Chapter - 1

Introduction

The Context

The present study addresses the question concerning the constitution of community identity. Antithetical to the dominant historical and ethnographic thinking that community is an essential category that continues through time, the present study intends to hypothesize that any attempt to essentialize community identity would produce only an ahistorical argument. Identity is not essential, aspatial and atemporal, but it is historical. Therefore, it changes in relation to the changing socio-political and economic situations. When arguing so, we do not fall into the limitations of social determinism. Rather we would argue that the constitution of community identity is effectuated as a consequence of the corresponding relation between the socio-economic situation and the mentality of the subjects live in it. To establish this argument, the present study will proceed with analyzing the strategies adopted by the Namboodiri community in three different historical conjunctures to structure and restructure their community identity in modern Kerala. The first is the colonial phase (or more precisely, the period of social reform) wherein how the Namboodiri who had internalized the values of colonial modernity appropriated new strategies to structure a ‘modern and civilized’ Namboodiri will form the central concern. The second situation is the period of Land Reform in post-independent Keralam, wherein we will examine how Namboodiri rebuilt their community identity differently when their existence was challenged economically. The third moment is the recent neoliberal phase, wherein we could see the Namboodiris reinventing their once rejected past which is embodied of ritual authority to address the risks and uncertainties created by the contemporary Keralam.
During the colonial period when the idea of social reforms had disseminated all parts of Kerala and affecting almost all communities, the Namboodiri community had not remained isolated. It was during this period that a response to the colonially constructed identity of the Namboodiri community was initiated. The colonially constructed notion on the Namboodiri community as dominating, essentially unchanging and having enjoyed all types of luxuries got concretized during this period.¹ The popular literature and writings of this period has carried down these notions. Though reformers among the Namboodiri community like V.T.Bhattathirippad, Mullamangalathu Raman Bhattathirippad (M.R.B), M.P.Bhattathirippad (Premji) etc. laboured for introducing reforms and to change the projected identity of the community, the constructed image of the community remained unchanged. This constructed image disseminated among the masses through the discourses objectifying the Namboodiri community. The present study tries to perceive the essential characteristics thus attributed to objectify community and how it eventually constituted a community identity as a discursive effect.

The present study also tries to address how Namboodiri women's identity gets constructed during the reformist context. It is a commonly accepted argument that women question could be used as an indicator of society’s advancement. “Among rude people, the women are generally degraded; among the civilised people they were exalted”.² Among the Namboodiri community also women was degraded and exploited in the 19th and early 20th century. The role of women in ushering change, the status of women as an index of social transformation is being discussed increasingly of late.³

¹ Literature from European Travelogues of post-15th century to native literature in the 19th and early 20th century followed this suit
Women issues were the central issue in the social reformist movement which was taken up by the Namboodiri reformers by the third decade of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Namboodiri reformist perception on women question was revealed in the debates within the community in 1920’s and 30’s. In fact, the reformist discourses on Namboodiri women were carried out by their male reformers.

The second context of Namboodiri restructuring themselves is during the period of Land Reforms. As a result of the introduction of the Land Reforms by the successive Governments of Kerala, the then tenurial relations, whether it was Jenmi-Jathi-Naduvazhi form or that of feudal mode, began to change. The Namboodiri were the community who had deeply influenced by the Land Reforms. The discourse which argued for and against land reforms emerged in the 1960’s and 1970’s objectified the Namboodiri community and in and through this discourse once again they were reinvented. Also, the community had to reinvent themselves to address the changing socio-economic situations.

Yogakshema Sabha, the central organization that had been working to restructure Namboodiri communities had followed new slogans, charted new programmes and new strategies in 1980’s. In the last three decades Yogakshema Sabha and the community, in line with trends in the larger public, were at the cross roads, witnessing a resurgent phase of modernization. They expanded and consolidated their community base mainly through active involvement in public issues. Attempt to keep up their identity through reviving rituals and practices specific to the community and engaging in community building activities by appropriating the cyber space has been in increase since 1990s. These developments also show that the community is getting restructured even in the contemporary period.
All these shows that caste or community identity is not static, rather it changes through times. Any attempt to essentialize caste/community identity would lead us far away from understanding social reality. The principles of structuring community can well be comprehended by the discussions on concepts like caste, community, identity and modernity. This understanding has bearing with the recent argument that modern castes of India were the product of colonial modernity as well.\(^4\)

It is understandable that during the reform phase Namboodiri community gradually shifted from caste elitism to community consciousness. Paradoxically the community again showed the tendency to project their caste elitism during the post-independence period. During the reformist period, with the spread of English education and the influence of colonial modernity, Namboodiris understood the futility of sticking back to their caste elitism and internal differentiations. Further, it forced them to accept a wider consciousness of being a community. The internal hierarchies within the caste had been erased to form a united community.

There is a common apprehension that modern communities are the product of colonial modernity. Colonial modernity claimed that social reforms in India were an offshoot of people’s wishes to improve themselves. This had been made possible by internalizing the idea of culture and civilization that had brought by the colonial masters by the colonized. It has been argued that colonialism was made possible, survived and

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\(^4\) Nicholas Drikes, a constructivist, is of the opinion that caste was invented by colonial anthropology and colonial state institutionalized caste through the system of census and other administrative practices. *(Caste of Mind, Colonialism and the Making of Modern India*, Princeton University Press, 2001,p.115) Similarly Kenneth W Jones held the view that modern castes in India were the creation of the British administrative system *(Socio Religious Reform Movement in British India*, New Delhi, 1944,p.81). Gyanendra Pande also expressed the view that ‘pre-colonial society was too fragmented by sub-castes and local loyalties to have larger alliance to emerge’ *(The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, Oxford University Press, 1990p.199)
strengthened by the cultural technologies of rule.\textsuperscript{5} In making religion the primary factor in the definition of community, the British laid basis for a discourse that claimed to represent the interest of loosely conceived social categories.\textsuperscript{6} For the perpetuation and elegance of administration the colonial Government inaugurated the study of diverse conditions of the colonial people. The British launched Census in 1871 and subsequently implemented organized methods for taking the census of the people. Census contributed to the formation of communities as British officials identified religion as the unit for its social, political and administrative measures.

