NAMBUTIRI,
ANTHARJANAM, MAN,
WOMAN : REFORMING
MALAYALA BRAHMINS
Introduction: *Reconsidering Reformism*

'Social-reform' movements in twentieth century Keralam have often been characterised as representing part of a 'Malayalee Renaissance'. It has been claimed that the experience of 'Renaissance' in Keralam was of a more specific and intense sort compared to the North Indian experience, that the strong anti-caste thrust of *avarna* groups in reformism made it a stronger and more fundamental experience of social change. Thus the social change that took place in late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Keralam (which comprised of several elements, prominently, the increasing opposition to traditional limitations upon individuals, including those of caste) has been most often characterised as an essentially liberating experience that freed the individual from feudalism, caste and debilitating family-forms. "At the beginning of this century", writes A.Shreedhara Menon, "caste and feudalism encircled Keralam ...Institutions like untouchability, polygamy, polyandry and matriliney flourished under the patronage of feudalism. The larger section of people in society did not have the freedom or the opportunity to grow or develop according to their own ambitions". The experience of 'Renaissance' (along with other factors like

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progressive legislation etc. on the part of the State) however, seems to have altered the scheme fundamentally:

"The ordinary man in Keralam today has been liberated from the bondage of caste and feudalism. The institutions that functioned as impediments to the socio-economic progress of people have all been reduced to ruins...."³

It has also been recognised that the formation of organisations which set up the building of modern communities as their major goal was a salient feature of this period, and that the ideas of individual liberty and social change gained circulation in and through such organisations.⁴ The new identities given by the new organisations are considered to be of a sort which respected and fostered individual aspirations. Very often, they are projected as a sort of a 'first step'⁵ in the sense of paving the way for movements based upon identities that could be potentially shared by a greater number of people, such as the national movement or

³ ibid., p.181.

⁴ A. Shreedhara Menon writes "It is interesting to note that it is the community-organisations that have played the major role in ushering in social change in Keralam". (ibid. p.174) Also, P.K.K. Menon, The History of the Freedom Movement in Kerala, Vol II. Thiruvananthapuram: Govt. of Kerala, 1971, p.455.

⁵ Mannath Padmanabhan in his Smaranakal (Memories) (Kottayam: SPSS, 1968), justifies his participation in community-building despite his disbelief in caste, in these terms. He had abandoned his caste-name, 'Pillai'. Also see, preface written by M. Govindan to M.K. Sanoo, Sahodaran K. Ayyappan, Kottayam: D.C Books, 1989. Several other public figures active in nationalist and communist movements have attempted such justification. For instance, in a recent autobiography by V.R. Krishnan Ezhuthachan it is mentioned that he was active in both the nationalist movement and in the Ezhuthachan Samajam, the community-movement, at the same time, and that the two did not really clash. See, Atmakatha (Autobiography), Thrissur, 1997, p.33.
the communist movement. It has been argued that ".....communal approach to problems in Travancore and Cochin was gradually widened and transformed into a national and political movement to achieve the goal of freedom and responsible government". The 'awakening' that reform-movements made possible is seen to underlie this. It has also been claimed that the progressive ideas that gained prominence in and through social reform movements such as the Shree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) movement facilitated the rise of the communist movement in Keralam. There have been, however, noteworthy attempts to qualify this claim. But, despite their differences, most of these accounts largely rely upon the notion of an already-present Individuality which the 'Renaissance' helps to release or develop; in this sense they remain along with the self-claims advanced by the spokespersons of reformism itself, even when they occupy apparently-opposing positions.


7. P.K. Gopalakrishnan, op. cit., n.1, p.523. E.M.S. Nambutiri pad, however, has argued that the politicisation of the masses which social reform movements made possible was limited, and that they did not necessarily aid the formation of movements wider in scope. He views the social reform movements and the nationalist movement as distinct from each other, which, however, exerted mutual influence. The limited nature of the social reform movements is found to lie in that they were often opposed to wider nationalist interests. E.M.S Nambutiri pad, Keralam-Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi (Keralam- Motherland of Malayalees), Thiruvananthapuram: Deshabhimani Publications, 1981, pp.269-70. However, as seen above, this was not always the case. E.M.S. himself admits later that the communists were able to insert a progressive agenda into many community-movements without altering their community-base, ibid., p.336. The community-organisation and the nationalist movement are, in other words, both modern collectivities which have striking similarities in the manner in which they pre-suppose the Individual and the Individual's relation to the Collectivity, even when opposed to each other on issues of political interest.
There have been, at times, attempts to explore internal conflict, expressed or dormant, within reform movements, or stress one aspect (i.e. liberation of Individuals or institution-building) over the other in reformism. Scholars have, for instance, have differed in their interpretation of the famous consecration of an 'Ezhava Shivan' by Shree Narayana Guru at Aruvippuram in 1888--some have preferred to see in it an attempt at Sanskritisation, while others interpret it as 'social protest'. A third position has viewed it as an "intervention in popular culture, with a view to transform it in the image of, but distinct from, the upper-caste culture", but it is further argued that this was appropriated by the rising Ezhava middle-class to suit its aspirations, and thoroughly institutionalised in the SNDP Yogam. The tension between Individual-liberation and community-building has often been accepted as a key feature of Nambutiri reformism too, in both its journalistic


and academic characterisations. A recent paper on the Nambutiri reform movement has sought to argue that palpable tension existed between the liberatory aspirations of Antharjanams (Malayala Brahmin women) and the interests of those who aspired to build the modern community.\textsuperscript{12} The advocacy of intra-caste marriage of young Nambutiris (Malayala Brahmins) is seen to be stemming from economic, not liberatory-political interests.\textsuperscript{13} The reformist initiative is itself seen to have arisen from the need to modernise the community (in fact, the pre-existing caste), to make it an effective player in the modern public domain.\textsuperscript{14}

What is striking about most of the above work is that key notions like 'Individual', 'liberation', 'protest', 'community-building' etc. are hardly ever subjected to close examination. Take, for instance, the notion of 'liberation'. Even in the disagreements that arose within Nambutiri reformism in the 1930's, the rhetoric of liberation was fully implicated in the project of transforming men and women into useful and hardworking subjects; it always referred to a collectivity into which the Individual was to be integrated, be

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  \item \textsuperscript{12} Toshie Awaya, 'Women in the Nambutiri 'Caste' Movement' in T. Mizushima and H. Yanagisawa (ed), \textit{History and Society in South India}, Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1996, pp.51-52. She concludes that "... In order to establish the castes as discrete entities, it has been essential for the caste leaders to manipulate the sexuality of female members of their own caste". ibid., p.54.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} ibid., p.50.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} ibid., p.48.
\end{itemize}
it the 'Nambutiri Community', the 'Indian Nation' 'Malayalee Society' or whatever. Even in attempts that were made to redefine the notion of women's liberation and link it to women's participation in equal terms to men in the public domain, their integration as 'useful' subjects into a modern collectivity is upheld. Even those accounts which at times recognise that the notion of 'liberation' voiced within reformism was not equivalent to the commonsensical understanding of 'freedom', have not tried to state it explicitly. In most instances, the effort is to describe the experience of reform as the movement of the "Ordinary Man" from a condition of constraint to a state in which these are removed.15

But, as elaborated in the previous chapter, the notion of *swatantryam* that had gained currency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Keralam was linked to the realisation of a self-reflecting consciousness that could at the same time conform to an ideal subjectivity. The 'free' Individual when imagined was always and already implicated in modern collectivity. When one goes through the writing left behind by reformist movements, one finds an intense concern with *fashioning* Individuality, even when this activity is described as 'liberating the Individual'—one need only to note the intense debates over the content of Individuality, the specific practices that were found necessary for its fashioning, the kinds of institutions that were prescribed for the attainment of this end and so on, especially marked within Nambutiri reformism. Reform movements may then be

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15. op.cit. above, n.2, n.3.
regarded as institutions that sought to *fashion* Individuals, rather than as forces that 'liberated' a pre-existing Individuality. Fashioning Individuals need not be taken as the production of docile subjects; indeed, it implies the conferring of new sorts of agency on Individuals so fashioned, Individuals equipped with the capability to effectively operate within the modern community and the modern public domain. However, this agency should not be equated with 'freedom' in its commonsensical usage (i.e., lack of all sorts of constraint). Again, treating reform movements as institutions that fashion Individuals does not mean that they must be conceived of as a sort of machinery, mechanically producing subjects. Reform-movements do appear to be a kind of 'apparatus' or as a part of one, but they were also indisputably the site of struggle about fashioning. By the 1930's, for instance, the so-called conservatives among the Malayala Brahmins had been completely drawn into reformist language, speaking in the interest of 'Nambutiris' etc. The disputes that raged within Nambutiri reformism in the 1930's could be read more fruitfully as debates about *fashioning* rather than as a tussle between 'less liberating' and 'more liberating' positions. Even if the reform-movement did function as a sort of machinery, what it was to be, who was to operate it, how it was to function, under what conditions and limits it was to work, and a host of other critical matters was constantly at the centre of debate and struggle.

The project of modern community-building that appears at the heart of the reformist agenda in Keralam was by no means a simple assertion of pre-modern collectivities. The modern community which reformers set up as their goal was distinct in many striking ways.
The formation of the modern community was clearly seen to be dependent upon the
destruction of pre-existing forms of knowledge and practices found characteristic of the
older collectivities. It required that their members be *subjects*, who participate in the process
of making the community, not those who are simply born into it, or simply get used to its
practices and usages. The modern community, further, can be described as a substantial
entity with sets of features identified as 'characteristic of' or 'typical to'; it is not, as the pre-
modern collectivity, a set of groups interlinked through networks of sharings and
obligations, arranged in hierarchy, exhibiting a sort of 'family resemblance' in practices,
customs, in the structuring of everyday routine etc., often recognisable as a totality only
from the outside. Almost every *reform* movement in Keralam displayed remarkable zeal

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16. See for instance, Kanipayyur Sankaran Nambutiripad's description of the *murajapam* ceremony in
which the pre-modern collectivity of Malayala Brahmins as a loose collection of groups, hierarchically
Kunnammulam : Panchangom Press, pp.80 -100. The phrase Purathhekku Kodukkal (clumsily
translated as 'Giving to Outside'), interestingly, meant both the practice of serving food to the Nair
Adiyar (servant - class) after serving first the male members and then the female members of the Illam,
and the practice of marrying off a woman from a group of higher up in the hierarchy (say Addhyan)
into a group lower down (say Aryan), usually, out of financial difficulties. The former meaning is
given by Kanipayyur in *Ente Smaranakal* Vol 1, p.32, and the latter by the Malayala Manorama,
which published an editorial in 1906, attacking it as a social evil, causing much pain to families.
Apparently, women who were thus married off were treated as Aryan — members of a group lower on
the hierarchy—when they returned to their natal homes on special occasions etc. See, *Malayala
Manorama* (henceforth, M.M.), Editorial, 'Purathhekku Kodukkkal' ('Giving to Outside'), August 1,
1906. Kanipayyur also hints at the lack of a unified set of rules governing conduct among the
Nambutiris—he refers to clash between different authorities regarding interpretation of rules of
penitence etc. An interesting instance of such disagreement is mentioned—here the issue was the
penitence prescribed to a certain Nambutiri accused of adultery which was finally taken to court in
1877. The court apparently came to a decision by the argument that the procedure of trial by ordeal
was *not universally accepted* among the Malayala Brahmins. *Ente Smaranakal* Vol 3, pp.134-44.
Here one may see how the notion of the modern community and the tendency of the community to
(continued)
for ending internal hierarchies and practices that worked to mark distance between groups—be it Nambutiri, Nair or any other. The relations envisaged in the modern community, between members and the collectivity, ideally, were to be different from those in the pre-modern collectivity. Re-formation of the collectivity clearly implied the re-integration into it, of the members of the collectivity as individuals. This definitely targeted the loose pre-modern collectivity in which several groups with 'family resemblance' were interconnected through networks of obligations and hierarchical arrangement; but it sought to transform this into the internally-homogenised modern community. Here the creation of the Individual and the building of the modern community need not be regarded as opposing tendencies. If the view which regards reformist institutions as 'vehicles through which forces that release an already-present Individuality are activated is unacceptable, this does not automatically endorse a perspective that would regard them as simple efforts at institution-building. One consequence of either accepting tacitly the common-sense notion of liberation or failing to scrutinise it closely is the reinforcement of the idea that the project of 'liberation', is

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possess 'universally accepted' rules are operative in the court's ruling, and how they are employed to make decisions regarding practice within the pre-modern collectivity. For another version of this incident see, K.P.Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala, Cochin : Government of Cochin, 1929, pp.267 - 70. He quotes the eye-witness account of O.Chandu Menon here.

