antarjanams, 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 adhvēdanam. He condemned aged marriage of grihastams 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.

310 Paṅgkkāṭt Bhaṭṭathiri, “Vaidhavya Niṛbandham”, YK, 16:95, Sep 8 1926.
312 K.K. Vārīyar, “Vaniṁthaḷōkam”, YK, 18:11, Oct 26, 1927. Like Kuṟumūr, he too was talking about the case of North Indian widows.
313 Śravaṇaḷī Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Presidential Address, 9th Annual meeting of the Saṅgham, Angādivipuram, 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 Šāṅkaran Pūṭṭi 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. Kēśavān 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

315 Mādambi Čheriya Ṣāṅkavēdan 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.
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 Ālathiyūr, he differentiated widow marriage from remarriage and strongly pleaded for both. 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 *kaniṣṭāns* 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. 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. Later, in his account of the widow marriage, he tried

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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. Nhalūṛ Śrīdēvi as a precautionary measure against such disasters. He also has argued that had Kuriyēdath Tāṭrī been allowed to select a life-partner of her own choice, all that disgrace imposed on the community could have been avoided. *VṬyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitikal*, 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. Padīta Ramabhāi’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
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 Savha in its
26th annual meeting held at Perāmangalam 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 Savha 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 Antarjanams, 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

320 VTyudē Sampūrya Kritika, p.296.
321 See Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitram; C.K. Nambūtiri,
Ūrmakkurippukal. Also see Mātrūbhūmi Weekly, 11:42, Jan.8, 1934, p.15.
322 A letter from Athippatta Kriṣṇan Nambūtiri, Secretary, Sanātana Dharmā Samvakṣaṇa
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
323 The letter reads thus: "...If the Perāmangalam Savha 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 – Lalitāmbika and Mūthiringōd – made widow marriage the central theme of some of their works. Two stories of Lalitāmbika dealt with the sorrows of the widows and her drama related exclusively with widow marriage. 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 Antarjanams in general, Lalitāmbika highlighted the issue of the widows—especially child widows. The subject matter of the play was the life of an Antarjanam, married to an old Nambiitiri, 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 Nambiitiri. 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 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.


325 Lalitāmbika Antarjanam, “Sāvītō Adhāvā 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. Lalitāmbika 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 Kulakkada special school in association with the send-off function of the headmaster C.S. Subrahmanian Potti; it was also staged at a library anniversary in Kottarakkara, at the 35th annual meeting of the Sabha at Harippād and at the next annual at Trissūr. 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 Lalitāmbika Antarjanam, Ātmakathakku Oru Amukham, Calicut University, 1997, pp.78-84.

326 E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, “Lalitāmbika Antarjanam Nāṭakakaṁṭri 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, “Punarjanamam Thēdi Oru Sāvītīrkkutṭy”, Ibid, p.36.

327 Those days an Antarjanam 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 Trissūr. 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 Nambūtiriys 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 13\(^{th}\) September 1934, between Uma Antarjanam and M.R. Bhaṭṭathiripād, at Rasikasadanam, VT’s house at

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\(^{328}\) “Eyyā Okkē Oru Polē Ā”, Mātrabhūmi Special Issue, 1934; also see Mūthiringōd, Mūthiringōdīntē Kathakalum Upanyāsangaḷum, Trissūr, 2003, pp.45-53.

\(^{329}\) “Vidhavayudē Vidhi”, in Mūthiringōd, Mūthiringōdīntē Kathakalum 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.
A grand audience consisting of several prominent persons of Kerala participated in this historic event. 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, 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.

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. 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. He wanted her to be

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332 In his appraisal of the event Kuṭṭikṛṣṇa Mārār praised M.R.B. for the courage he had shown and referred to VT as “a karmayōgi, 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 Vīdhavāvīvāham” in Nizhalaiṭam, Trissur, 1945, pp.58-63.

333 See Mātrubhūmi Weekly, 12:27, Sept.17, 1934, p.16.


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 Antarjanam 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 Antarjanam 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.