Census was prime factor in initiating the feeling of community among the people of India. Though initially British categorized people in terms of religion, gradually people themselves felt the consciousness of community. Identities were multiple in the pre-colonial period and the ill-defined boundaries of the pre-colonial communities were replaced by discrete categories which could be enumerated exactly and which claimed exclusive identification by their members. This discursive operation induced people to participate in public sphere in terms of collective identities defined by the state. Modern governing practices thus reconstituted the meaning of community and ethnicity, producing a brand of modern ethnic consciousness in India.\textsuperscript{7}

The Census of 1871 categorized people as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ without bothering what these categories in fact constructed. ‘Religion’ was the colonial reference point and it was this practice culminated in the formation of separate electorate.\textsuperscript{8} The

\textsuperscript{5} Bernard Cohn, \textit{Colonialism and Forms of Knowledge-The British India}, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1996, p.XVII
\textsuperscript{6} Aysha Jalal, \textit{Self and Sovereignty; Individuals and Community in South Asian Islam Since 1850}, OUP, New Delhi, 2001, p.34
\textsuperscript{7} Sudipta Kaviraj, “Modernity and ethnicity in India; A History for the present”, in \textit{EPW} Vol. 30, 1995, p.378
\textsuperscript{8} KN Panikkar, \textit{Communal threat, Secular Challenge}, Earth Worm, Madras, 1997, p.110
census report formalized the meaning of religion to mean a community comprising of individuals bound by a formal definition and accorded characteristics based on the data garnered by the enumerators. The opinion of Kenneth W Jones is relevant here, “the census defined communities, counted them, and examined their characteristics as social and economic units”. In this construction of communities, the colonial authorities paid least attention to the internal hierarchy of class, language, regional or sectarian factors of India. The Census of 1881 referred to Hindu, Muslim and Christians as nationalities. Thus nationality became an overall category within which we have castes, sub-castes, sex, age, marital status, occupation, education, and language. Kenneth W Jones further added that the only area of the census without a religious dimension was the section on infirmities-the deaf, dumb, blind, lepers, and insane. M.N. Srinivas even connects the origin of caste associations to Indian reaction to the recoding and ranking of castes in Government Census Reports at the end of 19th century.

Thus one of the aftermath of the census was the use of the single term 'Hindu’ to designate a population that ranged, so widely in belief, practice, identity and recognition. The enumerated categories were significant in identity formation of communities. Once the British constructed such communities, communitarian narratives began to flourish by about the close of the 19th century, which showed that all the natives unhesitatingly imbibed this construction. They now began to conceive themselves as members of the enumerated communities bound by doctrinal creeds ignoring the

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10 Ibid.p.184
11 MN Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, Berkeley, 1996, pp.94-100
12 Nicholas B Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, Perrmanent Black, New Delhi, 2002,p.225
diversities within community itself. Thus the census reflected the official British perception of Indian society rather than any social reality.\textsuperscript{13}

The apprehension that collective consciousness among the communities resulted in collective action is true in the case of socio-religious movements of Kerala. Emile Durkhiem had pointed out that timely combination of collective consciousness and collective action resulted in the changes of the society.\textsuperscript{14} As far as the the Namboodiris of Kerala are concerned this collective consciousness blossomed towards the end of 19\textsuperscript{th} and in the beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century resulting in the formation of Yogakshema Sabha. Durkheim opines that collective actions were the results of the positive responses to the crisis in the society and a society strained by continuous struggle between the forces of disintegration (rapid differentiation) and the forces of integration (new and renewed commitment to share beliefs) moves to progress.\textsuperscript{15} The same notion is applicable in the study of Namboodiri community. On the other hand Max Webber had indicated that religious and ideological leaders were continuously formulating new definitions of the world and only a few of them attracted their followers.\textsuperscript{16} At the same time Karl Marx judged that two antagonistic social classes produced modern collectivism.\textsuperscript{17} K.N.Panikkar argues that both renaissance and revivalism were integral to the search of identity.\textsuperscript{18} Colonialism provided a cultural context for their articulation.

The modern collectivity of Namboodiris tried to restructure themselves in accordance with the concept of modernity, rational and scientific outlook during the

\textsuperscript{13} Bernard Cohan, \textit{The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia in Anthropologist among Historians and other Essays, OUP, New Delhi, 2001}, pp.224-254
\textsuperscript{14} Emile Durkheim, \textit{The Division of Labour in Society, Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press,2001}, p.274
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid,p.274
\textsuperscript{17} John Elster, \textit{An Introduction to Karl Marx}, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p.123
\textsuperscript{18} K.N.Panikkar, \textit{Colonialism, Culture and Resistance},Oxford University Press,2007,p.27
reformist period. Attempts were made to refashion their customs and traditions in tune with rational social behavior that colonial modernity largely advocated. Yogakshema Sabha, the community organization of the Namboodiris like other caste associations of the reformist period, helped for bringing social mobility among the Namboodiris. The Namboodiri community as a part of modernization process accepted modern western education, the chief symbol of colonial modernity, as a medium for achieving the skills necessary for materializing all these objectives. Thus Namboodiri reform movement always tried to construct a separate identity for the community to attune with the changes in the modern world.

