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THE IDEOLOGY OF VT

CHAPTER 5
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Any study of the ideology and career of VT would be incomplete unless it takes into account the major trends that marked the early decades of the 20th century. The period was noted for the fundamental changes brought about by the colonial system in the material conditions and the world outlook. The caste-cluster consciousness\(^1\) developed during this period gave birth to community-building efforts and caste/community movements. Social movements had community interests as their focal point of mobilization and agitation; even the secular agenda of these movements were determined chiefly by sectarian considerations. While the lower castes tried to enhance their social status through caste mobility, for which sanskritization\(^2\) along with modernization served as the medium, the upper castes were forced to relinquish several of their privileges and had to adapt themselves to the norms of the emerging civil society in order to retain their social prominence. Therefore, community-building measures were soon succeeded by political and religious measures; while an increased participation in the nationalist movement sought to forge a niche in the expanding political domain, a vigorous struggle for the construction of a new

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\(^2\) M.N. Srinivas, who developed the concept, explained it thus: “...A low caste was able in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and tea-totalism, and by Šāṃskṛitizing its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and the adoption of the Brahmanic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent, though theoretically forbidden...” Šāṃskṛitization thus presupposes not only an assimilation of the practices of the dominant castes but also the acceptance of the Brahmanical view of society. M.N. Srinivas, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, Calcutta, 1952, p.30. Aiyappan argues that the urge to move up culturally through imitation of the norms of the higher castes must have been present even before the political and economic base of the Kerala social system was disturbed by the British administration. A. Aiyappan, *Social Revolution in a Kerala Village*, Bombay, 1965, pp.125-25.
Hinduism by purging untouchability and universalizing temple entry provided the upper castes alternate means of religious domination.

The Nambûtiri movement too was stimulated by similar trends. Starting from its extremely orthodox agenda, the movement expanded its programmes with the inclusion of fresh demands like English education, swajâtivivāham, emancipation of women, elimination of sub-caste distinctions, accommodation of the banished, eradication of distance pollution and temple-entry to all. The attitudes and ideological position of the leaders also seem to have developed with the advancing agenda.

5:1. Reformism and Community-Building

For a generation of Nambûtiris including VT, reform was synonymous with survival. Society and economy were fast changing and to continue in the old order would mean increasing marginalization. Although the need for reform was felt equally by all Nambûtiris, its gravity was more intensely experienced by the less privileged and non-noble sections of the community. In the emerging environment of social equality they (as Apphans and Āsyans) felt deprived of their right of equality of opportunity in the community and society. Their desire to find a space in the new society and in the collapsing joint family enforced a situation in which reform and revolt became inevitable.

VT justified the reform movement in his memoirs by referring to the long process of marginalization the Nambûtiris were subjected to in all spheres of life. This marginalization was profoundly felt by Nambûtiris like him and this

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3 By quoting Talcott Parsons that “Frustration, we must remember, is always relative to expectations. It is the circumstance which serves to explain why movements for radical change have so often centered in relatively privileged groups who, by commonsense standards, are well off”, P.K. Gopalakrishnan observed that this had what strained the social system of the Nambûtiris and had impelled the younger generation to fight for changes. “Nambutiri Brahmins” in A. Aiyappan and L.K. Balaratnam ed., Society in India, Madras, 1956, p240.

4 See the first chapter of his “Kan̄ṇīrum Kiṇāvum” in VTyude Sampūrṇa Kiṇīkīl, pp.131-134.

5 VT introduces his memoirs Kan̄ṇīrum Kiṇāvum against the growing marginalization and pauperization of the Nambûtiris. He writes that he grew up in such a situation when both
would explain the cause of their extreme radicalism. The dominant Nambūtiris could compensate their increasing social and political peripheralization through their control over vast landed estates; for others, deprivation was the naked truth of real life. VT has noted how the Nambūtiris, with their outmoded customs and their obstinate attachment to tradition, became objects of ridicule for others and how they stood in the way of the progress of their own community. In fact the obstinacy and indifference shown by the rich, conservative and noble Nambūtiris had not only affected them, but also had blocked the progress of the dispossessed and the needy. VT’s speeches and articles indicate how he developed this anti-patriarchal position.

In so far as VT’s involvement in the Sabha was concerned, he was not able to make headway into the leadership of the Sabha, till the close of the 1920s. This was mainly due to two reasons. First, the major issues of the ’20s were marriage reform and enactment of the Regulation both of which had made considerable advance by the time he had entered into the reform arena. Second, he could not enroll into the group of the policy makers of the Sabha till the end of 1929 (when he was appointed as the organizing secretary of the Saṅgham) because of the strong opposition of the moderate sections due to his radical position. In 1927 he had presented a resolution on the question of the increasing unemployment among the Nambūtiri young men and suggested solutions, including investments in agriculture and trade, but apart from the initial enthusiasm it created, it failed to make any lasting impact. Even in the women question, in which he was portrayed as the chief protagonist, his outlook and

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Brāhmānyam and janmitham had been dying out. For details see VTyūdē Sampūrṇa Kritikaṭ, pp.127-130. He situated this phenomenon in the context of outmoded customs and the indifference shown by the Nambūtiris towards modern education and science. While the Nāyars and Tiyars rose up from their slumber and tenant and servile classes rallied behind the tri-colour flag, the Nambūtiri sat idle on the doorsteps chewing betel and no Nambūtiri was seen among them. Ibid, p.128.

P. Chitran Nambūtiripād, “VT- Kerala Charitrathile Oru Ithiḥāsam”, Vivēkōdayamaṭ, 14: 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.15. He had not been elected as the secretary of the Sabha before 1948 and of the Saṅgham never at all. In 1929 he was appointed as the Organizing Secretary of the Saṅgham.
vision did not traverse beyond the marriage agenda. Though he later emerged as an exponent of such ideals as equality within the sub-castes, accommodation of the banished into the community, subjugation of the Vaidikar and the elimination of distance pollution, none of them were his individual projects nor were they materialized under his leadership. In the 1930s he strongly pleaded for a Kēraḷa Sabha instead of the several caste associations and wanted to link it with the concept of Aikya-Kēraḷa. This was a considerable advance in the policy of the Sabha, but VT was not able to convince the community of the viability of the measure and how it would benefit them. The majority of the Nambūtiris, who were moderates, began to treat VT's idealism harmful to the interests of the community. In this situation VT failed to alleviate the apprehensions of the community and could not lead the Nambūtiris towards the direction which he considered desirable for them.

In fact VT's success and fame as a reformer lies in his pragmatism. He knew how the movement could be radicalized, through unique methods, propagated through his vibrant speeches and clever interventions. His short stories were a brave engagement in the reform discourse and helped in highlighting the plight of the Antarjanams and in convincing them of the need of reform. VT's was the brain behind the pamphlets which were circulated among the Antarjanams at the Varikkāssēri vāram. More productive was the drama which in fact radicalized

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7 O.M.C. writes that VT, through the Saṅgham, tried to form a common platform by associating the Sabha, NSS and SNDP together. O.M.C. was the secretary of the Sabha then. O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, “VT- Chila Smaraṇakā”, Vivēkōdayam, Vol. 14, No. 5-6, May-June 1982, p.32.

8 There is disagreement over the real impact of the stories on the Antarjanams. In the prevailing environment of illiteracy and terrible system of seclusion, it would not have made tangible results. The observation of E.M.S. in 1944 that 95% of the Nambūtiri families had not started to send their daughters to schools (“Nambūtirimār Engōṭṭu?”, YK, Silver Jubilee Special, 1120 (1944), p.24) and the fact that it was the inefficacy of the print media that had forced the reformers to switch over to the more effective means of the theatre support this presumption. But the recollection of Antarjanams like Uma M.R.B. reveals that it could arouse a few of them like her (in Pālakkūzh Nārāyaṇan, op.cit, p.136).

the entire reform environment; VT was immediately appointed as the organizing secretary of the Sangham and in a very short time the whole marriage agenda was put into practice. The success of the drama and the subsequent enthusiasm it created in the reform process had led the Sabha to send a delegation to north Malabar under its five leaders viz., Kuṭṭan Nambūtiripād, Mūthiringōd, VT, Pāndam and Paḷḷam Krishnan Nambūtiri to spread the message of reform in those areas where an awakening was not so strongly felt.¹⁰

It is evident that in ideology and in practice, VT’s position was much less radical compared to many others like Mūthiringōd, Pāndam or E.M.S. He always wanted the conservatives to be offered a chance for a change of mind (in the case of extreme conservatives the result was a foregone conclusion) by appealing to humanism and community interests; he had realized that the support of the majority community was necessary to perpetuate the results of the reform programme. He was also very particular in having a perfect coordination between the word and the deed. His wanted to become a leader like Kuṭṭur, but he could neither emerge as the one and only leader of his community nor put his reform agenda into practice with its full support. In fact it was the death of V.S. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri,¹¹ who had emerged as the leader of the Sabha after Kuṭṭur, that provided VT an opportunity to rise up in the community; however, the community refused to accept him as the undisputed leader as in the case of the former two.

One of VT’s cherished ambitions was the linking of the Nambūtiri movement with the Nationalist and Aikya Kērala movements. In the 1930s he made an ardent effort to achieve this end, but he had to face strong opposition

¹⁰ UN, 11:35 Feb.28, 1930.
¹¹ Vendrakkāt Saṅkara Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri was the editor of both the YK and the UN and was the power behind the Nambūtiri Regulation. He could lead the radicals and the moderates of the community together. His death in 1924 forced the community to search for a new leader; this was the context of the rise of VT into the leadership of the Sabha. See O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, “Māṭiya Nambūtiri”, Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 34:1, 18 March 1956. Still, he could not become the single-most leader.
from the community which sidelined him on this issue. In fact, he could not convince the community of the benefits his proposals would bring to it nor was the community ready to accept his advice on this matter due to communitarian obstinacy and middle class pressures. The intentions were certainly implicit; the call was made in the name of Hindu unity and humanist ideals and by presenting things in the context of the Nationalist movement.\textsuperscript{12} He wanted to expose the problems of the Nambūtiris before the general public, as is evident from the widow marriage incident, and to ally with members of other communities in dealing with the serious internal issues of the Nambūtiris. The Ulbuddhakērālam project too was an effort with a similar intention but with clear political designs. These were symbolic of putting an end to Nambūtiri exclusiveness and, in the latter case, there was an attempt to rally people under the Nambūtiri leadership.

VT’s call for the winding up of community reform and to concentrate on Hindu social reform coincided with the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha and the beginning of the Civil Disobedience Movement; during this time EMS started associating with the National Movement. In fact VT’s focus was on Hindu unity and it was not surprising in the context of the religious bent of the Nationalist movement. Since the movement collided with the Nambūtiri interests with its stress on the reform of customs and a pro-tenant disposition in Kērala, VT’s repeated call for harmonizing the two could not appeal to majority section of the community. The outcome was a complex of contrasts, the Sabha itself lost grounds and VT had to wind up his public activities soon.

It is extremely difficult to interpret VT’s association with the Sabha after the Ōngallūr meeting; some ten years ago he had urged to conclude its activities.

\textsuperscript{12} The idea of an all-caste panel was first proposed by Kuṟumūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād (“Aikyakērālam – Oru Samudāya Sabhayudē Āvaśyakathā”, \textit{UN}, 11:58 Aug 15, 1930). He made a strong plea for an all-community forum in the context of the developing caste tensions and of the future possibility of responsible governments. He pointed out that \textit{Hindu Mahāsabha} would meet the requirements but since it is an association of individuals alone, another similar forum of communities was necessary. He suggested a model on the lines of the League of Nations representing 3 members each from different communities.
E.M.S. was really motivated by political designs to revive the Sabha though the focus was on communitarian issues; but VT was incited by community interests alone. The issues which the Sabha took up in the 1940s were not new; the matters were there but they were not addressed during the 1930s. In fact in the 30s VT might have been lured by the ambition to take up the leadership of the Hindu community and to reestablish the domination of the Nambūtiris. Community feeling was always strong in him; even in the 1970s he had blessed the Sabha in its revived form.¹³

This brings us to the question of ideology, the point of difference between VT’s reform ideology and that of his contemporaries or of the earlier generation of reformers. Due to the influence of several factors, VT was forced to keep his communitarian interests hidden or to express them only in the general context of social interests.¹⁴ His stay at Trissur had brought him into contact with groups of diverse interests and the great influence of the freedom movement had created in him a fairly broad outlook. He had understood that the progress of the Nambūtiris was possible only in the context of general social welfare and that the retention of community interests needed the consent of other communities. So, he took special care in presenting a community interest as a social cause. It was justifiable in the context of the presumption that the reform of the Nambūtiri was a necessary prerequisite for the progress of the society. As the privileged,

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¹³ See VT’s message to the new Yōgakṣēmasabha, YK Annual Number, 2:1-2, Sep-Oct. 1980, p.1. VT expressed deep sorrow over the downfall of the Nambūtiris and urged them to take all possible measures to give birth to a new “Uppi Nambūtiri” (Nambūtiri young man). He expressed great despair over the inability of the Nambūtiris to take up the murder case of Ammini Antarjānanam as a serious issue of communitarian interest for rallying the Nambūtiris together. (Ammini Antarjānanam was murdered at Muvattupuzha on 31st August 1979. It was alleged that there were conscious attempts at diverting the investigation. See P. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, “Ammiṇi Antarjāna Case-Um Yōgakṣēma Sabhayum”, YK 1:1, Sep.1979, pp.9-15). His anxieties over the plight of the community is attested also by C.K. Nambūtiri in 1982 in his Ormakkurippukal in which VT is said to have asked him to take measures to strengthen the Sabha.

¹⁴ After his Alathiyur speech, the UN expressed a sigh of relief over VT’s continued interest in community reform and consoled all the people who had come to believe that he had fallen from community reform to Harijan activities. UN 15:6, 17 Nov. 1933, p.6.
landowning segment of the society, community interests presented from a sectarian point of view would do more harm; alliance with the dispossessed on selected spheres would help retain some economic and social privileges.

Nor did modernity influence VT considerably. Even the dictum 'modern at work and pre-modern at home' could not be applied in the case of VT; he was a critical traditionalist from the very beginning. He had been an exponent of tradition and caste-based norms and practices which the radicals of the community had despised for their role in retarding the progress of the community.\textsuperscript{15} The radical measures taken by the reformist Nambūtiris including VT to eliminate the external marks of caste identity like the thread and the kuduma were in fact symbolic acts of protest against the vaidikar as is evidenced by the fact that several of them soon reverted to accept what they had renounced.\textsuperscript{16} Even otherwise, such acts were conformed to community interests because caste marks had impeded the free involvement of the Nambūtiris in the emerging civic culture. It is important to note that VT never compromised over the essentials of 'Nambūtiritham'. Never did he denounce either Śaṅkara or Pāraśurāma nor did he try to subject the Nambūtiri tradition, which men like him wanted to reform, to a structural criticism. The community was never attacked and tradition was never repudiated; only the 'vices' and 'defects' were denounced for they had brought about the 'fall' of the community. The modernization of the community was envisaged not as the negation of tradition, but as the reorientation of tradition in accordance with the changing environment without sacrificing basic community interests.

VT's concept of a model society, or the means to achieve it, is nowhere specified explicitly, but an untheorized ideology of reform could be seen scattered throughout his speeches and writings. According to him, not all

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} See the Ālathiyūr speech of VT in UN 15:7 & 8, Nov.24 & Dec.1, 1933, reproduced in \textit{VTyuđë Sampūṇṇa Kritikal}, p.547.\
\textsuperscript{16} E.M.S, \textit{Aimakatha}, p.131.}
traditional institutions and values should be replaced; some of them should be reformed and a few others should be retained. His ideal of a future society was based on nuclear family, equitable share in property, education to all and a rational religion. A cynic would find in his reform rhetoric mere verbalism since his later writings abruptly set aside his earlier radical views by making a strong appeal to an abstract ideal of Brāhmānyam, trusteeship in land ownership and a plea for a space for the Brahmins in social matters. The revivalist tendencies of radical thinkers of the reform movement like VT lent support to the presumption that radicalism was a means of community reform and was aimed at finishing the internal agenda within the shortest period possible so that they would be able to take up the leadership of the subsequent social movement.

5:2. Community and the Nation

VT’s attitude towards the Congress and the nationalist movement perfectly conformed to the general attitude of the Nambūtiris and the Sabha. The Sabha had started showing considerable interest in the nationalist movement by the close of the second decade of the twentieth century but after the Malabar rebellion, and with the intensification of the tenancy movement, an abrupt passivity pervaded over its active association with nationalism.\(^{17}\) In the 1920s it almost withdrew from its affiliation to the movement and even began to oppose it. By the close of the 1920s a revived interest started spreading but there was a considerable shift in focus: rather than involving in political issues, it concentrated on constructive programme, especially temple entry and eradication of distance pollution.\(^{18}\) The Sabha supported the Guruvāyūr

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\(^{17}\) Herring observes: “As importantly, the nationalist movement in Malabar necessarily included opposition to landlords and their agents who utilized the colonial state to enforce their power”, Ronald. J. Herring, *Land to the Tiller: the Political Economy of Agrarian Reform in South Asia*, Delhi, 1983, p.159.

\(^{18}\) See Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, New Delhi, 1994, pp.78-80. Jeffrey writes that for the Congressmen from Malabar district, the temple-entry campaign gave an opportunity to revive interest – at a safe distance – in a Congress that had suffered a severe setback with the Māppilā rebellion of 1921. For Travancore Nāyars, like
Satyagraha and many Nambūtiris actively took part in it. But only a few participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement and most of them kept aloof from the later Congress-led political struggles. Meanwhile a section of the politically motivated Nambūtiris drifted to left-wing politics. While many were active in the communist party, the 1940s was marked by the absence of Nambūtiris as leaders of the Congress.

It is rightly observed that the role of the caste associations in the nationalist movement was rather meager and negligible; most of them took either a policy of indifference or an attitude in opposition. This was because the nationalist movement was identified with upper caste interests; achievement of civic rights and upward social mobility depended on the support and patronage of the British. But a total detachment from the emerging nationalist culture was not altogether desirable. A considerable space helpful for harmonizing with the nationalistic ethic was availed by the various items of the constructive programme, especially the anti-untouchability measures, and in the context of Kērala it expressed itself in the form of the temple-entry agitation. Other aspects of the programme like prohibition were not acceptable for many; such as the Izhavas who had toddy-tapping as their traditional occupation. In fact the essential features of the Gandhian ideology like Ahimsa or cultural nationalism (which had its stress on upper caste values) had increasingly alienated the lower


19 François Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier, “Socio-Religious Reform Movements in Kerala: A Reaction to the Capitalist Mode of Production”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 11, June 1978, p.7. The indifference of the caste movements towards nationalist politics has been explained with reference to their difficulty in taking class positions; associating with a particular organization meant acquiescing to its class position. The S.N.D.P. withdrew from political involvement for fear of internal split. See Georges Kristofel Lieten, “Caste in Class Politics” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, 1979, p.323.
castes from the sway of nationalism.\textsuperscript{20} The domination of the English-educated upper caste men in the Congress also gave the impression that it stood for elite class interests rather than for national considerations.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, mixing upper-caste interests with the nationalist cause made the situation all the more worse; the Nāyaṛs who had dominated the Congress had already converted it into a forum for the promotion of their caste interests, especially the tenants' cause, and this factor had been a matter of concern for both the upper and lower castes.\textsuperscript{22} Since most of the caste associations had been based in Travancore, where anti-British politics had no scope at all; indifference to the nationalist movement was quite natural.

Against this background, the \textit{Sabha} movement evinced considerable advance, not only did the \textit{Sabha} incorporate the essentials of nationalism in its functioning right from its beginning but had responded to the ups and downs of the movement all through.\textsuperscript{23} This can be explained with reference to two factors. Though the movement was based in Trissur, a major share of the Nambūtiri population belonged to British Malabar where the nationalist movement had

\textsuperscript{20} C.V. Kunjurāman, "Swayambharaṇavum Izhavarum" (Editorial) \textit{Kēralakaumudi}, 3:19, 14 July 1921. Contextualizing the Vaikam Satyagraha, C. Kesavan wrote that for the Izhavas the Congress was an organization affiliated to the interests of the Caste-Hindus and this factor had compelled them to align with the British against the Congress which represented nationalism. C. Kesavan, \textit{Jivitasamaram}, Kottayam, 1990, pp.255-56.

\textsuperscript{21} "A broad group within the Izhava movement stood for struggle against the svaṇṇa caste domination, but was willing to compromise with the imperialists whom they considered to be allies in their struggle. To a lesser extent, this was their attitude towards the monarchy also...the vacillations and compromises by the ssavaṇṇa national leadership had made Izhavas suspicious of them. National freedom without the destruction of the caste system would be hollow". T.M. Thomas Isaac & P.K. Michael Tharakan, "Sree Narayana Movement in Travancore" in S.K. Sreevastava & L. Sreevastava eds., \textit{Social Movements for Development}, Allahabad, 1988, p.169.


\textsuperscript{23} Veluthat Kesavan, "Nambūtiriyum Manuṣyanum", \textit{Sāhiyalōkam}, March-April 2003, pp. 22-25. Veluthat also argued that right from the beginning the deliberations of the Sabha were strictly in tune with the Congress ideals of democracy and majority decision.
considerable roots by the second decade of the previous century. Secondly, the 
ideals of the Congress perfectly harmonized with upper caste values; with the 
entry of Gandhi it had incorporated strong elements of cultural nationalism 
focusing heavily on brahmanical values like Ahimsa, vegetarianism, Ramrajya, 
Swadeshi and the trusteeship. The Gandhian ideals perfectly harmonized with 
the ‘traditional’ and exclusive but privileged life of the Nambūtiris.

But in the political realm this harmony was greatly counterbalanced by the 
assault on the economic and social privileges of the Nambūtiris from the very 
nationalist movement. Since the Congress was by then captured by the English 
educated Nāyār middle (tenant) class, which had the tenant issue as the major 
plank of its agitation, cooperation with the Congress created considerable 
difficulties. The early interests of the Nambūtiris in associating with the 
Congress were evidently meant to counterbalance this agenda. The conflict of 
interests came to a crisis during the first non-cooperation movement; it 
degenerated into the violent rebellion of 1921 during which the Māppilas took

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24 One of the important developments that helped the growth of regionalism/nationalism 
beyond the narrow locality feeling was the play of several factors together such as the 
development of a print culture, growth of modern means of communication, access to 
common language and state intervention in cultural life. See K.N. Panikkar, “From Revolt 
to Agitation: Beginning of the National Movement”, Social Scientist. Vol. 25, Nos. 9-10, 
Sep-Oct. 1997, pp.32-33. Locality consciousness was extremely powerful among the 
Nambūtiris till at the beginning of the twentieth century; it was with the community-
building efforts and with the rise of the nationalist movement that they started coming out of 
this narrow outlook.

