Chapter-2

Construction of Community Identity: Namboodiris in Literature

The Namboodiris who occupies dominant position in the caste hierarchichal society of Kerala has become a serious academic debate. Volumes of literature have been produced discussing various facets of Namboodiri community. This chapter is an attempt to look into the process of identity construction of the Namboodiris and see how the community has been portrayed by various writers since the age of Tamil anthologies. The chapter argues that images produced by the contemporary literature starting from the Tamil anthology are unique in the process of identity construction. Literature plays a seminal role in the formation of the community as Gramci has rightly remarks, “Culture is embodied in language and every day practices. Language serves both as a reservoir of fossils of life and civilization.”

Representations in early literature

The earliest group of literature which refers to Namboodiri villages of Kerala and Tulunadu are the Sangam literature. One of the Brahmin settlements of Kerala, Chellur, celebrated in tradition as one of the northern most grama of Kerala, had been identified in the Sangam literature as the centre of Vedic religion and with a strong tradition of Parasurama. The Akam songs mentioned the conditions of Agraharams of Chellur. This would suggest that the process of Brahmin migrations and settlement in Kerala had

60 KesavanVeluthat, Brahmin Settlement in Kerala-Historical Studies, Sandhya Publications, Calicut University, 1978,p.3
61 Chellur is identified as modern taliparamba in Kannur district
begun as early as the age of Sangam.\textsuperscript{62} M.G.S.Narayanan and Kesavan Veluthad argues that Brahmins played a crucial role in the Sangam society.\textsuperscript{63} The argument seems to be questionable because tribal polity and society existed during the age of Tamil anthologies.

Dandin, the 7th century poet and scholar who adorned the Pallava court in Kanchi bestowed high praise on his excellent Brahmin friends, like Maathrudatha and others from Kerala. Bhavathratha, the father of Mathrudatha and the author of \textit{‘Kalpasoothraadika’}, was represented as performer of 33 sacrifices and a man endowed with power to bless or curse. Mathrudatha is described as equal to his father in all respects and unique in poetic ability, loyal to his teacher and friends. Dasakumararcharitham hails Brahmins as the authority of sacrifices.\textsuperscript{64}

Mooshakavamsakavya composed by Athula in the 12\textsuperscript{th} century A.D refers to Brahmin villages like Sambarapuram and Chellur (identified as Trichambaram, and Taliparamba).\textsuperscript{65} It also mentions to Cheruthazham, which is not included in the original 32 Brahmin gramas. The close look of this work shows the evolution of Brahmin community as a powerful social group.\textsuperscript{66}

A point to be noted here is that there is marked difference in the way in which Namboodiris had been pictured in early literature and the Mantrapralam

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid.p.17

\textsuperscript{63}The point of view of MGSNarayanan is that Brahmans, along with their Vedicpuranic lore and ritual tradition, formed an influential section of sangam society and played a crucial role in policy making in the courts of the chieftains of Tamilakam during the Sangam age (MGS Narayanan, “The Vedic Puranic Sastraic Element in Tamil sangam Society and Culture”, \textit{Proceedings of Indian History Congress XXXVI session Aligarh},1976,p.31) Kesavan Veluthad also holds that attempt of establishing Brahmin supremacy by pointing to the argument of land grants to them by Parasurama can be seen in these early Tamil songs(\textit{Brahmin Settlements in Kerala}, pp.3-4)

\textsuperscript{64}Dandin, \textit{Dasakumararcharitha} (Adventure of Ten Princess), Global Sanskrit Literature Series in English-13, Global Vision Publishing House, New Delhi,p.104

\textsuperscript{65}Mooshakavamsakavya- a dynastic chronicle on the Mooshaka dynasty that ruled over Ezhimala.

\textsuperscript{66}NP Unni, \textit{History of Mooshakavamsakavya}, 1980,p.197
literature. Literature so far discussed are projecting Namboodiris as great sacrifice and people embodied all knowledge. This control over sacrifices and knowledge made them socially dominant in the society through their ritual power. In the subsequent writings of Manipravalam literature this appears almost like simpleton, which is explained below.