A Brief History of the Namboodiri community in the Pre-British period

The early history of Namboodiri community is very complex as there is only very few sources to understand the process of Aryanisation of Kerala. Scholars have been argued that the migration of Brahmins into Kerala was closely connected with the growth of wet land paddy agriculture which might have been began by 4th century AD and the subsequent emergence of rural village economy in Kerala. The Aryanisation of Kerala was a slow process but had a steady progress. Raghava Warier and Rajan Gurukklal argue that aryanisation was affected not by the force of arms but by peace.19

The progress of Aryanisation in South India is reflected in literature and legends. From Sangam period onwards there were frequent references about Brahmin village of Kerala and Tulunadu.20 These works characterize Kerala as an integral part of Tamilakam. Chellur, celebrated in tradition as one of the northern most Brahmin grama

19 Raghava Warier and Rajan Gurukklal, Kerala Charithram, Vallathol Vidyapeedam, Sukapuram,1991, p.110
20 There is different opinion on calling the early period of south India as age of sangam. Modern historians prefer to call this period as age of Chentamilpattukal.
of Kerala, and therefore, possibly amongst the earliest, has been identified in Sangam works as the centre of Vedic religion and as the strong tradition of Parasurama.\footnote{Kesavan Veluthat, Brahmin Settlements in Kerala Historical Studies, Sandhya Publications Calicut University, p.5}

The traditional works like ‘\textit{Keralolpathi}’, ‘\textit{Keralamahathmyam}’, ‘\textit{Sankarasmrithi}’ and ‘\textit{Kerala Natakam}’ dealt the Parasurama legend in connection with brahmanisation of Kerala. This tradition, like other legends of Indian mythology, was centred on the story of a celebrated conqueror by name Parasurama, but it was scarcely possible through the mist of fable even to conjecture anything respecting the real existence of a personage or events connected with him. According to this tradition Brahmins were brought to the southwest coast of India by Parasurama, and they settled in thirty-two \textit{gramas} in the South Kanara District of the present day Karnataka state and thirty-two \textit{gramas} in Kerala.\footnote{Grama Sanskrit word denotes a village or a community} The story hints on some geographical factors.\footnote{AR Rajarajavarma “Namboodiris and literature”, in Parayil Raman Namboodiri (ed), \textit{Namboothiris}, Mangalodayam, Trissur, 1917, p.33} Aryans in search of new land through Gokarnam moved south and extended to Kerala.\footnote{Ibid,p.34}

Those who settled in Kerala were called Namboodiri Brahmans. There is an argument that the Aryans who had migrated to Kerala called as Namboodiris or Kerala Brahmins because they had engaged in various careers other than the one that the North Indian Brahmins do. Rituals of Namboodiri had also differed from rituals of other Brahmin groups of India perhaps because of the peculiar geography of Kerala.\footnote{AR Rajarajavarma, “Namboodiris and literature”, in Parayil Raman Namboodiri (ed), \textit{Namboothiris}, p.36} However, in this context the word Kerala denotes the land between Gokarnam and Kanyakumari. Thirty two of them were said to have been between Gokarnam and Perumpuzha in Tulunadu. In seeking to identify the remaining 32, lied in the south of

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{veluthat} Kesavan Veluthat, \textit{Brahmin Settlements in Kerala Historical Studies}, Sandhya Publications Calicut University, p.5
\bibitem{grama} Grama Sanskrit word denotes a village or a community
\bibitem{ar1} AR Rajarajavarma “Namboodiris and literature”, in Parayil Raman Namboodiri (ed), \textit{Namboothiris}, Mangalodayam, Trissur, 1917, p.33
\bibitem{ar2} Ibid,p.34
\bibitem{ar3} AR Rajarajavarma, “Namboodiris and literature”, in Parayil Raman Namboodiri (ed), \textit{Namboothiris}, p.36
\end{thebibliography}
Perumpuzha river in Kerala. Apart from these thirty two original villages, several new
villages have been emerged by fusing together elements from the already existing ones.
Thus, many Upagramams and other independent settlements have been developed,
constituting a network throughout Kerala, with command over land, a large number of
 tenants and the entailing feudal privileges. AKTM Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri argues
that the process of the Aryanisation of Kerala was the result of two main traditions. One
of them was based on the Maratha tradition in which Kadamba King, Mayura Varma
imported Brahmins to Kerala. Another tradition was that the Arab conquest of Sind and
the destruction of Aryan settlements in North India forced the Aryans to move towards
south.\textsuperscript{26}

There is the absence of clear knowledge about the character of Namboodiri
migration into Kerala. According to the traditional works, Parasurama brought Brahmin
to Kerala from Ahichatra in Karnataka. Considering the similarity in inscriptions and
commonness in the ideologies of Bhakti movement, there is an opinion that Brahmins
migrated to Kerala from Tamilnadu.\textsuperscript{27} There are also arguments that Brahmin migrated
to Kerala from Tulunadu.\textsuperscript{28} Inscriptions and literary evidences show that it was before
the establishment of the Brahmin settlement in Kerala that the Brahmins occupied the
Karnataka region. This was in turn led to the continuation of similar settlements in
Konkan and Saurashtra region.\textsuperscript{29} The Brahmins of all these regions have cherished the
belief that their land was created and donated them by Parasurama.

\textsuperscript{26} AKTM Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri, “Namboodiri villages”, in Parayil Raman Namboodiri (ed)
Namboothiris, Mangalodayam,Trissur, 1917, p.7
\textsuperscript{27} Raghava Warier and Rajan Gurukkal,op.cit, p.110 By considering the similarity they also argued that
Brahmin migration in to Kerala was not from particular place but from different neighbouring places.
\textsuperscript{28} Kesavan Veluthad, op.cit, p.4
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid,p.4
The majority of modern historians held the opinion that Brahmins came to Kerala between the first and fourth centuries Christian Era. Meanwhile scholars like Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai believed that Brahmins migrated to Kerala much later. As the Sangam works made reference about the existence of Brahmin culture at Chellur, the Brahmin migration and settlement to Kerala had started by the age of sangam. There are sufficient reasons to believe that Brahmin migration to Kerala started by the 4th century A.D. In the 4th century A.D. the Kadamba ruler Mayuravarman was a supporter of Brahmanism. But between 4th and 5th centuries Callabras were against Brahmanism. It is believed that during this period large group of Brahmins had migrated to Kerala. Dandin, the court poet of Mahendravarman Pallava, belongs to 7th century A.D., mentioned about two Brahmins of Kerala visiting Pallava country as professional sacrificers. The chief feature of the Brahmin settlement of Kerala was that all the Brahmin gramas of Kerala were flourished on the banks of rivers.