25 An article by T.V. entitled “Nambūtirimārum Congressum”, YK, 14:73; June 14, 1924; 
14:74; June 18, 1924, while opposing the Congress, glorified Gandhi and opined that his 
ideals like truth, devotion, morality, courage, sincerity, light food habits, moderate speech, 
patriotism, compassion, etc are imitable for all. The UN in its Editorial glorified the 
swadeshi on the grounds of national interests and urged the Nambūtiris to follow the call of 
Gandhi on this point. UN, 2:6, Kumbham, 1096/1921, p.256.

26 In an article, Kōdanāṭi Nārāyaṇa Nambūtiripād questioned the Congressmen for 
misinterpreting the broad and noble objectives of the Congress for their selfish tenancy 
interests. See YK, 13:69, May 30, 1923. He also attacked the Māṛubhūmi for supporting the 
Congress to strengthen the tenant cause.

27 The first All Kerala Conference of the Congress was attended by Nambūtiri representatives 
including Paśchiman Rāman Nambūtiri, Kūṭūr Kunjunipī Nambūtiri and Cherumukku 
Cheṛiya Vallaḷhān Nambūtiri. When a resolution seeking to solve the grievances of the 
tenants was placed for discussion, the Nambūtiri representatives wanted it to accommodate 
the grievances of the janmis too. See YK, 11:29 Apr. 29, 1921.
the opportunity to settle their class interests against the landed aristocracy, especially the Nambūtiris. The Nambūtiris had to face considerable hardships and material losses.28 Though it was at the hands of the Māppīlas, Congressmen were denounced for instigating them in the name of non-cooperation and thus victimizing them.29 But the Nambūtiris in general held the view that the rebellion was not a tenant uprising but only a riot of plunder.30 The rebellion brought about a very strong feeling of animosity towards the Congress31 and created a setback in the tempo of the nationalist movement in Kērala in general leading to the spread of political passivity and intellectual bewilderment.32 Of course the alliance of the Congress with the Māppīlas came to an end and it “aroused


29 An editorial of YK wrote that the speeches of the non-cooperators incited the foolish Māppīlas, drained them away the fear of the authority and emboldened them to rise in rebellion. “Māppīla Lahāla”, YK, 11:47, Sep.9, 1921. Also see Kāippayūr Sāṅkārā Nambūtiripād, “Malabar Lahalayum Congressum Janmikalum”, YK, 13:65, May 16, 1923; Karuvatt Nārāyanān Nambūṭiri, “Malabar Lahalayum Congressum Janmikalum”, YK, 13:68, May 26, 1923. (It is interesting to note that an earlier editorial of the UN had praised the Congress decision to take up the Khilāfat cause and had urged people all over Kerala to sympathize with the Muslim brethrens. UN, 2:2, Thulam 1096, p.56)

30 The Congressmen were criticized for attributing the tenancy question as the root cause of the rebellion and to get support for their tenancy agitation. Intervening in the discussion over the Malabar tenancy bill, Mūthiringōd rejected this presumption on the ground that if tenancy issue had been the real cause, the rebellion would originate as a tenant uprising and would spread over the whole region of Malabar; it did not affect north Malabar at all. See his “Oru Vimsaranam”, YK, 14:71; June 7, 1924. In fact, the general attitude taken by the Nambūtiris was closer to the theoretical position proposed by Stephen Dale. See his “Mappilla Outbreaks: Ideology and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Kerala”, Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXXV, No. 1, Nov. 1975, pp.85-97.

31 The article by one T.V. entitled “Nambūtirirūrum Congressum”, YK, 14:73; June 14, 1924; 14:74; June 18, 1924, cautioned the Nambūtiris in their association with the congress. Since the Nambūtiris were a minor community, backward in education, employment and politics, least influential and quite untrained in English language which had been empowering other communities, and since the Congress had been opposing the government, it was better for them not to cooperate with it. The Congress was also encouraging the tenants who were trying to seize the Nambūtiri property and was accusing them for the outbreak of the Māppīla revolt. The protection of the Nambūtiris lay only with the government. Though Gandhi was good, Congress was not truly Gandhian. Therefore the Congress was unfavourable for the interests of the Nambūtiris.

32 This sense of bewilderment was evident during the Salt Satyagraha of 1930; the marchers were careful to avoid the Māppīla tracts. See Robin Jeffrey, “Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940, Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, November 1978, p.85.
hostile communal passions and disturbed the relationship between the Hindus and Muslims as no other previous incident". Gradually, efforts were started to chalk out Hindu unity through various measures. This was the context in which Gandhian constructive programme came to occupy a place of prominence with an emphasis on the eradication of distance pollution. Still the Sabha and the Nambūtiris in general, opposed the Vaikam Satyagraha. Though the point of

33 Roland E Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala*, Madras, 1992, p.142. Swai alerted that though the Moplah tenants' disturbances have been regarded as religious, since those who participated in them were predominantly Muslims who believed that they were involved in a jihad, it has to be noted that their jihad was not aimed at proselytization but was intended to abolish exploitation, notwithstanding the fact that the janmis were largely Hindus. Bonaventure Swai, "Notes on the Colonial State with reference to Malabar in the 18th and 19th Centuries", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 12, July 1978, pp.60-61.


35 “The possibility of unifying the diverse caste movements under the umbrella of the Congress seemed possible only if Hinduism could be purified by the abolition of untouchability and everyone could enter it as equals... in the retreat from secular political activity after the Mappila Rebellion, the role of arbiter between castes presented the Malabar Congressmen with a programme”. Dilip Menon, *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India*, New Delhi, 1994, p.80. An editorial of the *UN*, before the launching of the Satyagraha, praised the decision of the prominent individuals of Travancore to discuss the temple-entry issue but cautioned that its success lay in gaining the consent of the 'respectable' sections of the (Hindu) society. *UN*, 3:3, Vrichikam 1097, p.91.

36 An editorial of the *UN* condemned the Satyagraha. While supporting the issue behind the agitation, it called upon the Satyagrahis to make use of other methods, especially a consensus of opinion, to solve the issue. It wrote: "We firmly believe that even today the best way to reform orthodox customs and obsolete practices is not to resort to Satyagraha or non-cooperation but to obtain the sanction of religious leaders to bring about salutary changes with the concurrence of the Maharaja. Forgetting this valuable path some overenthusiastic and intolerant people have imported men and money from British India into our country and have instilled animosity against our pure-hearted Maharaja by unjustifiably rebuking him and his government and by resorting to Satyagraha they have brought notoriety to Vaikam. We are greatly distressed at this event". (UN, 5:9, Edavam 1099, pp.398-99). In a few more editorials, the *UN* repeatedly scorned the Satyagraha. See *UN*, 6:3, Vrichikam 1100, pp.149-151; 6:5, Makaram 1100, pp.262-64; 6:6, Kumbham 1100, pp.317-20. It is really surprising to note that the *YK* wrote not less than 16 editorials against the Vaikam Satyagraha. See *YK*, 14:53, Apr.2, 1924 to 15:49, Mar 14, 1925. In an article, Paśchimān Rāman Nambūtiri praised the stand taken by the *YK* over the Vaikam issue and explained it as perfectly conforming to community interests. See his "Congressukārum Vaikam Satyāgrahavum", *YK*, 14: 68, May 28, 1924. After the withdrawal of the Satyagraha, the correspondent of *YK* reported that it was becoming difficult for the
opposition was the method adopted by the agitators, the realization that the national movement was antagonistic to Nambūtiri interests had persuaded them to take such a strong attitude.\(^{37}\)

An important factor that forced the Nambūtiris to take a cautious attitude towards the nationalist movement was their commitment to the British rule due to their position as landlords. It was not possible for them to alienate the British since their landed rights depended on the consent of the British and it was all the more expedient in the context of the strong pressures from the tenants for legislation. Though the Congress position on landlordism was not an imminent menace, the peculiar situation in Malabar was a cause of concern. Tenancy legislations had already been passed and there were demands to effect necessary amendments. This was the reason why the Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar turned out to be strictly political and not economic.\(^{38}\) Cooperation with the Congress was thus a difficult exercise; but to keep aloof from it involved the danger of being marginalized in the emerging public sphere.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{37}\) Nambūtiris to pass through the three roads of the temple, except the eastern one, for fear of defilement. *YK*, 15:78; June 27, 1925.

\(^{38}\) From its third volume, which was in Sep-Oct, 1921, i.e., the next issue after the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion, the *UN* stopped its column named “Samrajya Sandarsanam” (which was a review of the political situation in India and an evaluation of the major developments of the nationalist movement) and started its editorial column. A statement declared that they were forced to stop the column due to the prevailing political situation; thereafter they would concentrate on issues of communitarian interest. *UN*, 3:1, Kanni 1097, pp.2-3. The editorial of the same issue called upon the Hindus to find a solution to the problem of pollution and stressed the need of reconverting the Hindus who were forcefully converted to Islam. *Ibid*, pp.3-4.

\(^{39}\) In Malabar, the peasant proprietors or tenant cultivators did not pay land revenue to the government. The assessment was made with the janmis who paid the land revenue. In such a situation a no-tax campaign could be launched only by the landlords, but since most of the janmis were loyalists, a no-tax campaign was not possible. Strongly influenced by the Gandhian ideology, the Congress leaders in Malabar were not inclined to start a no-rent campaign. See K. Gopalankutty, “Mobilization Against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar”, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26:4, 1989, p.476.

\(^{39}\) This dilemma came to the fore in the context of the visit of Simon commission. The *Sabha* submitted a memorandum to the Commission for specially considering the Nambūtiris in spheres like education, employment, representation etc. When some protested against this (for fear of the Nambūtiris being branded as anti-national), an editorial of the *YK* justified
The educated Nambūtiris had realized that keeping away from the nationalist movement would adversely affect the political prospects of the Nambūtiris. Their exclusiveness in the past had already sidelined them in the public sphere. Their privileged position in the political realm had been fading out with the development of the new political culture and civil society. All those communities which were already politicized had started to reap benefits by gaining representation in the legislatures and by furthering their community interests through political maneuvering at the cost of the privileges of the dominant castes. In the prevailing social situation in which the Nambūtiris constituted only a microscopic minority, the defense of their rights needed concerted and wholehearted political intervention but through quite different measures taken by the lower castes. They should act as the representatives of the whole society and should capture the leadership of the entire population. Their late entry in community reform and in political affairs had made their task extremely difficult.

Owing to the peculiar character of their customs and the act on the ground that the Nambūtiris had always been the supporters of the monarchy, (YK, 19:47, Mar 6, 1929). Justifying the memorial, Pāṭirīssērī wrote that all communities were trying to protect their interests and since the constitution of the Sabha was against the ideals of the Congress, any change in its policy needed an amendment in the bylaw. (YK, 19:64, May 15, 1929). He added that the kind of political freedom promoted by the Congress was unsuitable for the interests of weaker communities like the Nambūtiris because they have not been availed of a respectable space in the political world. The participation of the Sabha in politics was strictly for the sake of the Sabha alone. (YK, 19:70, June 5, 1929). Protesting against the memorial to Simon, OMC Nambūtirīpād argued that in no distant past India would become independent. A change in the structure of the Sabha was hence necessary for associating it with the Congress. (YK, 19:69, June 1, 1929).

This factor had been a serious cause of concern for the Nambūtiris and had expressed itself through various forms. One of them was the denunciation of democracy as majority opinion; the other was an indictment against parliamentary system, both of which meant the capture of the traditional and legitimate rights of the Nambūtiris. This theory was applied to the tenancy issue and the temple entry agitation. See Kunhimangalath Manayil Vāsudēvan Tirumumb, “Congressukirum Janmikālum”, YK, 14:43, Feb.23, 1924; Editorials, YK, 14:93; Aug 27, 1924; 15:99, Sep 16, 1925; TV, “Nambūtirīmārum Congressum”, op.cit.

40 In his article “Nāmiṭṭayum Adhappathikkān Kāraṇamenthu?” (YK, 15:27, Dec.20, 1924), Mūthirṅōd observed that late entry into the field of reform had made the progress of the community very difficult; other communities had gone too far. In the preface of his “Kapṭirūm Kināvum” (VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.128) VT too shared this fact. He wrote: “The cock had already crowed twice heralding the new era of transformation. The crimson tint of the emerging dawn had painted the Kerala hill-top with saffron. Everyone -
institutions, they were forced to work more ardently and for a longer period than the other communities the success of their reform. Prolonged preoccupation with community reform was also a major cause for their belated entry in the political field. However, the 1930s saw a marked progress in the reform measures and several Nambūtiris became active in politics and they took the initiative in fostering unity between the community and the nationalist movement. The Sabha supported the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha and VT actively participated in it. Meanwhile E.M.S. moved on to the political sphere by entering into the Civil Disobedience Movement. However, may be because of the traditional lethargy to personal enterprise, or because of the difficulty in mingling with lower caste groups or due to the embarrassment in associating with the Congress as a second partner, many Nambūtiris were forced them to keep away from the national movement. The striking contrasts between the community movement and the nationalist movement also might have been a decisive factor; while the former was aimed at achieving formidable goals, like gaining family and property, the latter demanded the sacrifice of material pleasures for the sake of nation-building.

A new development that appeared in the political domain of Kēraḷa provided the Nambūtiris scope for a respectable space and an upper hand in politics. By the middle of the 1930s the left wing gained dominance within the Congress and the K.P.C.C. itself came under its control. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād emerged as the leader of this group and men like Pāndam, I.C.P, M.R.B, M.P, Arya Paḷḷam and many others began to associate with it actively. The factors which endeared the Nambūtiris to the communist party have been a matter of considerable debate; the radical character of the Nambūtiri movement may have been a very

the Nayar, the Thiyya and even the lowest among all, whom we had kept aloof as the scum of society, the Adiyān and the Kudiyān – had risen up and had lined up under the tricoloured banner of freedom. The Nambūtiri alone was conspicuous by his absence. He was sitting on his door-step chewing betel leaves and arecanut”.

important factor. Still, V.T. continued as a Congressman and a Gandhian. He observed that the absence of legitimate and individual claim on the joint property of the illam might have created an ideological environment for the Apphan Nambūtiris to align with other dispossessed classes and got attracted towards communism. However, not all radicals were attracted to communism; several of them continued to be Congressmen. He also noted that not just poor Nambūtiris were attracted towards communism; both the poor and the rich, and even intellectuals, were attracted to it. But the attraction of the Nambūtiris

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43 Jeffrey noted that a vigorous Communist Party grew out of earlier movements for basic civil rights. Radicalized by the campaigns of the previous years, growing number of people began to reject the attempts of their middle class castemen to use them as cannon fodder in communal pressure groups. Robin Jeffrey, “Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1869-1940 – The Temple Entry Movement” in Robin Jeffrey ed., People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States, Delhi, 1978, p.136. Elsewhere Jeffrey suggested that the structural and ideological props of society were destroyed by the reform movements of modern Kerala and men and women were unsettled and displaced against their will. Marxism in Kerala came to fill an ideological void keenly felt by thousands of literate, alienated people. Given glaring class divisions, high rates of literacy and heavy population density, what was crucial in directing Malayalis toward communism was the breakdown of the social system. Robin Jeffrey, “Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party in Kerala, 1930-1940, Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 1, November 1978, p.78. In a similar way Mayer explained the fascination of young Nambūtiris and Nāyars to Communism the result of a frustration and boredom which was spreading among them because they had left their tārawāds and had no proper jobs. Adrian C. Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, Bombay, 1952, p.136. In a dissenting note to Jeffrey, M.P.S. wrote that the leadership of the communist movement in its early stages was provided by men who came from well-to-do families with a strong educational background. Some of them, moreover, hailed from patrilineal Nambūtiri and Christian families. M.P. Sreekumāran Nair, “Decline or Revitalization?” Journal of Kerala History, Vol. IV, Part II, 1977, p.497.

44 Responding to the question why V.T. did not become a Communist, P.G. remarked that basically he was not opposed to Communism and that on many occasions he had cooperated with them. Even his association with the Congress and the rationalist movement was a revolutionary measure. P. Govinda Pillai, “VT Oru Kalāpakāri”, Mānava Samskriti Annual, June-July 2005, pp.13-14.


46 Gopalan Kutty et.al, op.cit, p.244. May be from his own experience, VT observed that it is unfair to conclude that the rich Nambūtiris sided with the Congress and the poor with the
towards communism stands justified by the dynamics of the Nambūtiris movement, that in the 1930s the Nambūtiris were looking out for a commanding position in the public sphere, and the political domain, which they found very difficult to achieve in the given circumstances; a shift to communism would enable them to gain an upper hand.\(^\text{47}\) The fact that even the communist Nambūtiris were considerably motivated by communitarian interests is revealed by the revival of the *Sabha* at Öngallūr under the auspices of the communists. They cautioned the community of the danger of being lethargic and proposed a programme to achieve an economic revival with a focus on protecting the property they were holding.\(^\text{48}\)

VT’s association with the nationalist movement started with his participation in the Ahmedabad annual conference of the Congress in January 1921 when he

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\(^{47}\) Dilip Menon observed that it was more an organizational move than an ideological one. The discipline that Marxist/socialist ideology provided allowed the communists to take over the political organizations of the Congress by 1939. They became ‘communists’ first and then discovered Marxism. Dilip Menon, “Being a Brahmin the Marxist Way: E.M.S. Nambūtiripad and the Past of Kerala”, in Daud Ali ed., *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1999, p. 57. Menon also suggests that the Communist Nambūtiris had an inclination towards communitarian interests since their entry into politics was preceded by an active involvement with the reform movement within their own community. Even the attempts of E.M.S. at the reinterpretation of the history of Kerala in the 1940s and ‘50s may have been a negotiation of Nambūtiri identity at a time when Brahmans were under siege in South India. *Ibid*, p.61. Even a known communist like MRB later expressed considerable doubt over the reason behind his affiliation to the movement. He writes: “Was I gradually becoming a follower of Communism? I cannot say... Was Communism really good for the world? I didn’t know. But I was sure that servitude in whatever form was a scourge...Nowhere except in Communism could I visualize a concerted effort to exterminate the evil forces of repression. It was not the rosy dream of the formation of a communist ministry that led me to dedicate myself for the emancipation of the world”. MRB, “Ennilēkkō Pinnilēkkō”, *Māṭrubhumi Weekly*, 66:45, 15 Jan. 1989, p.20.

\(^{48}\) Personal conversation, K.C.K. Nambūtiri (aged 90), Öngallūr, 25 Sep. 2005; M.C. Nambūtiripad (Active participant of the Öngallūr Sabha and younger brother of Mūthiringōd), Triśūr, 11 November 2005. K.C.K. Nambūtiri told that Nambūtiris were attracted to Communism because it was not opposed to the Nambūtiri interests. Factors such as the leadership of E.M.S, radical bent of the Nambūtiri movement and the fact that the leadership and the agenda of the Congress organization was decided by men from other communities stimulated the process. The revival of the *Sabha* at Öngallūr considerably promoted this transformation. Personal Conversation,
was a school student.\textsuperscript{49} He also attended the first Conference of the All Kerala Congress Committee at Ottapalam in April 1921.\textsuperscript{50} Thereafter till the beginning of the Guruvayur Satyagraha, V.T. did not associate himself with the congress activities but had shown considerable interest in Gandhian ideals and in the anti-pollution measures. VT’s indifference to political nationalism has been explained with reference to his preoccupation with social reform engagements; for he had realized that political involvement should necessarily be preceded by an urgent social reform; that it was futile to demand political freedom unless the prevailing evils of his community were eliminated; that with the reform of the Nambūtiris the reform of the society would be considerably easier.\textsuperscript{51} VT himself argued that he found social reform as an integral part of the nationalist movement and hence he felt the Sabha as ‘Congress in its miniature’.\textsuperscript{52} It is highly probable that like most other Nambūtiris of the period, VT’s active association with the Congress was interrupted by the outbreak of the Malabar Rebellion and the devastation it caused to the morale of the community enforcing the Nambūtiris to rethink on the efficacy of unrestricted involvement in the national movement.\textsuperscript{53} Though being a product of the community

\textsuperscript{49} VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.225.

\textsuperscript{50} APP Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.55.


\textsuperscript{52} See VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.526. VT claimed his role in the social reform movement equal to the role of the freedom fighters. He explained that though he was not ready to face lathi-charges or to face imprisonment by getting involved in political struggles, the hardships and distress attendant to social reform activities were not basically different since it involved painful alienation from relatives and neighbours. Devika observed that men like VT considered their work to be ‘nationalist’ in the sense of preparing the members of their castes to become subjects of the nation, full participants in a pan-Indian culture. See J. Devika, “En-gendering Individuals: the Project of Nambūtiri Brahmin Reform in Kerala”, Journal of South Indian History, 1:2, March-August 2004, p.85.

\textsuperscript{53} His negative references to the Māppilas and the Malabar Rebellion may serve to substantiate this point. His first story “Vishukkettam” was written in the context of the Malabar rebellion and against the material and moral wounds it had created on the psyche of the community. See Ibid, pp.55-58. E.M.S. wrote that the rebellion had a two-way impact. One was the feeling that Māppilas could not be trusted. Second, it caused to create a strong attitude against Gandhi, non-cooperation and the Congress. Amakkatha, p.43. But his personal experience was different; Māppilas were entrusted to guard his illam during the uprising.
movement and equally concerned over the plight of the Nambūtiris during the days of the reform, the writings of EMS are marked by highly radical views and the absence of this prejudice.\textsuperscript{54} Even after the initial success of the community reform measures and of his repeated urge to the Nambūtiris to participate in the national movement to hasten the formation of a united Kērala, VT did not involve himself in any political struggle but rather busied himself with his commune project.\textsuperscript{55} He was never active in the Congress afterwards; he was not a party to the Aikya Kērala movement and in the post-independence era he emerged as a strong critic of party politics of all variety.\textsuperscript{56}

\textit{Ibid}, p.42. May be because of the lack of such an experience or an undue reliance on the community version of the rebellion, or due to a complex of other factors, VT had developed a rancour against the Muslims.