Manipravalam depicted Namboodiris as people leading easy-going lives, interested in Devadaasi dance and theatrical performances such as Koodiyattam and Koothu. It was for this reason that this period earned the rather appropriate sobriquet of being the "orgiastic period" of the Namboodiris.\(^\text{67}\) The Manipravala poets described Kerala as ‘Brahmakshatram Janapadam’ which meant the territory where the Brahmins functioned like Kshatriyas.\(^\text{68}\) Chandrolsavam\(^\text{69}\) spoke on the prevailing custom of sambandham among the Namboodiris. The Unnineelisandesam recounted Eravipuram, Puttathanam, (Near Quilon) and Paroor (near Kottayam) as rich and populous Namboodiri centres. At the same time Sukasandesa stated that royal families received royal power through the words of Namboodiris and it further stated that Namboodiris organized themselves into 64 gramas and provided leadership to the royal families.\(^\text{70}\) All these references in these works showed the social status enjoyed by the Namboodiris during the medieval period.\(^\text{71}\)

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\(^\text{67}\) See Ellamkulam Kunjan Pillai, *Studies in Kerala History*, Kottayam, 1971, p.191
\(^\text{68}\) MGS Narayanan, Medieval Kerala What made it Different from the rest of India, International Seminar on Kerala School of Mathematics, Calicut on 28/05/2010, p.4
\(^\text{69}\) Chandrolsavam - a long erotic poem in Manipravalam style written by an anonymous Namboodiri poet belongs to the early 16th century
\(^\text{71}\) P.K. Gopalakrishnan, Namboodiri Yugam, in A.V.Sreekumar (ed), *VT Vellithuruthitazhathu Raman Bhattathirippad*, V.T.Centenary Celebration Committee, Mezathur, 1997, p.4
The texts like ‘Keralolpathi’\textsuperscript{72} (Malayalam), ‘Keralamahathmyam’, (Sanskrit), ‘Sankarasmrithi’ (Sanskrit), ‘Brahmapratishatakaranm’ (Sanskrit) ‘Kerala Natakam’, and ‘Dasavaralalu’ (Tamil), though a combination of myths and legends, had furnished information about the land system, social structure and political power the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{73}

Keralolpathi gives the legendary possession of landed properties to the Brahmins as a gift from Parasurama. The work thus legitimised them as the landed monopolies of Kerala. It refers to some of the important land tenures like ‘janmam’ and ‘kanam’. Keralopathi says, “Parasurama created Malayalam, the karmabhumi, and gave it as a gift to the Brahmins of 64 gramas. The gifts of flower and water given to the 64 gramas together for their enjoyment were called as Janmam. The gift was given to the taravads of a gramam together and called ‘Egodakam’. Afterwards, he gave the right called Rajamsam to 3600 Brahmins of ten gramams by pouring water on the sword. They may put their fingers in water and would say, this is my janmam”\textsuperscript{74} Keralolpathi goes on describing that Parasurama finally organized the settlements/villages, setting special tasks to several groups. He introduced ‘adima’ and ‘kudima’ in desams and thus saved

\textsuperscript{72} Keralolpathi and Keralamahatmyam centred on the Parasurama legend. The story is that the land of Kerala was raised from the depth of the sea as a result of the severe penance offered by Parasurama. After the creation of Kerala Parasurama invited Brahmins to this new land and presented Kerala to them. Keralopathi was supposed to be composed somewhere in the 17\textsuperscript{th} or 18\textsuperscript{th} century as it contains clear reference to European powers like the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. While the Kerala Mahatmayam dealt with the origin of Kerala and its people, the Keralolpathi gave history of Kerala down to the modern age, including reference to the British in Kerala.

\textsuperscript{73} Gundert, (ed), Keralolpathi, Trivandrum, 1961 reprint, p.70, P. Shungunny Menon ascribes the authorship of Keralolpathi to Thunchaththu Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, a 17th century scholar of the Malabar region of India, P. Shungunny Menon, History of Travancore, Vol.1, p.28

\textsuperscript{74} Gundert, op.cit, p.11
The adiyars and kudiyars. It also describes the introduction of ‘kanajanma-maryada’ (custom).  

The Sahyadrikandam, Sankarasmrithi, Grama Padhati (Kannada) and Vyavaharamala describe about 32 Brahmin villages of Kerala and 32 Tulu Brahmin gramas. Dasavaralam, a Tamil traditional work mentions about the subdivisions among Namboodiri community like Namboodiri, Embranthiri and Bhattathiri. According to this work, the Brahmin villages of Kerala and Tulunadu form single cultural unit, even though there were geographical, administrative and political differences.

Sankara Smrithi/ LaghudharmaPrakasika, the Brahmanical law code of Kerala dealt with the customs and practices of the Kerala Brahmins which itself was a modified version of Bhargava Smrithi. Sankara Smrithi continued to dominate the life and practices of the Kerala Brahmins till 20th century. Regional differences in the Brahmanical codes are apparent from a comparative study of Sankara Smrithi and Manu Smrithi. Sankara Smrithi permits only the eldest member to marry (Laws on polygamy or adhivedhanam) where Manu Smrithi allowed polygamy to all Brahmins. While Sankara Smrithi bans marriage of girls with old man Manusmirth is silent on it.