30 On the question of the date of Brahmin migration in to Kerala, there were different opinions among the historians. K.P.Padmanabha Menon says that Brahmin migrated to Kerala in 3rd century B.C (History of Kerala, p.43). On the other hand the opinion of William Logan is that, “Brahmin migration in to Kerala started in the 8th century A.D. (Malabar Manual, p.183), Ellamkulam.P.N.Kunjan Pillai held the view that Brahmins came to Kerala before 3rd century B.C. and reached its climax by the 8th century A.D (Studies in Kerala History, p.199), K.N.Ganesh argues that Brahmin migration to Konkan and towards the south of Konkan started before Christian era. (Keralathinte Innalekal, p.42)

31 Chellur is identified as modern Taliparamba in Kannur District of Kerala state.

32 Dandin, Dasakumaracharitha (Adventure of Ten Princess), Global Sanskrit Literature Series in English-13, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi, p.104

33 On account of the geographical settings of these Brahmin villages, the thirty two Brahmin villages were grouped into three.

1. Between river Perumpuzha and Karumalpuzha. The Brahmin gramas included in this division were Payyanur, Perunchellur, Alathur, Karunthole, Chokiram, Panniyur, Karikkattu, Isana Mangalam, Trissiva Perur and Peruvanam.

2. Between river Karumalpuzha and Churni. The Brahmin gramas included in this division were chamunda, Irungatikkatal, Avathiputhur, Paravur, Ariankkalam, Muzhikkalam, Kalavar, Atavar, Chenganadu, Lilibam, Uliyannur and Kadathanatru.

3. Between river Churni and Cape Comerin. The Brahmin gramas of this division were Etamanur, Kumaranelur, Katamaruku, Aranmula, Tiruvallu, Kivangur, Chengannur, Kaviyur, Venmani and Nirmana, AKTKM Valiya Narayanan Namboodiri, “Namboodiri Villages”, in Namboothiris (ed) Parayil raman Namboodiri, p.51
Most of the Brahmin settlements of Kerala were found clustered in the most fertile regions.\(^{34}\) This resulted in the rapid agricultural production. Unlike that of the nadus of medieval Kerala, the Brahmin villages were based on definite boundaries, arrangement of agrarian system, and right over land. Kerala Brahmins believed that their original grama belongs to one among the thirty two Brahmin gramas. There was cultural, geographical and ecological similarity between the Brahmin village of Tulunadu and Kerala and were considered as a single monolithic cultural unit.\(^{35}\)

The Brahmin influence over Kerala society was adequately strengthened by the Bhakti movement started by 8th century A.D. The Bhakti movement influenced the construction of temples. As a result of Bhakti movement and royal patronage temples became the integral part of the social and religious life of Kerala since 9th century A.D.\(^{36}\)

Salais, though well known as educational centres had also imparted military training to Brahmin youths in different parts of Kerala.\(^{37}\) In the subsequent period, however, their profession of arms lost all relevance and they were reduced to the status of professionals performers of the the typically Namboodiri entertainment known as ‘Sanghakkali’ or ‘Panayam kali’. In short, Namboodiris had become a significant economic, social and political force in Kerala by the time of the rule of Perumals of Mahodayapuram. This justified the argument that the polity under the Cheras of Mahodayapuram was in reality a Brahmin oligarchy and that the Brahmin constituted the real power behind the throne.

\(^{34}\) The Brahmin gramas located near important rivers of Kerala were, Payyannur and Perum VChellur lies north of Valapattanam river, Karikkad and Karanthola near river Chaliyar, Esanamangalam, Alathur, Trissivaperur, Panniyur and Chovvaram were located near river Bharathapuzha, Paravur, Iranikkulam, Muzhikkalam, Iri, Alathur, Trissivaperur, Rewettamedu, Adappur Chengamanad, Uliyannur, Kazhuthanad, Elibhyam, Chamunda, Avattiputhur and Peruvanam were located near Periyar river and Katamaruk, Kidangur, Kumaranellur, ettumanur, Kaviyur, Chengannur, tiruvalla, Venmani and Neermanna located between river Periyar and river Pampa.

\(^{35}\) N.M. Namboodiri(ed), *Keralathinte Nattuvazhikal*, DC. Books, Kottayam, p.91

\(^{36}\) Kesavan Veluthat, *op.cit.*, pp.41-67

\(^{37}\) Salai means the educational institutions attached to the temples during the early medieval period.
And, there was indeed a council of Brahmin in the Chera capital known as the Nalu Tali, the memory of which survives in four temples of Melttali, Keezhtali, Netiya Tali and Chingapuram Tali.

In the temple oriented Brahmin settlement Brahmin gramas were called ‘ur’. From the epigraphical sources it is evident that Brahmins were the proprietors of the ‘ur’. The governing council of the Brahmin grama was called as ‘sabha’ and its members were called ‘uralers’. The land under the control of Brahmins was known as ‘Brahmaswam’ and the land under the control of temples was known as ‘Devaswam’. Thus the temple centred settlement played a crucial role in the growth of Brahmin influence over Kerala society.