\textsuperscript{54} He wrote: "It is to the illiterate backward Moplah of the Ernad and Walluvanad taluks that the honour goes of having raised the initial voice of protest against the oppression of the Janmi". (\textit{A Short History of the Peasant Movement in Kerala}, Bombay, 1943, p.1). He gave two explanations for the question why the revolt was confined to Māppila peasants. First, the Māppilas as a community had a much higher sense of organization than the Hindus. Second, they had more reason to rally round the Congress and Khilāfat than the Hindus (\textit{Ibid}, p.10). Though these are not sufficient to explain the communal, anti-Hindu turn to the later stages of the Rebellion, the class analysis provided by him greatly outstripped the highly emotional perception of VT. On the basis of the observation that majority of the Māppilas did not participate in the rebellion and that communal violence was only marginal and negligible compared to the volume of the rebellion, VT’s approach appears greatly prejudiced. See Robert. L. Hardgrave, Jr, “The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar” in \textit{Modern Asian Studies}, 11:1, 1977, pp.97-98. Moyarath Šaṅkaran in his memoirs treated the revolt as a purely political act. See Moyarath Šaṅkaran, \textit{Entē Jeevithakatha}, Kozhikode, 1965, pp.161-62.

\textsuperscript{55} There is an interesting anecdote. I.C.P. wrote that E.M.S, before his departure to Calicut, for his participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement, handed over his gold wrist-watch to VT and requested him to stick on to social reform and to utilize the price of the watch for the same. (\textit{Viplavathinte Uthudippukal}, p.50) Some people explain VT’s indifference to party politics with reference to this story; that his commitment to E.M.S. forced him to stick on to the social domain. See Civic Chandran, “Enthukoṇdu VT?” \textit{Mātrubhūmi Weekly}, Dec.26, 1999. The episode is also referred to by C.R. Kesavan Vaidyar, “Kṣoḥbhikkunna Manuṣyasnehi”, \textit{Viśēkōdayam}, Vol. 10, No. 27-28, May 23, 1976. Vaidyar maintains that it was a sort of binding agreement between E.M.S. and VT.

\textsuperscript{56} O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād, “VT-Chila Smaranakal”, \textit{Viśēkōdayam}, Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.32. VT’s political attitudes run strikingly parallel to that of Kēḻappan. His preference to Gandhian constructive programme, liberal communalist stand (his involvement in the Angādipūram temple issue and opposition to the formation of Malappuram district, for instance), strong hostility to communism (he was very active in the “Viṃōchana Samaram”) and his aloofness from politics in the post independence era, all would compel a comparison with VT. For details see, M.P. Manmadhan, \textit{Kēḻappan},
Those who present VT as a great nationalist and a true Gandhian have missed the point of the total absence of a critique of colonialism in his works.\textsuperscript{57} Though he had placed himself in the context of the communitarian reform and the emerging nationalism, he refused to link them with the colonial situation. This may not be surprising in the prevailing condition of the British patronage of the Nambūtiris and as a ‘minority’ looking towards them for ‘protection’. VT’s indifference to politics of the post-independence era also might have induced him not to refer to the colonialism/nationalism binary.\textsuperscript{58} Even in the 1930s when he repeatedly pleaded to the Nambūtiris to be active participants in the nationalist movement, he was directing them to enter into the social struggle, particularly in the anti-pollution agitation. As priests and the custodians of custom, the attitude of the Nambūtiris had been a great impediment to the development of a civil society which in turn was harmful for the Nambūtiris too. While it obstructed their own material progress, it made them the targets of popular opposition. Therefore, VT’s crusade against pollution had in fact benefitted his own community since, by rescuing the Nambūtiris from the wrath of the lower castes, it simultaneously saved them from being the chief agents promoting conversion of the lower castes to other religions.

\textsuperscript{57} This is in sharp contrast to the autobiography of E.M.S. where he placed himself in the wider context of the declining Nambūtiri community, the dominant colonial system and the emerging Nationalist Movement. With reference to his earlier works, this lacuna might be justified since “even in the 1930s the Congress leaders in Malabar did not attempt a rigorous analysis of the British rule”. (K. Gopalankutty, “Mobilization Against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar”, \textit{The Indian Economic and Social History Review}, 26:4, 1989, p.460). But it is surprising to notice the absence of a colonial critique even in his memoirs which appeared in the post-independence era.

\textsuperscript{58} Despite politics being the new civil medium through which popular issues like social equality and empowerment of the downtrodden could be materialized, VT’s opposition to it is really disturbing. In fact VT stood for finding temporary solutions for the immediate grievances; he was not in favour of a restructuring of the social system.
VT’s political ideology is explicit from his Ultruddhakērālam experiment; it reveals his attitude: he preferred to concentrate on the social sphere neglecting political struggles.\textsuperscript{59} But even his engagement with the social issues was marked by a note of caution regarding the course social change had to take. It also explained the nature of the impact of the nationalist movement on his thought process. He was highly influenced by the Gandhian utopia and the model of the feudal village life. Rather than solving the existing social and political issues through modern methods of social transformation, VT tried to bypass them through an imaginary model of a commune which from the theoretical perspective was a withdrawal from the civil society.\textsuperscript{60} It was also noted for its exclusive character since it accommodated only the socially and politically enlightened sections. Even in the historical sense it was not progressive; the colony started by Kittappan as early as 1921 was meant for Harijan welfare; we have no evidence of Harijan presence at Ultruddhakērālam. The claim of the commune as a step towards the formation of Aikya Kērala is flimsy because of its exclusive character; it excluded not only the Harijans but the non-Hindus as well.\textsuperscript{61} Nor was there any attempt to link the commune with the contemporary political developments.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{59} Chatterjee writes: “Gandhism finally reconciled the contradictions between the utopian and the practical aspects of its political ideology by surrendering to the absolute truthfulness and supreme self-sacrifice of the satyagrahi. It had gained its strength from an intensely powerful moral critique of the existing state of politics. In the end it saved its truth by escaping from politics”. Partha Chatterjee, “Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society” in *Subaltern Studies*, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p.189.

\textsuperscript{60} It explained VT’s inability to come out of the feudal vision. Undue emphasis on family, morality and traditional values and the nostalgic ideal of a self-sufficient village life have been identified as the greatest impediments to social progress and to the liberation of the downtrodden. See K. Dāmōdaran, *Manusya*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1951, pp.105-06.

\textsuperscript{61} It has been argued that since VT had been speaking about the possibilities of a united Kerala for some time, the commune was a step towards achieving this goal. See I.V. Babu, “M.R.B-yude Pravārthanam Oru Vilayiruthal” in M.N. Vijayan ed., *M.R.B: Jīvitam, Kritikal, Darśanam, Trīssūr*, 2004, pp. 89-90. Babu takes the same position in his PhD work *The Social, Political and Cultural Results of the Nambūtiri Renaissance*, University of Calicut, 1996.

\textsuperscript{62} It is noted that Gandhi’s conception of politics did not envision a bourgeois civil society or a modern state with a representational form of government. Gyan Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India*, New Delhi, 2000, p.220.
VT's outlook on politics in the post-independence era substantiated his general negative attitude to popular politics and representative government and displayed striking similarities with the position of Gandhi on the issue. He observed the new political culture from the point of view of mounting violence and immorality including corruption. For him democracy was a farce; a play of the 51% against the 49; and a mockery by the power-hungry politicians. The alternate ideal he presented was really utopian and reactionary — the temple-centered agrarian village life directed by dharmic values. He did not refer to the place that would be occupied by various social classes in such a civil society nor how the feudal dharmic values could be made use of for the promotion of a modern social order. He also refused to acknowledge how modern politics provided the non-privileged a say and a space in their own governance and the way it promoted their welfare. In fact what disillusioned many people like him was the development of a new culture in which politics was conducted "not in landlords' houses but in the streets and fields".

63 Parliament, for instance, Gandhi called "a sterile woman and a prostitute", the first because despite being a sovereign institution it cannot enact a law according to its own judgment but is constantly swayed by outside pressures, and the second because it continually shifts its allegiance from one set of ministers to another depending on which is more powerful. But basically Gandhi objects to an entire structure of politics and government in which each individual is assumed to have his own individual interest, individuals are expected to come together into parties and alliances in terms of those self-interests, these combinations of interests are then supposed to exert pressure on each other by mobilizing public opinion and manipulating the levers of the government machinery, and legislative enactments are then expected to emerge as choices made on behalf of the whole society. Gandhi refused to accept the argument that if effective combinations are formed among individuals and groups sharing a set of common self-interests, then the institutions of representative democracy will ensure that the government will act in ways which are in the common interests of the entire collectivity. Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in Subaltern Studies Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, pp.163-64.

64 VTudē Sampūrṇa Kritika, pp.506, 529, 641. VT observed that significant issues like prohibition, forced religious conversion or ban on cow slaughter should never be decided by the balance of 51%-49% votes; rather they ought to be decided by true democracy (i.e. by seeking the majority opinion of the total (Hindu) population).

65 See VTudē Sampūrṇa Kritika, pp.501, 521 and 529.

66 See VTudē Sampūrṇa Kritika, pp.448-51; 455-58; 529-31.

If VT was a conditional partner of the Congress and the Nationalist movement, he was stubbornly opposed to Communism. In his manifesto of anti-communism, he branded it as foreign, dogmatic, rigid and hypocritical. He found that the element of servitude involved in it ran counter to the cherished ideal of individual liberty; in his appraisal of Gandhism he found the absence of this factor as providing it an added value and as extending a space for his ideal concept of the ‘absolute’ and ‘dharmic’ man. But his preference to Gandhism was more due to its insistence on tradition than to its appeal to true human love or individual liberty. Elsewhere he had stated that Gandhism was conveyed to him as a purely religious doctrine and its ideal of trusteeship captivated him because of its close similarity with the Nambūtirī tradition.

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68 In a note of extreme disdain, VT wrote: “Sometime ago, E.M.S. Nambūtiripād conducted a Saptāham at Ongallīr in order to humanize the Nambūtirī. For E.M.S, humanizing the Nambūtirī meant making him a communist. In order to accomplish this aim, he started a Work Centre for the Antārjanams. Though it had the innocent name, it was really a centre for baptizing Nambūtirīs into communists. Despite these efforts, had the Nambūtirīs been humanized at all?...The hammer and sickle entrusted to us by E.M.S. is not to be used to chop-off the head of other people but should be used to destroy one’s own ignorance and conceit”. Māṭrubhūmī Daily, 4-11-1970, cited in A.V. Sreekumar, VT, p.236.


70 Ibid, p.480-81. VT’s friend Dāmōdana maintained that VT was depressed over the decline of the ‘dharmic’ man. Both the capitalists and the communists rallied behind ‘economic’ man causing to bring about a moral decay. See N. Dāmōdana, “Entē VT”, in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, op.cit, p.111.

71 Kēlappan opposed socialism for its denial of individual liberty; nor was equality possible in a society where the scope for individual liberty does not exist. Equality was anti-natural too because individual capacities differ greatly. K. Kēlappan, “Sāmyavāda Siddhāntam”, Māṭrubhūmī Weekly, 12:17, 9 July 1934, pp.4-5. He later explained his indifference to the socialists in their opposition to truth and non-violence. Māṭrubhūmī, 26 May and 14 Sep. 1938. Similarly, Vaḷḷathō opposed Communism on account of its appeal to violence. C. Govinda Kurup, “Vaḷḷathōum Communisavum”, Māṭrubhūmī Weekly, 44:23, 21 Aug. 1966, p.32. It is observed that rather than seeing non-violence as a form of struggle, the Congress leaders including Kēlappan elevated it to an ideal which for them was more important than the struggle itself. K. Gopalankutty, “The Task of Transforming the Congress: Malabar, 1934-40”, Studies in History, 5:2, n.s., 1989, p.184.

72 VTyudē Sampūṛṇa Kṛitiṇa, pp.479, 526. Gandhi’s opposition to communism was more from the cultural and nationalist standpoints. He wrote: “...Let us study our Eastern
In analyzing the attitudes and ideology of VT, a factor of considerable importance is the volume of his intellectual capacity. VT’s close friends have acknowledged his own statement that he was rather an emotional being and not an intellectual being. VT’s writings are marked by the absence of a theoretical perception and he appears to have missed a clear ideology and philosophy; he was highly influenced by certain abstract ideals but within the framework of a strong communitarian vision. Even Gandhism was not his ideal. This intellectual bewilderment differentiated VT from E.M.S. His later attachment to tradition and emphasis on cultural revivalism may have been accentuated by the frustration created out of this intellectual incapacity.

5:3. Secular Ethos and Sectarian Concerns

VT is generally treated as a great secularist. His appeared in the public with a commitment to the ideals of the civil society as early as the 1920s; he had freed himself from the traditions of his caste, had abandoned all caste symbols and had championed the cause of the whole society. It was not a mere verbal exercise; he worked in association with the S.N.D.P. activists, disregarded the prevailing rules of pollution and dined them at home. He frowned at the outmoded rituals and fought against the clergy. He attacked caste/religious orthodoxy and had been forced to live as an outcast in his community. He was very active in the temple-entry movement and Harijan welfare measures and strongly pleaded that the Sabha should be disbanded and the Nambūtiris should start working for the institutions in that spirit of scientific inquiry and we shall evolve a truer socialism and truer communism than the world has yet dreamed of. It is surely wrong to presume that Western socialism or communism is the last word on the question of mass poverty”. Again, “Class war is foreign to the essential genius of India which is capable of evolving a form of communism broad-based on the fundamental rights of all and equal justice to all”. CW, Vol. 58, pp. 219, 248 cited in Partha Chatterjee, “Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society” in Subaltern Studies, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p.192.

72 See VT’s statement to this effect in ibid. Personal conversation with VT’s close friend N. Dāmōdaran, Valāncēr, June 18, 2000 confirms this fact.
73 I.C.P. wrote: “...We became communists and daringly marched forward. VT faltered; his hesitation to make a breakthrough limited his activities to that of a mere humanist”. “VTyudē Karṇakāṇḍam”, Dēśābhīmāni Weekly, 22:27, Nov.12, 1995, p.37.
uplift of the downtrodden. He worked enthusiastically in the nationalist movement and was highly influenced by the Gandhian ethics of communal harmony and Sarvodaya. He got his sister married to a low caste man, led a jātha to propagate mixed marriages and even declared his willingness to become a Muslim if it would benefit that community. He was highly motivated by radical humanism and rationalism. He denounced superstitious religion and urged for a rational religion. He could not have chosen any ideology other than secularism.

Of course VT was ‘ultra-secular’ when compared to many of his contemporaries. In the 1920s he created strong personal and organizational ties

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76 Personal conversation, V.M. Koṭṭh, Farook College, 8-4-2003.
77 In his ideology and political outlook, VT was highly indebted to Kēṭappan and he duly acknowledges his obligation. Kēṭappan, in his article on the Vaikam Satyagraha, justifies the struggle in the context of the increasing tendency of the lower castes, especially Izhavas, to renounce Hinduism. (K. Kēṭappan, “Vaikam Satyagraham”, Māṭrubhūmi Oneam Special, 1925, pp.42-45). In another article written around the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha, he expressed great concern over the harms caused by conversions. This article is specially noted for Kēṭappan’s assessment of Muslims as the ‘other’; they are seen as a threat to the nation and national unity; this was mainly for the organized structure of the Muslim community and their stress on international brotherhood. (K. Kēṭappan, “Mathavum Samudāyavum: Mathaparirathana Śramam Koṇḍuḷa Dōsam”, Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 10:17, 18 July 1932, pp.7-8). In the second part of the article (“Mathavum Samudāyavum: Oru Swarājya Government Cheyyendathenthell?” Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 10:20, 8 Aug.1932, pp.4-5, 10) he emphasized the need of relegating personal religion to the background to promote national interests. He expressed doubts over the social utility of temples and mosques (churches too?) and identified them as institutions of exploitation and divisiveness and for impinging individual liberty. He suggested a 12-point programme to control religion and to make it conform to national interests. At the end of the Guruvāyūr Satyagraha, Kēṭappan urged to found a memorial for the struggle combining a rescue home for children, a hostel for Harijan girls and a home for the aged and the insane. (“Agathikalkku Oru Rakṣāmandiram”, Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 10:43, 16 Jan. 1933, pp.8-9, 20). In all these articles Kēṭappan appear as a strong exponent of nationalism, humanitarian and rational sentiments but in a subsequent article he questioned the infallibility claims of rationalism. He wrote that human knowledge was defective, scientific theories were periodically altered, and rationalism was based on the 19th century science. He concluded that it was absurd to deny God; after all one can only be agnostic and rational in religious faith. K. Kēṭappan, “Yuktivādam”, Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 12:27, 17 Sep. 1934, pp.4-6. He clarified later his position by stating that he was opposed to rationalism because it was becoming a kind of religion. (Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 12:27, 29 Oct. 1934, pp.9-10, 30)
78 Tampan wrote that the period was marked by intense radicalism; everyone was vying with the other to excel in it. It was not confined among individuals but even communities were competing to become rationalistic. This trend was due to two factors: the sweeping impact
with Ayyākkutty and Sahodaran Ayyappan and at Mangalōdayam he treated even his Izhava subordinates on equal terms, with utmost sympathy and understanding. He had an array of friends from all castes and communities. As an activist of the Sabha, VT wanted its outlook to be broad enough not only to instill the spirit of secularism in the Nambūtiris but also to forge an understanding in them of the various problems of other communities. He urged the Nambūtiris to renounce their caste exclusiveness or else they would be socially alienated as in the case of the Tamil Brahmins of Kērala. He wanted the Nambūtiris to accept the new system of education, to enter into a profession or job, to modernize customs and rituals, to liberate the Antarjanams enabling them to adapt to new situations and to interact with women of other communities, to enter into the nationalist movement and to contribute to the nation-building process. His drama was a manifestation of all these ideals. He wanted the Nambūtiris to emulate other communities in the realm of education, employment and in organizational matters.

of nationalism and the rising radicalism of the lower orders. He reveals sufficiently clearly that, in this respect, communities and individuals were driven by their selfish interests. M. Rāmavarma Tampān, "Kēralathilē Samudāya Pariśkāram", Māṭrubhāumi Weekly. 9:8, 7 March 1932, pp.4, 25.

79 Ayyappan played a very decisive role in instilling secular and nationalist ethos among the Izhavas. See M. Sahadevan, Towards Social Justice and Nation-Making, Palakkad, 1993, pp.64-70. However, Ayyappan opposed the religious conversion agenda of C.V. Kunjurāman and C. Krishnan and, just like T.K. Madhavan, was a strong votary of the Hindu faith. See C. Kesavan, Jivitasamaram, Kottayam, 1990, pp.254-55.

80 Vidyūdē Sampūrya Kṛitiṇa, p.547. They have been keeping up their exclusivity and did not show any interest in social or political movements.

81 The Nambūtiris were attracted towards the anti-untouchability movement by their community interests. Cooperation with the constructive programme was an extension of the community reform agenda because the norms of ritual pollution had been retarding material progress of the community. Kolenda noted that it was practically impossible to maintain pollution rules in modern occupational contexts. The need for 'ritual neutrality' in the public places forced many to strive for relaxation of pollution restrictions. See Pauline Kolenda, "Caste in India Since Independence" in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson ed., Social and Economic Development in India-A Reassessment, New Delhi, 1986, p.116. Similarly, Shea observed that among the traditional barriers to economic development, the most serious were the lack of effective social communications and their discouraging influence on entrepreneurial morale. See Thomas W. Shea, Jr., "Barriers to Economic Development in Traditional Societies: Malabar, A Case Study", Journal of Economic History, XIX: 4, December 1959, p.509.
In the beginning of the 1930s when the community reform measures made a breakthrough and when he started getting closer to the issues of Harijan welfare and temple-entry, VT justified it as the moral duty of the Nambūtiris to uplift the downtrodden.\(^8^2\) The 1920s were notable for the great debates on pollution and caste inequality and the rhetoric of the Izhavas on conversion as the means of social emancipation.\(^8^3\) “If the problem of ‘untouchability’ caused such a fierce controversy in Hindu society”, observed Nirmal Verma, “it is because the shudras, though an assimilated part of the caste system, always remained very much on the periphery of the society, not really outsiders like the mlechchas, but not exactly ‘insiders’ either”.\(^8^4\) Although the debates over conversion were focused on Buddhism, and not to Christianity or Islam, it was a threat to the

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\(^8^2\) VT’s story “Chettachāla” was a forceful statement of his faith in philanthropy; an upper caste man is portrayed as helping a Cherumi and her son by giving her clothes and by financially assisting the boy for his education. Perhaps the story would help explain his ideology of Harijan upliftment. See *UN* 15:13, Jan 5, 1934, p.2. Sankarji’s story ‘Nambūtiriyudē Bhūtadayā’, *UN* 11:18, Oct. 25, 1929 also deals with a similar theme.