17. An incident reported by the M.M in the 'Swadeshvartha' (Local News) column of January 16, 1930 illustrates this well. This was about an attempt to form a common front of Tamil and Malayala Brahmins to respond jointly to political issues. Apparently a meeting was called at Kilimanoor. However, the whole effort turned out to be a non-starter, with not a single Malayala Brahmin even approaching the venue.
somehow 'pure', free of all interest, not entangled in power-politics. Indeed, such interpretation of Achara Viplavam (Revolution in Observances) has resulted in the constitution of a modern mythology flourishing around figures like V.T.Bhattatiripad.\(^{18}\) This is not to devalue the role such figures have played in reformist struggles, or to downplay their personal suffering but merely to remind that the subtle shift involved in considering them to be hallowed, exalted beings rather than historical actors, needs to be cautiously taken, since such adoration often blunts critical and historical perspective. For example, there is some basis to put forth the hypothesis that the demand for reorganising power-relations within Illams was the result of not just the humanistic response of some young Nambutiris to the gross injustices they witnessed, but also of the need to cope up with the breakdown of Patriarchal power in the Illams. In 1905, the Malayala Manorama was warning the Malayala Brahmins of this danger, pointing out that women and the servant-class in the Illams were colluding against the men, and that unless Patriarchal power was reinstated on a stronger and more modern basis, all would be lost.\(^{19}\) Soon after this

\(^{18}\) The large number of articles appearing on this topic in contemporary Malayalam journalism all participate in this. Academic perspective on social reform movements in the all-India context has undergone remarkable change in the recent years—traces of hero-worship are being steadily erased. See, for example, the collection of recent essays, Patricia Uberoi (ed.), Social reform, Sexuality and the State, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1996.

\(^{19}\) Editorial, M.M., 'Smarthavicharathinu Idavarunmatinte Karanangal' (The Reasons for Occurrence of Smarthavicharam), 12 July, 1905.
warning, the sensation-making 'Kuriyedathu Tatri' case\textsuperscript{20} broke out, seemingly confirming the Malayala Manorama's warning. Criticisms of the systems of alliance prevalent among the Malayala Brahmins had been voiced much earlier, for example, by the protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century\textsuperscript{21}, but it was this incident that many reformers would refer to as a turning-point in their consciousness, something that opened up a new awareness of the 'condition of the Nambutiris' and the need for change within Illams\textsuperscript{22}. It may be

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\item This was the Smarthavicharam (the ritual trial of offenders of the norms of sexual conduct among the Malayala Brahmins, in which the Antharjanam suspected of such breach was stripped off her status as Antharjanam and labelled Sadhanam—literally, 'a thing that makes (the trial) possible'—and then subjected to a highly ritualised procedure of questioning, and excommunicated if proven guilty. The Sadhanam could be excommunicated only if she confessed to the breach of conduct; if a confession could not be extracted, she was returned to the Illam as Antharjanam. If proven guilty, all the men whom she named as her accomplices in the offence would also be excommunicated along with her without any further enquiry into the truth of her statements. The excommunicated men, however, were permitted to obtain Pampu, which was a formal permission to undergo trial by ordeal in order to prove themselves not guilty. This was to be granted by a Smarthan, an important authority in Smarthavicharam. The trial by ordeal could be sought not only by the excommunicated man but even by his male progeny on his behalf. But this option was not available to the woman. For a detailed account of Smarthavicharam, see, Kanippayur Sankaran Nambutiripad, Chapter 7, ibid., pp.115-130. The incident mentioned here was the Smarthavicharam of the Antharjanam named Tatri (Savitri) of the Illam called Kuriyedathu, which occurred in 1905, which was exceptional in that she named sixty-four paramours, which included scions of the most esteemed and powerful families of the Malayala Brahmin aristocracy. The extraordinary nature of the case prompted the Raja of Kochi to allow a Purushavicharam in which the accused men were allowed to cross-examine Tatri. But no one escaped. All sixty-four, along with Tatri, were excommunicated.

\item See, 'Marumakkathiayathaiulla Doshangal' (The Disadvantages of Matriliny) in Vidyasangriham Vol.1(5), July 1865, pp.347-48. This was a magazine published by the CMS missionaries from Kottayam, as the magazine of the CMS College.

\item V.T. Bhattatiripad, Karmavipakam, Thrissur: Best Books, 1988, p.2; Also see, Interview with V.T. Bhattatiripad in—V.T.-ye Kandethal (Discovering V.T), Mezathoor, 1984, conducted by D.D. Nambutiri et al., also see, Kanippayur Sankaran Nambutiripad, op cit., n.16, p.117.
\end{enumerate}
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remembered that the major reform organisation that worked for the constitution of the modern Nambutiri community, the *Nambutiri Yogakshema Sabha* (*YKS* from now on) was formed not very long after this incident\(^2\). This evidence would not only qualify the 'materialist thesis' regarding the origins of the *YKS* but also afford a less romantic conception of the struggle to reconstitute family-relations in *Illams*. This, of course, would strongly qualify the veneration of heroic liberators.

This chapter proposes to briefly examine the project of fashioning individuals as it was presented within the Nambutiri reform movement of the early twentieth century. This involves an exploration of the way in which 'tradition' comes to be constructed in reformist self-knowledge, as the necessary 'raw material' available for reformist transformation—which is made in the first section. This argument implies that 'tradition' gets constructed not by merely assembling together various elements of the pre-modern social order, but by the active interpretation of these elements and their interconnections with the help of categories given by modern knowledge. Here, two such key images, the 'Nambutiri', and the 'Antharjanam' which also figure in transformed fashion in the modern community, are studied in some detail. These images may or may not conform to pre-modern social reality, but it is beyond doubt that they were central to reformist self-knowledge, and therefore, crucial in making reformism itself possible. The importance of self-knowledge in the

\(^{23}\) The *Nambutiri Yogakshema Sabha* was started in 1908.
project of self-transformation can be hardly underestimated. As early as 1822, we do find evidence for attempts on the part of the State in Tiruvitamkoor to put checks upon the high rates of dowry among the "Nambutiris and Pottis" (which was found to be causing suffering to Antharjanams, loss of their sexual chastity and prolonging spinsterhood among them). The importance of self-knowledge seems to be that such measures on the part of the State could have some effect only when a new awareness of their 'condition' was produced and actively circulated among these groups themselves.

The project of fashioning Individuals (and the modern Community) stressed the need for instituting new practices that would be useful for the attainment of these ends. But what these were to be, what institutions would serve to establish these, and a host of other questions were intensely debated in reformist circles--even the nature of the ideal form of social ordering according to which the modern community was to be organised was a matter of debate. But strikingly, amidst these differences, there was the common acceptance of the need for a non-reciprocal relation of power between the Reformer and those who were to be

24. A Royal Proclamation issued in 1822-23 A.D. Karkadakom 31, (July-August), 1998 M.E. in the name of Rani Parvati Bhayi expressly criticised the high rates of dowry among "Nambutiris and Pottis", observing that the Brahmavum endowments granted to the Malayala Brahmins were being alienated as a result of this. It fixed the rate of dowry at a maximum of 700 Kaliyan Panam per marriage, and ordered that girls of these groups must be wedded between the ages of ten and fourteen. Further, it ordered that all unmarried young women of these groups above fourteen years of age must be given away in marriage within two years from the date of the proclamation. This proclamation has been reprinted in Kizhakke Madathil Govindan Nair and Dr.B.Pushpa, Charitvathinte Aedukal (988-1022), Thiruvananthapuram, 1992, pp.181-82.
reformed. And this relation was most intensely exemplified in the relation posited between the Nambutiri-Man as Reformer and the Antharjanams whom he was to reform.

. Self-Knowledge

The transformation of the Malayala Brahmins into a modern community fully capable of operating within the political, socio-economic and cultural institutions of modern society was unquestionably an item that figured high up on the agenda of 'Nambutiri reform'. The means towards achieving this end were also clearly identified—the fashioning of the Individual. The Nambutiri Kutumba (Family) Regulation Committee stated this in unequivocal terms:

"...But the true and permanent well-being of the community does not depend upon the promulgation of royal legislation. Members of the community must realise that it mainly depends upon the abilities of each individual and act accordingly. The community will be truly blessed only when such knowledgeable and open-minded individuals become numerous."

The modern 'Nambutiri' community was to be a collectivity that would be built and maintained through 'positive' efforts of Individuals. But this did not involve the dismissal of

25 The Nambutiri Kutumba (Family) Regulation Committee Report and Draft Regulation, Thrissur: Mangalodayam, 1925, pp.92-93.
the older collectivity in totality. Rather, what was envisaged was a Re-formation—the transformation of those who belonged to the older collectivity into individuals through which a community organised on modern lines would be created.

The agenda of self-transformation meant that reformism was intensely concerned with looking 'inwards' into the existing collectivity and the individuals comprising it. This self-inspection produced a large body of knowledge that claimed to represent the truth about

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26 Dismissal of identities given in the older order, wholly or partially, for new ones, both secular and religious, was a familiar strategy in Keralam by the 1930's. A section of the Pulayas under the leadership of John Joseph Pampady adopted the name Cheramar to denote a new collectivity they formed; in 1918, Parayas petitioned the Maharajah of Tiruvitamkoor to allow them to change their name to Sambavar (T.H.P. Chentarashery, Ayyankali, Thiruvananthapuram: Prabhatam Publications, 1989, p.126; C. Abhimanyu, Ayyankali, Thiruvanathapuram: Dept. of Cultural Publications, Govt. of Kerala, 1990, p.216). In Kochi, Pandit K.P. Karuppan suggested the surname Dheevaran for the members of Araya community, before, a member of the Araya community, Dr. Velukutty, had called himself 'Velukutty Arayan'—see, Ettumanoor Gopalan, Dewer Enna Karmadheeran (Biography of P.K. Dewer), Kochi: Dewer Smaraka Samiti, 1993, pp.14-15. In a pamphlet written in 1920, Sahodaran K. Ayyappan questioned Ezhava reformers thus: "Is it enough to remain Ezhavas for all times? Our Swami (Sree Narayana Guru) has been advising us to abandon the narrow pride of being Ezhava, and embrace the sacred and noble pride of being 'human'". (Sahodaran K. Ayyappan 'Jati Vyatyasam' (1920) (Caste-Difference), reprinted in M.K. Sanoo, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Kottayam: D.C. Books, 1989). In the wake of nationalism, individual activists were giving up local names for 'universal ones': Kunhappa Nambiar became 'K.A.Keralaeevan', Vishnu Nambisan became 'Vishnu Bharatteevan' (K. Gopalan Kuttay, 'The Civil Disobedience Movement in Malabar' Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. 26(4), October-December 1989, p.461). Several new religious identities also emerged in such rejection of established ones—one may remember the revival of Buddhism in Malabar among Triyys by reformers like C. Krishman. Also important is the emergence of new religious sects like the Pratyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (Society of the God of Immediate Salvation) centered around the remarkable figure of Poikayil Yohannan, later called Shree Kumara Guru Devan, which attracted the untouchable Jatis (See, Vijayan Kangazha, Shree Kumara Guru devan-Jeevacharitraasanghram (A Condensed Biography), Thrissur, 1978; Shreekumara Gurudevan, Kottayam: Shree Kumara Dharmam Samajam, 1983). For a recent study of the Sabha, see, P.Sanal Mohan, 'Religion, Social Space and Identity: Construction of Boundary in Colonial Keralam', Paper presented at the Conference of Subaltern Historians, January 3-8, 1998, at Gini Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow.
the nature of the collectivity and those who belonged to it. The author of a text titled *Valkkannady* (Hand-Mirror) claimed:

"This hand-mirror has been crafted to reflect some of the figures that inhabit that hell, the *Anthappuram* (inner-quarters) fit only for ghosts. This mirror will reflect images only vaguely due to the inadequacy of the materials used to make it and the inefficiency of the craftsman who made it, only that whatever gets reflected in it is true. In any case, I hope that this will aid Anarthjanams to perceive themselves and gain self-consciousness, much more than that faded piece of bronze to be found today in *Anthappurams*."  