\(^{336}\) Ibid, p.296.
\(^{337}\) VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, 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 Ḍrmaikal”, Pāṭbhēdam, November 1992.
\(^{339}\) Smt. Uma M.R.B, “Thalayilezhuthu Thiruthiya Kai”, Māṭrubhūmi Weekly June10, 1976, reproduced in Pālakkizh 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 Upanyāsangal, 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. 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. 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

340 I.C.P. Nambūtiri, Viṣṇuvaṁśī, Uttanakapāla, 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 Stṛts 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 Nambūtirī 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 Nilambūr Rāja also. In Malabar, the Zamorin was able only to ban entry into Guruvāyūr 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 Trīṣṣūr, 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 Ulbuddhakērālam. 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 Harippūd which was held immediately after the event. The

342 E.M.S. has written about the consequences of bhṛgaṇ 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 Madamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Yōgakṣēmasabhā Chariṭam. 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 Kodumuṇḍu on January 12, 1935 decided to file a suit against the decision of bhṛgaṇ, but whether any decision was taken to this effect is not clear. Ibid.

343 Madamb 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 Chariṭam.

344 Leela, Uma's daughter (Uma had a daughter at the time of the second marriage) described the hardships they had to suffer at Kodumuṇḍu; they were under the mercy of Kānjiṟ mana and led a virtually impoverished life until M.R.B. got a job at Shōrnur. The family continued to be banished; later when he became the editor of Keli he came and settled at Trīṣṣūr. But she attested that M.R.B. preferred to live in distress and refused to repent over his deed. Personal Conversation, Mulankunnath Kav, Trīṣṣūr, 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 Njaḷūr Nambūtiri and Śrīdēvi Antarjanam, that too at the auspices of VT. It was not as eventful as the first one and did not last too. Njaḷūr Nambūtiri died soon and Śrīdēvi 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 Antarjanam; 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, *Ormakurippukal*.

\(^{346}\) 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.


\(^{348}\) 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 “Prēṃjīyudē Ormakāḷ” (*Paṭabhēdam*, 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 Charitram*), 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 Pimbam*, p.21.
4:11. Ulbuddhakēralam

One of the significant landmarks in the public life of VT was the founding of the Gandhian commune, known as Ulbuddhakēralam, in 1935. 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, 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, 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. Its role in linking the Nambūtiri reform movement with the rising nationalist struggle has also been noticed. 

Admiration and eulogy apart, the experiment had to undergo severe criticism as well. The commune has been evaluated as basically a utopian project and its failure is attributed to V.T’s ideological inhibitions and his inability to identify the realities of the times.

The Context

Communes attained a new socio-political relevance in modern India when it got linked to nationalist politics. Gandhian aśram at Sabarmati became the hub of Indian nationalism and the new cultural consciousness. For Gandhi, commune

350 Though most writers refer to it as a colony, some of the aged people of Kodumuṇḍa 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.
352 M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, op. cit.
355 Puthupally Raghavan, op.cit., p. 217.
was also the ideal form of human settlement, village reconstruction and self-government. Āśrams were Gandhi’s variants of civil society and public sphere. But Gandhi’s important ideals in general, and the social ethic enshrined in the āśram 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. The correlation of āśrams 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.

In course of time, however, Gandhian āśrams 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.

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.


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. Müssath, Kēḷappan Enna Mahāmanusyan, 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 Guruvñyũ Satyagraha, Kējappan attempted to invite public attention through an article towards the founding of an āśram, a congregation of individuals, who lay faith in Gandhian ideals, for the promotion of Harijan welfare. In his famous speech at Ālathiỹũ V.T stressed the need of starting a similar colony. Two years after this speech, V.T. attempted to put his dream project into practice, but in an altogether different context.

humane treatment; but the launching of both coincided with crucial points of time in the history of modern Kerala.