\(^8^3\) See C.V. Kunjurāman, “Thiyārku Nallathu Buddhathatham Thanneyāu”, *Mitavādi Special*, Vol. II, No.2, 1925, pp.6-24. He wrote many similar articles encouraging conversion as the means to social liberation. See his “Ī Gathikeṭṭā Ābhāsa Matham Namukku Vēṇḍā”, in P.K. Balakrishnan ed., *Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru*, Kottayam, 1969. C. Kesavan observed that C.V’s ‘bomb’ was decisive and had enforced the Travancore government to make the Temple Entry Proclamation. C. Kesavan, *Jivitasamaram*, Kottayam, 1990, pp.254-55. But others like Ayyakkutty, Ayyappan and Kumāran Āsān opposed conversion (See *ibid*). Kumāran Āsān stated that he was not a votary of religious conversion but stood for religious reform. N. Kumāran Āsān, *Mataparivartana Rasāvādam*, Thonnakkal, 1123. Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru also opposed conversions. “Swamy stemmed the tide of conversion by arguing that all religions were the same and it was the individual who had to lift himself up. He showed how one could do this by remaining a Hindu with the different ethic which he had legitimized”. M.S.A. Rao, “Changing Moral Values in the Context of Social-Cultural Movements” in Adrian C. Mayer ed., *Culture and Morality*, Delhi, 1981, p.204. Mannam is reported to have participated in the Vāikam Satyagraha mainly for finding a means to check conversions to Christianity. See Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in Travancore 1921-47*, New Delhi, 1994, p.59. Similarly, it is argued that the presence of the Christian missionaries and the fear of mass conversions were decisive in bringing about social reform measures in Travancore by the caste-Hindus as well as by the government. Koji Kawashima, *Missionaries and a Hindu State: Travancore 1858-1936*, New Delhi, 1988, pp.149-218.

dominant position of the caste-Hindus. The experience of the Vaikam Satyagraha and the later developments had led to great political and social maneuvering which made it very clear that Nambūtiris were becoming the targets of social criticism and attack. The Malabar Rebellion and the Trissur revolt had earlier revealed how conversions would affect the interests of the upper castes adversely. This had been the reason behind an increased interest over the future of Hinduism. The invitation extended to hardcore radicals like

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85 “Conversion to Buddhism was just an adoption of an ideology that is non-hierarchic. By becoming a Buddhist, one is not trying to raise one’s caste status, but is identifying with a non-caste ideology”. See Bernard S. Cohn, India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization, New Jersey, 1971, pp.140-41. Jeffrey explains the situation differently. A court decision of 1885 had ruled that converts in Travancore would not have any inheritance rights over their ancestral properties. While this difficulty of property and inheritance deterred prosperous Izhavas from conversion, the rigorous missionary view of marriage discouraged the poor and self-seeking. Moreover, as many Izhavas prospered, they were able cautiously to imitate the manners of Nāyars. A respected place in Hindu society was a more desirable goal than a doubtful Christian role between contemptuous Syrians and polluting Pulaya converts. Robin Jeffrey, “The Social Origins of a Caste Association, 1875-1905: The Founding of the SNDP Yōgam,” South Asia, Vol. 4, 1974, p.48. A report in the Sahādaran supported Jeffrey’s argument. But it added that Hinduism was preferable to any other religion for the kind of religious freedom it afforded. Therefore rather than going in for a change of religion, the Izhavas should work for the reform of Hinduism. See Sahādaran, 2:11-12, Menam-Medam 1095 (March-May 1920), pp.290-94.

86 The progress the Izhavas had made in the previous few decades under Sree Nārāyana Guru did not in any great measure mitigate their grievances, as the Guru’s advaita philosophy found no acceptance among caste Hindus, and his establishment of Izhava temples only helped to ghettoize them from the mainstream of Hindu life, thus in a way magnifying their distress. Thus they found themselves in a situation where they were totally disillusioned with Hinduism itself. It was understandable, then, why some of their leaders thought that the only way out of their misery was mass migration to non-Hindu religions. Cyriac K. Pulpilily, “The Izhavas of Kerala and Their Historic Struggle for Acceptance in the Hindu Society”, Journal of Asian and African Studies XI: 1-2, p.41.

87 In February 1921, a meeting of Congress-Khilafat volunteers was summoned at Trissur to protest against the arrest and imprisonment of four leaders of the Khilafat-Non-cooperation movement which resulted in clashes between the local Christians and the agitators. The Christians, who supported the government, tried to sabotage the meeting and it ended in a week-long riot in the town. See Mōzhikunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, Khilafat Smaranakal, pp.5-12. Mōzhikunnam narrated the incidents from the reports of the Yōgakṣēmam.


89 The Sabha, right from its beginning, had started showing concern over the future of Hinduism in the context of conversions to Christianity and Islam and the resultant declining
C.V. Kunjuräman, Ayyappan and Mannam to the annual meetings of the *Sabha* was also accentuated by this factor. In order to solve the crisis created by pollution and temple-entry issues, some kind of a realignment of caste-ties was necessary;\(^90\) compromises were possible and justifiable in the name of nationalism and humanism.\(^91\) Still, the voice of the Harijans were not heeded, there were no efforts to associate either Ayyankali or any other Pulaya in the *Sabha* deliberations.

Thus in the 1930s VT was highly captivated by the ideal of Hindu unity and, in the contemporary socio-economic environment, this was accentuated by the highly threatened Nambütiiri caste interests. In fact this was what that made the Nambütiiri radicals to cooperate with the constructive programme of the nationalist movement. The same factors might have inflamed VT’s radicalism during the Guruväýür Satyagraha;\(^92\) it was an opportunity to prove the number of Hindus. An article in *Mangalödayam* identified two reasons for this phenomenon – uncommon deaths and conversions. But conversions were seen as due to persuasion or for selfish ends. It recommended education to discourage conversions since it would convince various sections of people of their ‘swadharma’. See “Hindukkalude Gathi”, *Mangalödayam*, 1:2, Dhanu 1084, p.41-48. In the post-1921 period, rather than attempting to dispel the fears of the nationalist Muslims, some of the Congressmen were more concerned with those Hindus who had been converted to Islam and wished to reconvert them. In the Hindu Conference convened at Tirunavaya, which was sponsored by the Hindu Mahasabha, many prominent Congressmen participated and in the 43-member committee formed to ‘eradicate evils in the Hindu community’, 17 were Congressmen. See K. Gopalankutty, “Mobilization Against the State and not against the Landlords: The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar”, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26:4, 1989, p.473.

\(^90\) It was highly necessary too: “The Christian teaching was a challenge to Hinduism, and the best of Hinduism accepted the challenge. Relatively few of the students in the mission high schools and colleges became Christians – the main groups of converts were always from the depressed classes...” Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja: Social and Political Change in Travancore 1921-47*, New Delhi, 1994, p.52.

\(^91\) The Harijan welfare measures have been explained with reference to the ongoing Hindu-Muslim struggle in British India and the voting strength of the sixty million untouchables. Dick Cooman, *Communities and Electorates: a Comparative Discussion of Communalism in Colonial India*, Amsterdam, 1995, p.45; Louis Onwerkerk, *op.cit.*, p.56.

\(^92\) The basic limitation of the Guruväýür Satyagraha has been noted. Temple entry ‘continued to be seen within the paradigm of the ‘purification of Hinduism’ and the ‘conversion even of the most orthodox’ effectively limiting the political potential as well as the participation of anyone other than the upper castes. The untouchables were to be the admiring audience in this show of self-sacrifice and high ideals arranged for them...The political aspect of
credentials of the Nambūtiris on the issue of temple entry. But the failure of the Satyagraha frustrated him; its failure corresponded with the victory of the orthodox and was capable of hindering the cause of temple entry and the scope of Hindu unity, and would help to enliven the conversion issue. VT continued his temple-entry measures for some time more but lost interest in the issue once the temple-entry proclamation was passed.93

In the 1960s he began to associate with the rationalist movement.94 He found temples as centers of corruption and superstition and during the jātha conducted to propagate mixed marriages he urged the people to follow a rational religion. Still, VT was not an atheist, nor was he opposed to religion.95 He wanted to eliminate superstitions, to make religion rational and to make it idealistic as is seen from his attack on idolatry and superstitions.96 Like Gandhi, and Kējappan, he too renounced temple-worship but he surpassed Gandhi in his rationalist and agnostic position.97

untouchability had been ‘settled’ by the Poona Pact; only the religious aspect remained. This necessarily meant that those who were not Hindus could not ‘interfere’ with what was now defined as a ‘deeply religious movement’…” Dilip Menon, Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, New Delhi, 1994, p.115.

93 There was a report of a new temple being thrown open to all Hindus at the efforts of men including VT and at the presence of other Guruvāyūr Satyagrahis. Mātrubhūmi Weekly, 10:46, Feb.6, 1933. Though he was active in the Sabha after Ongallīr, he did not cooperate with the Pāliyam Satyagraha which was aimed at opening the road to the Pāliyam House for all people. The Satyagraha was led by the communists and the Sabha actively supported it. See Payyappalji Bālan, Pāliyam Satyagraha, TVM, 1997. But his earlier comrade Pāṇḍam Vāsudēvan Nambūtiri was very active in it. See Dēsābhīmāni, March 6, 1948 cited in Cherayi Ramadas “Pāliyam Samaravum Vivarāṇaṅgaḷum”, Kēralaṇapattanaṅgal, Vol.6, Jan.1997, p.164.


95 In his article “Entē Āstikyavum Nāstikyavum”, VTyūdē Sampūrṇa Krītikaḷ, pp.507-08, VT blatantly refused to state whether he was a believer or not for, according to him, no saint was able to tell the last word on it. In spite of his rationalism, he believed that only great men are able to make conclusive statements. Interestingly, he revealed that he used to pray but not for himself. In another article (“MC”, Ibid, pp.429-30), VT called for a rethinking on the main focus and basic ideals of the prevailing rationalist movement. He wrote that it should not simply be confined to issues such as religion and god, but it should develop as an outlook, an attempt to explore into things from a non-mechanical perspective.

96 See his article “Entē Yuktivādam”, Vīvēkōdayam Special Issue, May 23, 1976.

97 In a discussion involving the prominent persons of the period as to how they perceived God, VT defined Him as “A fear-inspiring, blind figure in eternity, shrouded in darkness”.


Though he was a skeptic and detested temple-worship, he was neither against caste nor against religion. He did not deny caste or religion in the same way he had denied god and temples. VT’s ideal of social equality or his secular posture did not mean a casteless or non-religious society as is evident from his later articles. His opposition to conversions is more striking particularly in

98 O.M.C. writes that VT was a good Hindu and had been respectful and zealous towards Indian culture. O.M.C. Nārāyaṇan Nambūṭiripād, “VT-Chila Smaranakal”, Vivekodayam, Vol. 14, Nos. 5, 6, May-June, 1982, p.31. Even Rammohan is reported to have defended Varnasramadhharma. See Bruce Carlyle Robertson, Raja Rammohan Roy: The Father of Modern India, Delhi, 1995, p.179.

99 During this period, Mannam and Kēlappan deserted their caste surnames (Mannath Padmanabha Pillai as Mannath Padmanabhan and Kēlappan Nair as Kēlappan). Kēlappan also resigned from NSS in an attempt to keep aloof from casteism and to promote social and political reform. See D.D. Nambūṭiri, “Caste and Social Reform Movement in Kerala”, in P.J. Cheriyandy ed., Kerala State Gazetteer Vol. II, Part II, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p.481. Mūthirigōd renounced his surname Bhattāṭhiriṇīpād and replaced it with Nambūṭiripād (he was one of the greatest votaries of a monolithic Nambūṭi community). There was no move from the side of VT towards this line. But his son does not have any such caste surnames (V.T. Vāṣudēvān). Sons of most of the reformers are known by their first names without having any caste-surnames.

100 The highly radical and philosophical contemporary interpretation of caste was made by Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru. Guru reinterpreted jati as biological species. In his encounter with Gandhi, he vehemently challenged chaturvarna. He also argued that since semen from any human male can impregnate any human female proves that ‘human’ is a species or jati. Caroline Osella and Philippo Osella, “Izhavas and the Micro-politics of Caste, or the Political in the Personal”, Journal of South Indian History, 1,2, Mar-Aug.2004, p.42. The radical Nambūṭiri version of caste may be the one represented by the position of Mōzhikunnam. He wrote that he did not want to renounce caste or to be circumscribed by it; he wanted an independent identity within his own caste. See his Khilafat Smaranakal, Kozhikkode, 1965, pp.212-13.

101 VT’s resentment to religious conversion is clear from his reference to two events. He vehemently opposed Uma Ben’s conversion to Islam and her remarriage to a Muslim and quarreled publicly with the man. The Ramasimhan case was more problematic. One Khan Saheb and his brother Ali Bappu were converted as Nambūṭiris with all formal rituals. Khan Saheb married an Antāṭjanam. But he and his wife were murdered. The culprits were acquitted on appeal. For a brief description of the event see T. Madhava Menon ed., A Handbook of Kerala, Vol. II, TVM, 2000, P.785. Khan Saheb’s father-in-law became a pauper due to the litigation. He used to visit VT. See VT Vāṣudēvān, “VTyudē Lokam” in Pālakkīzh Nārāyaṇan, op.cit, p.145. In an interview Vāṣudēvān told that VT had thought of writing a novel on this event, but he did not. Personal Conversation, Mēzhathūr, 12-2-2003.
the context of the radical position taken by many reformers advocating conversion of Antatjamams so that they may be emancipated from their hellish living conditions.\textsuperscript{102} In fact VT wanted to replace caste and religion with culture,\textsuperscript{103} as has been done by ‘Neo-Hindus’ like Bankim Chandra, Vivekananda, Aurabindo and Gandhi.\textsuperscript{104} In his later articles, he glorified many aspects of the feudal tradition which he had attacked earlier with a very strong sense of nostalgia. His controversial speech at the RSS meeting also is noted for its focus on ‘culture’ and cultural nationalism and it has been absolved of sectarian outlook because of the ‘absence’ of any communalist element in it.\textsuperscript{105}

VT himself explained that Hinduism was not a religion but a cultural tradition and a way of life.\textsuperscript{106} To glorify a culture which had its roots in caste-based hierarchy and in the total absence of a democratic tradition, the replacement of religion with culture does not make any advance. Though VT is treated as a hardcore secularist and anti-caste by conviction, he had retained a highly casteist and elitist social outlook sufficiently helpful in promoting cultural nationalism. This sort of an intellectual position is the most fertile environment that could be used by the exponents of communalism.\textsuperscript{107}


\textsuperscript{103} P.K. Balakrishnan wrote: ‘...VT’s religion was nothing but the framework of a culture...’ See his preface to the article of Mūthisingōd in his own edited work Sree Nārāyaṇa Guru, Kottayam, 1969, p.314.


\textsuperscript{106} VT’s Palakkad Speech cited by Akkitham in “Manuṣyaṇe Nambūtiriyakkān” in V.T-yē Kandēthal, pp.36-38; VT’s Diary, courtesy, V.T. Vāsudevān.

\textsuperscript{107} For instance, Akkitham argued that though VT was not an RSS activist, he sympathized with it and some of his attitudes, like vegetarianism and tea-totalism, perfectly matched with
VT’s concept of secularism cannot be understood without a reference to the kind of rationalist thought current in those days.¹⁰⁸ It was neither anti-religious nor totally anti-traditional; it envisaged a religion free of irrational customs and blind superstitions.¹⁰⁹ Hinduism was taken as a set of values and ideals which were rational and hence eternal. Though these (Hindu) values and ideals had decayed considerably in course of time, the Nambūtiris were still considered to be the fountainhead of them which other castes were supposed to emulate.¹¹⁰ When heated discussion over nambūrītham arose and many radicals observed that it was the chief factor that hindered the progress of the Nambūtiris,¹¹¹ VT did not refer to it at all but later on gave it a new interpretation.¹¹² For many

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¹⁰⁸ No reform movement of the period was able to ignore the powerful rationalist thought which was getting popular. The first rationalist movement in India, namely Sahodararangham, originated in Kerala under Sahōdaran Ayyappan in 1917 and the first rationalist publication, Yuktivadi, appeared in 1929, under M.C. Joseph. U. Kalanādhan, “Kēraṭhialē Yuktivāḍa Prasthānatam”, Dēśābhīmāṇi Suppmtent, 5 July 2000.

¹⁰⁹ In his article “Samyavādavum Mathavum” (Māṭrubhūmi Weekly, 12:26, 10 Sep.1934, pp.7-8), Kējappan defended Hindu religion by arguing that there is no connection between caste and Hinduism and denounced the tendency to repudiate religion in the name of caste disparities. He argued that anything, including religion, would decay gradually and referred to the case of the Muslim priests who used to exploit believers in the name of religion.

¹¹⁰ In many respects, VT seems to share the position held by Rammohun Roy on Hinduism. The basic outlines of Roy’s reconstructed Hinduism consisted of the rejection of idolatry, Brahman priests and rituals; for him God and His existence were proven by the complexity of reality. The rational and highly ethical vision of Hinduism had been lost over the centuries through the unfortunate influence of Brahman priests. Roy would return Hinduism to its past purity. Once proper belief was re-established, erroneous customs would disappear. For him, religion could not be judged solely on its own internal scriptural evidence, but it must also be measured by reason and shown to be free of contradiction and functioning to uphold a beneficial social order. See Kenneth W. Jones, Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India, New Delhi, 1994, pp.31-32.

¹¹¹ VT’s son recalls that VT used to speak of humanism as the ideal, which he held nobler than Nambūtiriness. V.T. Vāsuvedāvan, “Vtyudē Dhārma Śaṅkataṅga”, Malayāḷa Manorama Weekly, 45:2, 8 Jan. 2000, p.3. Humanism was in fact taken as a higher form of Nambūtiriness. In his welcome speech at the 21ª annual meeting at Mavēlīkkara, Subrahmanyam Pōṭti asked the Nambūtiris not to be trapped by words like swadhamānuṣṭānam and Nambūrītham; since no one had defined them satisfactorily; it was an orthodox subterfuge to counter the reform process. See YK, 19:29 Jan. 2, 1929. In his Īngallār speech, E.M.S. called upon the Nambūtiris to abandon at least that amount of Brāhmaṇyam sufficient enough to instill in them the essential ideals of work and labour. See “Nambūtiriyē Manaṣyaṇākkān”, EMS-nte Sampūrṇa Kritikal, pp.291-92.

¹¹² In his speech VT urged the Nambūtiris to refashion the existing Nambūrītham, which was rotten, in order to revive its real virtues. Vtyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, pp.546-47. Methab
Nambūtiri reformers, the rhetoric on Nambūtiritham might have been a strategy of reform; but for VT it was different, he wanted to retain certain (Nambūtiri) values which he truly believed to be eternal and emulative.\(^{113}\)

VT’s eulogists have absolved him for his liberal Hindutva position by attributing it to his intense emotionalism; he often responded rather sentimentally and instantaneously and not from a rational or theoretical point of view.\(^{114}\) Though this argument could be put forward as an excuse in the case of an orator who starts to lose his self-control as his speech advances, the case was not so harmless in VT. All of VT’s speeches during the reform days reveal that they were made after considerable home work and even his speech at Palakkad was well thought out. So far as his articles were concerned, he used to write and rewrite them before them being published.\(^{115}\) And even the charge that VT did not attempt at theorizing or that he was indifferent to ideologies does not hold good since even in the absence of an apparent ideology, a vague but untheorized

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\(^{113}\) Personal conversation, P.K. Muhammed Kunhi, Perumpilāvu, 10-09-2005. It has been observed that with the loss of rituality, a large part of the ‘support system’ of caste has collapsed. The feeling of belonging to a caste is now expressed more in the nature of community consciousness than in hierarchical terms. DL Sheth, “Caste and Secularization Process in India” in Peter Ronald de Souza ed., Contemporary India - Transitions, New Delhi, 2002, p.244.

\(^{114}\) There is a notion that VT was unable to say no to people who loved him. He was persuaded to participate in many public functions with which he did not share his views. N. Dāmōdaran, an associate of VT in the 1950s and after, observed: “VT was not a peaceful thinker. He was a burning enthusiast. This enthusiasm may provoke him to speak of undesirable things. In fact he was not an RSS nor was interested in making men Nambūtiris. I had reached his house some \(\frac{1}{2}\) an hour later he left home for Palakkad to attend the meeting. Had I reached there on time, he wouldn’t go for it. After return he told me that he spoke only of morality and humanism and nothing in favour of the RSS. ‘I told only what I was supposed to’. He lamented that he would rather not attend it. When people dear to him request, he couldn’t deny”. Personal Conversation with N. Dāmōdaran, Valanchery, 18\(^{th}\) June, 2000. Another friend of VT justified him by quoting his famous phrase, “If I were a woman, I would become a prostitute”. See P.K. Muhammed Kunhi, “VT Enna Vismayam”, in his own work Dukhathintiê Sugaridham, 1994, p.55. Conceding this point VT may be absolved; but his revivalist tone as found in his Palakkad speech was not an exception, he had been building up such an inclination from the ‘60s and was expressed through his articles and speeches.

ideological paradigm evidently gets manifested in his social interventions and thought-processes.\textsuperscript{116}

The concept of the ‘other’ had been integral to the approach and ideology of VT. He viewed religious communities other than the Hindus as outsiders and looked down upon them, especially upon Muslims, for their missionary zeal and religious exclusivism.\textsuperscript{117} He viewed Islam and Christianity as foreign and denounced them for their intrusion into the national body through invasion.\textsuperscript{118} They stood detached from the nation and stood as independent cultural segments incompatible with the national culture.\textsuperscript{119} His reservations against the Muslims may have been accentuated by their aloofness from the mainstream politics.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} Mādam holds that VT’s ideology could best be compared with that of Sri Aurobindo. See Mādam KunjuKuṭṭaṅ, Abhivādaya, Kottayam, 1989, p. 223. For Aurobindo, nationalism was a religious phenomenon. He criticized Muslims for treating nation secondary to their religion and for their refusal to get assimilated into the national body. See Jyothirmaya Sharma, Hindutva: exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism, New Delhi, 2003, pp.66-68.

\textsuperscript{117} Nirmal Verma noted that Islam and Christianity failed to arouse interest or curiosity among the Hindu traditionalists because they were ‘other’ in the absolute sense of the term. Nirmal Verma, “India and Europe – Some Reflections on Self and Other”, in Fred Dallmyr & GN Deve ed., Between Tradition and Modernity: India’s Search for Identity, New Delhi, 1998, p.329.

\textsuperscript{118} Conrad Wood speaks of the British official perception of the Malabar Muslims as ‘Jungle Moplah’. See Conrad Wood, “The Moplah Rebellions between 1800-02 and 1921-22”, Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. XIII, 1976, pp.105-06. VT approached conversions only from the religious, and hence sentimental, point of view. He was unwilling to link conversions with the caste system or the agrarian system. Wood remarks that conversion was an important weapon in the struggle against the jammi as the caste-superior and the peasant-exploiter. For details see Conrad Wood, “Historical Background of the Moplah Rebellion: Outbreaks, 1836-1919”, Social Scientist, Vol. 3, 1974-75, pp.23-24.

\textsuperscript{119} Even Gandhi viewed the Muslims as ‘the other’ as is evidenced by his comparison between the Chauri Chaura and the Malabar Rebellion. “The casual conjunction of ‘other Indians’ and ‘other Mussalmans’ in Gandhi’s comment underlines this point: Indians and Muslims are separate, if not contradictory, categories”. M.T. Ansari, “Refiguring the Fanatic: Malabar, 1836-1922” in Subaltern Studies, Vol. XII, Delhi, 2005, p.77.