The *Valkkannady* that is to be rejected is not really a mirror at all, but a piece of bronze; where as the newly-fashioned *Valkkannady* recommended by the author promises insight. This looking most often revealed lacks, defects, failings, lack of the ability to produce and conserve wealth, lack of freedom and so on. Through such insight such familiar figures as the stubborn and unreflective 'elder', the passive, suffering Anarthjanam, the dull, lazy and ineffective youth came to represent aspects of contemporary reality of Nambutiri life:

"Quarter of a century back, the Nambutiris' condition was quite pathetic. In those days, the Nambutiri community was dozing on the couch of evil aristocracy within that gradually-degenerating mansion of the older order. The community possessed virtually nothing for the attainment of success in wordly life. The Nambutiri had no idea what modern education or an honourable lifestyle was. He grew up with absolutely no thought about life. The Nambutiri had no thought of community or nation...... In short the Nambutiri community of those days was filled with young men lacking education and responsibility, elders who were adamant and

conservative, and Antharjanams who lacked freedom and knowledge.  

But obtaining a dismal picture of the self through introspection did not necessarily lead on to rejecting it—rather, it was recommended that one must try to correct it, to fill up gaps, remedy lacks. The existing collectivity would, then, be transformed; it would not wither away. Obtaining insight, therefore, was crucial in reforming and widely accepted as such. A major part of reformist writings were dedicated to this project—of exploring the current state of affairs in the collectively, discovering a past for it, making general assessment of the preparedness of the members for modern life and so on.

"It is of scarce doubt that if a community is to be led towards a glorious future, its past and present must be known. One may characterise those efforts to reform society not based upon accurate knowledge of the past and the present of the community as similar to the fruitless exercise of trying to build forts in the sky."  

Numerous articles that appeared in the Yogakshemam and the Unny Nambutiri, speeches that were made in the innumerable meetings of the YKS, Nambutiri Yuva Jana Sanghom (Nambutiri Youth League) and other fora, compilations of articles brought out under the auspices of the YKS etc., addressed the need to provide such knowledge. It was disseminated through a wide variety of media including fiction, poetry, songs and plays.

28 M.R. Bhattatiripad, 'Kaal Noottandinullil' (Within Quarter Century), Mathrubhumi Annual Number, 1936, p.51.

But, as already hinted above, this involved not just neutral, objective and value-free description, though reformers often made this claim. First of all, one needs to consider that only when liberal ideas, filtered through English sources (that were already in circulation in the late nineteenth century in Keralam) were accepted as necessary for knowing oneself and the world by sections of Malayala Brahmins did reformist zeal and self-knowledge begin to accumulate. Kanippayur Sankaran Nambutiriipad remembers that in the first decade of the twentieth century when the 'Kuriyedathu Tatri' case broke out, the newspapers were vociferous in their criticism of such practices as the Smarthatvicharam, interpreting it as evidence of the breakdown of Patriarchal power, and the morality that accompanied it. Kanippayur remembers that the majority of Malayala Brahmins who were little familiar with the newspapers, and almost totally isolated from what circulated in local society as 'Western Knowledge' were hardly touched by it. It is quite possible to think that these sections interpreted Smarthatvicharam quite differently. For the Smarthatvicharam was also a procedure of 'purification' which restored to the Illam an 'original purity', lost in the sexual misconduct of its members, to be regained by either punishing the transgressors, or


acquitting the Antharjanam. Far from signifying a lack, a failing or a state of decadence (as it did to the newspapers), the successful conclusion of the Smarthavicharam could clearly signify the good health of the mechanisms of regulating sexual conduct among the Malayala Brahmins.\(^{32}\) Later, reformism would more or less accept the newspapers' interpretation, though seeking to reinterpret the significance of Tatri's action. 'Western Knowledge' was openly acknowledged as indispensable in the generation of insight: "There is no other way than to allow the Western sun to reflect from your mirror of knowledge by cleansing it of the dirt of superstition accumulated since ancient times, using the water of Compassion."\(^{33}\)

What is involved here is not simply a project of rendering transparent the harsh realities of life within Ilams, but also actively interpreting it in order to justify the need for intervention by modern-inspired reformers. This is probably most evident in the reformist revelations of the harsh regimen that Antharjanams had to follow and the near-total

\(^{32}\) V.T.Bhattatiripad confirmed this possibility in a fictional recreation of a conversation between anti-reformist Nambutiris. In this conversation, the Raja of Kochi who conducted the vicharam is hailed as the guardian of dharma, safeguarding the health of pre-reform Nambutiri power, and its internal mechanisms of regulation. One participant, arguing that times were adverse for the Nambutiris, points out that this Raja alone tried to set the example of "earlier Kings": "He was a sturdy-minded man. It was he who conducted the Smarthavicharana of that Sadhanam from Kurỹedathu. It was his courage that made it possible to ostracise all the sixty-five that slut named." The Raja of Kochi emerges as a "Dharmaraja" in the "age of Kali". Here the authority that would effectively turn Smarthavicharam into an instrument for ousting transgressors of norms of conduct is recognised as the saviour of the community (V.T.Bhattatiripad, Karmavipakam, op.cit., n.22, pp.198-99).

\(^{33}\) Edappally Narayana Raja, 'Samayathinte Vila' (The Value of Time), in V.S. Narayanan Nambutiri (Compiler), Samudrayabodhanam (Instructing the Community), Thrissur: Edappally Yogakshema Upasabha, 1916, p.66.
domination of men over women in *Illams*. It was as if the revelation of the Antharjanams' restricted existence automatically required that they be projected as *passive* victims, meekly submitting to male oppression, who would definitely end up in silent and unrelenting suffering without help from (male) reformers. It was as though one could not think of reforming the Antharjanam without first projecting her as a victim who could not help herself. In the following passage, put by a reformist author into the mouths of 'Antharjanams', this surfaces fairly clearly:

"We are helpless. There is no one who sees or hears our woes. We do not even have the freedom to complain. If we speak out the truth, even our husbands and fathers get angry.... Among us there is no one who does not suffer as maidens, co-wives, widows or as wives of old men. We are prepared to do any amount of work in the kitchen, to toil without rest from daybreak till ten at night. All these are our regular duties. If only we were lucky enough to see that there is someone who loves us." 34

Antharjanams are then made to entreat women of other castes not to accept Nambutiris as husbands:...." we are watching diligently for the results of your kind efforts. Save us! Save us!" 35

This also required that any sign of subversive action on the part of Antharjanams be

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rejected as misguided and undesirable. In the famous reformist play *Ritumati*, the rebellious Devaki puts up stiff resistance to her family's efforts to reintegrate her into the *Illam*. Detained in her own *Illam*, she appeals to her reformist cousin to lead her out of her home, explicitly opting not to leave on her own: "If I leave like that, what fate will befall me?... Who will grant me refuge? Will I not have to live among strangers, like Uma Behn?" The reference to 'Uma Behn' is significant. This was the name of Uma Devi Naripetta, who, according to V.T.Bhattatiripad's version of her story, discarded her identity as Antharjanam, taking several lovers, and finally marrying a working-class, unlettered Muslim. Devaki, then, must not follow Uma Devi's example; she must wait for a reformer to lead her out into Womanhood. This is also evident in reformist recreations of Kuriyedathu Tatri's story in which the effort is to 'explain' her acts. "But I do not treat this as merely the story of a fallen woman", wrote Lalitambika Antharjanam about her recreation of Kuriyedathu Tatri's story in her shortstory *Pratikaradevata* (Goddess of Revenge), "rather, I view the event and this individual as the harbinger of the revolution that was activated in the community later on".

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36 M.P.Bhattatiripad, *Ritumati* (1944), Thrissur: Current Books, 1991. Incidentally, this was a play written with the conviction that "women should struggle for their own freedom, no one else will" (preface).

37 ibid., above, pp.75-76.


Madampu Kunhikuttan's *Bhrasht* 

40 Tatri's act is indeed reinterpreted as an act of subversion against male oppression and not simply as excessive self-indulgence--however, such acts are no longer to be emulated since the alternative of reform is available. Indeed it is unequivocally argued that to prefer such acts of subversion instead of the reformist alternative would not be acceptable at all--as is evident in V.T's retelling of the story of Uma Devi Naripetta. In both *Pratikaradevata* and *Bhrasht* the seemingly recalcitrant figure of Kuriyedathu Tatri is ultimately subjugated to the figure of Antharjanam-as-victim. She is portrayed as the familiar Antharjanam--young, innocent, docile, passive--who came to undertake desperate acts of revenge. In *Bhrasht*, the transgressor leaves the job of fighting injustice towards women among the Malayala Brahmins to young male reformers, acknowledging her act to be undesirable. 

41 In *Pratikaradevata* too, Tatri condemns herself as a 'sinner' beyond any hope of salvation.

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Interestingly, in many texts that relate the oppression of Antharjanams, especially literary texts, there appear female figures who are not passive at all, and in fact wield considerable influence--quarrelsome co-wives who manage to dominate their husbands, domineering, conservative Antharjanams hell-bent upon oppressing daughters or daughters-

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41 ibid., above, p.185.

42 op.cit., n.39, p.41.
in-law. But these figures too must be reinterpreted as ignorant collaborators who ensure their own slavery (interestingly, the undesirable Uma Behn is further faulted for having been a dominating co-wife, in V.T's story).  

In self-representations by Antharjanams one does find, very often, the figure of the passive Antharjanam accompanying statements about the oppressive structures that restrict them. Speaking at the Shree Mulam Assembly in 1937, Member K. Devaki Antharjanam evoked the then familiar picture of Antharjanams thus:

"Most Antharjanams observe ghosha (purdha). They have eyes but are prohibited from enjoying pleasant sights. They have legs but their movement is circumscribed. Their state is quite like that of household utensils.... In short the Antharjanam is a jailed creature. Antharjanams are constantly policed; they are not permitted to breathe fresh air, to see the world. An Antharjanam is born crying, lives her life in tears and dies weeping...."