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 Entering 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 Sampūrṇā Kṛitiṅa, 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 livelihood on leaving the school. Basic communicative skills have to be developed in three languages, i.e., Malayālam, 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 Sampūrṇa Kṛitiṅa, Sanchika 1. 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. 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 Kodumuga near Paṭṭāmbi, on the model of the Gandhian Phoenix and Sabarmati Āśrams, on a twenty five-acre-land taken on lease from Kāṇjūr Rāman Nambūtiri. 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. 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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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 Kāṇjūr Nārāyaṇa 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, Kummīṇi Paramēśwaran Nambūtiri, Kuthuḷḷi Nārāyaṇa Nambūtiri and Pēnangallūru. See A.P.P. Nambūtiri, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
manual labour for construction was done by the inmates.\textsuperscript{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 Prabhātam was arranged for starting a weekly journal named Ulbuddhakēraḷam.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{368} Two of them are in the article which he wrote to justify his sister's inter-caste marriage with Rāghava Panikker. 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.\textsuperscript{369} The third reference relates to the visit of Nālāpāṭt 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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\footnote{365 Ibid, pp.150-51.}
\footnote{366 Prabhātam Weekly was started as the mouthpiece of the Kerala Socialist Party in January 1935. E.M.S. Nambūtitipad, Atmakathā, 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 Asōkān, op. cit., p. 56; VT Vāsudēvan, "VTyudē Ulbuddhakēraḷam Oru Swapnam Pole", Samakālīna Malayāḷam, Nov. 1, 2006, p.118.}
\footnote{367 Those who wrote their accounts on the Yōgakṣēmasabha movement, like C.K. Nambūtiri, Mādāmb 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 Nālukēṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkkku, p.154.}
\footnote{368 V.T-yudē Sampīrēya Kritikal, pp. 307, 309 and 407.}
\footnote{369 V.T. Bhajathiripād's Diary, May 20, July 14 and August 3, 1940. Rāghava Panikkar's unpublished autobiography substantiates V.T's perception on the marriage as a sad event.}
\end{footnotes}
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. Bhaṭṭathiripāḍ (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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touching story of the pitiful life of Nhālūr Śrīdēvi Antarjanam, P.M. Nārāyanaṇ quotes some of her life experiences at Kodumunda and attests to V.T’s attitude on the commune. The silence of others like I.C.P. Nambūtiri and M.R.B. are truly striking. 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.

One of the very important pieces of information about Ulbuddhakēralam comes from the writings of E.M.S. Nambūtiriṇipād. 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

374 P.M. Nārāyanaṇ, “Oru Antarjanathinte Katha”, Kalāvikṣaṇam, Nov. 1997, p.11. V.T. is also reported to have told her that Ulbuddhakēralam was founded for victims like her.
375 I.C.P. Nambūtiri, Vipḷavathintē Ulthudippukal. 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. Bhāṭathiripād, “Kāl Nūttandinuḷḷil Nambūtirikku Vanna Māttangal”, Māṭrubhūmi 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.”

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.

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. 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.

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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. Mannathan, *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 Brahmns 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.
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. 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’ as has so often happened earlier, it was still a powerful weapon at the hands of the ecclesiasts to deal with acts of heresy. 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

383 But it is important to note that I.C.P. takes the issue of bhṛṣaj 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, Vipāvathintē Uṭṭhudippukaḷ, p. 49.
protection.\textsuperscript{384} V.T’s speech at Ālathiyūr makes it clear that he had anticipated a crisis-like situation within the Nambūtirī 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 Vaḷḷathōl, Nālappādan, Kuṭṭikriṣṇa Mārār, 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.\textsuperscript{385} V.T also recollects that prominent figures of the time had assisted him in the publication of the weekly.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Puthupally Raghavan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 216-17; Mādamb Kunjukutṭan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 225.
\item A.P.P. Nambūtirī, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 151; Mathramkōṭ Aṣōkan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.
\item V.T-yudē Sampūrṇa Kṛṭikāl, pp. 307,407.
\item A contemporary report reads that a meeting of about 100 people was convened in an open ground at “Ulbuddhakērālam” in order to protest against the Zamorin’s decision to deny the right of worship to 42 people, including Nilaṁbūr Rāja, at Guruvāyūr temple for their association with the widow marriage. The prominent men participated are VT, Kānjūr Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, Thadam Paramēśwaran Bhaṭṭathiripād, Kummiṇi Paramēśwaran Nambūtirī, Narippatta Kesavan Bhaṭṭathiripād, Mullappaḷḷi Brahmādathān Nambūtiripād, MRB, Mrs. Chōlayil Uṁāben, Mrs.VT, Mrs. MRB, and Śrīdēvi Narippatta. \textit{Maṭrubbhūmi Weekly}, 13:45, Jan.20, 1935.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
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.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{389} Disputes also began to arise over the ownership rights of the property.\textsuperscript{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”\textsuperscript{391} The crisis took a new turn with the partition of the Kānjiḻ Illam. The land on which the commune was situated was transferred to Kānjiḻ Nāraiaṇan Nambūṭiri who was a radical among the Nambūṭiris and later became a well-known Communist. He demanded the full clearance of the rent arrears overdue.