\textsuperscript{120} Wood pointed out that the aloofness of the Māppila from the political movement was not surprising when the self-proclaimed objectives of the first Malabar District Conference of the Congress at Palakkad in 1916 were considered. For a community with an enduring history of boldly asserted grievance towards British rule, the anxious declarations of loyalty to the foreign connection cannot have been alluring. For a denomination for which the sharpest social and economic antagonism was cast in communal terms the pervasive Hindu allusion and symbolism of the Congress would have been positively repellant. Above all it was clearly dominated by the high-caste Hindu jammis and vakils whom the Māppila had for so long identified as the source of his ills. Conrad Wood, “The Ernad Moplah and the
but other factors were equally important.\textsuperscript{121} Besides, setting the 'other' was certainly intensified by social and economic interests; these religious communities were outside the caste system and caste-based dharma; they dared to question traditional caste privileges and hierarchically arranged social order.\textsuperscript{122} The Christians were looked upon with admiration during the days of reform due to their industry and their attachment to modernism, but were perceived also with fear because they were capable of threatening caste hierarchy and dharma. The 'decline' of the Nambūtiris corresponded with the progress of the Muslims and the Christians who, as they were not bound by tradition and caste rules, ventured into all areas of economic activity, especially cultivation and trade, and prospered swiftly. Their increasing population strength and economic power were perceived with fear because these were capable of threatening the dominant position of the Nambūtiris. Their missionary zeal was

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\textsuperscript{121} Overt evidences supporting VT's disgust with the Muslims is not available but considering the fact that the Nambūtiri movement had shown great concern over the Census reports, an increase in Muslim population clearly reflected in them must have been a disturbing factor. Based on the census data, Miller gives us details of this population increase. Over the 50 years from 1891-1941 while general population increased by 46\% in the Madras Presidency, the Māppilas grew by 89\%. In between 1871-1961, Muslim population of Malabar grew by 250\% and that of the Hindus by 136\%. During 1891-1941, percentage of Hindus decreased by 7.3\% per 1000, while Muslim population increased by 12.9\%. The enlargement of the Māppila population may be attributed to two factors: natural increase and increase by conversion. See Roland E Miller, Māppila Muslims of Kerala, Madras, 1992, pp.34-35. The growing awareness of the role of conversions in strengthening Muslim population and in endangering the interests of the Nambūtiris might have forced VT to take a strong attitude against the issue of religious conversions.
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\textsuperscript{122} It is observed that among the higher castes in particular, the attitude towards Islam was coloured by the way in which Islam impinged upon their interests. Amalendu Misra, Identity and Religion: Foundations of Anti-Islamism in India, New Delhi, 2004, p.20. Chatterjee suggested that the tendency to view Islam and Christianity as outsiders is an entirely modern, rationalist and historicist idea. Its appeal is political and the framework of its reasoning is entirely secular. Even anti-Vedic and anti-brahmanical religions like Buddhism are counted as Hindu and are claimed as part of the Hindu jati. Thus, the criterion for inclusion or exclusion is one of historical origin. Religions originated outside India are, therefore, foreign. Here, India is the generic entity, with fixed territorial definitions, which acts as the permanent arena for the history of the jati. Partha Chatterjee, “History and the Nationalization of Hinduism”, in Vasudha Dalmia & Heinrich Von Steitencron ed., Representing Hinduism: The Contradiction of Religious Traditions and National Identity, New Delhi, 1995, p.126.
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also a serious menace to the interests of the community. Tipu became a villain because it was with him that large scale conversions and organized attack on traditional privileges started to take place. The Māppila riots also were remembered with dread as cruel attacks on Hindu dharma. (It is very important to note that with the Malabar Rebellion marked discussions on the future of Hinduism took place and a desperate call for Hindu unity ensued.) Though the Nambūtiris did not support Vaikam Satyagraha, they became convinced of the necessity of a refashioning of social relations and of the relaxation of pollution rules. Thus concern over culture and tradition was not simply an emotional and national question; it was closely associated with social and economic interests.

123 He wrote that issues like forced conversion and ban on cow slaughter should never be decided by a majority vote of 51-49 percentages in an assembly but should be resolved by majority opinion outside it. He found these as the most important issues and his attitude explains how he evaluated the role and relevance of popular bodies. See his “Adhamarē” in VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.529.

124 While narrating the story of Uma, VT showed considerable intolerance over conversion of Nambūtiris to Islam in his typical ‘cultural’ way. He wrote: “I know a few families who were socially ostracized because they had been converted to Islam during the time of Tipu’s invasion. None of them dresses the Māppila way. Nor have they given up the Hindu rites and customs. This is the first time a Nambūtiri girl turns up before me in a typical Muslim dress”. Quoted from the transliteration of VT’s article by V.C. Harris, “The Story of Uma”, Haritham, No.17, 2005, pp.60-61. Re-accommodating the Nambūtiris who had been converted to Islam by Tipu was a matter of serious debate during the Nambūtiri movement.

125 Dale observed that taking advantage of the opportunity provided by the Mysorean invasion, the Māppila tenants became de facto jannis and after the defeat of Tipu refused to surrender their lands to their ancient jenmakkaris. This was the most common reason for what Jonathan Duncan described in 1793 as the “bitterness of enmity between the two sects”. Stephen F. Dale, “The Mappilas During Mysorean Rule: Agrarian Conflict in Eighteenth-Century Malabar”, South Asia, Vol. 6, 1976, p.10.

126 When a resolution endorsing the freedom of movement was introduced in the Travancore Legislature, all the Nambūtiri legislators voted against it. Editorial, Kēraṭakaumudi, 6:46, 13 February 1925. It is interesting to note that most of the Nambūtiri reformers did not oppose the demand raised by the Vaikam Satyagrahis but they denounced the path chosen for achieving the goal.

127 Dilip Menon writes: When phrases like tradition are used there is an implicit and unquestioned assumption that all have equal access to and equal status within these nebulous monoliths. But what solace can untouchables find within Hindu tradition, if they are buffeted by the winds of colonial change? The simple dichotomy of inner and outer, tradition and modernity collapses since lower castes are excluded from the inner spaces of tradition itself. Heir access to colonial modernity is mediated through their entrapment in the domain of a tradition within which they can only be subordinate or outcaste. On the other
particular to perceive even the Nāyars and Izhavas as outsiders. His later conservative position on caste and opposition to social equality reveals that the secular credentials of VT in the 1920s and 30s were dictated mainly by communitarian considerations.

5:4. Lure of Modernity and Fetters of Tradition

The ideological foundation of the Nambūtiri movement was modernity; it aimed at refashioning the community in tune with the essentials of modern values. Modernity was expressed both as an outlook and as an attempt at restructuring old institutions in tune with new ideals. Every aspect of tradition including customs and practices were reevaluated in accordance with scientific and rational paradigms and their continuity was decided according to their utility and reliability. Though there was continuous discourse on ‘fall’, ‘golden age’ and ‘revival’, what in fact envisaged was not the blind revival of the past as such, but past glory, the glory of Nambūtiri superiority. So reform was justified in the name of reviving the glory, in all spheres including the intellectual, social, economic and the political. The status of the Nambūtiris as the ‘dominant caste’ had to be reinstated and the means of restoration was reform of the old as new. This could be achieved through modern education and by modernizing the economic institutions – including feudal landownership – and also by reorganizing the family structure and power relationships. All these

hand, it is this very modernity that allows them access to the knowledge of that which subordinates them. Tradition for them is, otherwise, not only a scarce resource but an inaccessible one. Dilip Menon, “Caste and Colonial Modernity: Reading Saraswatavijayam”, *Studies in History*, 13:2, n.s., 1997, p.292.

128 In fact VT’s social position was defined by the notion of the ‘Dominant Caste’, the members of which were having a privileged position, wielding considerable power over other local castes, having command over resources and organizing local activities. For details see M.N. Srinivas, “The Indian Village: Myth and Reality” in J.H.M. Beattie and R.G. Liehhardt, *Studies in Social Anthropology: Essays in Memory of E.E. Evans-Pritchard*, London, 1975, pp.69-72.

129 Kurumč Nārāyaṇan Bhāṭṭathiripāḍ transliterated the famous anti-revivalist speech of Ranade and it was published in the *UN*. Ranade opposed the tendency to revive the outmoded customs and traditions since they contradicted with ‘true Brāhmaṇyam’. See *UN*, 8:4, Dhanu 1102, pp.221-24.
were supposed to convert the Nambūtiris into a model community grand enough for others to emulate: a community based on rational thinking, utilitarian outlook and humanitarian ethos.\textsuperscript{130}

In the first decade of its origin the \textit{Sabha} was not able to promote these ideals in a powerful way; but from the beginning of the 1920s they began to dominate the reform agenda and the overall outlook of the community. They also considerably succeeded in influencing at least the upper echelons of the community, especially the active workers and the enthusiastic followers. But, these were lofty utopian ideals extremely difficult to be accomplished in life and there were considerable disputes as to the modes to be adopted in realizing them. By the beginning of the 1930s, following the era of radicalism, the conflict between the ideal and the practical began to take an opposite course towards a strong reactionary and revivalist trend. This was due mainly to two reasons. First, with the fulfillment of the highly challenging agenda, i.e., the marriage reform, the movement failed to put forward a common programme powerful enough to unite the various segments of radicals. Disputes over objectives and methods of future reform led to the decline of the movement and soon gave the conservatives an upper hand. Secondly, in matters relating to community interests, like the tenancy issue, approach to the Congress, etc, even a large section of the radicals held a moderate view which was closer to the orthodox outlook than to the radical. Hence well before the ideals and institutions of modernity took their roots, the movement dispersed and tradition got a lease of life, though without its old and tyrannical authority. The essence of modernity was threatened and this was expressed as a post-reform reaction in the form of the revival of several customs which were rejected (such as the high importance attached to rituals in life and the negative attitude towards educating and

\textsuperscript{130} V.T. Rāman Bhaṭṭathiripād, “Kudumba Regulation: Ūṛjītha Parisṛamaṅgaḷ”, \textit{FK}, 17:19, Nov. 24, 1926.
uplifting women) and a flood of penances taking place even for trivial acts of deviation from tradition like dining with the lower caste people or for abandoning the ghőṣa.

The forces of reaction had created decisive results: except the first generation of women who appeared in public, others stayed back and even many of those who had boycotted the ghőṣa withdrew to seclusion; men lived idle lives and married with the intention of obtaining heavy dowry; sambandham and aged marriages continued; only two widow marriages had taken place till 1944; by and large Nambiitiris were not active either in politics or in other areas of public life. In fact the lasting results of the movement were the outlawing of adhivedanam and the recognition of secular education for boys. The ideological impact of modernity was only faintly felt among the common Nambiitiris. This was mainly because women continued to be backward and landlordism held its sway.

However, even the process of reaction was marked by the adoption of a modified form of the old customs and not a return to the old tradition as such. Being the priesthood and the landed aristocracy, the Nambiitiris were inclined to stick to tradition which caused to leave them behind in material progress. Educational backwardness retarded their professional advancement; their low numerical strength and their waning economic privileges incapacitated them in their fight for the special rights of their community through bargaining from a

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132 Mādamb Nārāyaṇān Nambūtirī’s Yōgakṣēmasabha Charitram gives details of this orthodox reaction and the surprising tendency of many erstwhile radicals to succumb to penances.
134 “Nambūtiriyē Manuṣyanākkān”, in EMS-ntē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, Sanchika I, p.278.
135 Ibid, pp.277-78; 300-302.
136 E.M.S, “Nambūtirimār Ṛṇgōṭtū”, in EMS-ntē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, Sanchika I, p. 262. The attitude of the community towards Mrs. MRB was a clear instance of this reactionary position. E.M.S. wrote that even in 1944 the community in general treated her as an outcast. See “Nambūtiriyē Manuṣyanākkān”, in EMS-ntē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, Sanchika I, p. 291.
137 Ibid, pp.312-315.
position of strength. Demands for special representation also arose in this context against which leaders like E.M.S. warned the community that such measures would boomerang on the community. In the context of the cessation of reform halfway, and the slow erosion of the reform ethic, and because of the disparity between the high expectations and the utter incapability of realizing them, attachment to tradition became an unavoidable necessity. Meanwhile traditional forms of subsistence such as ritualism and priesthood provided less challenging professions. Thus ritualism, traditionalism and casteism dominated the Nambūtiri world in the late 30s and early 40s which greatly intercepted the community’s further engagements with modernity.

The silence of VT during this period was not altogether casual or inadvertent; in the beginning he did not respond to the critical issues that marred the progress of the community, and the society at large, and when he started responding he had become very selective. He focused his attention on two objectives; one, against the ruthless system of dowry and the consequent ‘sale’ of Antarjanams, and two, attracting the Nambūtiris towards farming. His stories written during this period were directed towards this end; though he associated with the ‘work centre’ he seemed not to have been motivated by the concept of women empowerment. He was alarmed by the growing immorality among the Antarjanams and its probable impact on the image of the community. As far as the second area of interest was concerned, he wanted the Nambūtiris to retain...

138 In matters of government jobs, he observed that Nambūtiris were occupying more than what they really deserved in terms of their population strength. Ibid, pp.310-311; “Nambūtirimār Eṅgōṭṭu”, in EMS-nil Sampūrṇa Kritikal, Sanchika I, pp.258-259; “Nambūtirimārūm Pratyēka Prātiṇidhyavum”, in EMS-nil Sampūrṇa Kritikal, Sanchika I, pp.170-172.

139 His memoirs keep silence over the Öngallir episode. He also later condemned the ‘work centre’ model alleging it as a plot by the communists to recruit women into the party. See his “Nambūtirimārūde Kūlippaṅi Saptāham”, Māṭrubhūmi Daily, 4-11-1970, reproduced in A.V. Sreekumar ed., VT, p.236. Nowhere in his memoirs or articles other than this he had referred to the ‘work centre’ nor did he recognize the kind of women empowerment envisaged through it.
their *janmam* property by entering into agriculture as real farmers. He wanted to contain the tenant claims. This is clear from the two stories written by him during this period.\(^{140}\)

In the post-independence era VT's public interventions revealed that he had considerably retreated from his obsession with modernity. Though he continued his attachment with humanism and rationalism, to him these concepts had acquired different dimensions, especially as a confrontation with communism and as a focus on individual liberty and philanthropy. He also took up the role of the moral reformer crusading against political corruption and nepotism.\(^{141}\) His agitation was commendable in the context of the increasing vices in party politics but the alternative model he suggested was the feudal order with ‘dharmic’ foundations.\(^{142}\)

In the articles which he wrote during this time,\(^{143}\) he glorified a utopian temple-centered village life, the trusteeship system and the dominant place of the Brahmins in the social and ethical domains. More surprising was his attempt to justify and glorify caste and to present it as a ‘scientific’ system.\(^{144}\) Evidently he presented himself as a Nambūtiri and

\(^{140}\) See “Manakkale Kāryasthan” and “Chūṇḍippalaka”, in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitiкал*, pp.99-107.

\(^{141}\) In fact obsession with morality was a Victorian relic permeated among the colonial subjects through modernity. “Feeling guilty about the loss of their religious faith, suspecting that that loss might expose them to the temptations of immorality and the perils of nihilism...they were determined to make of morality a substitute for religion — to make of it, indeed, a form of religion”. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Marriage and Morals among the Victorians and Other Essays*, London, 1986, p.21.

\(^{142}\) M.G.S. argued that VT’s outlook was prophetic; by not being attracted to Communist politics, which had its base on violence and unreason, he had truly foreseen Gandhism as the true ideal for the future and had realized how illusive and short-lived would the fascination towards it be. See M.G.S. Nārāyaṇa, “VT: Commuṇisathinappathēkkul[a Yāṭhayiḷe Mārgadaṣṭakaṇa” in A.V. Sreekumar, *op.cit*, pp.75-83.

\(^{143}\) See the collections of articles in *VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitiкал*, pp.433-541.

\(^{144}\) *Ibid*, pp.459-64; 534-35. In modern times we have several exponents of caste. For instance, Coomaraswamy defended the pre-modern caste system because he found it more human than the modern class system. Gandhi also did so but went further, i.e., he sought to reorder the hierarchy of skills — to re-legitimize the manual and the unclean and delegitimize the Brahmanic and the clean. Ashis Nandy, “Cultural Frames for Social Transformation: A
disclosed the secret behind his attraction to Gandhism, its revival of ‘Ārṣhadharma’ and its focus on individual merit and scope for self-realization. VT used plenty of Nambūtiri symbols and cultural forms in all these articles both as similes and metaphors.

The tendency towards cultural revivalism might have been triggered by the frustration in VT in his later years and which might have been brought about by his, as also his community’s, increasing marginalization. It greatly differs from what has been described as ‘critical traditionalism’ which developed as a choice to the advancing and alarming westernism; VT’s association with the RSS and Tapasya revealed that his infatuation with cultural revivalism had clear political dimensions.

In a tradition-bound community like that of the Nambūtiris, to be modern in the true spirit was extremely difficult. The radical reformers had challenged tradition and had broken its symbols (like abandoning the sacred thread, cutting the tuft of hair, smoking, drinking coffee, wearing shirts, using wrist watch, taking food outdoors and traveling in train) in order to provoke the orthodox; provoking the orthodox was a reform strategy in those days, it was necessary to win the hegemonic struggle against the opponents of reform. Where tradition

Credo”, in Fred Dallmyr & G.N. Devy ed., Between Tradition and Modernity: India’s Search for Identity, New Delhi, 1998, pp.253-54. Bateille has suggested that even intellectuals have been greatly sensitive in their approach to caste – a kind of indifference or even hostility – especially when it comes to marriage. See Andre Bateille, “Caste in Contemporary India” in C.J. Fuller ed., Caste Today, Delhi, 1996, pp.162-63. It is because caste is not merely a form of identity, arising from birth in a particular group, it is also a matter of consciousness. Andre Bateille, “Varna and Jati”, Sociological Bulletin, 45:1, March 1996, p.16.

Bhikku Parekh, Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi’s Political Discourse, New Delhi, 1999, p. 42. He defined critical traditionalism as the mobilization of indigenous resources, borrowing from Europe whatever was likely to supplement and enrich them.

P.S. Kesavan Nambūtiri termed it as “Muṣippikkal”, which was the third method (the first being the ideal of the ‘4 changes’ of Mūthiringōd and the second, Satyagraha). See his inaugural speech at the Pānjl Girls’ School, YK, 20:65, May 26, 1930.
was strong and deep-rooted, attempts to overcome it required an all-out struggle against its symbols and authorities. But for most of the Nambūtiris, it was only a makeshift arrangement; it did not mean an end in itself. Once orthodoxy was weakened and when its power of resisting reform had exhausted, the recalcitrance of the reformers too started melting away and they themselves became the exponents of tradition in relation to the new generation. Among the Nambūtiris, instances of reformers turning into reactionaries were not uncommon.147 Though VT appeared to be a staunch radical in comparison to several of his contemporaries, his word was not the final one with regard to radicalism. In fact, he wanted to retain the essentials of tradition right from his early days of public life and it was not surprising to observe that he made a retreat from his earlier stand of embracing modernity. This change of outlook gained considerable momentum once the chief agenda of the reform movement was achieved and the necessity of linking the movement with a wider social movement became apparent. Since the Nambūtiri movement had a strict communitarian agenda, any future and secular agenda could only be built upon the foundation of the Nambūtiri tradition.148 This could best be understood from the case of VT’s Ulbuddhakēralam. Therefore, the gradual development of a

147 In his presidential address at the 13th Annual meeting of the Perāmaṅgalam NY Upasabha, (YK, 20:58, Apr. 30, 1930) Pāṭṛiśśēri condemned the young radical Nambūtiris for their high-handed measures in reform which were crossing the limits of community interests and ethical boundaries. He remarked that, except a few, all Nambūtiris would become ‘Sudarsanites’ in the near future. He repeated these points at the Aṅkamaly NY Upasabha meeting (YK, 20:63, May 21, 1930). Pāṭṛiśśēri was severely criticized for his growing conservatism and he was accused of becoming the next Paśchimā. See E.M.S., “Nambūtiri Samudāyathinte Innathe Nila”, UN 11:44, 45 & 46, May 9, 16 & 23, 1930. Similarly hardcore radicals like Mōzhikunnam Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād, Kāṇippayūr Śāṅkaran Nambūtiripād and Pāḷḷuḷy Vāṣudēvan Nambūtiri later cooperated with the reactionary Nambūtiri Youth Congress and its organ Patāka led by T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād in 1948. See T.S. Bhaṭṭathiripād, “Samudāyadrōhī”, Dēśābhīmāni Weekly, 22:27, Nov. 12, 1995, p.47.

148 It was not surprising since the Nambūtiri movement was greatly influenced by the national culture which the national movement launched most powerfully as its historical project to fashion “a ‘modern’ national culture that is nevertheless not western”. See Partha Chatterjee, The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and postcolonial Histories, Delhi, 1995, p.6.
crisis in his fascination towards modernity was neither surprising nor mysterious. VT’s steadfastness to Nambūtiri values and social ethics, uncompromising vegetarianism, 149 opposition to parliamentary politics and the concealed faith in the social utility of the caste system, all prove that his obsession with modernity was short-lived or was imposed by the compulsions of the circumstances. 150 Even his avowed faith in rationalism was just an opposition to superstitions or a reaffirmation of the ancient Indian rationalist tradition. In the 1970s he started drifting away from his rationalist position alleging that it was becoming institutionalized.

5:5. Landlord Interests and Land-reformist Pretensions

One of VT’s most reactionary stands was on the land question which, however, evidently harmonized with the attitude of the Sabha and the Nambūtiri movement. Nambūtiris were the biggest landlords of Kēraḷa and the very founding of the Sabha was meant to defend the janmi interests against the

149 In a study of the food habits prevalent among the Assamese upper caste Hindus, Audrey Cantlie noted the importance of regulations surrounding food in the daily life of the orthodox Hindu and the critical role of food transactions as an index of caste status. Their food habits are based on three assumptions. First, food is held to be imbued with moral qualities which affect the mind and disposition of the eater such that certain categories of food cool the blood and dispose to virtuous thoughts while others inflame the passions and brutalize the character. Second, the cooking of food opens it to contagion from outside. Raw whole foodstuff carries no pollution and is freely purchased in the market from an untouchable or a Muslim. Third, moral qualities are transmitted by contact with cooked food and internalized by the eater. So, to accept food from a man of lower caste is to acquire lower caste status. ‘According to the quality of his food’, it was said, ‘the eater possesses his mind. His habits and character become as his food’. Restrictions on diet are socially significant as an assertion of spiritual status so that the higher the rank of a caste, the more limited are the types of food it does not consider impure. Audrey Cantlie, “Moral Significance of Food among the Assamese Hindus” in Adrian C. Mayer ed., Culture and Morality, Delhi, 1981, pp.42-44. Also see Bernard S. Cohn, India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization, New Jersey, 1971, pp. 113-34. While VT broke some of these rules, his steadfastness to vegetarianism revealed that he retained some others.