When the Perumal kingdom disintegrated in twelfth century, the influence of the Brahmins went on. The development of Kerala in the early medieval period could be viewed as the beginning of the political and social order in which ‘uralers’ (Brahmins) and ‘karalers’ (Naris) occupied a predominant position.\(^{38}\) The Brahmin settlements became semi-independent units of administration during this period.\(^ {39}\)

The heyday of the Namboodiris was between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries.\(^ {40}\) During this period they were masters in arts, war affairs, learning and scholarship which enabled them to establish their supremacy over kings and rulers. From the 12\(^{th}\) century onwards Brahmin community of Kerala began to adopt many customs and practices. The practice of eldest male member of the family alone marrying from the same caste was firmly established.\(^ {41}\) Increased wealth and political power led to greater

\(^{38}\) Ibid,p.68
\(^{39}\) These semi-independent units of administration during the medieval period known sa ‘Sanketams’
\(^{40}\) Elamkulam PN Kunjan Pillai, Studies in Kerala History, National Bookstall Kottayam, p.195
\(^{41}\) Ibid,p.196
leisure, which made possible the creditable intellectual and cultural contributions by members of this community. It also resulted in greater licentiousness. The literature of this period, in both Sanskrit and Manipravalam, a mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam, gives us a picture of such easy-going life, as do other forms of art in this period, including the Devadasi dance and the theatrical performances such as Koodiyattam and Koothu. It is for this reason that this period earned the rather appropriate sobriquet of being the "orgiastic period" of the Namboodiris.

The period after the fifteenth century witnessed major changes in the course of the history of Kerala. Trade with the western world, first via Arab Muslims and then directly through the Portuguese and the Dutch, brought about a major transformation. The Namboothiris failed to read the writing on the wall and adapting to the changed situation. They lived in a make-believe world of feasts and Kathakali and games like chathurangam, unmindful of the winds of change that were blowing around.

The Mysorean invasions, firstly by Hyder Ali and then his son Tippu Sultan, in the second half of 18th century resulted in bringing some changes in the power enjoyed by the Namboodiris. Many Namboodiri families escaped to Travancore in fear of persecution. After the end of Mysorean power and the establishment of the British power, the latter reinstated the lost power of some Namboodiri families.

**Concepts and Methodology**

Theoretically there are two strong opposite positions on understanding the question of identity. They are the ‘primordialist’ and the ‘constructivist’. The primordialist

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42 According to Varanakkott Illathu Krishnan Namboodiri, trustee Sree Raghavapuram Temple, Cheruthazham, Kannur, some Namboodirit families of north Malabar like Chenamangalam, Cheeravally, tuturam, Cheerakkadu, and Karakkadu escaped to Travancore during Tippus invasion (interview on 16-04-2008)
perception held that any collective people that seem to have some kind of enduring social identity, solidarity, and boundness could be regarded as a community. They generally regarded community as natural groupings, based on ties of shared blood, language, history, territory and above all culture. This perception argues that ultimately by evolutionary movement community would disappear and replaced by more homogenous social firm like class. A limitation of this position is that they conceive community as an essential being. Mean while, constructivists are of the opinion that communities are non-essential. They further argued that community emerges in relation of opposition to the changing socio-economic-political arder. For example, the community we discuss here is emerged during the colonial period. The colonial state through the utilization of different technologies created communities; therefore, community has been viewed as the production of colonial modernity. Colonial construction of community was both discursive and non-discursive. Drawing upon Faucault and Edward Said, the constructivists held the view that community identity was invented by the operation of certain political and discursive processes.

The concept of invention of tradition and imagined of communities are probably the most widely cited theories today about community formation. Benedict Anderson argued that identities (ethnic or national) uniting large number of people could arise only after a certain technological level had been attained. To him, it was print capitalism which facilitated the collective imagining of the communities. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Range points on the constructive nature of tradition, which in its modern form


the product of late 19th and early 20th centuries. Scholars who are trying to understand social process from post-structuralist positions, including Subaltern studies group largely follow this constructivist position. Thus, the survey of existing literature on community as an analytical category reveals the fact that majority of the modern scholars broadly follow a constructivist perspective about the community. Almost all of them identify colonial administrative practices and ethnology as major strategies in constructing modern ethnic identities.

European construction of community identity examines how modernization under colonial Government has led to sharper articulation of identity among the subject population. The argument is that the formation of communitarian tendencies is an effect of renaissance and social reform in India. It is the result of the growth of literacy and print capitalism, and the growth of communication networks that has ensured the lateral integration of the people who subscribe to a caste, religion, region, or speak the same language, such community is an imagined one, to borrow the expression of Benedict Anderson. But community is ridden with internal contradictions of its own, and despite the assumption of a common culture, invented ‘tradition’ and genealogies, they cannot hope to become a cohesive whole in any respect. Edward Said’s dictum is relevant here; “All interpretations are what might be called situational, they always occur in a situation whose bearing on interpretation is affiliative. It is related to what other interpreters have said, either by confirming them or by disputing them or by continuing them. No interpretation is without precedents or without some connection to other interpretation”.

46 Edward said, Covering Islam, Vintage, 1997, p.162
Edward Said’s emphasis on situation is important for the present study. Situation has been viewed two senses, one, as mentioned earlier, three socio-political situations within which the community identity is constituted and reconstituted. Second is the different situations within which interpretations are made, either by the colonist, or by the community who develops new dispositions to interpret themselves, or interpretive attempt of the present research. All these are linked, but more important is the fact that, the situationalism and constrctivism enable us from proceeding with a non-essentialist argument and exposing the dynamics of constitution of social realities. This would remain as the methodological backbone of the present study.