Also important is the fact that the representation of the 'Nambutiri', 'Antharjanam' or of life within *llams* perpetrated in and through self-knowledge was indebted to depictions that pre-dated Nambutiri reformism. In earlier accounts by Europeans the 'Nambutiris' appear mysterious and alien, even threatening, to the Western eye. But towards the close


45 About the 'Bramenes' of Calicut, Duarte Barbosas wrote early in the 16th century, "They believe and respect many truths, yet do not tell them" (Duarte Barbossa, *The Land of Malabar*, Source Series No.1, The Making of Modern Keralam, Kottayam: School of Social Sciences, MGU, 1991. p.35). (..continued)
of the nineteenth century this arrogant, inscrutable, oppressive-looking figure was being increasingly accompanied with or even replaced by other sorts of characterisation. The 'Nambutiri' was still an oppressive figure, an impediment to the well-being of others, a squanderer and parasite. Rebuking the Tiruvitamkoor Sarkar, the missionary Samuel Mateer wrote thus:

"As it is crowds of sensual and dissolute Brahmins are maintained in idleness, their intellectual and manual labour is lost to the community and they are encouraged to continue to regard themselves as quite a different species of man from the wretched down-trodden low-caste population". 46

By the early twentieth century, the modern-educated sections of local society had begun to share this criticism. "They are the lords of the soil," wrote T.K.Gopal Panikkar about the 'Nambutiris',

"...possessing large powers of oppression and domination over the labouring classes, the Nairs.... their social liberties are circumscribed by the opprobrious intervention of a priestly

(continued)

This distancing of the Nambudiris drew severe criticism from Europeans in the 19th century, particularly from missionaries like Samuel Mateer. "Arrogant and oppressive, vindictive and cruel", wrote Francis Day, "these Brahmins will turn aside than tread on a worm or on any other insect, but will think the murder of a slave no crime, should he provoke his death by too near an approach to one of his bigoted race...." (Francis Day, The Land of the Perumals- Its Past and Its Present (1863), New Delhi: AES, 1990, p.306). Here the Nambutiris are not found to be devoid of respect for life, but those who scrupulously avoid wilful destruction of minor life-forms will give no concession to human life which, to Day, seemed the highest form of life. Such behaviour seemed quite alien to western notions of mercy, compassion, humanity and so on, and the 'Nambutiris' were easily cast as 'inhuman'.

class who have ever-remained an obstructive element in their national economy".47

But by this time, this figure was becoming less distant; its distancing was becoming less fear-inspiring. Increasingly, 'Nambutiris' came to figure as 'simpletons', benign folk bewildered by the rush of progress, and therefore 'backward'. Rendered passive, they seemed to deserve more of persuasion and sympathy. "Considering all these factors" wrote the Nazrani Deepika in 1906, (the 'factors' mentioned prominently included their lack of English education) "it must be pointed out that the Nambutiris will fall a step below lower classes like the parayas and pulayas. Hence they must be given precedence among the Educationally Backward classes..."48 The Malayala Manorama too found it necessary to persuade the Nambutiris, and opted to tolerate their resentment towards well-meant advice, on the grounds that this was a result of their 'simplicity': "Our experience has shown that their simple-mindedness can be such that they might make such interpretation" (ie., that the Malayala Manorama's advice was intended to spite them).49 In his report on the Census of Travancore of 1891, V.Nagam Aiya wrote thus about the 'Nambutiris':

"The Nambutiri's hospitality and charity are proverbial (and the Brahmin guest).... is most


48 Nazrani Deepika, 'Nambutirimanude Vidyabhyasasthiti' (The Condition of Education of the Nambutiris'), December 5, 1906.

49 Editorial, 'Malayala Brahmanarude Adhunikavastha' (The Modern Condition of Malayala Brahmins), M.M, July 19, 1905.
kindly treated, and inspite of the uncouth manners and queer conversation which he may meet with, he is certain to carry away the happiest recollections of the Illom.... They are simple, innocent, unobtrusive and unassuming. 50

Contemporary ethnographic work, too, made use of this attributed 'simplicity' to interpret Malayala Brahmins—this was best exemplified in Edgar Thurston's interpretation of the belief attributed to the Nambutiris that "Europeans have tails" as evidence for their 'simplicity'. 51 It is interesting to observe that this attribution of animal qualities to Europeans is not interpreted as a kind of 'Othering'. In fact, the 'Othering' of the Europeans appears all the more clearly in a story attributed to the Nambutiris in which the 'origin' of Britain is narrated and the British are identified to be the true descendents of the monkey-army of the Ramayana. 52 In many late nineteenth century Malayalam novels, the 'Nambutiri'is

50 V. Nagam Aiya, Report on the Census of Travancore Vol.1, 1891, pp.686-88. Writing in 1881-82 about the Murajayam, the occasion in which large numbers of Malayala Brahmins were accorded lavish hospitality at the Padmanabha Swamy temple, in Thiruvananthapuram, Nagam Aiya commented upon the 'Nambutiri', depicting them as a strange mixture of discipline and excess, innocence and cunning, ignorance and scholarship. Here the 'Nambutiri' appears an alien breed, but no more fear-inspiring, indeed, as a strange species that need not be feared, one that may be observed. Quoted in Nagam Aiya: A Biographical Sketch by 'An Old School-Fellow and Friend', Thiruvananthapuram: Keralodayam Press, 1911. It is interesting to note that even traditional ceremonies like the Murajapam were by now occasions for collecting information, not just modern Censuses.


52 T.K. Gopal Panikkar, op.cit., n.47, pp 69-70. Now, whether this story was really the product of the Nambutiris’ 'Othering' of Europeans is not confirmable. The same belief (that Europeans have tails) was attributed to the Nairs of North Malabar by Francis Buchanan in the early 19th century. See, F. Buchanan, A Journey from Madras Through Mysore, Canara and Malabar (1807) Vol.1, New (..continued)
inevitably pitted against the ideal Man almost feature by feature. In *Indulekha* for instance, the figures of Kesavan Nambutiri who insists upon understanding the white man's powers in his terms—as the result of magic—and of Soory Nambutiripad, the woman-chasing simpleton whose gestures of courtship appear beastly to the thoroughly-modern heroine, are but versions of the Nambutiri-as-gullible simpleton. Even the malevolent Kuberan Nambutiripad of *Saraswativijayam* turns out to be a fearful and gullible character when confronted by modern legal machinery. In *Indulekha*, Madhavan, the hero, and Soory Nambutiripad, form several pairs of contrasts. Madhavan's merit lies in his personal qualities and achievements, Soory's, in his birth and inherited wealth alone; Madhavan has the capacity to earn through government service, Soory has to depend on the labour of others; Madhavan is equally at home with what are specified as 'Western' and 'traditional' knowledges, Soory knows nothing; Madhavan is capable of Love, Soory knows only lust. Nambutiri reformers later openly acknowledged their debt to such depictions preceding reformism among the Malayala-Brahmins. V.T. Bhattatiripad, in a speech, remarked:

(..continued)


"Chandu Menon wrote the novel Indulekha. Marumakkathayi (those groups acknowledging matriarchy) women took it to their hearts. We on the other hand became painfully and angrily aware of our grandfather's - that Soory Nambutiri's idiocy and lecherousness."

The image of the suffering Antharjanam, too, predated reformism. "The condition of the Nambutiris being thus," remarked the Nazrani Deepika, "that of their females requires little narration. To be born female in the Illams of Nambutiris where even sunlight does not fall properly is itself hell." In Indulekha the Antharjanam figures precisely as what should not be accepted as the model for the self-transformation of women. Saraswativijayam too narrates the story of the passive, good-hearted, gentle, innocent, voiceless, all-suffering Antharjanam (guarded with "Moslem jealousy", wrote Nagam Ayaya in the Manual) would grow in enormous proportions within reformism, quite outdoing the image of the Nambutiri in its ability to legitimate reform.

However, this image received a sharp jolt with the Kuriyedathu Tatri case in which a figure unrepentantly 'sinful', calculating, ruthlessly bold and outspoken, who could argue

55 V.T. Bhattatiripad, Speech titled 'Punarvivaham Athava Vidhavavivaham' (Re-marriage or Widow-marriage), Appended to Karmavipakam, op.cit., n.22, p.345.
56 Nazrani Deepika, op.cit., n.93, p.94.
57 Indulekha, op.cit., n.53, p.44.
59 Such importance was granted to this item in the agenda of Nambutiri reformism that to other observers sometimes it was as if the significance of this movement lay mainly in this. See, C.J. Thomas, 'Nambutirimare Patti' (About the Nambutiris), Dhekartyude Katil, Kottayam: SPSS, 1960, p.8.
"like a barrister" and defeat her opponents, seemed to take the frontstage.\textsuperscript{60} The Malayala Manorama felt obliged to explain:

"In earlier times, human beings were much less crooked and false. In those times if Antharjanams happened to commit some folly out of foolishness or innocence, they would readily confess..... they had no intention of deliberately defiling anyone. The Antharjanams subjected to smrthavicharam these days must be smooth operators."\textsuperscript{61}

It is not really surprising to see that the image of Kuriyedathu Tatri would continue to haunt the reformers for a very long time.\textsuperscript{62}

Sometimes the lacks and failings that were pointed out in self-knowledge were interpreted as the lack of gender. The inability of the Nambutiris to engage in productive activities or acquire the skills necessary for modern political and cultural life was sometimes

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{60} M.M., Report on Smrthavicharam, 22 July, 1906.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} M.M., ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} An interesting analysis of reformist retellings of the story of Tatri is to be found in K.M. Savitri Devi, 'Kuladayaya Devata: Kuriyedathu Tatriyude Avatarangal' (Goddess who is a Whore. The Incarnations of Kuriyedathu Tatri), in Kerala Padhanangal(7), Forthcoming. She analyses three retellings—the Malayala Manorama's; Lalitambika Antharjanam's Pratikaradevata and Madampu's Bhrasht. Besides it is interesting to note that V.T.Bhattatiripad upheld the reformist reading, arguing that if only Tatri had been permitted to wed a suitable man of her choice, she would have not taken such a path (V.T.Bhattatiripad, 'Kuriyedathu Tatri Enna Sadhanam'(The Sadhanam called Kuriyedathu Tatri), Appended to M.Govindante Kavitakal Vol II (Poems by M.Govindan), Changanashery: Renjima Publications, 1989). Other than the strictly reformist versions there are others that link Tatri's act to a 'higher purpose' like M.Govindan's poem 'Oru Koodiyattathinte Katha' (The Story of a Koodiyattom) (ibid., above, pp.171-215). See also his article 'Kalayum Kamavum' (Art and Bodily Desire), appended to ibid. K.M.Savitri Devi (ibid.), mentions that the story of Tatri circulated in Illams by word of mouth, and that it served as a warning to Antharjanams, indicating to them what they should not be.
openly read as the lack of 'Manliness'; similarly, the lacks identified in Antharjanams was read as the lack of 'Womanliness'. In the proposals put forth regarding the reformation of the collectivity along modern lines, often it was implicitly accepted that one had to acquire a gender in order to be an Individual; that one's 'inherent capacities' had to be developed. In one of the most famous of all reformist plays in Malayalam, Adukkalayil Nin nu Arangathekku (From the Kitchen to the Frontstage), the lack of Manliness emerges as the crucial issue in the hero Madhavan's self-appraisal:

"Am I not a Man? Can I not earn my keep through labour, like others? I definitely can ... Yes, I have decided to learn some English, come what may....I must certainly get to know what the sky, and what the earth is."63

Similarly, Antharjanams were to be transformed into Women—capable domestic managers, Reproducers—efficient organisers of their specific domain, the domestic. Implicit in this was the recognition that Antharjanams in the pre-reform order lacked Womanliness.

An author in the Unny Nambutiri recommended,

".....Give them an education capable of making them ordinary women, of making them human beings! Let them also become women! Human beings! Let the community prosper!"64


Yet, precisely because of the attribution of qualities like innocence, piety, patience and chastity to them, they seemed sometimes much better candidates for Womanhood than, say, women of the Marumakkathayi (matrilineal) groups. Though, of course, it was admitted that they lacked the proper training that would entitle them to the title Womanhood.

To briefly recollect what was argued in this section, the generation of insight through 'looking inward', to identify one's strength and weaknesses so as to enable self-transformation was a widely-acknowledged need within Nambutiri reformism. Its importance was perceived to be such that efforts to fashion Individuals and a reformed community that was thoroughly-modern through them, were considered fruitless if not guided by such insight. Revolving around the collectivity of 'Nambutiris', reformist self-knowledge helped to set up the Nambutiri-Man and more controversially, perhaps, the Antharjanam-Woman, as the final goals of reformism—as we shall see, in the proposals regarding self-correction that were put forward within Nambutiri reformism.