The social positions enjoyed by the Namboodiri Brahmins were reflected in the folk songs of Malabar especially ‘Thottampattukal’. These Thottampattukal brought about a few references on the settlement of Brahmins in Malabar. The narrations in

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75 Ibid, p.14, kanajanma maryada- the hereditary rules ascribed to land
76 Brahmin families who originally belong to north of Chandragiri river, called as ‘Akkaradesikal’. This cultural unity is well attested in the presence of Tulu Brahmin priests in the prominent temples of Southern Travancore including Sri Padmanabha Temple, Thiruvananthapuram, Ettumanur and Thuravoor.
77 Sankarasmrithi 6-2-8 to 10
78 Sankarasmrithi 2-3-17-20
79 Tottampattukal is connected with Teyyam, one of the important folk traditions of Malabar.
Thottampattulal points to the high social status enjoyed by the ‘Sagara Brahmins’ (two hundred and thirty seven families) and the ‘Samudram Brahmins’ (two hundred and fifty seven families) of North Malabar. The theological and mythical ideas of Brahmins were disseminated among the people of Centeral and Southern Kerala through the folk songs like Mavaratham Nizhalkorthu Pattu, Bheeman Katha, Bharathaporu, Seethaswayamvaram, Uthararamayanam and Sreekrishnaleela.

Namboodiris in Travalogues

A major shift has taken place in Kerala society in the post-15th century period. Trade with the western world, first via Arab Muslims and then directly through the Portuguese and the Dutch, brought about a major transformation. Namboodiris like other communities appeared in the writings of European travelers, missionaries, administrators which were featured in Crispin Bates statement, “South Asians have long grown accustomed to being represented by others: in the colonial period by colonial officials eager to dissect and define their societies for purely practical administrative purposes and in the post colonial period by the academic- historians, anthropologists and other- telling as what Indian society really is”.

Different groups of foreign travellers have introduced various types of narrations on the Namboodiris of Kerala since 10th century A.D. Most of these representations were

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80 The Brahmins of Karnataka who migrated to north Malabar and one of the group to Travancore. Sagara bramins, one of the Yajurvedee Brahmins group with 237 illams and they are mostly settled near Sree raghavapuram temple Cheruthazham, Kannur and Sree Vallabha Temple at Thiruvalla desam, who were also called “thiruvalla desikal”.
81 Brahmins settled in North Malabar after the sagaram Brahmins
82 Interview with Y.V. Kannan, Kunhimangalam, 13-04-2008
84 Crispin Bates, Beyond Representation-Colonial and Postcolonial Construction of Identity, Oxford University Press, 2006, p.22
not based on a thorough analysis of Kerala society but based on their preliminary observation of it. Generally these travalogues noticed the priestly domination of the Brahmans over the Kerala society.

Chinese traveller Chou JU Kua called Kerala as ‘Nambirajya’ (land of Namboodiris) perhaps because of the socio-economic, political domination enjoyed by the Brahmans.\textsuperscript{85} Marcopolo, the Venitian traveller referred to Brahmans as a truthful trading class. He opined that Brahmans of Kerala followed monogamy and strict vegetarianism and it was easy to recognize them as they wear poonul (Sacred thread).\textsuperscript{86}

The Brahmin centres of North Malabar in the accounts of Iban Batuta were Dharmadam and Badahattar (Valapattanam). But the interesting factor is that not even a single Brahmin family could be seen in these places in the modern period. Batuta commented that Dharmadam was a place of orthodox Namboodiri and added that the hostile attitude of the Brahmans at Badahattar (Valapattanam) was the reason for the low number of Muslims at Valapattanam.\textsuperscript{87} In the writing of these early travellers Namboodiris are pictured as traders.