150 It is argued that the continuation of the symbols and institutions of tradition is an index to the failure of the institutions of civil society to take root and gather strength in independent India. Old forms of collective identities have not only held their ground but become increasingly assertive. Andre Bateille, “Varna and jati”, Sociological Bulletin 45:1, March 1996, p.26.
advancing tenancy movement. It was the Janmi Sabha that was transformed into the Yōgakṣēmasabha. In all the three political divisions of Kēraḷa, tenancy movement had taken strong roots by the end of the 19th century. Though the Mysorean invasions and the Māppila revolts had considerably threatened the privileged position of the Nambiitiris as landed magnates, the establishment and consolidation of the British power helped them to recoup their position though as junior partners and dependants of the colonial government. But the advancing tenancy movement actively supported by the English educated native bureaucracy and intelligentsia put the Nambiitiris again on the defensive. The fading out of the traditional patronage of the governments, which had its singular focus on the protection of the Nambiitiris, demanded united and concerted efforts on the part of the janmis to defend their rights and privileges. The deliberations of the Sabha rightly prove this fact.

Two important developments created great concern for the Nambiitiris on their prospects as janmis. First one was the slow disappearance of princely

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151 C.K. Nambiitiri, Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Mumbum Pimbun, pp.21-22.
152 Dharma Kumar writes that traditionally revenue in Malabar was very low; in fact the landowners of Malabar claimed that they had paid no land tax at all before the Mysorean invasion. Land and Caste in South India, New Delhi, 1992, p.23. Panikkar says: “What the Mysore Sultans did during their short period of rule was to absorb either the whole or a part of the janmi’s share as revenue”. K.N. Panikkar, “Peasant Exploitation in Malabar in the Nineteenth Century”, Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. 11, 1984, p.174.
154 In an editorial criticizing the new tenancy bill, the YK observed that most of the government servants in Malabar came from the tenant families. YK, 14:70; June 4, 1924.
155 An editorial of YK lamented that with the British rule the Nambiitiris lost their political privilege; though they were still the lords of the society, nobody recognized them. YK, 14:67, May 24, 1924.
156 As Jeffrey noted, this was mainly because in the 1930s ritual status roughly coincided with economic power and caste with class. Robin Jeffrey, “Matriliny, Marxism and the Birth of the Communist Party, 1930-1940”, Journal of Asian Studies, XXXVII: 1, Nov. 1978, pp. 80-82.
patronage in the states of Travancore and Cochin and the shift in governmental support in favour of the tenants’ cause. In fact new forces had started to work and even the governments were greatly concerned with promotion of entrepreneurship and economic progress towards capitalist development; the idle and backward looking janmis could not be the potential forces of development. The second one was the formidable advance of the tenancy movement with the strong backing of the Congress. The tenants were presenting their issue in terms of democratic rights; because they were the majority, they had the legitimate right to get their demands fulfilled. This had been creating panic among the janmis for in future, in the event of the rule of the majority, they would suffer; thus the exigency of janmi interests forced them to turn against the Congress and the very concept of majority rule enshrined in democracy.

157 While describing the decline of the community in the context of the reform movement, VT referred to the helplessness of the Cochin Raja in opposing the Tenancy Bill. See VTyudé Sampûrya Kritikal, p.129.

158 This desperation had forced the Sabha to urge the Nambûtiris to worship Paraśurâma vigorously. NYJS pamphlet No. 15, quoted in YK, 14:29, Jan.2, 1924, called for observing Paraśurâma puja, as had been resolved by the Sabha, as a means to strengthen the hands of the Nambûtiris to withstand the mounting tenancy pressures.

159 This does not mean that the tenant cause was without grounds. K.V.M, despite him being the editor of the Vasumati (the organ of the janmis) and a strong associate of the Sabha, sympathized with the tenants. His family too was kâñam tenants. He maintained that the condition of the kâñam tenants was the most precarious, in relation to Veyumpiigakkiir, since they had to meet the exorbitant levy demands from the janmis and the high amount needed for the resettlement at every 12 years. Hence he justified the movement of the tenants for fixity of tenure. K.V.M, Aimakatha, pp.50-53.

160 See Kunhimangalath Manayil Vásudévan Tirumumb, “Congressukârum Janmikalum”, YK, 14:43, Feb.23, 1924. P.C. Thampán in “Janmikaludê Sukhajîvitam”, YK, 14:92; Aug 23, 1924, identified educated Náyars (despite they being educated by their sambandham fathers!) as the tenant agitators. He criticized the Mâtrubhûmi for supporting the partisan tenant cause. An editorial of the YK (14:93; Aug 27, 1924) denounced the decision of the Madras government to forward the Malabar Tenancy Bill to the Select Committee as a ‘betrayal by the majority’ and pointed out the inconsistency of taking decisions concerning 42.6 million people in an assembly of 126 members with a meager support of just 56 of them. It also opined that representative assemblies thus fall short of reflecting real public opinion. When the Bill was finally passed, the YK in its editorial again attacked the concept of majority decision as envisaged by modern democracy. YK, 15:99, Sep 16, 1925.
Throughout its history the Sabha had struggled vigorously to protect the landed interests of the Nambūtiris. In his famous speech before the Janmi Sabha, Kuṟṟuṉ Uinti Nambūtiripād articulated how the tenant version of the tenancy issue was unjust and conflicted with the ‘legitimate’ interests of the janmis. In a sweeping condemnation of the tenancy movement Kāṇippayūr warned the tenants that their demands were not different from plunder of others’ properties. Discourse on the janmi-kudiyān issue gained momentum when the Malabar tenancy bill was introduced by Krishnan Nāyār in the Madras legislature in 1924. Opposing the bill, the janmi representative Prabhakaran Tampan argued that it favoured the kāṇam tenants alone who were just middlemen and had been exploiting the real peasants.

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161 “The main issues that were discussed by the Nambūtiri reformers all the way to the late 1920s were those of tarawād reform, education and the relationship between landlord and tenant”. G. Arunima, “Multiple Meanings: Changing Conceptions of Matrilineal Kinship in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Malabar”, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 33:3, 1996, p.302.
162 Vasumati was a weekly journal published from Calicut for promoting janmi interests. See K.V.M, Ātmakatha, pp.155-57. M.R.K.C. was its editor and after him K.V.M. worked for some time as the editor. Its manager was Pārayil Rāman Nambūtiri who had edited the work Nambūtirīmār.
163 UN, 3:10, Mithunam 1097, pp.458-68; 3:11, Karkidakam, 1097, pp.502-11. Panikkar supported the kāṇakkāran’s independent rights on the soil which implied permanency of kāṇam tenure. The practice of the renewal of kāṇam, after every twelve years, with the payment of a kāṇapappāṇam by the kāṇakkāran to the janmi, was a sort of advance, either a loan of rent or a security for the payment of rent. The perception of the British government identifying the janmi as the rāiyāts in whom the “exclusive right to the hereditary possession and usufruct of the soil was vested” was in fact impelled by the political expediency of creating a rural gentry loyal to them. K.N. Panikkar, “Peasant Exploitation in Malabar in the Nineteenth Century”, Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. 11, 1984, pp.174-78.
164 “Janmisabhyayudē Chumathala”, YK, 14:22, Dec.5, 1923. He argued that the janmis were extremely sympathetic to the tenants and had been satisfied with what the tenants paid them; they had been holding the lands as their own; instead of showing gratitude for these they were growing more and more aggressive.
165 YK, 14:56, Ap.5, 1924. An editorial of YK alleged that Krishnan Nair was trying to convert kāṇam tenants as second janmis by requesting the government to divide the produce of the land into three portions to be enjoyed as equal shares among the janmi, the kāṇam tenant and the farmer. Ibid.
Some of the Nambūtiris like Kurūr had realized the trend of the times as is understood from his efforts towards starting capitalist farming and the cultivation of commercial crops. But this trend was confined to a few and that too only to those who were settled in the neighbourhood of the enterprising Christian cultivators. The vast majority with their dread for the new and the unknown, held fast to the old world. In fact the transformation of an age-old tradition could not be possible by merely creating an awareness of the situation; it needed basic and structural changes. The existing property relations and family structure with primogeniture and ban on Kanistavivāham had to be replaced with individual partition and the universalization of swajātivivāham. Marriage reform and promotion of English education gained currency in the circumstances of increasing concern over janmi interests.

In the 1920s the concern over landed rights gained momentum with the appearance of the new class of English educated Nambūtiris who associated the question of land alienation with the tenancy movement, the existing family structure and nature of property relations. The traditional customs of primogeniture and ban on Kanistavivāham was designed to retain property intact without being fragmented and to maintain the nobility but it nurtured only lethargy and brought about the ruin of the Nambūtiris. In the prevailing system of joint property, the junior sons grew indifferent to the management of property and custom did not allow them to interfere in its management. They roamed aimlessly and entered into sambandham relations. Hence property could not be protected of without altering the marriage practices and the system of inheritance. Since vast estates could not be managed by a single person, partition was the only viable alternative. Concepts like Nambūtiritham and dharma

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166 There is a striking contrast. Most of the janmis and the janmi organs approached the tenancy movement and the demand of the Nambūtiri young men forbhāgam with equal apprehension since both were capable of threatening their autocratic powers and privileges. See K.V.M., Atmakatha, pp.163-64. On the other hand, the Nambūtiri young men were equally conservative as far as landlord interests were concerned because tenancy movement
would not save property, it needed enterprise and enthusiasm. Thus marriage reform was not simply a means to modernize the community but was aimed to revitalize it economically.\textsuperscript{167}

In the 1920s the discourse on the security of feudal property became serious with the threat of bringing a tenancy bill for Malabar. While the earlier attempts of the Māppilas were through armed insurrection and by assassinating unscrupulous \textit{janmis}, the new method was peaceful and constitutional; the government was persuaded to enact laws to provide fixity of tenure and security from arbitrary eviction. The measures taken towards statutory reform brought about a panic-like situation because as a minority community the Nambūtiris could not present their case forcefully in the legislatures and as an extraordinarily orthodox landed aristocracy they could not get the support of other social classes.\textsuperscript{168} Even the governments were in favour of the tenant classes; they had to pacify popular discontentment and to initiate measures of economic progress. Thus while the existing customs incapacitated the majority of the Nambūtiris to defend their property, the advancing political culture hindered them from promoting their class interests.\textsuperscript{169}

\textsuperscript{167} "...landlord interests were being represented as the community’s welfare. The younger elements within landed families supported such ideas, as these would enable them to inherit or divide property". G. Arunima, \textit{There Comes Papa}, New Delhi, 2003, p.172.

\textsuperscript{168} The Bill introduced in the Madras legislature was passed in September 1925 against all the claims of the \textit{janmis}. It sanctioned permanent occupancy right to all \textit{kāgam} tenants and incapacitated the \textit{janmis} from increasing the rent and from enforcing resettlements (\textit{Polichezhuthu}). See YK, 15:98, Sep 12, 1925. It was observed that the position taken by the Select Committee was completely opposed to the interests of the \textit{janmis}.

\textsuperscript{169} The long process of tenancy legislations has been greatly detrimental to the rights and privileges of the \textit{janmis}. The powers of the \textit{janmi} were considerably reduced; he was no longer able to evict at will, to receive renewal fees, or to cultivate all the land if he wanted to do so and his revenue from rents had been reduced. Instead, the \textit{kānakkār} benefitted considerably; the Act of 1930, which has been called a Kānammadar’s Bill, rewarded them mainly by fixing a ceiling in the renewal fee. See Adrian C. Mayer, \textit{Land and Society in Malabar}, Bombay, 1952, pp.87-91.
The entire course of the Nambūtiri reform movement was characterized by its defensiveness. As the landed aristocracy and as the privileged community, the emerging social order was extremely harmful to their collective interest. Most of the programmes of the movement were basically oriented towards safeguarding their existing rights and privileges. Though marriage reform and partition of joint property were meant to provide the junior sons a space within the family and the community by helping to empower them, it incorporated a defensive agenda. Though the demand for English education was severely opposed by the conservatives, it finally received their consent because they realized that English education was absolutely necessary to safeguard community interests. All communities which had prospered achieved it through English education – by entering into the bureaucracy and the legislatures and by gaining legal awareness. For promotion of community interests they had to pursue the path followed by other communities who had prospered. Even the reform of custom and modes of behaviour were aimed at removing the obstacles for an easy entry into the public sphere.

As an advocate of community interests, VT too was guided by these considerations. He was a strong votary of the traditional landed rights of the Nambūtiris. His articles on the Nambūtiri regulation revealed his intense concern in safeguarding property and progeny by reforming customs through state legislation. He strongly pleaded for a family regulation, with provisions for

170 An editorial of the YK (“Malabar Kudiyān Bill”, 16:81, July 14 1926) alerted the elders, after the enactment of the tenancy bill, that if they continue to stand divided, property would thus go on looted by other sections of communities in this way.


172 It is highly probable that his contacts with M.R.K.C. and his job at the Yōgakṣēmam Company had helped to promote strong janmi attitudes in him. M.R.K.C. was appointed as the manager of the Yōgakṣēmam Company with for converting the YK into a strong organ of janmi interests. The Company was owned and managed by shareholders who were mostly janmis. See K.V.M. Ātmakatha, pp.117-19. VT’s work at the company would certainly have demanded loyalty to the janmi cause. But surprisingly VT did not belong to a rich janmi family. See VTyūdē Sampūrṇa Krīṭikā, p.181.
both parivēdanam and bhōgam, since it was the only means to check the ruin of property. In fact his first serious article was an evaluation of the tenancy problem in which he lamented over the drain of property through the kārysthans (managers) and expressed great concern over the tenancy bill going to be passed in the Madras Legislature which was meant to provide legal protection to the tenants. He suggested that this great menace could be overcome only by creating an awareness in the janmis about the gravity of the problem and condemned all the Nambūtiris, who refused to educate their children, for accelerating the alienation of ṭaravād property. Some of his earliest stories also were written in the context of the declining economic situation due to the chaotic life condition within the community and to the assault from outside. These were not simply a strategy of reform intended to arouse the community from their lethargy is well attested by his later stories in which he not only urged for the spirit of entrepreneurship and enthusiasm but also blamed the tenants and the kārysthans for hastening the pauperization of the Nambūtiris.

VT’s statements on the land question as found in his memoirs may confuse people to think that he was strongly opposed to landlordism and stood for the interests of the real peasants. He had never refused to praise those janmis who

176 His two stories of the Ōngallily era clearly convey this message. “Manakkalē Kāryaṭhan”, VTyudē Sampūrna Kritikal, pp.99-104; “Chuṇḍippalaka”, ibid, pp.105-107. In his later articles, VT strongly attacked them and even argued that they were instrumental in bringing about the downfall of the community by playing between the janmi and the tenant. They emerged as the new intelligentsia, as the new bureaucrats and as the new politicians. See VTyudē Sampūrna Kritikal, pp.450-51, 506.
177 See VTyudē Sampūrna Kriikkal, p.147. He wrote: “Even today the extremely slothful and indifferent landlords ride on the shoulders of the real tillers of the soil. A social order that brings only starvation to the working people, but provides sumptuous feasts to for the lazy, should be wiped out”. Even in 1980 he maintained that his fight was against landlordism
were particularly strict to their tenants\textsuperscript{178} and to denounce those who were lenient for their careless life.\textsuperscript{179} He later openly justified landlordism on the ground that the ancestors had acquired these properties suffering considerable hardships. It was the foreign rule that had made the \textit{janmi} a mechanism of exploitation and oppression; the earlier system was true trusteeship conforming to Gandhian Grama Swaraj.\textsuperscript{180} One of the prominent individuals VT acknowledged to have greatly influenced him was M.R.K.C. who was a strong exponent of landlordism and a strong opponent of the tenancy movement.\textsuperscript{181} In
fact VT was not in favour of either tenancy reform or land reform; his statement to the effect that there was no feudal exploitation in the past explicitly denied the social relevance of the tenant cause. What really he wanted was to convert the feudal estates into capitalist farmlands and the rent-receiving janmis to be enterprising cultivators. He wanted to remove the blemish cast on the Nambūtiris as non-producing parasites. A change to that effect was essential for the progress of the community as well. He had clearly placed the Sabha in the context of this changing social vision and found its mission the transition from landlordism to capitalism. In fact the movement, which called upon the Nambūtiris to be human, was directed to exhort them to be capitalists; even the famous speech of E.M.S. at Öngallūr had conceived a capitalist programme in order to make them as ‘humans’.

VT’s Ulbuddhakēraṇam commune experiment implicitly revealed the way he approached the questions of landlordism and private property. The farm was started on a rented land with VT as the patron. He vehemently opposed the

tradition. In another article “Pṛakṛiti Virōdham” (UN, 4:5, Makaram 1098, p.258-270) he declared women should not to be freed and they should not be treated as equals just because such demands ran counter to the laws of the nature. His story “Siddhamoorthiyude Sukradasa” (UN, 5:2, Thulam 1099, pp.141-154) put lawyers as villains and denounced them for raising the tenancy issue simply for professional interests. He condemned the new education for creating lawyers; it was with their entry that the traditional dharma collapsed. More reactionary was his “Udanthadi Allenkil Sati” (UN, 5:12, Chingam 1099, pp.605-611) in which he justified the practice of Sati in the name of the sanctity of conjugal relationship.

VT’s argument has been discredited by E.M.S. (Ātmakatha, p.37) and by K.N. Panikkar (“Peasant Exploitation in Malabar in the Nineteenth Century”, Journal of Kerala Studies, Vol. 11, 1984, pp.155-85).

VTyudē Sampūṛṇa KṛitiKal, p.246. Shea identified the traditional system of agrarian economy as the greatest barrier to economic development in Kerala. “In Malabar, rent-receiving landlords could not, as a rule, effectively reinvest their income in agricultural operations because of taboos discouraging both their personal participation in cultivation and close physical contact with cultivating castes. Since the pursuit of agriculture as a calling was deprecated, no incentive stimulating the resource-owning classes to make systematic studies of the technical needs of their cultivators existed, and cultivators had no motivation to work toward systematic improvements in cultivation techniques”. Thomas W. Shea, Jr., “Barriers to Economic Development in Traditional Societies: Malabar, A Case Study”, Journal of Economic History, XIX: 4, December 1959, p.509.

K. Gopalan Kutty et.al, op.cit, p.244.
demand for converting the land into a trust on the ground that cooperative enterprises would not last; the success of a noble venture depended on the leadership of a noble individual.\textsuperscript{185} He was not simply arguing but was taking a firm decision. In fact VT's attitude was not just an espousal of the trusteeship theory but a strong defense of the concept of private property. He was uncompromising on his position despite it being a social cause.\textsuperscript{186} VT wanted it to be an individual concern, in the model of a traditional Nambūtiri ĭllam, which itself was a kind of trust managed by a kāraṇavan.\textsuperscript{187} VT wanted a traditional system remodeled according to the new ideals of social good and on a secular basis. But the patron-like role of an individual was indispensable even for a social establishment, the concept of trusteeship was assigned to justify private property, and a Nambūtiri tradition was retained in a secular institution.\textsuperscript{188}

VT's attitude towards the tenancy and land reform issues was determined by his predilection over landlord interests and his unflinching faith in the sanctity of private property.\textsuperscript{189} His writings are conspicuous for a total absence of references to land reform, by way of negative or positive statements.\textsuperscript{190} But this silence is

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} VT's obstinacy cannot be justified in the context of the alleged Communist pressures designed to capture the commune; he was not circumscribed by any such reservations when he associated with the communists in the community reform measures after 1944.
\textsuperscript{187} "The Nambūtiri title to property was not absolute ownership, but more in the nature of trusteeship, entailed to the performance of certain sacred duties." T. Madhava Menon ed., \textit{A Handbook of Kerala}, Vol. II, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000, p. 789. Later on V.T. explained that it was his attachment to tradition that had led him to lay faith in the Gandhian ideal of Trusteeship. See K. Gopalankutty, et. al, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{188} In an interview with N.K. Bose in 1934, Gandhi explained that the ideal of property as a trust was 'true in theory only'. Cited in Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in \textit{Subaltern Studies Vol. III}, New Delhi, 1984, p.191.
\textsuperscript{189} Gandhi rejected a proposal to work for the improvement of starving peasants instead of serving the Harijans and denied the efficacy of forming peasant organizations which would naturally include Harijans in so far as their economic condition is concerned, on the ground that the plight of the Harijans required special treatment. CW, Vol. 58, pp.80-81 cited in Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi and the Critique of Civil Society" in \textit{Subaltern Studies}, Vol. III, New Delhi, 1984, p.190.
\textsuperscript{190} Still, there are a few indirect but revealing observations. He wrote: "Seizing land from big landowners in order to distribute it to the landless is just like butchering high-yielding milch
nullified by his frustrating observations on the destitution of the Nambūtiris in the post-independence era and on the advance of the hitherto marginalized communities in the cause of democracy but at the cost of ‘dharma’. The same factor heavily contributed to determine his political affiliations; his attraction to Gandhism and opposition to Communism were highly dependent on his position on the land question.


The notion about the Nambūtiri movement as having had women emancipation as its foremost agenda seems to have gained a general consent; the superiority of the movement over others is attested by stressing this aspect. For instance, it has been observed: “Seeing that women had to bear all injustices on their tender shoulders, this movement realized that the first step towards social change lay in the improvement of their condition. And VT was the word and sword of this movement”. Or again, “His movement can aptly be described as a male dominated women’s liberation movement. For all reform movements of the 20th century, other than that of V.T’s, women’s emancipation was only a marginal issue; but for the Nambūtiri movement, it was the central problem, the very hub of its activities”. It is also observed that what motivated the cows for providing free foot wear for the poor. Only short-sighted political workers with an eye on votes indulge in such activities. A right should be bestowed upon a person only if he really deserves it”. VT yudē Sampūrṇa Kritikaṭa, p.520. He was more agitated over the attitude of the extremists (possibly Naxelites). He wrote: “To break a house at midnight and rob all the valuables in it is an act of barbarism. Influenced by the movement of economic equality, many people are prompted to do things which they presume would bring about equality in society. They consider these acts as sacred". Ibid, p.519.

