Chapter - 8

Conclusion

The present study on the process of structuring Namboodiri community revealed that claims and imaginations of community identity are contextual. Community shifts their strategies of constituting community and appropriation of elements that should form the community identity always in relation to the changing socio-economic-political order. It forces us to argue that there is nothing essential within the community to refer to and project as determinant of their identity, as these elements never remain static through time. That is, community is not always already an entity, rather it is a process of becoming. This has been arrived by analyzing three critical moments in the history of Kerala, viz., the early 20th century social reform period, period of the implementation of Land Reforms, and the contemporary neo-liberal era. Strategies of the Namboodiri community have been focused since, they were considered not only as the dominant in the society but also as a community that preserved caste exclusiveness throughout history due to some spiritual sanctions.

The analysis has been preceded primarily focusing on the writings produced by the Namboodiri community itself. An exception to this is first chapter titled ‘Construction of Community Identity- Namboodiris in Literature’, where focus has been made to analyze discourses objectifying the Namboodiri community emerged from externally. This chapter also forms the background of the whole succeeding discussions. The writings of European travellers, Christian Missionaries, colonial administrators and ethnographers, fictional and non-fictional writings produced within Kerala are the key constituents of this discourse. These discourse, but, constructed Namboodiris differently.
Ritually bounded, therefore, irrational, ignorant and isolated group; abode of barbarism; a community turning against civilization are some of the images constructed through these discourse. Once Namboodiris began to internalize the discursively constructed images as reality, subjectification of Namboodiris to colonial modernity became complete. This newly acquired position of colonial subject interpellated them to demand for reforms. That is, it is the internalization of the value idealized through colonial discourses that generated conditions for restructuring Namboodiri community in the early 20th century. Formation of Yogakshema Sabha was critical in this juncture.

It has been argued that there were periodical changes in the policies and programmes of Yogakshema Sabha. Sabha moved from a moderate position in the beginning to a radical position in the later effectuating significant transformations to the whole outlook of the community. The Sabha headed the self-correction movement of the Namboodiris in accordance with the changing socio-political situations. The strategies taken by Sabha accentuated the reformist movement of Namboodiris on the one hand and created a false consciousness among them, on the other, that the demand for reform is emerging from within the community and was not an effect of internalization of colonial ideology. The Sabha with this misrecognition, as Pierre Bourdieu argued, lead all movements against the discursively constructed social realities. Thus, there were movement against scriptural restriction of freedom, demand of accepting colonial modernity, and prescription of new values, views and practices to make them fit to live in the new world. Thus in the early 20th century the constituents of Namboodiri identity became the elements that western rationality had projected as ideal. Therefore, we can argue that the political strategies of the Sabha had changed continuously not because of their own interest, but because of its relation to the changing larger social world. Since
the Sabha was formed to reform Namboodiri community, it needs to acknowledge the larger socio-political developments including resisting colonial domination, cultural practices and economic exploitation; else its effort would have been in vain. Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha had a difference from other caste based reform movements like the Pulaya, the Ezhavas and the Nair. Primary intention of these movements were to challenge the then existing social hierarchy. However, the Namboothiri movement was directed to reproduce the existing social hierarchy. In the contemporary Keralam these caste organizations work as pressure groups for getting more economic and political rights firming back on to their caste status in social hierarchy. The net result of these developments is the continuance of the Nairs as Nairs, Ezhavas as Ezhavas and Pulayas as Pulayas. But the Namboodiri reform movement that had begun with advocating parivedhanam, widow remarriage, boycotting of ghosha and accepting English education soon turned to be a movement affecting the very existence of their caste. Through these effort they were imagining a new identity wherein its members could be trained in English education, family form could be changed from joint family to that of nuclear family, and women could be emancipated from hiding behind umbrella, to note a few. All these are directed to move the community from exclusion and isolation to the public sphere.

The Namboodiri community who had reconstituted themselves in and through the social reform and accepted new identity appropriated different strategies to re-invent their community identity in post-independent period. A crucial moment was the enactment of the Land Reforms. If reconstitution of social position was the fundamental idea behind reforming community in the early decades of 20th century, reproducing economic domination was the prime concern during the period of Land Reform. In an
inevitable situation of being under forcible law of the Government, Namboodiri were forced to accepted new concept of life. Fundamental among them is the acceptance of different forms of employment other than ritual service. Though it had begun during the colonial period itself, accepting new forms of labour provided by modern institutions became unhesitantly acceptable during the second half of 20th century. Further, the land reforms of 1950’s and 1960’s resulted in creating a rethinking within community on their economic position and for the first time planning and industrialization got prime place in their discussions. Namboodiris understood the importance of labour and they succeeded in reconstituting themselves with the contemporary situations by entering into different economic fields.

In the contemporary neoliberal era, the Namboodiris once again changed their strategies of constituting community identity. In recent years there are attempts to revive their social status through invoking once rejected tradition and customs; that is, accepting those practice which they dismissed during the period of social reform as uncivilized practice. It could be because off the realization that, as Pierre Bourdieu has argued, through appropriating social and symbolic capital social dominance can be reproduced. Now, once again the Namboodiris began to claim separate identity from others through popularization of traditional customs and rituals. The caste marks and symbols, once pictured as hindrance to the progress of the community, began to find its place in the contemporary community practices. This revival, however is taking place on the community that had already undergone several major changes. That is, caste marks and symbols are put on a community which is not one of the pre-colonial but one emerged in and through colonial modernity and western rationality. Imaging this new collectivity, or rather caste exclusiveness, as continuity from time immemorial with scriptural
sanctions, we would argue, is wrought in the structural condition of individualized human existence, and not in a collective consciousness of the pre-colonial social order. The new collective identity imagined through invoking caste symbols and customs constitutes a new Namboodiri community that is striving to address uncertainty as well as opportunities provided by the neoliberal era and not the threat provided by colonialism or immediate post-independent state. Imagination of community identity will continue, but always in relation to the objective social world in which it exists and without referring to any essential being within.