65. This way of characterising Antharjanams is found to be carried over not only into reformist literature, such as Moothirgingode's *Aphante Makal* (1932) (*Uncle's Daughter*), (Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1989), but also in depictions of Antharjanams in texts like P.K. Kochaapan Tarakan's *Balikasadam* (1922), Thrissur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi, 1993, in which the young Antharjanam who acquires modern education and ways of life represents pure, ideal Womanhood, simply purified and perfected by modern education.
Self-Correction

Nambutiri reformism was by no means homogenous as far as proposals were concerned. In the various proposals regarding Reform (found not only in the list of concrete suggestions discussed in the YKS meetings but also in reformist speeches, articles in reformist publications, even in reformist literature or theatre) we do find differing, even opposing positions. Such differences have sometimes been characterised, for example, as a 'liberal-radical' conflict. In this section the attempt is indeed to demonstrate the variety of positions that were raised within Nambutiri reformism — however, there is no claim that this is an exhaustive account. But since it is not possible to make detailed enquiries into the self-claims reformers made about the political orientation of the various proposals here, the use of terms like 'radical', 'liberal' etc. will be eschewed. Instead, in order to demonstrate both the difference and the sharings between them, we have preferred to focus upon certain specific ones. It is hoped that this will help to shift attention away from the correctness or incorrectness of political labels fastened on to reformist proposals and bring into light the specific ways in which they conceive of the re-formed collectivity and the measures by which it was to be realised.

66. For an account of the conflict between factions characterised in this way, see, V.T. Bhattatiripad, Karmavipakam, op.cit., n.22, pp.181-83. The editorial of the Kesari, published in December 1933 makes use of this frame of reference, Appendix, ibid., pp.360-62. Here we use the term 'Re-form' to denote the ideal vision that is projected in reformist proposals.
It is possible to regard all these proposals as formulations of the means of self-correction of the 'Nambutiris'. First, all of these share a minimum degree of acceptance of the presence of a 'Nambutiri community' as a substantial entity, with a certain unified past and present. Each of these accept to lesser or greater degree the history of the 'glorious past' of the Nambutiris, as well as the evaluation of the present as a period of decline. Secondly, all these accept, in various degrees, the need for self-correction. Thirdly, they all accept the necessity of human intervention for Re-form to be actualised. However, if such commonality may be found, equally or even more importantly, there are differences between them. For example, even when each of these proposals or sets of suggestions accepted the history of the Nambutiris' 'glorious past', it is important to note that in each case, this served to legitimise quite different versions of the ideal modern collectivity.

Here we first consider a Memorandum prepared by the Kottakkal Upasabha (local unit) of the YKS proposing the Re-form of the Nambutiris, titled Swadharmamushitanam (Performance of One's Own Dharma), published in 1917. The replies submitted by E.T. Divakaran Moos to the questionnaire circulated by the Nambutiri Family Regulation Committee, published in 1925, have important sharings with this. By examining these we

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67. Swadharmamushitanam (Performance of One's Own Dharma), Memorandum presented to the YKS by the Kottakkal Upasabha (sub-unit), 1917.

68. E.T. Divakaran Moos, Replies to the Questionnaire of the Nambutiri Family Regulation Committee and Some Opinions, Thrissur, 1925.
might obtain a definite version of imagining Re-form.

In these proposals, the modern Nambutiri community is envisaged as one which preserves its internal hierarchies, norms, values, knowledges, kinship and marital arrangements but which has acquired sufficient means to ensure its continued prosperity in a rapidly modernising world. Internal changes are not ruled out; but these are to be kept minimum. Customs, practices and usages already prevalent are not regarded as anachronistic. In fact, there is the conviction that it is quite possible to retain them while acquiring certain skills like English education, and Western knowledge, necessary to protect the interests of the community in the modern world. The Memorandum even found that some of the traditional institutions of the Nambutiris were in tune with the needs of modern society:

"In these days in which Western scholars have published a great many works that dwell upon the necessity of the division of labour, there is very little need to elaborate upon the greatness of Varnaashramas discovered by our Rishis, the creators of the Smritis."^69

So also, it was felt that the traditional Sanskrit-based education could be effectively reformed into a means by which the Individual could be fashioned. It recommended that the Brahmacaryashrama (celibate life prescribed for young Nambutiri men) could be converted into a full-fledged period of training in which

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^69. Memorandum, p.4.
"...the discipline enjoined in education, true humility, regulatory practices by which self-control is instilled and the means by which Vedic knowledge and knowledge necessary in practical life... are provided."\(^{70}\)

Side-by-side it was also suggested that Nambutiris should acquire English education and Western knowledge in institutions of learning organised according to "the principles inherent in the Gurukula system of the olden days.... which would promote also a true understanding of "eastern knowledge"\(^{71}\) and lauded the educational endeavours of Tagore, Gandhi and Munshi Ram.\(^{72}\) It further noted that "according to the Parashara Sruthi, Brahmins are not prohibited from entering professions like agriculture prescribed for Vaishyas ...."\(^{73}\) and hence recommended trades like finance, banking etc. as well as the formation of Agricultural Co-operative Banks.\(^{74}\) But, at the same time, it suggested that "this must be done without much interruption of Tapas"\(^{75}\). On the one hand it insisted that spiritual pursuits be retained as the distinguishing feature of the Nambutiri (even recommending that they preserve and further their 'spirituality' so that others would retain

\[\begin{align*}
70. & \quad \text{ibid., p.27.} \\
71. & \quad \text{ibid., p.17, p.21.} \\
72. & \quad \text{ibid., p.22.} \\
73. & \quad \text{ibid., p.18.} \\
74. & \quad \text{ibid., p.19.} \\
75. & \quad \text{ibid., p.18.}
\end{align*}\]
their faith in Nambutiris' spiritual powers, thereby retaining traditional sources of income, like *Pratigraham*). On the other hand, it allowed that customs and practices appropriate to the adopted professions, as well as those necessary for the "preservation of the body" (in all the vagueness of this specification) may be accepted even in preference to established ones.

The *Memorandum* and E.T. Divakaran Moos' suggestions, however recommended that the internal hierarchies of the community must remain more or less intact. E.T. Divakaran Moos held the view that intra-caste marriage of younger men, and altering of control over property in *Illams* need be allowed only according to specific circumstances.

Both rejected ending *Sambandham*, refusing to characterise it as immoral or wasteful. Both are silent about female education; Moos suggested permission of intra-caste marriage with some more frequency as a solution to the "problems related to marriage of girls"; the

76. ibid., p.8.
77. ibid., pp.30-31.
79. ibid., pp.22-32.
80. ibid., pp.71-72; pp.16,17; *Memorandum*, op.cit., n.67, pp.11-12.
Memorandum rejects the proposal to allow Antharjanams to travel by rail on the ground that it will cause Sambarkadosham.82

Reforming, in these proposals, seemed to involve two things. First, it meant acquiring certain new skills like English education; second, it meant setting right internal 'imbalances'. Moos went on to discuss the crisis of the community in the language of Ayurveda, diagnosing it as basically due to internal aberrations, and prescribed a cure that would restore the 'disturbed humours' to their normal state.83 The reformist organisation was conceived to be one that would not only provide the essential skills for modern life but would also work as an agency that settled internal disputes.84 Specific suggestions like the limited support for intra-caste marriage are considered to be measures that would redress imbalances. The reformed community is not to be marked so much by increased population or material prosperity as by better internal regulation and a bare minimum of modifications absolutely essential for the preservation of a specific way of life in a rapidly modernising society. These proposals too accept the present to be a sorely lacking one; however, they propose to remedy the lack by rejuvenating a lifestyle they consider truly characteristic of

82. Memorandum, op. cit., n.67, p.24. Roughly translated as 'pollution through contact'.


84. ibid., p.22; pp.68-69.
A second pair of proposals that may be considered here are the *Nambutiri Family Regulation Committee Report (1925)* and the *Nambutiri Female Education Commission Report (1927)*, both of which, again, have important sharings, and which articulate a specific position vis-a-vis Re-form. In both, the reformed community is one which has adopted modern arrangements of family life; which has reorganised property-rights, inheritance and management; which has clearly accepted the modern domestic-public demarcation as the key manner of organising social life. There is the firm conviction that unless such modernisation was not undertaken, survival in modern society was impossible. It argued at the same time for the greater exclusivity of the Nambutiris—for instance, through strong resistance to *Sambandham* marriages. This inhered in the very definition of the family accepted in the Family Regulation Committee Report in which the family was accepted as consisting of the householder (the eldest male member), the younger men, the

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85. It may, of course, be asked whether this was really characteristic of the Nambutiris or not.

86. *Nambutiri Kutumba (Family) Regulation Committee Report and Draft Regulation* (henceforth, N.K.R.C.R.), 1925. The Committee was presided by Desamangalathu Guptan Nambutiripad (AKTMK).

87. *Nambutiri Stree Vidyabhysa Commission Report (Female Education)* (henceforth N.F.E.C.R.), 1927. This Commission was also presided by AKTMK Guptan Nambutiripad.
women and children.\textsuperscript{88} This is different from the definition preferred by E.T. Divakaran Moos, in which the \textit{Taravad} is not only the immediate family but also includes the \textit{Adiyar} (the Nair servant-class), \textit{Veluthedan} (the washerman), the \textit{Velakkathalavan} (the oilman) etc. who are seen to have certain distinct rights over the \textit{Taravad}.\textsuperscript{89} Besides being a more exclusive unit, the modern Nambutiri community was also to be strong in \textit{numbers} and this too was found necessary to bargain effectively in one's own interest in modern society:

"If the war of life is to be won, then an army is necessary. Guns, swords and spears might not be needed for community-life, but tongues, arms and legs are all needed in great numbers. We have known from experience that the \textit{Janmi-Kudiyan} Bill and the Religious Institutions Regulation all are the victories won by groups which are energetic and populous, over those who are not...."\textsuperscript{90}

In both these proposals there is a strong plea for the transformation of the Nambutiris and the Antharjanams into \textit{Men} and \textit{Women}. This is regarded as the single most necessary step in reforming the community. Nambutiris were continually urged to engage in gainful activities.

\textsuperscript{88} \textit{N.K.R.C.R.}, op.cit., n.86, p.2.

\textsuperscript{89} E.T. Divakaran Moos, op.cit., n.68, pp.24-25. That the \textit{N.K.R.C.R} focussed on the family — the \textit{Kutumbam} — and \textit{Replies, on the Taravad}, may itself be a significant difference (here, the term \textit{Taravad} was used by Moos to indicate the Nambutiri homestead).

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{N.K.R.C.R.}, op.cit., n.86, p.84. This was one common argument that was put forth in favour of intra-caste marriage of younger men of the \textit{Illam}. These legislations, i.e. the \textit{Janmi- Kudiyan} Bill, and the \textit{Religious Institutions Regulation} were opposed in the \textit{YKS} as detrimental to the interests of Nambutiris. See \textit{Malayala Manorama}, Report of the 18\textsuperscript{th} \textit{YKS Sammelanam} at Chovvara, January 9, 1926.
agriculture, industry, finance and other professions, and to acquire modern knowledge. The Family Regulation Committee Report cautioned that

"We must not consider it very fruitful to enter the struggle of life with our share in the family property as the sole source of support. Only he who is capable of earning through his own labour will be successful in these times."^{91}

Women of the community were to receive an education that would equip them for modern domesticity -- indeed, it was not so much the complete lack of education that seemed the problem.^{92} The sort of education received by the Antharjanams was found useless in modern life, and hence to be replaced with a new scheme that would prepare them to be efficient housewives and good companions to modern-educated husbands.^{93} The difference between the two is well-evident in the responses obtained to the questionnaire circulated by the Female Education Commission. While the well-known Sanskrit scholar Punnashery Nambi recommended a scheme that would be helpful in preparing Antharjanams for performance of daily rituals and practices carried out in Illams and the

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91. ibid., p.93.