192 VT yudē Sampūrṇa Kritikaṭa, p.514. He also opined that the new Janmi is more dangerous than the old one. V. Muraleedharan Nair, “VT, Aṅgu Innu Nirāśanāṇa”, Kalākaumudi Weekly, 241, April 6, 1980, p.25.
193 In a very interesting study which compared the mass bases of Communism in Kerala and West Bengal, Zagoria noticed that the landholders of Kerala who supported the Communists were mainly those with three acres or less of land. Donald S. Zagoria, “Kerala and West Bengal”, Problems of Communism, Jan-Feb.1973, p.22.
195 Ibid, p.15.
reformers was "women’s natural right to acquire freedom from male supremacy..." Not only is the movement portrayed as having had gender parity as its primary agenda but VT is identified as having played an instrumental role in providing this new dimension to the movement.

Of course it was a fact that no other reform movement in Kerala had taken up gender issue as strongly as the Nambūtiris, that their grievances were made a part of the reform agenda and sought to be solved through separate and radical measures. But it is equally important to note that it was a male led emancipation programme and as such its agenda was moulded strictly according to the interests and priorities of the male segment of that community. The miseries of the Antarjanams had surfaced chiefly because of two reasons. Firstly, women in no other community were subjected to such extreme subordination as among the Nambūtiris. Secondly, the emancipation of the

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196 Ibid, p.18.
197 The 13th annual meeting of the Sabha in May 1921 rejected even the demand for a discussion of the grievances of the Antarjanams. K. Kesavan Potti in his article “Antarjanangal” lamented that resolutions which were submitted in the Sabha to this effect were discarded. See YK, 11:43, Aug.12, 1921.
199 Toshie Awaya argues that obvious tension existed between the liberatory aspirations of the Antarjanams and the interests of modern community-builders. The advocacy of swajītivāham of kanīṣṭans was seen to be stemming from economic, not liberatory political interest. Toshie Awaya, “Women in the Nambūtiri Caste Movement” in T. Mizushima and H. Yanagisawa eds., History and Society in South India, Tokyo, 1996, pp.51-54.
200 A report in Calcutta Guardian on the Antarjanams (“The Nambūtiri Women”, reproduced in YK, 19:37 Aug 3, 1929) while sketching out their pathetic condition, showed the great concern over their plight. Repressive form of patriarchy prevailed among all traditional communities, even among matrilineal. But in terms of marriage and property rights, matrilineal women were relatively free from the kind of deprivation that those among patriline had to face. They continued to live in their natal home even after marriage and did not want to depend upon their husbands either for their sustenance or for the care of their children. Divorce and remarriage was neither taboo nor much difficult. Freedom of movement also was not much restricted. Although the powers and the role of the kāranāvan inflicted great restraint upon their autonomy and independence, the position of women was far better in the case of matriarchal tarāvāds. Marriage was the life ideal for matrilineal women too, as was shown by the case of Indulekha, but by the beginning of the 20th century a large number of women had entered into the public sphere as professionals and writers. The 1931 Census Report of Travancore read: “The high degree of education attained by the women of Travancore... have contributed not a little to make the women of the country self-
Antarjanams was an essential prerequisite for the reform of the community and for the universalizing of the reform ethic.\textsuperscript{201} It is observed that the Antarjanams, who were confined indoors, and the Apphans who wandered about outside without having a roof over their heads, together constituted the true ‘internal proletariat’ of the community.\textsuperscript{202} The success of the reform agenda, including \textit{swajātivivāham}, equitable partition of \textit{illam} property and the right to create nuclear families, was dependent upon the awareness created among the Antarjanams and their strong support in opposing them. Therefore, the women’s emancipation agenda of the reform included the male grievances of the kanistans and it is not surprising that the leadership and ideology was determined by them.\textsuperscript{203} Premji confirmed this fact, fairly clearly, though decades later, when he said: “It was man’s fight to gain his own ends that resulted in the benefits reaped by the Nambūtiri women in the realm of social reform. The triumph of women was not the result of their own struggle.”\textsuperscript{204}

Since \textit{sambandham} had to be fought out, for which primogeniture and scriptural ban on \textit{Kaniṣṭavivāham} stood as obstacles, it was essential to create

\begin{itemize}
\item reliant and self-dependant...
\item K.C. Nārāyānan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.17.
\item These reformers viewed women as their subjects – to be changed as a consequence of persuasive arguments, social action, education and legislation. Sumit Sarkar has argued that they were concerned primarily with modifying relationships within their own families and sought only ‘limited and controlled emancipation’ of their womenfolk. Sumit Sarkar, “The Women’s Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal” in Kumkum Sangari and Suresh Vaid eds., \textit{Women and Culture}, Bombay, 1994, p.106.
\item Bhanuprakash, “Malāyāṃmayudē Śūryaśānnidhiyam”, \textit{Dēśābhimāṇi Sunday Supplement}, 13 Sep. 1998, p.4. The entire process of Indian social reform had treated women as mere objects of reform: “In the case of women, the reformers determined what was responsible for the present deplorable condition of Indian womenhood’, and how the situation could be remedied. This was not considered unusual, for it fitted the traditional role of men as ‘protectors’ and women as ‘dependants’, men as initiators and givers and women as passive recipients. It thus perpetuated the system while supposedly attacking it”. Suresht Ranjan Bald, “From Satyarth Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the ‘Women’s Movement’ in India” in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., \textit{Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment}, New Delhi, 1986, p.196.
\end{itemize}
awareness among the Antarjanams of the necessity of marriage reform in order to encourage them to resist the prevailing practices. Equally important was the kind of disgrace that the primitive life conditions and the public appearance of the Antarjanams brought about on the educated Nambūṭiris. The replacement of feudal patriarchy by the ethos of modern nuclear family necessitated conditions in which the wife would accompany the husband in his public life and would manage their home in his absence. This exigency called for a realignment of women’s position and role in accordance with the new circumstances but strictly in tune with the norms of male supremacy. The system of patrilocal residence, the status of women as house-wives, the concept of domesticity in tune with the nationalist discourse, all revealed the stereotypic ideal of female emancipation.

This was the context in which special care was given to the physical appearance of the Antarjanams and to make them enlightened wives. An educated husband needed an educated wife, his public engagements demanded his wife to be his companion and be capable enough to manage household affairs; his social relationships would entail his friends coming home with him and they should be treated well by his wife; and a sound knowledge in health and child care was essential for nurturing a powerful and intelligent new

\[205\] Mūthiringō, “Bhayankaramāya Bhāvi”, YK, 19:87 Aug 3, 1929. He wrote that while men were on the path of reform, Nambūṭiri women were still in the 10th century. If they continued to be so, in future, men would not turn towards them at all.

\[206\] If the colonial discourse domesticated, depoliticized and subjugated the colonized, the nationalist discourse reclaimed the domestic as the site where a resisting, liberatory, self-identity took form. Anupama Roy, “The Domestic, Domesticity and Women Citizens in Colonial India”, Contemporary India, Vol.2, No.3, July-Sep.2003, p.128. It was in this sovereign space of the domestic, where Partha Chatterjee identified the ‘most powerful, creative and historically significant project’ launched by nationalism i.e., the construction of the reformed, national tradition with the ‘woman’ as its repository. Partha Chatterjee, op.cit, 129.

\[207\] Priyadatha Kallāt observed that the women emancipation agenda of the Sabha was limited to dress reform alone; any further steps beyond this position was taken by the leadership after Ōngallār. Conversation with I.V. Babu cited in Social, political & cultural Result of Nambūṭiri Renaissance. Ph.D Dissertation, University of Calicut, 1996, p.202.
All these warranted women’s education and a controlled emancipation. A famous article and a speech of VT dealt in detail with these male concerns. Elsewhere he explained the dynamics of the liberation of the Antyajanams from another angle fairly clearly: “This liberation struggle against orthodox Brahmanism was really a hoax meant to serve male interests for the organizers of this movement had hardly any respect for the cause of women’s emancipation... If the kaniṣṭans organized themselves for swajātivivāham, they had two reasons: one, a vijāti woman will not meekly submit to her Nambiitiri husband’s onslaughts against her. Two, their whim for heavy dowry and a slavish wife ...” In fact VT’s statement reflected the strictly marriage-oriented agenda of the female emancipation programme of the Nambiitiri movement.

It is interesting to note that women had started to realize the implicit agenda of female emancipation proposed by men. For instance, Pāvathy Nenminimangalam in an article “Strīvām” (Strī, 1:1, Edavam 1108 (May-June 1933), pp.15-16 in J. Devika ed., Her-Self: Early Writings on Gender by Malayalee Women 1898-1938, Kolkata. 2005, pp.149-50) cautioned women not to give too much importance to either attire or adornments or to misunderstand women’s duty as seducing men. She urged women to earn their livelihood just like men and take it as a matter of dignity.

Demands for education of women addressed the male need for companionship and understanding, a need that surfaced because of the exclusionary and alienating British imperial state and the growing mobility in Indian society. It was good for the country, good for the husbands, and for children. It was good for women only because it helped them become good wives and mothers and trained them to perform their roles more effectively in the modern context. Women’s education was not seen as a means to career advancement. Even a staunch exponent of women’s education, like Dayananda Saraswati, eloquently defined women’s role thus: “The woman should do the domestic duties in obedience to her husband. The work outside should belong to the province of the man’s duties”. See Suresht Ranjan Bald, “From Satyartha Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the ‘Women’s Movement’ in India” in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment, New Delhi, 1986, pp.196-98.

Pāvathy Nenminimangalam in her speech at the 17th Annual meeting of the Ālathiyūr Upasabha lambasted at the indifference of the male reformers towards the grave issues of the Antyajanams. She said that women who boycotted ghōṣa started accepting it again. She pointed out that by and large liberals had started showing indifference to gender issues and many were returning to a conservative position saying that they had not expected this much. She attacked men for their hypocrisy; they were professing revolution without any sincerity and had little interest in practicing them in personal life. Dēvaki Narikkāṭtiri in her speech at the same meeting lamented over the inability of women to go forward if men had abandoned
Reform was regarded as the chief means by which such 'defects' could be rectified, and one of the issues that received considerable attention was the condition of the Antarjanams, generally treated as the 'reformer's burden'. In this process, the Antarjanams came to be conceived of as objects of reform, not its agents and were "portrayed as victims who needed to be 'led' out of their plight, as if passivity were a necessary attribute of the oppressed". Reforming Antarjanams was an intense concern among the Nambūtiri reformers, which gained considerable momentum by the end of the 1920s. Many Antarjanams discarded ghōśa, liberated themselves by entering into the public sphere and worked actively in the reform movement along with male reformers. Though reforming the Antarjanams was the centre of the debate, male reformers differed over the conception, the means and the priorities to be kept in mind and the

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213 J. Devika, "Engendering Individuals: The Project of Nambutiri Brahman Reform in Kerala", *Journal of South Indian History*, 1:2, March-Aug. 2004, p.87. But Devika cautions us that modern literature and theatre also provided the space in which such constructions were challenged. Both these possibilities are found fulfilled in the writings of Lalitimbika Antarjanam who was a critical participant in the reform movement. Some of the most persuasive constructions of the dreary existence of women in illams and their sheer powerlessness are to be found in her early short stories, and also, some of the most strident critiques of male-oriented reformism.

214 The Annual Meeting of the Sabha at Taliparamba was presided over by Pārvathi Nenminimangalam and the name of Ārya Paḷḷam was proposed as the next Satyagrahi candidate to replace Kelappan at Guruvāyūr. See Mūṭhirinŏd, "13-ām Thiyathī", *Māṭrubhūmi Weekly*, 9:2, 1 Feb. 1932, p.7; M.R. Bhāṭṭathiriṇḍ, "Viḷḷavathintē Oṛēḍu", *Māṭrubhūmi Weekly*, 14:1, 23 March 1936, pp.8-9. But, except in the case of a few, majority of the Antarjanams who had come out in the public did it on coercion from the part of their husbands. See A. Bhavadāsan Bhāṭṭathiriṇḍ, "K.N, V.T Enniavarkku Prathyakṣa Katthē", *UN*, 15:9, 8 Dec. 1933, p.3. This was the reason why except a few, the majority soon withdrew into seclusion.
limits to be imposed in the process. Male reformers had started showing concern over the Antarjanams' efforts because they wanted to expand their own platform of liberation.

A significant factor behind the Nambūtiri agitation for marriage reform was the increasing concern over sambandham as a non-manly practice. It worked as a crucial factor in promoting swajātivivāham and was very decisive in bringing the Antarjanams to the reform arena. Sambandham alliance was a partnership of two independent individuals almost on equal terms in both conjugal and economic relationships. The reform literature stands testimony to the great respect shown by the Nambūtiris towards their sambandham wives; even a mūss with three Nambūtiri wives preferred to stay with his liaison. This was because they were educated and fashionable. But once the concept of marriage and partnership started to be viewed from the new moral point of view, where wife was supposed to be the junior and obedient partner of the husband, sambandham was frowned upon as non-manly and ridiculous. The role of the

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215 There was considerable fear that Antarjanams would misuse their newly acquired freedom and this apprehension began to develop as a serious matter of concern and started disturbing many reformers around this time. See Maniyan, “Śrī Swātāntryanthintē Pōkkku”, _UN_, 14:38, June 30, 1933, p.2; M.S. Krishnan Nambūtiri, “Antarjanam”, _UN_ 14:36, 16 June, 1933, p.2. Krishnan Nambūtiri urged the Nambūtiri men to impose some necessary restraint over the the Antarjanams and to keep control over their radicalism.

216 It was a general belief that ‘too much of this women’s lib’ would upset the serenity and tranquility of the family which was considered to be the shock absorber of disquiet and turbulence in the outside world. See Saradamoni, “Women. Nation-Building and Indian Renaissance” in _In Search of India’s Renaissance_, Chandigarh, 1992, p.73.

217 VT’s narrative on his marriage and remarriage explains how respectfully he approached his sambandham wife. The alliance was purely sexual and therefore was free from power relationships. This had made sambandham a casual relationship but capable of retaining freshness all throughout. (But it is very important that VT openly described the physical features of his sambandham wife and his sexual relations with her as in the case of an illicit relationship. But nowhere does he make a description of either the physical features of any of the Antarjanams or of his sexual relations with his Nambūtiri wife). See _VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal_, pp.288-290.

218 _VTyudē Sampūrṇa Kritikal_, p.571.

219 To adapt it to the new concepts of paternity, marriage had to be converted into a ‘contract’ with the concept of the ‘protection of the wife’ and sexuality had to be redefined, restraining women’s sexual freedom. Praveena Kodoth, “Courting Legitimacy or Delegitimizing Custom? Sexuality, Sambandham and Marriage Reform in Late Nineteenth Century Malabar”, _Modern Asian Studies_, 35:2, 2001, pp.374-77.
husband in *sambandham* was devoid of manliness and was perceived to be similar to that of a wife—passive, submissive and casual—and was also feminine because he did not have the roles commonly held to be that of a husband—as the lord and the judge at home. Repeated references to manliness appear in the context of the discussion over *sambandham*. Treating *sambandham* as devoid of manliness evidently meant that the role of the husband and wife in *swajātivivāham* was that of the master of the house and his subordinate partner respectively. These were justified by the concepts of modern patriarchy; but a shift to *swajātivivāham* presupposed that the *swajāti* wife be culturally as advanced as the *vijāti* wife.

The dynamics of the women emancipation agenda of the Nambūtiri movement has been summed up thus: “The moderates among the Nambūtiris did not completely and fundamentally unseat the traditional concept of domesticity, but the inner quarters were completely redefined. The daily routine of the women within the *illams* which was traditionally a highly regimented series of ritualistic observances, was partially or fully replaced by a new routine that stressed domestic management, child-care, entertainment of guests etc. The place assigned to women—the inner quarters—seemed undisputed, but the function attributed to home, the power relations traversing it, the practices of domestic life and the agency of women, are all different. Secondly, the number of authors sought to locate the ideals in tradition and history so that they seemed to be not alien at all but part of a long-lost golden age, merely a rediscovery of one’s own lost legacy. A third strategy was to present the project of

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220 The notion of *Paurusham*, which formerly meant not just manliness but also bravery of fantastic proportions, was now linked with this worldly, concrete forms of power and authority circulating in the modern public domain. J. Devika, “Imagining Women’s Social Space in early Modern Keralam”, *CDS Working Paper Series No.329*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002, p.9. It was not simply an agenda of the social reform movements; recovery of masculinity was a part of the nationalist agenda too. See Radhika Singha, “Nationalism, Colonialism and the Politics of Masculinity”, *Studies in History*, 14:1, n.s, 1998, p.139.

221 It is argued that the challenge to the old order was made in terms of an image of society in which gender difference figured as the fundamental principle of ordering human beings, as the alternative to the established social order that privileged birth and inherited status. J. Devika, “Imagining Women’s Social Space in early Modern Keralam”, *CDS Working Paper Series No.329*, Thiruvananthapuram, 2002, p.2.
modernization as more or less a process of selection. The gap perceived between the existing arrangements and the ideal, it seemed, was not to be filled by importing solutions from the West. Rather, it seemed to lie in a careful process of selection, of isolating elements of socio-cultural life that were amenable to modern self-building and community-building and blending them to actualize the imagined modern order.²²²

VT’s contribution towards the Nambūtiri ideal of female emancipation was great and commendable; his legacy to the movement has been explained with reference to it.²²³ Unlike many other male reformers, he did not view women as mere objects of reform but wanted them to be active subjects.²²⁴ When he got an opportunity, he proved his credentials through his remarriage. He put his ideals into practice first at home and then in the wider field of his community out not only by making his wife a companion but also by setting a precedent. But in real life V.T’s concept of the position of women in society did not differ greatly from the view held by the moderate Nambūtiris; it ran parallel to the ideals of modern domesticity.²²⁵ His address to the Antarjanams and his thoughts on his remarriage issue revealed how he envisaged their position in the emerging new society.²²⁶ As a person who had laid great stress on morality and sanctity of family, he could not have advanced too far on the women question. In fact, the

²²⁵ Devika holds the view that this was the attitude of the moderate Nambūtiris. But VT’s stand on the women question show that even the radicals did not have an advanced vision in practical life. See J. Devika, “Imagining Women’s Social Space in early Modern Keralam”, Working Paper, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, April 2002, p.9.
²²⁶ VṬyudē Sampūrṇa Kṛitiṅa, pp.556-565; 566-579; APP. Nambūtiri, op. cit, pp.99-104. VT’s political guru, Kēḷappan had high reservations on the role of women in society. He wrote that what the nation wanted was not women who fought for power and position but ideal women who were ready to suffer and sacrifice and to serve the nation. See K. Kēḷappan, “Strīdaṁmaṁ”, Śṛimati Special, 1935.
concept of the “perfect wife” continued to be the reformer’s ideal. But the concept was redefined in accordance with the changing times: first, there were modifications in the appropriate activities for a female at different stages of her life; second, the appropriate area for female action was expanded; and third, there was a new and growing approval of individualism. As early as 1930 VT had started laying strict boundaries on feminine freedom; in his longest speech ever delivered, V.T. spoke about an imaginary meeting of the Antarjana samājām, in which he was also a participant, and which was presided over by an Antarjanam married to a Christian; he got provoked by the overconfident, assertive and highly westernized attitudes of the women who had gathered there. Even in his earlier works a cautious note was visible in his approach to women’s problems. In many of his short stories he described the miseries of the Antarjanams, but his real intention was to arouse in them the emotion of love towards young Nambūtiris so that Kaniṣṭavivāham might he encouraged. His drama, which is popularly acclaimed as an epic of women’s emancipation, laid strict boundaries on feminine freedom. At the end of the drama the hero warned: “Let woman be a weakling that man may dominate her, but the great institution that we call ‘family’ rests on her stooping shoulders. To sustain the growth of

It is more surprising to notice a similar vision even in the works of Lalitāmbika. While trying to emancipate women from the existing deplorable conditions, she aimed at a renaissance of ‘true Indian women’. She did not propose gender equality or economic self-sufficiency. Nor was there any attempt to question religion which sanctioned customs and social evils. She was only protesting against evils and injustices in order to realize a social reform. P. Sumalatha, Malayālathē Vanithā Nōvalistukaḻudē Feminist Samīpanam, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 1995, pp.84-85.

Finally, when a resolution congratulating another mixed marriage was passed, he bursted out in extreme orthodox fury and decided to wind up his whole reform activities. His presentation of the real story of the remarriage of Uma Antarjanam to a working class Muslim (Ibid, pp.322-330) is even more reactionary. His strong opposition to conversions, even as a means of liberation or empowerment, stands in sharp contrast to the position taken by many other Nambūtiri reformers. (E.M.S, “Nambūtirimār Engōṭu?” YK Silver Jubilee Special, 1944, in EMS-ntē Sampūrṇa Kritikal, p.265). This obstinacy reminds us of Tarabhai Shinde’s cry for equality, her reproach of male reformers who wanted to help women but not accord them equal status. See Geraldine Forbes, The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India, Delhi, 2000, p.22.
society her heart should be full of motherly tenderness; her robes will have to be torn up to cover the bleeding wounds of the nation..." 231 V.T.’s role model was Indulēkha. 232 Though shaped by colonial modernity, the personality of Indulēkha could not transgress the limits of feudal identity and values. 233 Her life-vision was greatly circumscribed by the ideal of marriage. 234

Against this greatly restricted and highly selective nature of the Nambūtiri agenda on the emancipation of the Antarjanams, VT’s involvement was certainly decisive. Since VT was invested with excellent literary capacities his stories, drama and speeches attracted popular attention and could contribute considerably to arouse the Antarjanams. His high concentration on the feminine issue also caused to promote the issue substantially and to build up his image as the exalted emancipator of the Antarjanams. But VT was neither the pioneer nor the only champion of female emancipation in the Nambūtiri community; his articles and speeches were relatively less radical too compared to those of many of his contemporaries like Mūthiringōd or Pāndam; in fact his renown originated from his high enthusiasm to make a niche in one of the specific spheres of the movement 235 and was aided by his inimitable style and literary caliber.

231 Adukkaḻayil Ninnu Arangathēkkku, in V Truvē Sampūrṇa Kritisīl, p.391. Two later dramas, which were also the products of the reform movement, had introduced the gender issue in an entirely different perspective. Premji’s drama written in 1940 presented the concept thus: “women’s destiny is in their own hands. They must fight for and win their own freedom. No one will show the moral courage to set the caged parrot free. It has to beat its wings on the bars of the cage and break them” (M.P. Bhattacharyipād, Ritumati, Triśūr, 1991, p.8, 72). Another drama, written and presented by the Antarjanams of the work centre at Lakkidi in 1948 contained highly radical feminist ideas. The preface of the drama stated: “In yester-years, V.T.’s farce Adukkaḻayil Ninnu Arangathēkkku set fire to the arsenals of orthodox Brahmanism. Today, the play Tozhil Kēndraithilēkkku aims a heavy blow at male domination” (M.C. Nambūtiripād, Preface, Tozhil Kēndraithilēkkku, Antarjana Samājam, Triśūr, 1948, p.iii).