Durate Barbosa, the Portuguese traveller who visited Kerala in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century lamented that Namboodiri appeared mysterious and alien, even threatening to the western eye.\textsuperscript{88} Barbosa states that Brahmans are the messengers who move from one kingdom to another with letters, money and merchandise, since they pass in safety

\textsuperscript{85}Chou JU Kua was in in India during the early decades of 13\textsuperscript{th} century and visited Kerala in 1225AD. P.K. Gopalakrishnan,op.cit, p.4, see SK Vasanthan, \textit{Kerala Sanskara Charithra Nigandhu}, Kerala Institute for Languages VolI, 2005,p.11
\textsuperscript{86} Velayudhan Panikkassery ‘Sancharikal Kanda Keralam’ (Kerala as viewed by Travellers), Current Books,2001, pp.133-34
\textsuperscript{87}Ibid, p.35
\textsuperscript{88}DurateBarbsa, \textit{A Description of the Coast of East Africa and Malabar in the beginning of 16\textsuperscript{th} century}, Haliluyt society, London, reprint,1970,p.51
without any one molesting even if the king is at war. The Brahmans are characterized by
him as well read, possess many books, and are learned and masters of many arts and so
the kings honoured them. As by the 20th century married Namboodiris (eldest son) were
not monogamists; infact having more than one wives by the eldest Namboodiris had
became common. Barbosa states that monogamy was the general practice among the
Brahmins and the Namboodiris were not allowed to remarry when his first wife alive.
Barbosa’s depiction of Namboodiris became the hegemonic image of the Namboodiris
and it was followed by the subsequent travellers.

Namboodiri priestly domination over the Kerala society was well attested by
Ludovico Di Varthema, Hamilton, and Captain Cope. They characterised the Namboodiri
customs related with marriage as ‘ceremonial husband.’ Ludovico Varthema illustrated
that the Namboodiris are the chief persons of the faith, as priests and amorous. When the
King takes a wife he select the most worthy and most honored of these Brahmans and
makes him sleep the first night with his wife, inorder that he may deflower her. The
King was obliged to pay the Brahmans four hundred or five hundred ducat. The king and
no other person in Calicut adopted this practice.

Hamilton observed the same practice in these words, “When the Samorin marries,
he must not cohabit with his bride till the Nambourie, or the chief priest has enjoyed her,
and, if he pleased, he may have three nights of her company, because the first fruits of

89 Ibid, p.123
90 M. Gangadharan, (ed), The Making of Modern Keralam, Source series No-1, Durate Barbosa the Land of
Malabar, MG University Kottayam, 2000, p.40
91 Herbert Risley, William Crooke, The People of India- Herbert Risley, p.209
92 The Travels of Ludovico Di Varthema in Egypt, Arabia, Deserts and Arabia Felix in Persia, India and
Ethiopia AD 1503-1508, p.110
her nuptials must be a holy oblate on to the God she worships”.\textsuperscript{93} Buchanan confirmed this practice by stating that the women (if the Tamuri family) were generally impregnated by Namburis, although if they choose they may employ the higher ranks of Nairs; but the sacred character of the Namburis always procured them a preference.\textsuperscript{94} Captain Cope in his ‘A New history of East Indies’ with brief observation on religion, Custom, Manners and Trade of the Inhabitants’ also observed the same practice prevalent in Kerala.\textsuperscript{95}

Sheik Zainuddin commented on the Namboodiri custom of \textit{samban dam} and opined that Nair women were proud of being the wives of Namboodiris. He rightly noticed that the children in this union enjoyed little right over their father’s property.\textsuperscript{96} He further added that no other women except Namboodiris practiced pardah system and kept away from public appearances.\textsuperscript{97} More over he opined that Namboodiris had their own succession and marriage rules.\textsuperscript{98}

Joan Nieuhof a Dutch officer visited Kerala in 1660’s observed that Brahmins held the highest position in the caste hierarchy of Kerala. Nieuhof pictured a Brahmin as intelligent, active, honest and trustworthy. According to him Brahmin life style was different from others and they were proficient in puranas, astrology and ayurveda. Nambooduri girl’s early marriage was prevalent during this period.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{93} John Pinkerton, \textit{A General Collection of the Best and Most interesting Voyages and Travels in all Parts of the World}. London, p.374
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, p.734
\textsuperscript{95} Captain Cope, \textit{A New History of East Indies with brief observation on Religion, Custom, Manners and Trade of the Inhabitants}, London, p.303
\textsuperscript{96} Velayudhan Panikkasser, \textit{Shaik Zainuddin, Keralam Pathinanchum Patinarum Nootandukalil}, Mathrubhumi Books, 2008, p.32
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, p.33
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid, pp.51-52
Hamilton visited India between 1688 and 1723 portrayed soci-cultural scenario of Kerala satirically. He referred on the polyandry and matrilineal system of inheritance in Malabar and noticed that untouchability existed even among the higher castes and surprisingly even between Tamil Brahmins and Namboodiri Brahmins. Hamilton commented on the sacerdotal power of the Namboodiris as they are the first in both capacities of Church and state, and some of them are Popes, being sovereign princes in both. The Brahmanas or Brahmanies are second in the church only.