92. According to the *Census of India, 1931* (Travancore, Part I), The Malayala Brahmans had the third-highest number of literates among women, 43.2%. The number of literate women among the Nair and Syrian Christian groups were 29.1% and 34.8% respectively (p.290).

essentials of kitchen-management, the other responses, on the contrary, suggest a form of training that would prepare Antharjanams for modern domestic life. The Report agrees with the latter, laying down a curriculum that included languages, music, history, geography, painting, cures for children's ailments, post-partum care, sewing and enough of mathematics for house-management.

Such a clear-cut definition of roles is also well-evident in the Draft Regulation prepared by the Nambutiri Family Regulation Committee, in which control and

94. Punnashery Nambi Nilakanta Sharma, Response to Questionnaire, appended to ibid., p.32. He advises teaching girls their mother-tongue and basic arithmetic that would aid them in domestic duties. Besides, it is suggested that they must learn to ascertain Rashi (asterisms), to know time by measuring shadows by day and the position of stars by night, and to calculate the Panchangam (almanac). "This is not for the sake of knowing alone. It has effects upon Fortune as well" (ibid.). It is further recommended that Antharjanams may be given adequate knowledge of Sanskrit, not for the attainment of a 'cultured mind' but for avoiding mistakes in chanting Stothrams. To cause such mistakes, Nambi reminds, would cause Dosham. Dosham is neither sin nor simple injury. It is that particular negative consequence that is seen to result from the transgression of a certain norm, or the incorrect performance of a ritual. Most doshams could be mended through Prayashchittam (penance) or other Partharams (ways of 'making amends'). It may be also remembered that it was precisely this routine of Antharjanams organised around rituals that was the target of criticism of reformers: "...they (Anthrjanams) start working in the kitchen by the age of eight...when a few years pass in this fashion other tasks are loaded on...what is called Nedikkal (making offerings)..... From early morning to 10 O'clock there is nothing but nedikal and namaskaram towards east, towards south, what more, to every corner. To Guruvayur Appan, Vatikkathappan, Kavil Shastaru and every other deity... Then the two Nazhikas (the Malayalee measure of time) in the afternoon are set apart to reading Puranas and Charadu Pidichu Japikkal (repeating holy chants a certain number of times everyday with one's fingers upon the thread worn around the neck)..." Madampu Narayanan Nambutiri, Response to Questionnaire, Appended to N.F.E.C.R., ibid., pp.65 - 66.

95. See, for instance, the response of the Raja of Chirakkal, ibid., pp.29-30.

96. ibid., pp.13-14.
management of property is firmly entrusted to men. These changes, however, did not seem very drastic. In the traditional way of life, there was already a strong division of space, with women being assigned the inner-quarters of the Illam (the word Antharjanam means 'inner-people'), and men, the outer world. It seemed quite possible to modernise without drastically violating divisions—the Report put forth the suggestion that young girls be educated in Illams by lady tutors,\(^7\) even though it was critical of the seclusion of Antharjanams.\(^8\) When faced with criticism of the apparent assent given to the ghosha system (seclusion) in the Report,\(^9\) its defenders described it as a 'practical, viable strategy' to spread modern female education.\(^10\) In both proposals, Re-form was not to be achieved through a violent and direct confrontation with the established order, though there was a clear perception of the power-stakes involved in re-forming. The Draft Family Regulation sought not to uproot the established family structure but to institute an effective set of checks and balances that

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97. ibid., p.16.

98. ibid., pp.7-8. The preservation of existing norms in modern institutions like the Nambutiri Vidyalayam (School) and for quite some time, in the meetings of the YKS, was scrupulously advocated (for a brief account of the routine of the Vidyalayam, see, Madampu Kunhikutttan, Abhivadaye, Kottayam: SPSS, 1986, p18). Sometimes this was described as a strategy to disarm conservative resistance to modern education. See, for instance, V.T. Bhattatiripad's recounting of the explanation given for such rules by the manager of the Nambutiri Vidyalayam while he was a student there in Karmavipaknam, op.cit, n 22, p.149.


would ensure good management by the *Karanavar* -- even when it strongly recommended measures for improving individual initiative of younger men. The position of *Karanavar* was made into one that could be potentially occupied by any adult male member who sought to form a separate family-unit on his own and, not just the eldest son. All adult male members could interfere in the management of properties and resources, unlike in the earlier arrangement. Reforming here appears as a subtle process of change by which existing structures are altered by allowing new institutions to proliferate in and through older ones, and not through sudden or violent measures. The reformist organisation is expected to play the role of initiator of this process. The Family Regulation Committee Report rejected the possibility of the reform organisation playing the role of mediator in disputes working to maintain status-quo; it rather preferred to conceive of the reform organisation as a platform which would discuss ways and means through which Reform could be attained, and as an agency working to implement measures found necessary, mobilising the necessary support from both inside and outside, such as petitioning the State to initiate legislation

101. The position *Karanavar* occurs both in connection with the joint family and the separated family unit in the Draft Regulation, pp. 1-8.

102. The *YKS* was also a forum which organised protest against measures it found objectionable. For example, at the *YKS* meeting at Edakkunni in 1930 it was decided that Nambutiris must observe a day of fasting in protest against the Raja of Kochi's reluctance to give approval to the Nambutiri Bill. See accounts in the *Malayala Manorama* as Editorial, January 15, 1930; and as a report, 'Tirunalniraharavratham' (Vow of Fasting on the Birthday of the Maharaja), January 25, 1930.
The conception of the ideal modern collectivity and the project of Reform found in the speeches and writings of V.T. Bhattatiripad — the core of ideas that came to be identified as the 'radical' position — was one that called for a thoroughgoing modernisation to be achieved through directly attacking and demolishing established institutions. Modernising the economic life of the community was thus conceived as involving not only modernising agriculture as enterprising landlords but also the removal of feudal relations themselves. Acquiring modern education was to be not only the obtaining of a necessary skill for modern life but a means towards developing resistance towards the older order. Modernising family life was seen to need much more than the promotion of intra-caste marriage or the provision of training in modern domesticity to Antharjanams — it also

103. Indeed, State effort in Tiruvittenkoo towards modernising Nambutiris was almost at least as old as the YKS. The State which supported the Othootus (Vedic Schools) was by 1909 diverting funds to popularising a modern school for them at Kulakkada. (The Travancore Administrative Report, 1911-12, p.69). Later the State in Kochi was urged to frame legislation that would direct the funds of such institutions as the Mathams to the promotion of modern education among Nambutiris. This was much debated in 1926. See, Malayala Manorama, 'Kochi Nambutiri Matadharma Sthapana Regulation' (Kochi Nambutiri Religious and Charitable Institutions Regulation), January 21, 1926; also articles in Malayala Manorama, January 28, 1926; reports of meetings against and in favour of the Bill, February 6, 1926, article on the Bill, February 13, 1926.


105. V.T. Bhattatiripad, 'Nambutiri Penkidangalkku Oru Ezuthu' (A Letter to Nambutiri Girls), published in Unny Nambutiri, January 19, 1930. Appended to Karmavipakam, op.cit., n.22., pp.310-21. In this text he prescribes a 'modern education' for those young Antharjanams who were denied access to it.
seemed to need promotion of remarriage of widows and even the separation of young women forced into marriage with old men,\textsuperscript{106} and providing a more open education to women that would expose them to the world. The debate over the suggestions of the Female Education Commission demonstrated the specificity of this position quite well. While a section argued that giving a limited education to Antharjanams in Illams was adequate to the needs of the community,\textsuperscript{107} there was the strong counter-argument that the transformation of Antharjanams into Women cannot be achieved without providing them with an exposure to the world outside, effectively breaking the ghosha.\textsuperscript{108} The ideal modern Nambutiri community thus reformed would be one that had no rigid boundaries with larger collectivities such as the 'Nation', 'Keralam', 'Hindu' etc. At the same time the identity of the new Nambutiri—the Nambutiri—Man—was to be completely distanced from the identity of the Nambutiri given by the traditional order. This, however, did not seem to require the total abandonment of the name. As E.M.S. Nambutiripad remarked in the Ongallur meeting of the YKS,
"The only request I make of you is to emulate the model of the early leaders of the Yogakshema Sabha. What did they do? They saw that without English education the community would be the laughing-stock of society—they were willing to sacrifice that amount of Brahmanyam in order to spread English education. In the same way, if we do not destroy our lazy life—if each man and woman of the community do not begin to live through labour—we will become the target of not just the ridicule but also the hatred of others....Destroy the Brahmanyam so that each person may be sent to work (destroy it only to that extent) — this is all I ask." \[109\]

Along with this, the task of the YKS was defined as forging an identity for the Nambutiris which was completely separated from the identity of the Nambutiri given in the older order, preparing them to live "like the ordinary citizens of Keralam" and "co-operating with the progressive forces that were working to build a free, socially-just and prosperous united Keralam". However, he clarified that "a Keralam devoid of Jati and community" need not be accepted as the final aim of the YKS. \[110\] Remarking that such a Keralam was inevitably in the future, he pointed out that "our programme must be aimed at making the Nambutiris capable of playing the role they deserve" in that society. \[111\] Drawing out the implications of such a stance, he went on to say that the exclusivity of the Nambutiri community must be ended, \[112\] and that active efforts must be initiated to form a common


110. ibid., p.34.

111. ibid., above.

112. ibid., pp.34-35.
front among modern community-building organisations to end jati hierarchy and mobilise people towards building a united and progressive Kerala. While the identity of the 'Nambutiri' was not to be necessarily given up, it was to be transformed into one that would not clash with the larger identity of being 'Malayalee'.

In the 1930's the YKS meetings witnessed charged debates over these different positions, with proponents of each trying to discredit and displace others. As E.M.S. pointed out later, this was based upon the mistaken notion that the different positions articulated were completely incompatible with one another. The notions of Swa\textit{\textasciitilde}an\textit{\textasciitilde}tr\textit{\textasciitilde}yam and the Individual that recurred in all these proposals were not drastically different; the fashioning of the Individual was commonly accepted as the goal of reformist activity. But also striking is another commonality which runs through all these proposals: the way in which they conceive of the relation between the Reformer and those subjected to reform, especially between the reformist Nambutiri-Man and the Antharjanam subjected to reform.

113. \textit{\textit{ibid.}}, pp.43-48. However, Nambutiri-Man was by no means a community which he was always seen as such. The continuation of the Nambutiri tradition was seen as the continuation of the Nambutiri tradition.
114. \textit{\textit{ibid.}}, pp.5-6.
III. **Reformer's Burden**

Reforming Antharjanams was an intense concern within Nambutiri reformism which gained considerable momentum by the end of the '20s. Suggestions regarding this involved many elements—preparing Antharjanams for modern domestic life by instructing them in modern housewifery; the promotion of monogamous intra-caste marriage; making Antharjanams desirable sexual partners for modernised Nambutiris by altering their dress-conventions; making them informed companions by adding to their understanding of modern society, its norms, rituals, practices etc.; equipping them with the necessary skills to encourage greater interaction with the modern world. There was even the argument that reforming Antharjanams would remain incomplete until they "attain education and success in examinations, employment and assets like the women of other communities, put an end to all sorts of restrictions, and enrich the community’s inner and outer domains."  

Reforming Antharjanams was, however, always at the centre of debate; reformers differed very significantly in their conception of the reforming that the Antharjanams were to undergo, the best means through which they could be reformed, the priorities that were to be kept in mind in formulating the means of reforming etc.