\textsuperscript{388} A.P.P. Nambūṭiri, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 150; Mathramkōṭ Aśōkan, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 56.
\textsuperscript{389} V.T. Vāsadēvan, Interview, 25\textsuperscript{th} April, 2006. Vāsadēvan 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 \textit{Ulbdhakēralaṁ}. VT Vāsadēvan, “VTyudē Ulbdhakēralaṁ: Oru Swapnam Pole”, \textit{Samakālīna Malayāḷam Varika}, Nov.1, 2006, p.119.
\textsuperscript{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 \textit{Ulbdhakēralaṁ} at Kodumundo, 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 Bhāṭṭathiripād. 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 \textit{Ulbdhakēralaṁ} at present consist of two more or less big buildings, a compound of about twelve acres and a big plantation.” \textit{Mātrubhūmi Weekly}, 15:6, April 26, 1937, p.17.
\textsuperscript{391} K. Gopalankutty, et. al, \textit{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 Aṣōkan, op. cit., pp. 55-56.
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. 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. 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.

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

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 Ulbuddhakēram, 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 Ulbuddhakēram, 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. In the land question too V.T. held fast to the Gandhian trusteeship doctrine. 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
Nambûtiris 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 Guruvăyûr Satyagraha.

\(^{403}\) See V.T-yudê Sampûrña Kritikal, pp. 251, 309. He made this statement forcefully in the
meeting held to congratulate the Nambûtiri couples of the first widow marriage.

\(^{404}\) E.M.S, Amakatha, p. 178. Nor does the denunciation of caste movements correspond with
V.T’s later personal association with the Nambûtiri 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 Nambûtiris. See V.T-yudê Sampûrña Kritikal, pp. 625, 629, 633. He is also reported to
have taken an initiative role, around 1980, in bringing the Nambûtiris together to discuss on
the ‘plight’ of the community and to chalk out plans for its future progress. C.K. Nambûtiri,
Örmakkurippukal. C.K. Nambûtiri 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
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 Kāṟalmaṇṇa became the venue for many uneven developments. Since by the time the Malabar Nambūtiri Bill was passed; more than 50 Antarjanams 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 Kērala Sabha, after eliminating all the existing sectarian Sabhas. He called upon the Sabha to work for an Aikya-Kērala 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 Brāhmaswam 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

407 Ibid. This is striking because VT had led the historic Yāchana Yāṭra 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 Sangham also had created a situation of crisis which forced many radicals to retreat from the movement. Just before the Pērāmaṅgalam Sabha in 1933, in a speech at the Harikanyapuram upasabha, VT damned it as the foul play of Āddhyan Nambūtiris. He repeatedly stressed the urgency of the Nambūtiris start working for the elimination of pollution and temple entry. The president of the Sangham at Pērāmaṅgalam, Tēnezhi Paramēśwaran Nambūtiripād, banished VT from the Sangham 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 Antarjanams who were present at the Sabha rallied behind VT and boycotted the deliberations. Thereafter no meeting of the Sangham was convened.

The 27th annual meeting of the Sabha at Harippad, presided over by Chittūr Kuṅjan Nambūtiripād, is noted for a remarkable decision: it resolved to retrieve those who were banished from the community for various reasons including the smārtavichāram of 1905 and the forced conversion during Tipu’s invasion and the rebellion of 1921. In the next annual at Trissūr under Pārvathi Nenminimaṅgalam, V.K. Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭathiri, who was excommunicated for his involvement in the Tāṭri case, was elected as a member of the executive. The last meeting of the Sabha was in 1939 at Trissūr 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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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 Antarjanams 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 Sampūrṇa Kṛitiкал, p.617.
412 Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitram.
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. A reactionary trend had started to develop within the Sabha by 1933; 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. By the enactment of the Nambūtiri Bills, the reform within the community was almost over, the male agenda was almost achieved and the Antaranjanams 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.

