



## National Journal of Hindi & Sanskrit Research

ISSN: 2454-9177

NJHSR 2025; 1(61): 226-229

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## The Journalistic Vision Of Punnasseri Sree Neelakanta Sharma Reflected In Vinjanachinthamani

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### Introduction

The heritage of Kerala's literary and educational history is adorned with numerous illustrious figures whose contributions have deeply influenced the cultural and intellectual fabric of the state. Punnasseri Nambi Neelakanta Sharma stands fore most among them as a scholar, teacher, poet, and a profound thinker who devoted his life to the propagation of Sanskrit education and classical knowledge. His legacy continues to resonate through his literary and educational endeavors, notably through his pioneering magazine Vinjanachinthamani. This Dissertation aims to explore and document significant portions of Vinjanachinthamani, focusing on its content, context, and relevance, while also offering insights into the life and contributions of its founder, Punnasseri Nambi.

### The Legacy Of Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma

Neelakanta Sharma was born on June 17, 1858, in Punnasseri Illam, located in Pattambi in the Valluvanad taluk of Malabar. He was the son of Narayana Sharma of Punnasseri Illam and Pappi Manayamma of the Ezhikkara Illam in Thaliyil, Varavur. At the age of five, following family tradition, he underwent the initiation into learning (ezhuthiniruthu) under the guidance of the family preceptor, Arangottu Warriar. His early teachers included Arangottu Warriar himself, Govinda Marar of the Edaveetil family in Thrithala, and Unnikanda Warriar of Kulukkallur.

Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma was a profound scholar in Sanskrit. In his effort to revive Sanskrit education, he established a Sanskrit school named Saraswathodyothini in 1888. This institution was later upgraded to a college in 1921 and is now known as the Sree Neelakanta Government Sanskrit College, Pattambi.

At a time when untouchability and caste discrimination were deeply entrenched in society, Punnasseri Nambi stood out as a social reformer who imparted knowledge to all, regardless of caste, religion, or gender. Disciples like the great poet P. (likely referring to Mahakavi P. Kunhiraman Nair) recall him as an extraordinary genius who could teach ten disciples ten different difficult subjects at the same time.

He was equally proficient in medicine (Vaidya), astrology (Jyotisha), literature, astronomical mathematics (Graha Ganita), and spherical mathematics (Gola Ganita). He published the Pattambi Panchangam and in 1078 ME (Malayalam Era), founded a medical clinic named Chinthamani.

Nambi was popularly known as Gurunathan. In 1085 ME, he was honored with the Veera Shrinkhala by both the Maharaja of Travancore, Sreemoolam Thirunal, and the Zamorin Manavikrama Ettan Thampuran. He was also awarded the title Pandita Raja by the Vidwatsadas (scholarly council) of Thripunithura.

## The Journalistic Vision Of Punnasseri Nambi

Punnasseri Nambi as a Journalist: A View through Vinjanachinthamani

Punnasseri Nambi used Vinjanachinthamani as a platform to promote rational thought and scientific temper. His journalistic style emphasized logic and reason over blind faith, reflecting the spirit of the Indian Renaissance. This positions him as a reform-oriented journalist committed to intellectual awakening.

His articles often discussed the importance of Sanskrit and Malayalam in education, aiming to enrich both. His linguistic precision and clarity show journalistic discipline and a strong editorial voice. In this sense, he contributed to journalism by using language as a tool for both cultural preservation and modernization.

Nambi's writing was marked by integrity and seriousness. He did not chase popularity or sensationalism but focused on the long-term intellectual development of society. This aligns with the principles of ethical journalism, where the goal is to inform and elevate public discourse.

Like modern columnists and editorial writers, Nambi functioned as a public intellectual. He analyzed social and philosophical issues critically, inviting readers to question and reflect. This makes Vinjanachinthamani more than a magazine—it was a medium of critical thought dissemination.

While today we distinguish between journalism and academic writing, Punnasseri Nambi's work blurred these boundaries. His articles were scholarly yet accessible, aiming to educate the layperson—an ideal that modern journalistic essays still strive for.

Punnasseri Nambi approached his topics with intellectual depth and seriousness, much like a seasoned journalist. His articles were not just for scholars but were designed to educate the common reader, making complex ideas more accessible.

His writing combined simplicity with depth. By adapting Malayalam for the expression of scientific and philosophical ideas, Nambi demonstrated how language could be a powerful tool in journalism for enlightenment and reform.