Thus, some reformers argued that Antharjanams were to be reformed without any

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115. V.T. Bhattachiripad, *Karmapakam*, op.cit., n.22, p.339. From the Speech titled 'Nambutiri Manushyanayi Maranamenkil' (If the Nambutiri is to turn into Man) made in 1930.
depletion of the 'special virtues' that, they claimed, were to be found in them;\textsuperscript{116} others held the view that they should be reformed by removing all particularities that may be found in them;\textsuperscript{117} some felt that a modern education that introduced Antharjanams to modern domestic life provided in the seclusion of Illams was sufficient;\textsuperscript{118} others strongly argued against this, favouring greater exposure to the world outside;\textsuperscript{119} there was also the argument that Antharjanams should voice their demands and opinions through streesamajams which did evoke alarmed responses that this went against the spirit of complementarity expected in ideal modern family life.\textsuperscript{120} There were also arguments that true freedom would be attained

\textsuperscript{116} Kanippayur Sankaran Nambutiripad in an article titled 'Stree Vidyabhysam'(Women's Education), \textit{Unny Nambutiri} Vol 9(12), 1928 remarked thus: "Though they possess little—indeed none at all—of the abilities essential for contemporary life, our female world is radiant with several rare and universally-valued virtues. To allow such virtues as simplicity, mildness of disposition, self-control, self-sacrifice and compassion to get worn out will not contribute to our welfare... if (Antharjanams are) sent to public schools, these will suffer... but this is not to say that status-quo must be preserved. Only that many of these virtues, which are eternal and desirable in anyone, but which are not abundant,are to be found in Nambutiri women, and that these must be preserved." (pp.724-25). Also see, M.Lakshmikkutty Amma, 'Nambutiri Balikamarute Vidyabhysam' (Education of Nambutiri Girls), from \textit{Unny Nambutiri} Vol 9(1), 1927, pp.76-8. The same caution was voiced by some respondents to the Female Education Commission's questionnaire. See, for instance, responses of Tottaikattu Madhavi Amma and O.S. Nambutiripad in the Appendix, \textit{Nambutiri Female Education Commission Report}, op.cit.,p.87,p.26 and pp.72-74 respectively.

\textsuperscript{117} Kuroor Narayanan Bhattatiripad, 'Samudayika Swatantryam' (Social Freedom), \textit{Unny Nambutiri} Vol 9(1), 1927, p.88.

\textsuperscript{118} M.Rama Varma Tamban, 'Nambutiri Balikamarute Vidyabhysam' (Education of Nambutiri Girls) in \textit{Unny Nambutiri} Vol 7(5), 1926, p.815-16 in which the recommendation of the Female Education Commission's report is defended.


\textsuperscript{120} See, for instance, Kanippayur Sankaran Nambutiripad's response to a speech made by a radical that (.continued)
only when Antharjanams actively entered public life, against this it was argued that encouraging women to overstep their role as managers of the domestic domain would lead to war between the sexes that would ultimately undermine social life itself.

There was, however, little doubt that the Reformer—the active agent of change who seemed to possess true in-sight into the past and the present of the community, who seemed to possess the capability to suggest and initiate measures that would shape the future-community, and hence seemed privileged to suggest and implement alterations in the established way of life, potentially affecting all members—was male. The formation of the YKS was significant in transforming the nature and extent of male power within the community. The annual meetings of the YKS became fora in which all (male) members who could be counted as mature men who attended the assembly could express opinions regarding the general affairs of the community (despite the fact that women's attendance

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Antharjanams must be encouraged to take decisions on their own through streesamajams in an article titled 'Stree Samajam' in Unny Nambutiri Vol 7(6), 1926, pp.347-57. Also see the presidential speech at the Edakkunni meeting of the Nambutiri Yuvaajana Sangham in 1930, reported in the M.M, 'Vanita Pangti' (Women's Column) titled 'Antharjanangalum Parishkaravum' (Antharjanams and Reform), February 6, 1930, in which streesamajams are recommended.


at the *YKS* meetings rose steadily, especially by the 1930's. This authority was often posed as opposed to the traditional sorts of male-centered authority within the community, to the authority of the *Smarthans*, the *Vaidikans* and the *Addhyans*. In these struggles Antharjanams continued to remain 'Anthar-janams'—people who inhabited the 'inner' space of *Illams*. They came to be conceived of as objects of re-forming, not as its agents. Antharjanams were to be 'led out', 'rescued', 'liberated', ushered on the frontstage from the kitchen', by the Reformer-Nambutiri. Here the distance between different positions vis-a-vis reforming Antharjanams is considerably reduced—whether the Antharjanams were to be 'protected' (as E.T.Divakaran Moos and the *Kutumba* Regulation Committee recommended in their different ways) or to be 'empowered' (as V.T. Bhattatiripad and E.M.S. Nambutiripad argued, again, in their very distinct ways). It is no surprise that the theme of the liberation of the hapless Antharjanam from the clutches of tradition through the agency of the Nambutiri-Reformer happens to be strikingly recurrent in reformist literary writing.  

124. E.T.Divakaran Moos expressed regret and discontent about such struggles in his *Replies...* op.cit., n.68, pp.1-8. See also, report of a resolution passed at the 7th Annual Meeting of the *Nambutiri Yuva Jana Sangham* at Chovvara in 1926, in *M.M.*, January 19, 1926. Also see, report of the request made to the Tiruvitamkoor *Sarkar* by Vanneri N. Raman Bhattatiripad regarding the *Murajapam* ceremony in *M.M.*, Oct 1, 1929 in the 'Swadesha Vartha' (Local News) column. Such conflict was already evident in the traditional institutions of learning of the Nambutiris by the 1910's. One such protest was led by Kuroor Neelakantan Nambutiripad (later to become prominent in the nationalist movement) as a student at the *Brahmasvam Matham* (traditional school) at Thrissur against a corrupt *vadhyan* (teacher). See, E.K. Krishnan Ezhuthachan, *Kuroor* (Biography), Kumananllooor, 1997, pp.18-22.  

125. Reformist literary effort produced shortstories—the early shortstories of N.Lalitambika Antharjanam such as *Yatavasanam* in *Adyathekkathakal* (Early Stories), Kottayam: SPSS, 1953; M.R.Bhattatiripad, *Valkkannadi*, op.cit., n.27, Moothuringuode Bhavatratan Nambutiripad, *Atnashooty*, (..continued)
The corresponding 'reverse' theme—that of her death and devastation in the absence of such a guiding light—is equally common. And in texts like Ritumati, Antharjanams are warned against seeking to venture into the world on their 'own'—that is, without the aid of a Nambutiri-Reformer. When the Antharjanam makes an alliance with a man of a different community, it may be made under the guidance of the Nambutiri-Reformer—then it becomes legitimate.126

But it is critical to note that the new sort of male-centered authority was significantly different from older forms not only in extent but also in nature. Thus the relation between the Nambutiri-Reformer and those whom he sought to reform, especially Antharjanams, was envisaged to be decidedly different from the relation between the Nambutiri and the Antharjanam within the strictly Patriarchal Illam. Kanippayur in his Memoirs remembers that the submission of the female members to males was fostered in Illams by a number of

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126. M.P. Bhattatiripad, Ritumati (1944), op. cit., n.36.

127. See V.T.'s account of his sister's marriage to a Nair under his guidance and supervision; compare this with his condemnation of Uma Bohn's choice of marriage to a working-class Muslim in Karmavipakam, op.cit., n.22, pp.262-268, and pp. 284-93 respectively.
means, like, for example, preferential consideration towards boys\textsuperscript{	extcopyright128}. Boys and girls were strictly segregated from an early age physically, and very different daily routines were prescribed for boys and girls\textsuperscript{	extcopyright129}. The obligations and bonds of marriage too were apparently quite different—indeed the nature of marriage in the traditional way of life was the target of some of the most severe criticism of the reformers. It was pointed out that the tie of marriage in \textit{Veli} involved no bonds of sentimental affection, and that it was contracted merely for the sake of maintaining the ritualistic practices of the \textit{Illam}, for obtaining heirs, or worse, to facilitate the marriage of daughters\textsuperscript{	extcopyright130}. Reformist criticism of married life in the \textit{Illam} often claimed that the husband's power over the wife was a violent, coercive one, which could even send the wife to her grave. M.R.Bhattatiripad's explosive play \textit{Marakkudaikkullile Mahanarakam} (The Hell Beneath the Cadjan Umbrella) which dwelt upon the violence inflicted by a husband upon his wife, it is claimed, was based upon a true incident\textsuperscript{	extcopyright131}.

In contrast to this, the relation between the Reformer-Nambutiri and the


\textsuperscript{	extcopyright129} Kanippayur, ibid., 'Antharjanangalute Dinacharya' (Daily Routine of Antharjanams), 'Brahmacharyam' (Celibate Life), 'Vedadhyayananam' (Study of Vedas), pp.160 - 200.

\textsuperscript{	extcopyright130} ibid, p.43.

\textsuperscript{	extcopyright131} P.K. Aryan Nambutiripad, \textit{Nalukettir Ninnu Nattilekku} (From the Homestead to the Country), Thrissur: Mangalodayam, 1969, p.106.
Antharjanam he rescues is not one in which the latter is made to obey the former through an ever-present, if veiled, threat of violence. In fact, the Reformer is expected to *guide* the Antharjanam by helping her to develop her own internality (marrying her was often projected as the first move in this direction). Thus the Reformer-Nambutiri was to take the responsibility of developing the Antharjanam into a *Woman*, and willingness to accept the 'Nambutiri-Man's Burden' was often found crucial in the making of the ideal Reformer-Nambutiri: "... It is not befitting to reject the plea of an orphaned woman to take her in, being a devotee of the community, or a man (*Manushyan)*... I have abandoned my community-life for the future-welfare of a hapless woman".132

Radical reformers tried to suggest measures by which the element of Love would be brought into the marital union, so that the traditional bonds of marriage would be completely transformed. V.T. Bhattatiripad, for instance, suggested that Antharjanams should adopt modern dress, acquire modern knowledge and familiarity with modern ways of life in order to establish a new sort of relation— one of companionship—with their modern-educated husbands.133 But besides these suggestions V.T.'s literary re-creation of the young

132. 'Anthappurathil Ninmulla Aahuanam' (The Call from the Inner-Quarters) in *Valkannady*, op.cit., n.27, pp 90-91. It may be noted that being a 'devotee of the community' and being a 'man' are not exactly opposed to each other in this passage.

133. From 'Nambutiri Manushyanayi Maranamenkil', op.cit. n.115, pp 332-36.
Antharjanam as active agent in Love elsewhere deserves attention. The Reformer-husband thus appeared to be teacher, guide, protector and lover to whom the Antharjanam, besides being the object to be reformed, is also the object of desire. This non-reciprocal relation of power was justified by projecting an ideal future in which Antharjanams would fully attain Womanhood and exercise that specific sort of authority attributed to Woman in and through the domestic domain. It was expected that in such an ideal society, this non-reciprocal relation, which seemed to be 'the need of the hour', would be unnecessary.

The appearance of the Woman-Reformer—Antharjanams like Parvati

134. It is interesting that while V.T's short stories like 'Vishukettam' or 'Enkil' (first published in an anthology titled *Rajanirangam* in 1928; reprinted in *V.T.Yude Kathakal*, op.cit, n.125) make the virgin-Antharjanam both a desirable object and an active subject in Love, she is liberated almost inevitably through the agency of the male Reformer—in fact under his supervision, in much of his other writings, especially his play *Adukkalayil*... (op.cit., n.63) in which the Reformer-hero Madhavan brings Tety, the Antharjanam he 'liberates' through marriage to the stage, with these words: "Let Woman remain weak for the sake of Man's merit. Yet it is upon her delicate shoulders that the weight of that great institution, the home, rests. The community's development requires the sympathy of her maternal heart." *Adukkalayil*... (op.cit, n.63, p.78). The transition of the Antharjanam from "being wife according to the Books, but practically a slave confined to the corner of the kitchen... to appearing in the front stage as the Mistress of the Home "must necessarily be mediated by the Reformer. The Editorial of the *MM* congratulated the Reformers on the performance of this play in so many words. (Editorial, January 15, 1930). The writer Keshavadev found it befitting to congratulate V.T for revealing the 'truth' about Antharjanams: 'It had not been known before that Nambutiri women were capable of the quality of Love and that they knew how to kiss the men they loved' ('Rajanirangam-Oru Asvadanam' originally published in *Unny Nambutiri*, 1932; appended to *V.T.Yude Kathakal* op.cit., n 125). Here the upturning of the stereotypical figure of the Antharjanam is quite easily discernible. However, 'Liberation' which is the channelisation of such capacity into certain clear-cut roles, must occur through the agency of the male-Reformer.