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. The Kāralampa

413 A.P.P. Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.143; Mathramkōṭ Aṣōkan, 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 ghūṣa elimination or anti-pollution measures. See UN 15:8, Dec.1, 1933, p.4.
415 E.M.S. wrote that after the Kāralampa annual meeting of the Sabha, there began to spread passivity in the reform movement. See “Ottappālam Sammēḻanam”, UN, Feb.2, 1934 (EMS-nte Ṣampūṟṟa Kṛitiṟkal, 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, “Pārvathi Nenminimaṅgalam”, UN, 1:2, Edavam 1122, (May-June, 1947), pp.69-70. Exemplifying Alathur Anujan Nambūtiripāḍ and Pāṭiriśśēri, VT pointed to this trend in his famous Harikanyakapuram speech in December 1933. See VṬyudē Sampūṟṟa Kṛitiṟkal, p.613.
416 See A. Bhavadāsan Bhāṭathiripāḍ’s open letter to K.N. and V.T, UN 15:9, Dec.8, 1933, p.3; also see Kuvumūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripāḍ, “Sabhā-Sanghāṅguḷē Ḫēṟkaraṟqam”, 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 Ōṅgallūṛ Sabha in 1944. See his “Nambūtiri-ye Maṇuṇyanakkan”, EMS-nte Sampūṟṟa Kṛitiṟkal, Sanchika I,
annual meeting of the Sabha became a venue of heated discussion over this issue and evident signs of discord developed.\textsuperscript{418} By the Péramaṅgalam 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.\textsuperscript{419} The last meeting of the Saṅgham was at Péramaṅgalam, 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.\textsuperscript{420} The movement was almost over, most Nambūtiris retired to personal and family life.\textsuperscript{421} The politics of reform had started its course of dissolution in the 1930s in

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\item[418] E.M.S. in a speech (\textit{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.
\item[419] E.M.S. outlined three attitudes at Pérambangalam. 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. \textit{Ibid}, pp.271-272.
\item[420] The typical case was that of K.N. Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, the firebrand radical and the editor of the \textit{UN} whose retirement from all reform activities was really surprising and had manifested in manifold ways; first and foremost, the \textit{UN} lost its radical vision that had marked its presence. An editorial of the \textit{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. \textit{UN}, 15:1, 29 September 1933, p.6. A. Bhavadāsan Bhaṭṭṭathiripād 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. \textit{UN} 15:9, Dec.8, 1933, p.3.
\item[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, \textit{Kēralam Malayāḷikaludē Māṭrubhūṃi}, Thiruvananthapuram, 1987, p.222.
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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

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, “Nambūtirirūru Vargiyā Sanghaṭanakālum”, Māṭrubhūmi 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, Kēralam Malayāḷikaludē Māṭrubhūmi, 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., “Nambūtirirūrūr Prathyēka Prāthinidhyavum”, UN, Feb.9, 1934, reproduced in EMS-nī Sampūrya Kṛītīkal, 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 Māṭrubhūmi (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 “Nājathē Nambūtirī”, 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. 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 Ulbudhakēraṇam, 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. 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.

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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 Nambūtiris 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 Māppila 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 Ulbudhakēraṇam 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 Paṇikker, a person belonging to the Nāyār 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 Pārvathi, 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.\textsuperscript{429} VT wrote that as on other occasions, the idea came from outside and when Dāmōdaran hinted him of it he was truly 'shocked'.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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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\footnote{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.}
\footnote{VT, "Miśāvivāha Prasthānathinu Oru Mukhavura", \textit{VTuđe Sampaņṭaga Kritikal}, pp.307-311.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p.307.}
\footnote{\textit{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. \textit{Ibid}, p.310.}
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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’. 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 Trissur. 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.