The goal of Vinjanachinthamani was to disseminate knowledge—especially in the fields of science, philosophy, and literature. This focus shows that Nambi viewed journalism as a vehicle for spreading wisdom and cultivating critical thinking in society.

Rather than passively reporting or avoiding controversial topics, Nambi engaged critically with the social inequalities

and outdated customs of his time. This positions him as a socially conscious journalist who sought to spark reflection and reform.

Through Vinjanachinthamani, Punnasseri Nambi set an early example of intellectual journalism in Malayalam. His work bridged the gap between scholarly depth and journalistic clarity—an ideal combination still relevant in modern editorial writing.

'Deshavrithantham': Punnasseri Nambi's Vision of News as Knowledge

In every issue of Vinjanachinthamani, the last page regularly featured a section titled 'Deshavrithantham' (National News). Unlike today's news reporting style, Punnasseri Nambi's presentation was entirely different. These were not just updates on local events or political happenings; they were windows into knowledge from all over the world.

His Deshavrithantham entries didn't restrict themselves to daily occurrences. Instead, they provided insights into global developments in science, spirituality, language, literature, and more. For readers, these reports offered not just "news" but profound learning and intellectual enrichment.

The very term 'news' took on a deeper meaning under Punnasseri Nambi's pen. His writing style transformed news from being a mere summary of events into a medium of education. Through this, he introduced a new model of journalism—one that went beyond headlines to cultivate awareness and knowledge.

This approach made Deshavrithantham not just a news column, but a unique educational platform for the public—a testament to Nambi's visionary role as an intellectual journalist. The Deshavrithantham section was included on the last page of the magazine.

Some of the news items included in the Deshavrithantham section.

- इंग्लण्डने भक्ष्यमूल्यमतिरिच्यते वास्तव्या विषीदन्ति।<sup>1</sup>
- (Food prices in England are really depressing.)
- श्रीमान् केल्लकोटराजवासुदेवराजस्स्यानन्दूरमगच्छत् ।<sup>2</sup>  
(Mr. Vasudeva, the king of Kellankota, went to Ananda.)
- केरलेषु संस्कृतपाठशालाम् परिशोधकेनाधुना परिशोध्यन्ते ।<sup>3</sup>  
(Sanskrit schools in Kerala are now being revised by the refiner.)
- भारतमहासभां द्रष्टुं "दत्तनुपोर्ट" इति कश्चन महामन्त्रसभा-सामाजिका आगच्छति ।<sup>4</sup>  
(A Mahamantra Sabha social worker called "Dattanuport" comes to visit the Bharat Mahasabha.)

## Other Journalistic Ideologies

### Education

Punnasseri observed that although education was universally recognized as essential, there were very few who sincerely worked for its improvement. Even the rulers, in his view, often failed to promote education in a holistic manner. Instead, the focus was narrowed to English education and the sciences in that language, while native languages and classical knowledge were neglected.

He lamented that schools were poorly supported, teachers were under-resourced, and society as a whole showed little initiative toward sustaining or improving educational institutions.

Seeing the failure of official efforts, Punnasseri proposed the formation of a people's assembly dedicated to the cause of education. This body, he argued, should collect contributions from citizens based on their ability, and use the funds to support schools, teachers, and learning resources.

However, he noted with concern that very few came forward, and among them, those who helped were even fewer. This lack of public spirit, he believed, was a major obstacle to progress.

Punnasseri urged people to stop asking, "Why should I act for the good of everyone?" and instead say, "It is I who must begin."<sup>5</sup> He believed that every citizen had a role to play in building an educated society.

He criticized the Malayali tendency to spend extravagantly on food, festivals, and luxuries, while ignoring the urgent need to invest in education.

"You quarrel over boat expenses and spend lavishly on feasts, but hesitate to support a school."<sup>6</sup>

Instead, he suggested that even a tenth of such wasteful spending could be redirected to promote education in:

Sanskrit – the sacred language of our tradition,

English – the key to modern knowledge and official communication.

Punnasseri believed that true prosperity—intellectual, moral, and spiritual—would come only when society:

Promoted balanced, inclusive education, Valued both ancient and modern knowledge, and Recognized education as a collective duty.

With such effort, we will gain knowledge, live comfortably, and be uplifted in this life and the next.

For Punnasseri Nambi, education was not a privilege but a social responsibility. His vision called for active public involvement, proper language policy, and reform-minded thinking. He wanted Malayalis to awaken from indifference and work towards an educated, enlightened society.