Social reform is another important domain appears in the study. The major argument on the origin of the social/reformist movement is that it emerged out of the degeneration of the society. M.S.A.Rao identified three levels of structural changes based on three types of social movements i.e. reformative, transformative and revolutionary. Reform movement brought about partial changes in the value system, were as transformative movement aimed at effecting middle level structural changes and the objective of the revolutionary movement was to bring about radical changes in the totality of social and cultural systems. Rao argued that reform movement also differed in its intensity and conflicts, conflict was least in reform movement, it acquired a sharper

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47 H.Blumer argues that social movement arise out of undefined or unstructured situatuions, which causes tress in the system (H.Blumer, “Collective Behaviour” in A.M.Lee (ed) New Outline of the Principles of Sociology,New York,195,p.130) , J.A.Bankas and Olive Banks holds that Social movements are functions of dissatisfactions with the existing order. (“Feminism and Social Change: A Study of Social Movements” in George K Zolloschan and Walter Hirich(ed), Explorations in Social Change, London, Routledge, and Logan Paul,1964,p.522) And Wallace opined that revitalization movements starts only when the participants of a culture feel that the system is unsatisfactory. (Revitalization Movement, p.256)

force in transformative movement, and in the case of the revolutionary movement conflict was based on the class struggle.

Kenneth W Jones defined socio-religious reform movement with reference to three terms viz, socio, movent and religious. ‘Socio’ implies an attempt to reorder the society in the areas of social behaviour, customs, structure, or control. A ‘Movement’ implies to understand any process that reshapes any one of these components or a combination of them. The term ‘religious’ refers to the type of authority used to legitimate a given ideology and its accompanying programme. All socio-religious reform movements demanded changes, ranging from relatively limited approach of defensive and self-consciously orthodox groups to radicals who articulated a sweeping condemnation of the status quo. In short, a socio-religious reform movement advocates modifications in social behavior, justified such advocacy by one or another form of religious authority, and then built an organizational structure it maintained overtime.

Kenneth W Jones identifies two types of socio-religious movements: transitional and accumulative. The first of these was pre-British in origin and pre-modern in its objectives and nature of functioning. The second group functioned within the colonial milieu and was led by individuals of cultural interaction which is accumulative in nature. The present researcher has utilized insights from both M.S.A.Rao and Kenneth W Jones. They agree upon the aspect of transformative/transitional potential of social reform. Looking at the effect of social reform among the Namboodiris, especially their family restructuring and condition of women, the idea of transformative (transitional) nature of social reform has been discussed. Mean while, the discussion on ‘accumulative’ nature of social reform developed by Jonnes, has been used to refer to continuity of tradition.

49 Kennet W Jones, op.cit, p.2
even when social-reform is going on. Therefore, the present researcher thinks that, the concept of ‘accumulative’ give some clue to understand the ‘continuity of tradition’ along with ‘invention of tradition’ and ‘changing tradition’.

The locality under study

The region under the study is ‘Malabar’. The present study viewed it in a larger perspective as the Europeans did that to cover all parts of Kerala. However, the word ‘Malabar’ had been used to refer to different geographical extension by different group of people. The term ‘Malabar’ was given to the Northern coast of Kerala by the Arabs and later to denote entire Kerala. Al-Biruni firstly called the coast as Malabar. The first of the two syllables ‘Mala’ must have been taken to mean ‘mountain’ or ‘hill’ in the Dravidian language, while ‘bar’ probably came from the Arabic meaning ‘country’, thus the word together meant a ‘hilly country’ The Arabs called it ‘Malibar’, ‘Manibar’, and ‘Malabar’ and the Europeans who came after them followed the same. By the 18th century this region was called as Malabar. In wider sense, the term ‘Malabar’ was used to denote the coast between Bombay and Kanyakumar, but it is mostly used to denote the western coast between Mangalapuram and Kanyakurnari. Today in the state of Kerala there is no such political or administrarive unit called ‘Malabar’. However, the region from Thrissur to Kasaragod is generally accepted as ‘Malabar’.

Sources

The major theme of the present study is the transformation that took place in the Namboodiri community during the colonial and post-colonial period. To understand this

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51 T.K.Gopal Panikkar opines that in the European concept Malabar denotes the territory from the northern landmark of Mount Deli to Cape Comerin in the south. (*Malabar and its Folk*, New Delhi, 1995, p.1)
transformation it is necessary to examine the historical development within the community from the early period. The primary sources for the study include archival records, the articles published in Unninamboodiri and Yogakshemam, Lakshmibayi Magazine, Malabar Quarterly Review, Jenmi magazine. I have also utilized resolutions and Memorandums passed during different sessions of Yogakshema Sabha etc. Archival records include the Census Reports, Administrative Reports, proceedings of Legislature such as Madras Namboodiri Act, Malabar Marriage Commission Report, the Descriptive catalogue of Manuscripts, Survey Reports, the State Manuals, the Ethnographical Studies and native newspaper reports have also been used as major source material. Reference on Namboodiris appears in travelogues, revenue and commission reports, government orders on administrative and legislative matters, opinions of the people collected by the government in response to the various bills introduced in the legislature, back issues of newspapers and magazines, court cases and judicial documents and legal books published during the colonial period.

One of the major aspects of the study is to look into the process of the construction of the identity of the Namboodiri community, their customs and practices and how the colonial images were then internalised by the Namboodiris themselves. The internalisation of the image led to the demand of the Namboodiris for reforming their customs and practices. The process of the construction of the images can be seen right from the initial period of European contact. The writing of missionaries and travelers like Shaik Zainuddin, Marcopolo, Joan Nieuhof, Canter Visscher, Durate Barbosa, and Francis Buchanan have been used to trace the process of the image of the Namboodiris as a community of luxurians and simpletons.
Data collected through personal interviews forms as an important source material for the study. The interviews conducted with M.R. Raghava Varier, N.M. Namboodiri, Varanakkott Krishnan Namboodiri, Trustee of Sree Raghavapuram Temple Cheruthazham, Kanayi Chettur Krishnan Namboodiri, a retired teacher, and with a number of Namboodiri Vedic scholars were immensely helpful for understanding the changes in the community during reform period and the period of land reforms.