VT placed the marriage in the context of both his characteristic radicalism and his destitute condition consequent to the collapse of the Ulbuddhakēralam 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. 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 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 Paṉikker, including his parents and

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, Ātmakathā.
434 Vītyude Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.309.
435 Edavam 7, 1116.
members of his *taṟawād*. VT writes that this event had provoked the non-Nambūṭiri 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 Paṇikkeṟ 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 Paṇikkeṟ was neither accommodating nor practical, he could not adjust at home, and so he was forced to stay with VT. Later on Paṇikkeṟ lost almost all his landed property and had to lead a miserable life. VT’s diary revealed his displeasure of Paṇikkeṟ’s stay with him and the correspondence between the two disclosed the slow development of discord over the question of Paṇikkeṟ’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 *Āimakatha*. 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 Nambiṟi 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 Nambiṟi 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”. *VTyūde Sampūṟṇa Kṛitiṇa*, p.298. The fact that VT wrote his second drama *Karitichanta* 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 *Āimakatha*.

⁴³⁸ VT’s diary, courtesy: VT Vāṣudēvan.

⁴³⁹ *VTyūde Sampūṟṇa Kṛitiṇa*, 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, Sahādaran wrote that inter-caste marriage was the correct step towards Hindu unity.441 Since the smṛitis and the śrutiṣ 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 Sahādaran; 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 Ōngallūr Sabha

VT’s re-association with the Sabha took place with the Ōngallūr 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 Sampūrṇa Kṛitiṇa, 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 wreak vengeance on them for the wrongs they had done against their own women. See his Atmakathā. 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 Sahādaran, May 18, 1940, cited in VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitiṇa, 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. Two important issues still haunted the Nambūtiris. First, heavy dowry demands and the educational and cultural backwardness of the Antarjanams had been creating considerable impediments in the way of women's marriage. Heavy dowry demands had revived the 'sale' of the Antarjanams. The educated and emancipated women, though only a few, were not ready to meekly succumb to this culture; the Antarjanasamājam strongly protested against it. 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

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 Nālukettīl Ninmu Nāṟṟilēkkku, pp.134-151. Mādamb Nāṟṟiyāpan 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 Yōgalṣēmasabhā Charitram.

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 Antarjanasamājams 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 Öngallur meeting, E.M.S. suggested a programme for the Sabha upon which the communist party would support the revitalization measures. 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 Antarjanams 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 Antarjanamasamājam, because the condition of the Antarjanams was extremely backward in relation to their men, he suggested that he would support the revival

445 “Nambūtirimār Erēngōṭṭu?” YK, Silver Jubilee Special, 1120 (1944), pp.20-24, reproduced in EMS-yte Sampūrya Kritikal, 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 Antarjanams; 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 Vargīya Saṅghaṭanakālum”, Maṭrubhumi Weekly, 22:40, 17 Dec. 1944, p.8.
of the Sabha since any progress of the Antarjanams 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 peyūkoda; 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 ghōsa 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 Antarjanams 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 Antarjanams. He asked them to emulate the Christians of Travancore if they wanted to achieve progress.

In his long speech at Ōngallīr, 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. 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 Antarjanams. The sale of the Antarjanams had been revived and there were reports of adultery. Dowry and lack of girls’ education stood against peyūkoda,

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?” “Nambūtirimār Enūgōtu?” YK, Silver Jubilee Special, 1120 (1944), p.24, reproduced in EMS-nte Sampūrṇa Kṛitiṇāl, Sanchika 1, p.266.

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 Izhava neighbour who prospered through dedicated work. The Nāyaṛs were now crying for government protection in their penury. The Nāyaṛ movement which started against the Brahmans 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. 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., “Ŏngallur Prasāṅgathinu Śēṣam”, 1946, in *EMS-ne Sampūrṇa Kritikal*, Sanchika 1, pp.228-234. Also see P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, *Nālukeṭṭil Ninnu Nāṭṭilēkkū*, 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 Shomprü were started.\textsuperscript{449} The organs of the \textit{Sabha} like the \textit{UN} and \textit{YK} were revived. The greatest impact was among the Antaljanams; they started a work centre at Lakkidi with the fund collected through a begging journey to the south.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 Antaljanams at the center; they had participated in the Pāliyam

\textsuperscript{449} Though a few Nambūtiri families like the Deshamangalam had Entéred into the industrial field, it was with the Ōngallūr 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, “Enmilēkkō Pinnilekkō”, Mātrubhūmi Weekly, 15 Jan. 1989, p.20.