## Importance of women's education

"When a child is born, it remains under the care of the mother for the first seven years of life. Only after that do others take part in their education." According to Nambi, a child's earliest lessons—habits, manners, speech, values—are learned from the mother. If the mother is uneducated, the child may unknowingly absorb undesirable behaviors. These early impressions often last a lifetime.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, Nambi argued that if we want knowledgeable and virtuous men in society, we must first educate the mothers who shape them. The education of women is not optional—it is a moral and social necessity.

Nambi was deeply concerned about the backward mindset among Malayalis, where educating girls was still considered shameful. While other parts of India and even Europe had already advanced in promoting women's education, Kerala lagged behind due to cultural prejudice and ignorance. He sharply criticized mothers who themselves lacked education and discouraged their daughters from learning, saying things like: "My daughter is too shy and delicate. She doesn't need education. English is a low language, Malayalam is useless..."

Such attitudes, he believed, were major obstacles to progress.

Punnasseri Nambi emphasized the importance of mastering three languages:

Malayalam – the mother tongue, for cultural and daily communication

English – the language of administration and modern knowledge

Sanskrit – the crown of all languages, carrying ancient wisdom

He insisted that schools should at least provide proficiency in Malayalam and English, and lamented that even Sanskrit was being neglected—not just by women, but even by men.

"O Malayalis! Reflect deeply on this matter. If nothing else, stop resisting the idea of women's education. At least try to shed this outdated mindset."<sup>8</sup>

Punnasseri's words were not just a suggestion but a clarion call for reform. He believed that educating women would uplift not just individual families but the entire society and nation.

Punnasseri Nambi's vision of women's education was far ahead of his time. He saw educated women as the foundation of a wise, moral, and enlightened society. To him, denying girls education was not just ignorance—it was a betrayal of progress. His appeal to the Malayali community still echoes today: educate your daughters, and you educate the future.

## Sanskrit Education

Sanskrit is the language in which our ancient wisdom in philosophy, medicine, astronomy, grammar, and ethics is preserved. To abandon it is to lose access to our very foundations.

Nambi believed that true understanding of Indian sciences and traditions was possible only through Sanskrit. He viewed the language as the gateway to Vedic and classical knowledge.

Punnasseri emphasized that Sanskrit, being revered across India, is a cultural thread binding diverse regions and communities. Through Sanskrit, one could connect with the intellectual heritage of the entire nation, not just Kerala.

He believed that Sanskrit literature, including epics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and works of Kalidasa and Bhartrhari, provide deep moral values. He urged that such knowledge be made accessible through structured education.

Punnasseri warned that the neglect of Sanskrit among Malayalis was a dangerous trend, especially when women and children were kept away from it. He lamented that even men lacked interest in the language once considered divine.

"What greatness can we expect in a land where even Sanskrit – the crown of all languages – is forgotten?"<sup>9</sup>

### He advocated for trilingual education:

Malayalam for daily expression, English for modern scientific knowledge, and Sanskrit for eternal wisdom. In his view, all three were essential for a well-rounded, cultured individual.

For Punnasseri Nambi, Sanskrit was not just a language to study—it was a duty to preserve. He saw it as a path to national revival, moral strength, and intellectual clarity. Reviving Sanskrit education was, for him, both a cultural responsibility and a spiritual necessity.

### Endnotes

1. Vinjanachinthamani ., Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma volume 22 pp 31
2. Ibid., pp 32
3. Ibid., pp 32
4. Ibid., pp 32
5. Vinjanachinthamani ., Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma volume 22 pp 34
6. Vinjanachinthamani ., Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma volume 22 pp 34
7. Vinjanachinthamani ., Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma volume 21 pp 36
8. Vinjanachinthamani ., Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma volume 21 pp 37

9. Vinjanachinthamani ., Punnasseri Neelakanta Sharma volume 21 pp 39

### Conclusion

This paper has sought to present an in-depth analysis of Punnasseri Nambi Neelakanta Sharma's journalistic perspective, with special focus on his editorial role in the magazine Vinjanachinthamani. The study reveals how Nambi's journalism was deeply rooted in cultural pride, educational reform, and rational critique.

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3. Punnasseri Sree Neelakanta Sharma ., Vinjanachinthamani volume 20, Achukudam, 1083 Thulam to 1084 Kanni
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