The reports of the newspapers like Mathrubhumi, Malayala Manorama, Deepika and West Coast Spectator helped very much for the study. These papers reported on the different stages of yogakshemam movement like Edakkunni session of Yogakshema Sabha; report on first widow remarriage and on staging of the dramas. Mathrubhumi weekly published articles of reformist leaders like Mullamangalathu Raman Bhattathrippad and V.T. Bhattathirippad.

C.A. Innes Malabar Gazetteer Vol. I & II, William Logan’s Malabar Manual, W.W. Hunters The Imperial gazetteer of India Vol. VI, The Surveys of Ward and Conner, Tenancy Reports, Government Orders and Revenue Department files and archival material dealing with education, marriage, inheritance and tenancy issues etc. also were yet another kind of primary source of the study since they provide a detailed picture of the Kerala society especially that of Malabar during the 19th century. The proceedings of the Legislative Assembly introducing the various bills and acts and the Census Reports have provided valuable information for the study. The Report of the Malabar Marriage Commission of 1891 is a mine of information.

\[^{52}\text{Othikkans in the colloquial language means the Vedic scholars who had the right to conduct brahmanical rituals}^\]
Field works has been conducted to collect data on the changes happening to the community in the contemporary period. Few websites and social network sites have been closely watched to understand how the Namboodiris restructure themselves in the contemporary world. There is a fairly big body of secondary literature dealing with one or other aspect of the problem under consideration. They largely constitute the material for discussing historiography.
Review of literature

There are a number of studies on the Namboodiris. The existing studies on Namboodiri community were in the form of ethnographic notes on cultural traditions and works in the form of auto-biographies which gives history from within. Literature so far available on the Namboodiris can be classified in to five. The first category is a kind of ethnography where the nature of caste, their customs and position in the hierarchy has been discussed. The nature of the writing of the travellers, colonial ethnographers, and few early historians forms part of this writing. All of them considered caste as a concrete category surviving time without change.

British occupation of Malabar resulted in the study on Malabar as they wanted to study people historically, ethnically and culturally for the permanency of their rule in Malabar. This was a part of the colonial administrative strategy in the sense that the administrators had to know the people to govern or control them. Cultural forms in these societies classified as 'traditional' were reconstructed and transformed through colonial knowledge creating opposites between the coloniser and the colonised and ruling through delineations, reconstructions and representations. A major concept that played an important role in this reconstitution of tradition was the concept of the 'orient' that was there in the minds of the Europeans. For Said orientalism was a sign of the power of the Europeans over the orient they colonized. This orientalist discourse played a major part in the colonial reconstructions and representations. This operation of power-knowledge

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53 the writings like William Logan and Edgar Thurston
54 for example the writings of Kanippayyur Sankaran Namboodiri and V.T.Bhattathirippad
combine turned the people into subjects through the process of subjectification. This process is carried out through different sites in the society”

The European travelogues form the 12th century onwards like Durate Barbosa, Francis Buchanan and Joan Nieuhof noticed the ritualistic domination of the Namboodiris. ‘Kerala Pazhama’ of Dr. Herman Gundert. (1840-1860) introduced scientific study on Brahmin community and scientifically observed social groups of Malabar especially the Brahmins. The writings of William Logan and Fred Fawcett were in the nature of ethnographic notes which noticed the caste elitism and internal hierarchies within the Namboodiri community. Fred Fawcett’s, ‘Namboodiris- Notes on some of the peoples of Malabar’ is an anthropological study of different caste groups of Malabar especially the Namboodiris. Namboodiri cultural practices were described in the writings of Nagam Aiyya, Pachu Moothathu, T.K.Velupillai, T.K Gopalapanikkar, Anantha Krishna Aiyyar, K.P.Padanabha Menon and K M Panikkar. These writings focused on the family and marriage relations and rules of succession of Namboodiris.

Another category of works are in the form of analytical interpretations. Ananda.E.wood, Marjatta Parpola, T.K.Anandi and Dilip Menon are examples for this. Ananda.E.woods, ‘Knowledge before Printing and after; The Indian tradition in changing Kerala’ is a study on Namboodiri education system and its changing patterns in modern Kerala. It discusses how knowledge was learned in traditional culture. Devika Nilayankode’s ‘Yathra Kattilum Nattilum’ is memory of a Namboodiri women. It portrays experience from within the system. The grievance and problems faced by Namboodiri women in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries are depicted in this work.

57 Antonio Gramsci makes a distinction between political and civil society, the former consisting of institutions like schools families and unions and the later consisting of state institutions like army, court etc. The Edward Said Reader, Vintage Books, New York, 2000, p. 73
58 Herman Gundert, Keralla Pazhama, Mathrubhumi books,2003,p.43
‘Antharjanangalude Acharanushtanangal’ written by Chenikara Parvathi Antharjanam gives a detailed picture of the customs and practices observed by Namboodiri women. A.M.N Chakyar’s ‘Avasanathe Smarthavicharam’ (The last Smarthavicharam) speaks about the life of Namboodiri women who were ousted from society by the custom of Smarthavicharam. It also throws light on the different customs and manners observed by Namboodiri community in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries.

The works of Adrian C Mayer, George Woodcock and M S A Rao give a socio-historic picture of Malabar. MSA Rao in ‘Tradition, Rationality and Change’ evaluates the role of education as an agent of social mobility. ‘Social Movements and Social Transformation: A study of two backward classes movements in India’ by MSA.Rao makes a comparative study of two religious reform movements. K.P.Padrnanabha Menon, P K S Raja, Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, K M Panikkar, T K Ravindran, M G S Narayanan, Raghava Varrier, Kesavan Veluthat, Rajan Gurukkal and K N Ganesh deal with the political, social, economic and cultural history of Kerala in different periods. Studies of these noted historians provided the background material for the present study.