\textsuperscript{450} Lalithāmbika Antaljanam in her “Antarjananāgalūdē Avaśat̄aka”, \textit{YK Silver Jubilee Special}, 1944, pointed out the failure of the efforts of the \textit{Sabha} in emancipating the Antaljanams and directly urged the Antaljanams 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 Lalithāmbika. 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 18\textsuperscript{th} century Nambūtiris. The idea of begging must have been from VT’s \textit{Vāchana Vat̄ra}, 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 \textit{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 Antaljanams could be attained only by developing a more scientific curriculum. \textit{UN}, 1:2, Edavam 1122, p.130.

\textsuperscript{451} T.S. Bhāṭṭathiripād was its leader and Kāṇippayūr Saṅkaran nambutirpaḍ, Palolli Vāsudevaṇ Nambūtiri and Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambutri were its active associates. They edited a weekly called \textit{Pathaka} attacking the new \textit{Sabha}. They also composed a drama \textit{Sakhāavintē Parivartanam}, which was staged at a few venues. See T.S. Bhāṭṭathiripād, “Samudrāyadpōhi”, \textit{Dēśābhīmāni Weekly}, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, pp.47-48. \textit{Pathaka} was published for a full year from January 1948. All the 51 issues are kept by T.S. Thirupettāri, Vadakkancheri. \textit{Sakhāavintē Parivartanam} was an anti-drama written against VT’s \textit{AA} in which Madhavan abandons Tēthi for her illicit relationships and winds up his association with the movement. See Nambūtiri Youth Congress, \textit{Sakhāavintē Parivartanam}, Panchangam Press, Kunnakulam, 1123. T.S. wrote five short stories which were published into a collection with the title \textit{Bleach}. All the stories except one (which is about Pazhassi Raja) ridiculed the communist Nambūtiris. T.S. Bhāṭṭathiripād, \textit{Bleach}, Mangalōdayam, Ṭīssū&r, 1951.
Satyagraha, 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 Öngallur revitalization efforts. He was the editor of the *Unpi Nambütiiri* and presided over the Pāzhur annual meeting in 1946. He extended all his help for the Antarjanams to found the work centre. He was elected as the secretary of the *Sabha* at Chēppu in the next annual meeting. By imbibing the Öngallur spirit, he wrote many short stories. The initial enthusiasm that emanated from the Öngallur spirit was but short-lived; with the death of the *Sabha* VT again retired from community affairs.

In fact, VT’s association with the Öngallur *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 Trissur in 1948. Many of the associates of the *Sabha* like C.K. Nambütiiri and Chittur Kunhan Nambütiircpåd slowly withdrew their support to it and became its strong opponents. VT’s association with the *Sabha* could be justified only

453 Olappamaṇa 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 Antarjanams for which nothing short of a work centre would suffice. He asked everyone to contribute towards it. In the meeting of the Antarjana Samajam he praised the venture of Kurjiyēdath Tāṭri as a great revolt against male domination in the Nambürä community and called upon the Antarjanams to free themselves from the shackles of male domination if they wanted to be truly liberated. Olappamaṇa, “Pazhūrīl”, UN, 1:2, Edavam 1122, pp.110-124.
455 See E.M.S, “Paraṣurāmantē Kērajathōdu Innathē Nambütiiri Nadathunna Daḥrmyuddham”, *YK*, Dec.31, 1947, reproduced in EMS-nē Sampuṛṇa Kritikal, Sanchika II, p.78. C.K. Nambütiiri 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 *Nambütiiri Yōgakēmasamahayuddē Mumbum Pimbum*, pp.35-36, 40. Also see his *Oṃmakkurippukal*, P.K. Aryan Nambütiiri 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 Antarjanams 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’. 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 Kēndrā 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 Kṛṣṇapistha 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.

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

Chittūr Kunhan Nambūtpipād vehemently and successfully resisted. See his Nālukettull Nīnum Nāṭṭilēkku, pp.140-151.

A.P.P. Nambūtpir, 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.

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.

\(^{458}\) *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 Brāhmaṇam”*. V. Asha, *Modernization among the Nambutiris in Kerala*, PhD Dissertation, University of Kerala, 1994, pp.261-262.

\(^{460}\) A report in *Kērala 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, Trīṣūt, 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. Vāṣudēvan 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 Sampūrṇa Kṛitika*, pp.631-32.