Francis Buchanan visited Kerala during 1800 and had given a vivid narration on the social relations of Kerala. Buchanan like Hamilton noticed the difference between Namboodiris and Tamil Brahmins. He argued that majority of the lands was the Jenmam property of the Namboodiris and the Namputiris, the Nairs and the aboriginal natives of Kerala resided in detached houses surrounded by gardens, and collectively called as desas. The houses of Namboodiris, Nairs and other wealthy persons were much better than those in the villages of India. With respect to the food of the King and the gentlemen, Buchanan opined that they did not eat flesh without the permission of the Brahmins.

Buchanan spoke on the wealthy position of the Namboodiris by stating that the Namboodiris pretend to have been possessed of all landed property of Malayala, ever since its creation, and in fact it is well known that before the conquest of Hyder they were actual lords of the whole soil, except some parts appropriated to the support of

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100 Alexander Hamilton, A New Account of the east Indies, Being the Observation and remarks (1688-1723) Vol-1, p.307
101 Ibid., p.308
102 Francis Buchanan, Journey from Madras through the countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, Vol-1, p.360
103 Ibid., p.360
104 Ibid., pp.352-33
religious ceremonies. Their land was called as called *Devastanam*; and other portions called *cherikkal*, which were appropriated for supporting the families of the Rajas.\(^{105}\) On the social position of the Namboodiris Buchanan observed that the Namboodiris, the lowest of whom is of a much higher birth than any prince on earth.\(^{106}\) On the landed power of the Namboodiris Buchanan refers to the the *Jenmam* or property of the Namboodiri Brahmins, and the right was, and by them is still considered as unalienable; nor will they allow, that any other person can with property be called *jenmakar*, or proprietor of land. As however, both duty and inclination prevented the Namboodiris from attending the management of these lands, they took various means of obtaining an income from the sudras, to whom they granted temporary rights of occupancy.\(^{107}\)

Buchanan argues that Tippu Sulatan’s invasion affected the fortune of the Namboodiris. He observed that on the occasion of Tippu’s invasion, the Namboodiris met with much trouble, and many of them were caught and circumcised. Those, who could escape fled to Travancore. It was three years after the company obtained the possession of Malabar, before Alvanchery Tamprakal would return his proper residence. The company allowed 25000 Rupees a year for the Namboodiri who officiate the temples.\(^{108}\) His observation on Namboodiri women is that they lose caste for infidelity, even if the crime has been committed with a Namboodiri man. Many Namboodiris have lost caste by having committed murder, or having eaten forbidden things. In such cases their children have in general become Mussalmans. They burn the dead, but a widow is not expected to perish on the funeral pile with the body of her husband.\(^{109}\) He observed

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\(^{105}\) Ibid, p.360  
\(^{106}\) Ibid, p.424  
\(^{107}\) Ibid, pp.360-61  
\(^{108}\) Ibid, p.426  
\(^{109}\) Ibid, p.426
that sati system was not practiced by the Namboodiris. Dr. Herman Gundert was in Kerala between 1840-1860 and made some observations on social groups of Malabar especially the Namboodiris.\textsuperscript{110}

There is marked differences in the way travellers observed the community. While the early travellers discussed in the previous section characterised Namboodiris as sacrificer, socially dominant and controlled land through ritual power, the later travellers writings, especially those came after Barbosa, focused on Namboodiris social and family relations that was a bond of peep into private life of the Namboodiris, to gradually construct them as an uncivilized people and devoid of (Christian) morale. The general characteristics attributed to the Namboodiris by these travalogues were priestly and spiritual domination over the society, aversion to the changes of modern world, and rigid social customs and practices.

**Colonial Administrative writing**

The main task of colonial writing was to understand the colonial people historically, ethnically and culturally. These writings were part of colonial administrative strategy in the sense that the administrators had to know the people to govern or control them. Cultural forms in these societies were classified as ‘traditional’ since it being traditional was to be reconstructed and transformed. Thus they engaged in creating opposites between the colonizer and the colonized and engaged in delineation, reconstruction and representation of the colonised.\textsuperscript{111} It was in this background that William Logan, Fred Fawcett and others started studying on different Indian

\textsuperscript{111} Nicholas B Drikes in Bernard S Cohn, *Colonialsim and forms of Knowledge, The British in India*, OUP, NewDelhi, 1997, p.IX
communities. References of these European administrators were pivotal in the construction of the Namboodiri identity.