232 V Truvē Sampūrṇa Kritisīl, p. 298.


234 “Though well-educated in modern fashion, the heroine makes forceful intervention precisely in a matter that falls clearly in the domain of the modern domestic, namely marriage and marital fidelity”. J. Devika, “Imagining Women’s Social Space in Early Modern Keralam”, Working Paper, CDS, Thiruvananthapuram, April 2002, p.3.

235 In his letter to the Antarjanams, VT expressed his ambition to gain a personal reputation by upholding a single and specific cause as had been done by Kurūr in the education issue, V.S.
In the 1940s when VT again entered into the public sphere he became actively involved in rescuing the Antarjanams from their miserable plight. He attacked the custom of dowry and arranged the first dowry-less and inter-caste marriage.\textsuperscript{236} He cooperated with the \textit{Ongallür Sabha} and worked for the uplift of the Antarjanams. He emboldened them to take up independent positions and helped them in the formation of a work centre at Lakkidi.\textsuperscript{237} But a few years later he came down with a scathing criticism on the "work centre model" and glorified an alternate project.\textsuperscript{238} He did not approach gender issues with the same sympathy all throughout; his position was dependent on the nature of politics involved in it; he also retreated considerably from his earlier radicalism in later years.\textsuperscript{239} His patriarchal limitations and his vacillating position on the gender issue can be properly understood only if we distinguish his reminiscences and other later writings from his speeches and works of the reform days. In most of

\textsuperscript{236} VT\textit{yudé Sampörña Kritika}: p.562.
\textsuperscript{237} VT\textit{yudé Sampörña Kritika}: p. 311. But he evaluated the marriage of his sister as a part of his anti-caste propaganda and not as an act of recognition of the self-determination of women. Later he opposed the remarriage of Uma Antarjanam on the ground that law forbade divorce in the case of Nambūtiri women and strongly condemned her inter-religious marriage with a Muslim. \textit{Ibid}, pp.322-330.
\textsuperscript{238} It was a new wage labour movement of the Nambiitiris and Antarjanams which was piloted by the Nambûtiri welfare society of Puthilôt unit. See V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, "Nambūtirimārude Kulippaṭi Saptāham", \textit{Māṟṟubhūmi} Daily, 4-11-1970, reproduced in A.V. Srekumar ed., \textit{VT}, p.236. (It is not included in \textit{VTyudé Sampūrṇa Kritikā}). This article is noted for VT's scathing criticism on the work centre at Lakkidi and for his observation that it was meant to convert the Nambūtiris into communists.
\textsuperscript{239} This runs parallel to the characterization of Raja Rammohun Roy. Despite being a 'champion of women's rights' and a feminist, his personal relationship with women were far from ideal. He was married three times. There is no evidence that he looked to his wives for companionship; there were rumours that his adopted son, Rajaram, was the child of his Muslim mistress. After Rammohun's father's death he argued with his mother and in anger left the family home with his wives and children. "Examined from this perspective Rammohun seems less than an ideal champion of women's rights": Geraldine Forbes, \textit{The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India}, Cambridge, 2000, p.10.
his later writing he is found to have taken an attitude quite contrary to the one that he took during the reform days.\textsuperscript{240}

In a sweeping criticism on VT and on his panegyrist, K.S. Radhakrishnan attracted the attention of the public towards the hypocrisy of VT on the women question; he argued that for VT women meant just Nambūtiri women and hence he does not deserve to be praised as the emancipator of women in general. A part of the criticism reads thus: “Though VT stood for the cause of women, we do not have any proof to show that he felt the pulse of women in general. In fact there is substantial evidence to show that he was insensitive to the sufferings of at least the Vārasyāps”.\textsuperscript{241} The criticism is valid not just for VT’s indifference to the sufferings of women in other communities but also for his tendency to compromise on the issues of women of his own community.\textsuperscript{242} V.T’s retreat was more meaningful because he was well informed of the varied aspects of modern feminism even as early as the 20’s.\textsuperscript{243} This may lead to the premise that his radicalism was simply a mask to hide his male agenda behind his feminism; or it was rather a reform strategy. The fulfillment of the male agenda needed the Antārjanams to be activated and this was possible only by presenting before them a wonderland of great opportunities.

\textsuperscript{240} As a Gandhian, probably VT was greatly captivated by Gandhi’s position on gender. For instance Gandhi wrote: “The man should look to the maintenance of the family, the woman to household management; the two thus supplementing and complementing each other’s labours...Nor do I see in this any invasion of women’s rights or suppression of her freedom”. Cited in Suresht Ranjan Bald, “From Satyarth Prakash to Manushi: An Overview of the ‘Women’s Movement’ in India” in Dilip. K. Basu and Richard Sisson eds., \textit{op.cit.}, p.203. It has been observed that Gandhi held \textit{emancipation} to be more appropriate than \textit{empowerment} or that the goal of empowerment can be realized only after emancipation. He also rejected undue importance attached to politics in transforming the social system. See K.P. Misra, “Gandhian Way of Women Empowerment”, \textit{Gandhi Marg}, Vol. 26, No. 1, Apr-June 2004, p.84.


\textsuperscript{242} It is surprising to note that VT in his autobiographical writings addressed all Nambūtiri women (including his wife and Uma Antārjanam) by the respectful plural term ‘they’ while his \textit{sambandham} wife is referred to as mere ‘she’. See \textit{VTyudē Sampārṇa Kritikal}, pp.282-91; 322-24; 337.

\textsuperscript{243} \textit{VTyudē Sampārṇa Kritikal}, pp. 549, 568, 569, 573. He had hinted at women’s self-realization, single life as spinsters, their entry into any domain of public life, etc, etc.
5:7. Summing Up

Any study of VT will be incomplete unless it takes into account his historic mission, that of rescuing the community from insularity and exclusiveness and to bring the Nambūtiris as partners in the modern civil society.\textsuperscript{244} But even this communitarian mission was not completely free from personal interests.\textsuperscript{245} Of course humanism and secularism had influenced him and his public dealings in a powerful way, but they were just concomitants of the basic objective and did not act as decisive factors in leading him to expand his platform.\textsuperscript{246} The Nambūtiri reformers had been disturbed by the incompatibility of traditional customs and the emerging social order, and the movement was aimed at removing those hurdles that stood in the way of their collective interests and thus hindered their entry into the new civil society. Hence communitarian interests dominated their reform discourse; English education and marriage reform were identified as the foremost means of achieving them.

In fact the reform movement had fulfilled its agenda around 1930, and so new ideals were incorporated into the movement by the politically motivated radical groups in order to gain an upper hand in the political domain and to revive the bygone Nambūtiri dominance in a new way. It included programmes such as the elimination of distance and touch pollution and the removal of obstacles that impeded their free involvement in the secular civil society. A

\textsuperscript{244} See M.G.S. Nārāyaṇan, "VT: Commuṇipathinappathēkkulja Yāthrayilē Mārgadāśākan" in A.V. Sreekumar ed., \textit{op.cit.}, p.78.
\textsuperscript{245} V.T. Bhaṭṭathiripād, \textit{Kaṇṇirum Kinōvum}, Kottayam, 1970, p.14. He writes that while he worked for the liberation of all people, who were smarting under the shackles of customs, he was in fact doing it for his own sake.
\textsuperscript{246} Moreover, VT and his close associates shared a common concept of humanism. Nālappāt believed that the base of Indian humanism was \textit{dharma} which was nobler than the concept of modern justice. Justice (\textit{nītī}) should be rewritten as \textit{dharma} because while justice can fasten the capitalist only, \textit{dharma} can act as a social and ethical restraint on both the capitalist and the labourer. See Akkitham, \textit{Ponnānikaḷari}, Kottayam, 1998, p.19. Similarly, Govindan held that the entire cultural capital, i.e., human values, which men have acquired over a period of the past 5 lakh years, is on the verge of extinction. This imminent danger could not be avoided through a simple economic struggle; a moral and ethical struggle alone can save humanity. M. Govindan, "Anvēṣaṇathintē Ārambham", in \textit{M. Govindantē Upanyāsangal}, Kottayam, 1986, p.27.
strong movement in favour of the formation of a monolithic, rationalistic, enterprising community was also being pursued with such programmes as the elimination of sub-caste differences and induction of all the banished groups (for various reasons including Śmārtavichāram, forced conversion into Islam or violation of custom); reform of customs and practices in accordance with the ideals of modern science and reason in order to make the Nambūtiris a model community; and instilling in them a strong capitalist spirit to convert them into an economically vibrant and dynamic segment of the society. Thus all the programmes of action, both sectarian and secular, had community-building as their chief target.

The petering out of the movement immediately after achieving the foremost goals has to be explained in this context. Most of the activists were satisfied with the fulfillment of the immediate objectives; the expansion of the programme to include the general grievances of the civil society meant hardships and renunciation of privileges which many found difficult to accept; the ultra-radicals were not able to convince them of the possible benefits of such a wider horizon. The traditional lethargy and conservatism circumscribed expansion into new arenas; even the radical aspects of the movement like female emancipation were given up half way. Thus the advance of the movement came to a turning point once the immediate communitarian and male-oriented agenda was met; with the enactment of the tenancy legislations and Nāyor Regulations, organized external pressures on the community also had faded away; the question of the eradication of pollution and enunciation of temple entry involved the consent of all the savarṇa castes, on which the Nāyorṣ were equally conservative. Thus the defensive agenda of the movement had vanished and the fuel had run out making the forward journey impossible.

The Nambūtiri movement was characterized by group leadership; the absence of a sole leader of authority was a cause of concern throughout the
1920s, in its decisive phase.\textsuperscript{247} Nambūtiris aspired for a leader of Mannam’s calibre;\textsuperscript{248} unfortunately they failed in producing such an undisputed leader. This may be because they lacked a common programme of action, incorporating all sections of the community, and, more importantly, they missed a common enemy. Even in the case of \textit{sambandham} and tenancy issues, which involved people other than the Nambūtiris, they could not bring the community together. In all these issues against which they fought, there were strong votaries within themselves who supported the other side. Factors generating serious discontent were also absent; before the partition of the joint property and the later land reforms, the community was never in economic distress; and in social life they never experienced dishonour.

Against this background the Nambūtiri movement represented a defensive response to erosion of property and privileges. The dawn of the modern age had unleashed new forces and new developments and had led to the empowerment of traditionally marginalized groups. These were possible only at the expense of the traditionally privileged groups, especially the Nambūtiris. The rise of other sections of society brought the Nambūtiris down in the social scale in a relative sense. They were still privileged and propertied but signs of downfall were clear and visible. The old values were also being replaced by new ones; the system of family, moral values and vision of life were all being refashioned according to western models. In a traditional society based on caste and its obligations, the changing value system created considerable hardships for the Nambūtiris who were dependent on others at all points of life. They had to adjust with the changing value system and to defend their privileges against the onslaughts of

\textsuperscript{247} After the death of Kūṟū, the Nambūtiri movement lacked a supreme leader which was clearly reflected in the discourse of the 1920s and 30s. See, for instance, Editorial, \textit{YK}, 16:93, Sep 1, 1926 and Pāṭirissēri’s plea for a leader in \textit{YK} 16:94, Sep 4, 1926.

\textsuperscript{248} C.K. Nambūtiri lamented that what the Nambūtiris needed was a leader like Mannam with a strong community feeling and leadership quality. \textit{Ormakkurippukal}, unpublished document.
the lower orders of the society. This needed new forms of caste unity and organizational structure; the reform movement was thus born with a strictly defensive programme.

VT was the product of this movement. In fact there is a great disparity between his prevailing image and his real life and mission as reflected by contemporary evidences. Born and brought up in an orthodox Nambūtiri family and being engaged in the communitarian movement for a long period, he could not shed off the strong communitarian sentiments in spite of his radical involvements and his radical postures. Nor did any of his later involvements provide him an image sufficiently capable of outweighing his communitarian inclinations; his later articles and speeches run counter to the development of a civil society. The failure of his aspirations on the role of his community and himself in the public sphere of the up and coming Kērala might have frustrated him.

Community, family and the individual were very much dear to VT; he looked at social problems from these paradigms. For him society was only secondary to the individual; the abstract ideal of the 'absolute man' was his fascination. Hence he preferred Gandhism for Marxism. He also eschewed party politics for it involved slavish subordination. He was never ready to compromise his individualism even for a social cause howsoever great it might be, but there were many instances of compromise on issues of communitarian importance. While glorifying the RSS, he was not bothered about its authoritarian and anti-individualistic structure. Those who dismissed his increasing conservatism as a consequence of ageing did not notice the thread

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of continuity that ran through his thoughts and attitudes from his radical days to the days of his frustration.

Of course VT had played a very decisive role in the history of 20th century Kerala through his involvement in the community reform; his contributions in transforming his community so as to enable it to adapt the changing social environment had considerably helped in bringing about a new social system and in the development of a new civil society.\(^{251}\) His great contribution in changing the marriage system and the family system, in bringing the Nambūtiri women outdoors, in fighting out pollution, in making the temple-entry movement successful and in discarding irrational customs and rituals that retarded the progress of the community, all had been crucial in the process of what has been called ‘making the Nambūtiri human’ and in clearing the way for the future social progress of Kerala. Reforming the Nambūtiri was the first necessary step towards reforming the whole society and in that respect the Nambūtiri movement, with all its defensiveness and communitarianism, deserves to be appreciated.\(^{252}\) The movement also contributed much to recast Hinduism on modern lines with its struggle against irrational customs and rituals and by instilling elements of rationalism in religious outlook. Some of the earliest women activists of the communist party came from the Nambūtiris.\(^{253}\) In that sense the movement played its role in the empowerment of women in Kerala.

\(^{251}\) The Nambūtiri movement allows space for a study in accordance with the Weberian thesis on the Lutheran Reformation. Although Weber’s thesis on Luther’s role in instilling a spirit of capitalism among the Europeans has been questioned, the Nambūtiri movement furnishes evidences to argue that it promoted the Nambūtiris to relegate ritualism and tradition to the background and to advance along capitalism and entrepreneurship. For a discussion see Frank Parkin, Max Weber, London, 2002, pp.40-70.

\(^{252}\) It is argued that his greatest legacy was to end the exclusiveness of the Nambūtiris and thus redeem them from the wrath of other communities. It was due to his activities, along with that of many others, that the Nambūtiris started Entering the public sphere in the modern period. T.K. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, VT Kritikal: Oru Paṭamam, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 1995, p.53.

Of late there have been serious discussions over the slow replacement of the reform values by revivalist trends. Rituals and superstitions are on the return; priestly vocation has become the lucrative profession for most of the Nambiitiris; and the new Yōgākṣēmasabha is discussing issues of trivial value. It is lamented that the most dynamic and secular-minded movement has fallen into the depths of sectarianism and retrogression and has ceased to be progressive and realistic. But the history of the Nambiitiri movement may reveal that this is not an alarming situation, the Sabha was always responding to pressures and forces from outside. Ritualistic faith is on the return and rituals, ceremonies and even superstitious beliefs provide a lot of job opportunities. For the Nambiitiris these are very prosperous fields of employment; as the priesthood they have an undisputed prerogative in the religious domain. As M.R.B. has rightly observed, the society as such has become un-intellectual. The Nambiitiris are taking advantage of this situation; a curious mixture of ritualism, irrationalism and professionalism provides them a new vista of life and the social dominance which they had lost during the age of reform and reason.

Even in the discussions on the recent revivalist tendencies, VT is the reference point as if he was the harbinger of all modern values in the community and his legacy as being threatened by the forces of revivalism. In fact it is a paradox that VT, who stood for the Nambiitiri values in the reform era and later, has been identified as the exponent of a secular and civil culture. The false


255 I.C.P. ridiculed it as “Plastic Yōgākṣēmasabha”. He said: “Now-a-days people belonging to the old Yōgākṣēmasabha make a lot of fuss about ‘Punyāham’ and they bemoan the lack of enough Nambiitiris to perform this purificatory rite. These are the plastic yōgakhemites”. Mādhyaṃam Weekly, 147:3, Dec.15, 2000, p.24.


identification of VT as the leader of the movement and also as the fountainhead of the radical and secular spirit continues to dominate both popular and academic perceptions.

Of late there emerged a debate over the revivalist affiliations of VT in his later life. It has been argued that the tendency of most of the political parties to deny tradition frustrated him to ally with the forces of revivalism and thus he was playing a crucial role in linking the Nambūtiri movement with Hindu revivalism. He resigned from the Congress and refused to associate with the communists. Finally he collaborated with the RSS because it was the true representative of nationalism, patriotism and tradition.259 On the other hand, there were simultaneous attempts to oppose the tendency to suffronize VT and to assert his strong secular affiliations. It is held that VT, who stood for making Nambūtiris humans, could never be otherwise and that he had denounced attempts at misinterpreting him during his very lifetime.260 In fact all these debates are based on the presumption by both parties that VT was the uncompromising champion of secular interests and values; while the former argue that the unethical politics of the mainstream parties had forced him to make a rethinking of his ideology and attitudes and to ennoble the Hindutva forces, the latter deny any changes in his attitudes at all. Reality lay between the two positions; VT was the champion of the causes of his community and its interests; he could not traverse much beyond that; however, his communitarianism did not develop into full fledged communalism.

Nor was VT the sole representative of the Nambūtiri movement. He was only one among its many leaders till 1932 and ceased to be a representative of the Sabha thereafter. By the early 1930s the movement had nearly come to an end, and after 1932 VT could not associate with the movement owing to many reasons. Thereafter the movement dispersed and dissolved into many streams.

VT busied himself with the Ulbuddhakērālam, EMS and many others entered into politics, and a few continued in the Sabha which was facing its extinction. Some of the erstwhile Sabha activists became Congressmen, some others Communists and a vast majority became inactive. VT’s writings and speeches after the 1950s indicated his personal attitudes and reflected his growing frustration; his opinions were not that of the community or that of the movement as a whole or that of other Nambūtiris who associated with other forums or those prospered through modern vocations. The nature of VT’s reaction conforms to a typical feudal backlash. But the society did not heed him much; it accepted only his radical image and not the reactionary one.261

The discussion on revivalism acquired special importance in the context of the growing disillusionment among the new generation of Nambūtiris due to their marginalization.262 This disillusionment created a sense of deprivation in them in relation to other communities who were held to have benefitted unduly through their pressure tactics which led the Nambūtiris to be sidelined.263 The revival of the Sabha is justified in this context.264 The old movement is severely

261 This is clear from the response to his articles. Even his most aggressive article “Adhamarē” (Kalākaumudi Weekly, 219, Nov. 19, 1979) evoked little response either from the side of the intelligentsia or from the readers.

262 P.K. Āryan Nambūtiri, “Charitpaṭhinte Paṭam”, YK 1:1&2, Sep-Oct. 1980, pp.67-69. By comparing the pre-reform days with the present condition, he found both as having marked by marginalization and identity crisis. If the Nambūtiris were able to recoup under an able leadership in those days, no scope for such a revival and no similar enthusiasm are visible today. He writes: “Even in those days, the problem encountered by the Nambutiri was that of his existence itself. He had to attain modern education lest he should be isolated or rejected from the mainstream of society. Today the problems have changed, but the danger to his existence still looms large. The Nambutiri is being neglected, marginalized and isolated in every field of social activity. He has lost his hereditary assets and the rich legacy of Nambutiri culture and tradition. He is denied the opportunity of employment and rehabilitation. In the vast canvas of society, the most distorted portarait is that of the Nambutiri...” Ibid, p.69.

263 The Nambūtiris are now engaged in an effort to recapture caste symbols (which they had earlier renounced in order to adapt to a secular social life) to organize on communal lines and to retain caste-exclusiveness. These ventures are evaluated as efforts aimed at community-building enabling the Nambūtiris to function as a pressure group and as a search for self-identity. See Supriya VC, Nambūtiri Pariṣkaraṇa Samrambhanga Malayāḷa Sāhityathil, PhD Dissertation, Calicut University, 2002, p.284.

264 See Editorial, YK, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, pp.3-5.
criticized for its ‘deconstructive agenda’ and for neglecting community interests in the name of ‘universal humanism’.\textsuperscript{265} It is a debatable issue whether there is a general decline in the condition of the community and if so what are the real reasons for the phenomenon. Even the land reforms measures of the post-independent era did not affect the Nambūtíris adversely much.\textsuperscript{266} Another tendency that has been developing recently is to ally with all those communities culturally closer to the Nambūtíris, like the \textit{Ambalavāsis}, and to incorporate them in the new \textit{Yōgakṣēmasabha}, in order to strengthen the bargaining power vis-à-vis other communities and their associations.\textsuperscript{267} One of the solutions recommended for the existing deprivation of the Nambūtíris is to urge the government to recognize Vedas as a subject of study at the university level.\textsuperscript{268}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{265} \textit{Ibid}, pp.4-5. “There is not a single Nambūtiri family left unaffected by the land legislation”. Nambūtiris are therefore urged to exert pressure on the government to form a corporation in order to resettle all those who were afflicted by the land legislation.
\item \textsuperscript{266} P. Chitran Nambūtiripād, “VT: Oru Kaṟmāyōgi”, in \textit{VT-yē Kandethal}, p.3. Marriage reform, partition of family property and the subsequent population increase had contributed much in weakening the feudal system well before the introduction of the the land reforms; such changes in fact rescued the community from a probable ruin that might have been caused by the land reforms.
\item \textsuperscript{267} It was advised to be formed as a ‘savaṇa federation’. M.P. Ilayath, “Oru Savaṇa Federation”, \textit{YK}, 2:1 & 2, Sep-Oct. 1980, pp.94-95. C.K. Nambūtiri, while supporting this move for the sake of political and economic interests, cautioned the Nambūtiris to retain exclusivity in community matters. He also suggested two offices for these two different purposes. C.K. Nambūtiri, “Yōgakṣēmasabhayudē Parapp”, \textit{YK}, 1:9, 10, May-June, 1980, pp.14-15. Azhvancheri Tambūkkal scorned at these efforts aimed at the creation of a collective identity at the expense of the Nambūtiri self. Personal conversation, Athavanad, 11-10-2005.
\end{itemize}