135. By the end of the '20s, the issues surrounding the 'liberation' of Antharjanams began to be voiced forcefully within Nambutiri reformist circles—female education, dress-reform, monogamy, widow-remarrige, intra-caste marriage, freedom of travel etc. In 1928, an Antharjanam became a member of the *Nambutiri YuvaJana Sangham* for the first time (reported in *MM*, December 12, 1928) (.continued)
Nenminimangalam who abandoned *ghosha* and actively entered reformist circles—complicated this relation but did not overturn it. In the writings of the Antharjanams who participated in discussions there is a tense acceptance of the Nambutiri-Reformer's key role in their liberation. O.C. Devaki Antharjanam, writing in 1928, opined:

(continued)

*Antharjana Samajams* were beginning to be formed numerously in this period. The *Antharjana Samajam* of Kidangoor in 1930 passed radical resolutions among which were requests to the government to grant them government jobs along with other women, and to give opportunity to Antharjanams who had gained basic education to study in London etc. (Report in the *M.M.*, February 15, 1930). The *M.M.* in 1929 made favourable comments on the 'Awakening of the Antharjanams', seeing in this development their imminent liberation. ".... They organise *Samajams*: A woman from Changanashery presided over the Karunagappally *Samajam* (*M.M.*., Editorial, 'Antharjanangute Unarchcha' (The Awakening of Antharjanams), June 8, 1929). An Antharjanam, Smt. Parvathy Manezhi, appeared in public at the Edakkunni *Yogam*, for the first time without *Ghosha* (*M.M.*., Editorial, 'Edakkunniyile Nambutiri Sammelanangal' (The Nambutiri Conferences at Edakkunni), January 15, 1930). Antharjanams also participated actively in debates around the legislation proposed to be implemented (the infamous episode in which V.T. Bhattatiripad and M.R. Bhattatiripad created a fictitious 'Vannya Savitri Antharjanam' and made her voice radical opinions should not obscure this) such as the Nambutiri Bill proposed by Gauri Paviran in the Kochi Legislative Assembly (reported in *M.M.*, January 23, 1930). In 1930, women students were admitted to the special school for Nambutiris at Edakkunni; a Special School for them was begun at Panjali. At the 22nd session of the *YKS* at Edakkunni there was but one woman present as spectator; at the 25th session at Karalmann, 75 Antharjanams were present (P.K. Aryan Nambutinpad, op.cit., n.131, p.122). Several Antharjanams emerged as able speakers and propagandists in the '30s. The President of the *Yuvajana Sangham* 's meeting at Vellinezhy in 1929 was a woman. By the '40s, Antharjanams had appeared as full-fledged political activists—notably, Devaki Narikkatiri, Arya Pallom and others—participating in *Satyagrahas* such as the one organised at Panjali in which the Antharjanams were severely beaten up (See, Cherai Ramadas, 'Paliyam: Samaravum Vivaranangalum' (Paliyam: The Struggle and Accounts of it), *Kerala Padhanangal*(6), January 1997, p.164); by the late '40s, a girls' hostel for college-going Antharjanams was begun at Thrissur; *Antharjana Samajams* were active in 'propaganda urging them to be independent financially, especially in the background of the furore raised around reports that young Antharjanans were being sold off to Sidhipur (Kamatika) and Sirsi (Maharashtra). Worth special mention is the play *Tozhilkendrathilekku* (To the Work-Place) written and performed by women of the *Antharjana Samajam* of Thrissur in 1948 (See, T.K. Anand, 'Theatre as a Form of Social Protest: Enactment of Plays and Rise of Consciousness among Nampudiri Women of Kerala', Paper presented at the *International Congress of Kerala Studies*, 27-29 August 1994, Thrivunamathapuram. *Abstracts* Vol III, A.K.G Centre for Research and Studies, Thrivunamathapuram, pp.174-75).
"...It is not enough that they (Nambutiris) become ready to liberate us...we too have to get ready to embrace that freedom... So the first thing that Nambutiris should do today is to prepare us for this. Mental preparedness is difficult to create... In this condition we will not desire proper freedom (swatantryam); we should not, at this time, strive for it. What we Antharjanams request you urgently is to endeavour to secure our liberty to wear clothes and ornaments according to our husbands' tastes, to travel freely with them and to pursue proper married life. In reality this freedom is not for our sake alone; you, too, will have freedom in precisely the same proportion as we do. As long as this lacuna remains unremedied all your efforts are bound to end as farcical exercises..."

Here there is no doubt regarding the acceptance of the Nambutiri- Reformer's role in preparing Antharjanams for swatantryam; however, there is also the hint that the swatantryam of men is dependent upon that of women. Antharjanams who wrote in contemporary journals and newspapers and spoke in reformist meetings were critical of the lethargy they perceived in the Reformer-Nambutiris' fulfilment of their 'responsibility' towards Antharjanams. Parvati Nenminimangalam's speeches are especially worth noting in this regard--her challenge to radicals whether anyone in the audience would be willing to


137. The Antharjanams who argued in this fashion were often reiterating, albeit with a different stress, the argument put forth earlier by male Reformers that the community's future itself depended upon its women. In accounts which spoke of the 'glorious past' of the Nambutiri community, the golden age was often found to coincide with times in which Antharjanams were respected and 'liberated'. "The Nambutiris of the Old gave Antharjanams the position of the goddess of the Home...", wrote one author,... "In those days there were many Antharjanams, who, like 'Kuroor Amma', shone as paragons of virtue." (M.N. Neelakantan Nambutiri, 'Antharjanangalute Adhunikavasta' (The Modern Condition of Antharjanams), in Vanitakusumam Vol 1(5), 1926-27, p.125.) This period is found to coincide with the period of the emergence of Nambutiri 'achievers' like Viluamangalathu Swamiyar, Melpathoor and Adi Sankara. The different stress in the arguments of Antharjanams, however, calls for attention.
wed a widow;\textsuperscript{138} her criticism of radicals like V.T. and E.M.S regarding their self-distancing from community-reform.\textsuperscript{139} But the criticism of the Nambutiri-Reformer's power over the Antharjanams figures more stringently in some short stories by Lalitambika Antharjanam written in the 1930's, notably\textit{ Itu Ashayamano?}(1935)\textsuperscript{140} and\textit{ Prasadam} \textsuperscript{141} (1939). The former mocks at the Reformer- husband's blind faith that his wife must be necessarily his inferior and demonstrates how the non-reciprocal relation between the Reformer and those who were to be reformed by him actually cancels out the establishment of the ideal complementary\textsuperscript{(sexual)} exchange in the family. In the latter the male Reformers' expectation of gratitude from the women whom they 'rescue' and turn into reform-workers, receives a sharp and biting retort.

Above all the differences that mark the proposals regarding re-forming Antharjanams, the pervasiveness of the projection of the above-mentioned non-reciprocal relation between Nambutiri-Reformer and Antharjanam specifies a level of correspondence.

\textsuperscript{138} Reported in \textit{M.M.}, December 29, 1930. For a brief account of Nenminimangalam's work as a Woman-Reformer, see a commemorative article by Premji, 'Parvati Nenminimangalam', \textit{Unny Nambutiri Vol 1(2)}, May-June 1947, pp.63-73.

\textsuperscript{139} V.T.Bhattatiripad responded to this criticism in his speech at the Alathur Upasabha in 1930. See, \textit{Karnavipakam}, op.cit., n.22, p.351.

\textsuperscript{140} From \textit{Irupatu Varshatilithu Shesham}, Kottayam: SPSS, 1962, pp.78-87.

\textsuperscript{141} From \textit{Kilivatalloode}, Kottayam: SPSS, 1954, pp.111-17.
If the goal set up in most of these proposals is the fashioning of a community organised according to the order of gender, in which complementary sexual exchange was to prevail, the chief means towards its achievement seemed to be the institution of a non-reversible relation of power between those who came into contact with the norms and mores of modern society earlier, and those who could not. That the nature of this relation was envisaged to be of a 'pastoral' sort\(^\text{142}\) does not in any way make it any less a form of power.

Making the Nambutiri family a site of reform also implied that it was also to become a site of pastoral power. Within the ideal reformist family (consisting of the Nambutiri-Reformer, the Antharjanam whom he brings out of the Ilam, and children) the agent of such power was definitely the male.

IV. **End-Note**

In this brief examination of Nambutiri reformism, modern community-formation appears as a complex process envisaged to occur through the shaping of Individuality. The ideal modern community, the goal of reformism, is most often conceived as organised by

\(^{142}\) The notion of 'pastoral' power is elaborated in Michel Foucault's work, notably in 'The Subject and Power', appended as Afterword to H.L.Dreyfus and P. Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983, pp.208-226.
the order of gender, and thus the fashioning of individuals also involves the development of gender—the fashioning of Men and Women. The reformist project saw a number of proposals that put forth ways and means towards achieving this end, all of which were based upon creation of knowledge of the community and its members resulting from self-examination (which, however, was heavily reliant on modern notions of the ideal Individual and Community, working as an ideal standard). In reformist self-knowledge both the Nambutiri and the Antharjanam of the traditional order appeared as 'lacking' figures, largely devoid of the qualities of Man and Woman. Further, it projected the Illam as the complete opposite of the modern family, in which women were in submission to men. However, this also seemed to require that Antharjanams be projected as passive figures, incapable of their own liberation. Given this, the liberation of Nambutiris and Antharjanams seemed to call for different strategies. While reformist speech and writing exhorted men to actively take up the challenge of self-transformation through a variety of means, ranging from adoption of the techniques of agricultural management etc. to mounting open challenge to authority in the Illam, the reform of Antharjanams was expected to occur through the agency of the Nambutiri-Reformer, mainly in the role of modern husband, father or brother. The ideal modern community that would be constituted through complementary relations between Man and Woman was to be realised only in a hazy future when self-transformation would finally be complete.

However, there is no attempt here to generalise about reform movements of the early
twentieth-century Keralam from this brief look at Nambutiri reformism. It might be possible to agree that all reform-movements that set up the building of a modern community as their goal were implicated, in one way or the other, to a greater or lesser extent, in the project of fashioning the Individual. Yet the specific ways in which this was dealt with could have been quite different and it is probably very important to focus upon this difference. Also the different sets of 'initial conditions' that reformers had to work with could have been significant—for example, the strict delineation of space between men and women in the Illam might have been important in the making of reforming strategies aimed at Antharjanams. But say, among the Syrian Christians, Nair groups, Ambalavasi groups etc, the established delineation of space, duties etc which were quite different from that in Illams could have worked to throw up reformist strategies quite different from those of Nambutiri reformism. Again, it might be true that reformist activity of most sorts were initiated mostly by men. But this does not render the enquiry into different reformist strategies pursued by different groups redundant.

As far as the Nambutiri community is concerned, the modern community organised according to the order of gender continued to figure as a distant dream for very long, even in

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143. By Ambalavasis, one means the groups that traditionally earned livelihood through temple-service - the Variers, Pisharadis etc.
the post-reformist, post-Independence times. The play *Patanam*\(^{144}\) (The Fall) (1976) which dwells upon the post-Independence Nambutiri *Illam* depicts a gloomy scenario of devastation of the *Illam* by the new forces unleashed by modernisation. The familiar stereotypes—Antharjanams, passive, suffering and victimised; the young Nambutiri, angry and frustrated—all appear with interesting touches here too. However, the oppressive force is no longer tradition, but a modernity that has 'betrayed' the Nambutiri, and the ideal modern community continues to be located in the future, yet to be actualised.

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