Colonial writers beginning from William Logan produced a different image of the Namboodiri community. Logan characterised Namboodiris as the most isolated, strict orthodox and less progressive among the castes of Kerala. Such an impression on the Namboodiris produced by William Logan continued to dominate in the colonial writing for a long time. Logan in his ‘Manual’ of Malabar gave a detailed description on the internal differentiation among the Namboodiris which was well engraved even in the construction of their house. For eg. ‘Illam’ and ‘mana’ or ‘manakkal’ represented the economic disparity among them and Logan argued that Namboodiri families were very few in number North Malabar and they were weak both economically and socially.

‘Namboothiris- Notes on Some of the People of Malabar’ by Fred Fawcett is an anthropological study of different caste groups of Malabar, where special emphasis is given to Namboodiris. Fawcett opined that unlike the Brahmins of the remaining Presidencies who follow different means of livelihood including commerce, the Namboodiris of Kerala tried to retain their sacerdotal position by strictly following their

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113 Ibid, p.148
114 Ibid, p.134, Logan further argued that Namboodiris were always against social education to keep their position as the masters of language, literature and overall education. Logan identified that internal stratification among the Namboodiris was reflected even in the study of Vedas. Among 1,017 Brahmin families of Malabar, 532 families studied Rig-Veda, 407, families studied Yajur Veda and 7 families studied Samaveda. 71 families of Malabar were not allowed to study any Veda. Logan with a critical outlook narrated the Namboodiri dominance over the judicial system of Malabar. He argued that Smarthavicharam was used by the Namboodiris as a weapon for checking the chastity of their women. Logan was of the opinion that generally the Namboodiris followed Makkathayam (patrilineal) as their law of succession but the Namboodiris of Payyannur followed Marumakkathayam (Matriliney).
priesthood. Fawcett considered the Namboodiris as aristocrats of the land, marked most impressively by two characteristics – exclusiveness and simplicity. He closely observed that Namboodiris of Malabar were not interested in participatory activities outside their home. Now and then a Namboodiri goes to Benares, but as a rule he remains at home. Regarding the customs and practices, Fawcett said that the Namboodiris observed 64 anacharams, of irregular customs said to have been promulgated by the great reformer Sankaracharya.

C.A. Innes, the author of ‘Malabar District Gazetteers’, commented on the marriage system of the Namboodiris that they followed the makkathayam (patrilineal) family system and the general rule was that only the eldest son was allowed to contract a regular marriage with a Namboodiri woman, the others being restricted to sambandham with women of the castes below them. He also admitted that exceptional cases were also there, there had instances of young men, not the eldest of the family, married from their own caste. Towards the beginning of the 19th century some changes had been taken place among the Namboodiris. These silent changes were well noticed by Innes and sited the case of progressive youths arguing for marriage of all males within the caste and even for widow re-marriage. Innes even attested the efforts of removing pardah system and he lamented that the efforts became a failure due to the resistance from Namboodiri women themselves.

Innes also supported the argument that the lack of progress of Namboodiris was due to reluctance to accept English education. Towards the close of the 19th century there

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115 Fred Fawcett, Nambutiris-Notes on Some of the Peoples of Malabar, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2001, p.33
116 Ibid, p.35
117 Ibid, p.54
118 Innes CA, Malabar District Gazetteers, Kerala Gazetters Department, 1997, p.104
119 Ibid, pp.105-06
was attempt to break the established tradition among the Namboodiris started. A silent revolution have been taken place to break the sacerdotal position of the Namboodiris by entering new occupations like clerical post in Government service; becoming Adhigaris (village headmen), and possessing tile-factory and becoming partner in a cotton-mill.\textsuperscript{120} Innes observed that these changes were the first indications of a ferment which would in another generation or two leave the whole lump; but the Namboodiris affluent and influential lord of numberless broad acres, exercised in some cases much dreaded powers of social interdict or excommunication, courted by the flower of Nayar womanhood and reverenced as nothing less than divine, was secure from those pricks of necessity, which spur less (or more) favoured classes to progress.\textsuperscript{121} By the close of 19\textsuperscript{th} century an arrogant, inscrutable, oppressive looking figure was increasingly accompanied with or even replaced by other sorts of characterization. The Namboodiri was still oppressive figure, an impediment to the well being of others, a squanderer and parasitive.