The works of T K Ravindran and K K N Kurup deal with the colonial political and administrative set up in Malabar as well as the land revenue policies of the British in Malabar. The work of T C Varghese ‘Agrarian Changes and Economic Consequences’ deals with the changing agrarian relations and the tenancy reforms Kerala in the colonial and post-colonial period. P Radhakrishnan and K N Panikkar also discusses on the agrarian issues and the changing socio-economic milieu of modern Kerala. The tenancy question of Malabar is presented by V.V Kunhikrishnan in his, ‘Tenancy Legislations in

Nandan’s novel ‘Kriyedath Tatri’ tries to project the atrocities of the male dominated societies on females. It narrates the story of resistance of Kuriyedath Tatri against male dominant Namboodiri society. Nandan indicates that Tatri was an example of exploited, suppressed women folk of Kerala. Nandan’s Kuriyedath Tatri is one among the large corpus of literature based on the story of Tatri. Important among them were Kunhikrishna Menon’s, ‘Aparadhiyaya Antharjanam’, Madamb Kunhikuttans ‘Brasht’ Lalithambika Antherjanam’s “Agnisahshi” and Unnikrishnan Puthur’s “Amrutha Madhanam’. V.T.Bhattathirippad’s ‘Adukkalayil Ninnum Arangathekku’, M.R..B’s ‘Marakkudaikkallile Mahanarakam’ and Premjis, ‘Ritumati’ were revolutionary works that accelerated Namboodiri reforms.

Some biographies and auto biographies throw light on the condition of the Namboodiris during 19\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries. N.P. Vijayakrishnan’s biography on Premji is worth to mention in this regard. It evaluated the customs and practices of Namboodiri community with a critical outlook. EMS Namboodirippad’s ‘Keralam Malayalikalude Mathrubhumi’ (1981), and ‘Atmakatha’ gives an account of social reforms and the institutions functioned for community renovation among the Nayars and the Namboodiris.

Some articles in leading journals and magazines throw light on the research done by scholars related to the present thesis. Udaya Kumar’s Self Body and Inner Sense:

\* MA Oommens ‘Land Reforms and Socio-Economic Change in Kerala’, and ‘A study of Land Reforms in Kerala’ JJ Nossiter’s Communism in Kerala and N.A.Karim’s Kerala land reform From Ambivalence to Prevarication are important in this regard.

The question of identity formation by restructuring situationally has not been addressed by any of these writings. Therefore, the present study is a desideratum.

Organisation of the study

The thesis is organised in eight chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The second chapter entitled ‘Construction of community identity-Namboodiris in literature’ evaluates the representation of Namboodiris in literature ranging from the ancient Tamil heroic poems to the literature emerged in 19th century. The chapter examines the nature of the construction of Namboodiri identity in literature and how later they internalized this constructed identity. The European Travelogues depicted Namboodiris as priestly class who enjoyed domination over the society. The European administrators of 18th and 19th century also pictured Namboodiris as an isolated class who stood against all symbols of colonial modernity. The path of the European scholars were followed by the historians and literary scholars of Kerala in the 19th century by projecting Namboodiris as a class enjoying all types of luxuries in life.
The chapter discusses on the constructed image of the Namboodiris in literature and how it resulted in the growth of a consciousness among the Namboodiris for internal reform. This chapter provides the material milieu for the succeeding chapters.

The third chapter titled ‘Imagining identity- strategies of Yogakshema Sabha’ examines how a community organisation formed for reforming community, changes its policies according to the changes in the larger society. The chapter analyses the role of Yogakshema Sabha in bringing reform among the Namboodiris. From beginning to the end a dialectics existed within the Sabha between the conservatives and progressives on the question of accepting reform. Sabha’s work for the spread of western education among the Namboodiris, attitude towards ongoing national movement, acceptance of radical ideas, and Sabha’s stand on Namboodiri becoming a labour force were also discussed in this chapter.

The chapter on, “Inventing new identity- Debates on Educating Namboodiris” deals with the attempts within the community for the spread of western education. The chapter analyses why the Namboodiris and other higher castes of Kerala were reluctant to accept English education during the early period of 20th century and what were the factors that forced them to accept English education. The chapter reviews the discourses existed within the community on the question of accepting English education.

The fifth chapter ‘On reconstructing family life’ discusses the processes of imagining new Namboodiri identity through reconstruction of family life. The articles in Unninamboodiri, Yogakshemam, different Commissions and reports instituted by Yogakshema Sabha viz Namboodiri Family Regulation Committee Report(1925), Namboodiri Female Education Committee Report(1927) and the movement for passing
Namboodiri Bills show the urge of Namboodiris to reconstitute their family according to the modern lines. These articles and reports were figuring to argue that there was constant attempt to re-define the meaning of family, concept towards property, ritual status and social status among the Namboodiris. When attempts to restructure their family life on progressive lines were going on among the Namboodiris, parallel there was another movement to keep up their traditional character of their life.

“Reforming the Identity of Namboodiri Women” examines the condition of Namboodiri women in the 19th and early 20th centuries and their objectification. The discourses within the community for women emancipation and its various strands were analysed in this chapter. The chapter also analyses how the women reform movement moved from the traditional concept of women to the level of demanding complete freedom for them by the close of the 1940’s. The chapter attempts to examine the intensity of debates existed within the community on women question.

The chapter on, “Re-inventing Community-Recent phase” examines how Namboodiris reconstituted themselves two crucial moments after the post-independence period. The chapter analyses the responses of the community towards land reforms and how the community reconstituted themselves to the changes brought about by it. How the Namboodiris began to adopt new strategies to cope up with the changes of the contemporary neo-liberal world from another part of the chapter. Namboodiri intervention in the cyber world especially the social networking sites like Facebook, Orkut, Google+, Twitter etc. shows the Namboodiri eagerness to find out their own space in the cyber world have been discussed here.