The writing of Samuel Mateer, the Baptist missionary in Travancore certified the Namboodiri domination over the people of Kerala. He even went to the extent of stating that the Namboodiris invented legends to maintain their caste superiority.\textsuperscript{122} Mateer’s comment on Namboodiri women was, “Their women are carefully concealed from the public gaze, and, when venturing out of the house, are enveloped in cloths or are covered by an immense umbrella”.\textsuperscript{123} Mateer argued that the Namboodiris tried to build up an image which encouraged to consider themselves as a quite different species of mankind

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid,pp.106-07
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid,p.108
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid,p.27
\textsuperscript{123} Mateer Samuel, The land of charity, A descriptive Account of Travancore and its people, Asian Educational Service, New Delhi (Reprint) 1991, p.30
from wretched, down-trodden low caste population. Matteer identified the characteristics of Namboodiris of Travancore as peculiarly sacred, and as exalted, secluded life devoted themselves especially to the performance of religious ceremonies with temples. In all great religious observances of the Rajah, their priests were the principal celebrants and were treated with every mark of reverence and respect. They rarely condescend to enter upon the arena of political life; and it was only in 1863 that the first instance occurred of a youth of this caste entered the High School at the capital, for the purpose of learning English. Matteer attributed the failure of missionary activities among the Namboodiris to their seclusion, caste prejudices, and strict attention to ceremonial purity. Matteer judged that the philosophy behind sambandham marriage was to restrict their numbers and it was for keeping their family property undisturbed. He evaluated that the caste superiority of the Namboodiris created a social atmosphere where the low caste women were very eager to receive the Namboodiri men.

Samuel Matteer gave a panoramic description of the caste superiority enjoyed by the Namboodiris of Travancore. Though comparatively few in number (little more than 3% of the whole population), they were the only class who were free from all social and religious disabilities, and enjoyed perfect liberty of action. The whole frame work of Hinduism has been adapted to the comfort and exaltation of the Brahman. His word was law; his smile confessed happiness and salvation; his power with heaven was unlimited; the very dust of his feet was purifying in its nature and efficacy. Each was an infallible

124 Ibid, p. 183
125 Ibid, p. 29
126 Ibid, p. 29
127 Ibid, p. 29
128 Ibid, pp. 29-30
129 Ibid, p. 30
Pope in his own sphere. The Brahman was the exclusive and Pharisaic Jews of India. He was professedly the pure and exalted priests, separated from all that is common or unclean.\textsuperscript{130}

Matteer argued that the traditional quasi legal rights and privileges conceded to the Namboodiris became formidable barriers to general progress and political improvement of the country. He poited out that Namboodiris were exempted from capital punishment for any offense whatever, and their crimes were very leniently dealt with, while those committed against them were severely punished. On the dominance of Namboodiris Matteer explained his own experience that during days of Europeans with Travancore, they were forbidden to use the main road and required to pass by path along the coast where Brahman rarely travel; access to the capital was also refused as long as possible. Matteer himself has been ordered to run out the public road when a great Brahman priest who was passing along in his palankeen.\textsuperscript{131} He lamented that while imposing the barbarous and inhuman restrictions upon others, the Brahmans had enjoyed complete freedom and good carde without syffering any diminution of comfort or honour.\textsuperscript{132}

The intellectual skill of the Namboodiris was appreciated by Elic Reclus, by stating that the most important quality of the Namboodiris was that of perfect veracity.

Forbes, writing by the end of 18\textsuperscript{th} century narrated that the Namboodiris were the authority in everything related to religion. He said that Namboodiris showed no interest in secular matters, and spent their days under the sacred groves of their temples in superstitious ceremonies and listless indolence, or study of the sacred volumes, treatises

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid,p.31
\textsuperscript{131} Ibid,p.32
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid,p.62
on astrology, medicine and fabulous legends, they inculcated benovolence to man and kindness to animal creation, and were reverenced by the inferior tribes, who sworn by their head and treated them with filial affections.\textsuperscript{133} Grose writing about the same period, found differences in Brahmans from other parts of India with those of Malabar, and remarked that in Malabar the Namboodiris though they had enjoyed greater status retained more of the humanity and disinterestedness of their primitive institutions.\textsuperscript{134}

The colonial administrative writing served the needs of colonialism and as a part of their general policy of criticizing the colonial people they also criticized the Namboodiris as an uncivilized one who were far behind of the time by their reluctance to accept English education and western life style.

Edgar Thurston had given a vivid picture of the Namboodiris of 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries. He considered the Namboodiris as the socio-spiritual aristocracy who were held in great reverence in every part of Malabar.\textsuperscript{135} Thurston reminded that the elements of Sankara Smrithi which instructed that all Nambudri women should carry with them an umbrella whenever they went out, to prevent their being seen by those of the male sex, and should be accompanied by a Nayar woman called a Vrishali, and that they should be covered with a cloth from neck to foot, and that they should not wear jewels.\textsuperscript{136}

Thurston observed the Namboodiris as ‘the aristocracy of the land’, marked most impressively by two characteristics, exclusiveness and simplicity.\textsuperscript{137} The traditional hospitality of the Hindu kings of Malabar, according to Thurston was the only

\textsuperscript{133} J Forbes Watson, \textit{The people of India, A series of Photographic Illustrations of the races and Tribes of Hindustan}, London, 1875, Vol.1,p.236
\textsuperscript{134} Grose, \textit{A Voyage to the East Indies}, London, 1875, Vol.1,p.242
\textsuperscript{135} Edgar Thurston,R.Rangachari, \textit{Castes and Tribes of Southern India} Vol. 5 (1909),Asian Educational Service, New Delhi, 1987, p.151
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid,pp.153-54
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid,pp.156-57
sustenance and support of the ordinary Nambutiri. Thurston made use of the attributed 'simplicity' to interpret Namboodiris. This was best exemplified in Thurston's interpretation of the belief attributed to the Namboodiris that they would even believe the exaggerated expression like that the 'Europeans have tails' which was evident for the simplicity. Regarding their characters he observed that the complete devotion to God, hospitality to strangers, scrupulous veracity and extreme gentility in manners were the chief traits. Shrii tongue was unknown to the Nambutiris, and it was commonly said that the severest expression even in an antagonistic situation of insult was treated lightly and often unheard. Of course, the modern Namboodiri was not the unadulterated specimen of goodness, purity, and piety that he once was. But, on the whole, the Namboodiri formed an interesting community, whose existence was indeed a treasure untold to all lovers of antiquity. According to Thurston their economic condition was, however, far from reassuring.

Native Writing

While colonial ethnography largely constructed Namboodiris as simple, isolated and exclusive, a group of writings emerged from the very milieu of colonial discourse, but produced by scholars from Kerala itself, constructed Namboodiris as dominant in Kerala society. They argue that it was through their ritual power that Namboodiris achieved economic and social dominance. This unquestioned dominance achieved through ritual power resulted in making them lethargic, pleasure seekers, and a group antithetical to modern cultural developments. When colonialism came emphasizing a value other than ritual purity, Namboodiri dominance began to decline. This group of

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138 Ibid, p.158
139 Ibid, pp.159-160
140 Ibid, p.159
scholars produced both history writing and manuals on the one hand and literary fictions, on the other. This section analyses some of these works.

The impact of European writing could be found in the works of Shangoonny Menon both in the way in which history is conceived as well as in the way in which Namboodiris is constructed. Sahngoony menon opined that on account of their role in the conduction of Murajapam ceremony, Namboodiris were held in high esteem in Travancore. He considered that the superstitious belief of the lower castes on the sacerdotal powers of the Namboodiris resulted in their increasing power. Like many other Europeans Shangoonny Menon also believed that it was for preserving the purity of their race that Namboodiris introduced the caste enquiry namely smarthavicharam, a long ritual procedure of proving/disproving innocence of Namboodiri women.

T.K. Velupillai too repeated many of the conceptions of Europeans on the Namboodiris. Velupillai attributed that Namboodiris were dominant and the anxiety to prevent the dismemberment of their families and fragmentation of their landed property forced them to introduce of sambandham system of marriage. Like Willaim Logan and Samuel Matteer, Velupillai has also narrated the manners and customs of Namboodiris including sixty four rules (64 anacharams) so as to establish the ritual procedures through which Namboodiris constituted pre-colonial Kerala society. For example, he emphasises that the Namboodiri Antherjanams rarely moved out of their house, and

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142 Ibid., p.73
143 Ibid., p.79
144 Velupillai, T.K. *Taravancore State Manual*, Kerala Gazetteers Department, 1996, Vol I, p.838. According to him Namboodiri dominance over the Kerala society continued for a long time and the main reason for this was their hold over land
145 Ibid., p.839
when they went out of their house they were invariably accompanied by a maid servant with cadjan umbrella to cover themselves from the gaze of others.\footnote{Ibid.p.839, Velupillai like C.A.Innes noticed the changes among the the Namboodiris who understood the spirit of the times and were filling into the line with the most progressive communities.} 

V. Nagam Aiya’s ‘\textit{Travancore State Manual}’ accounts the high social position enjoyed by the Namboodiris. Nagam Aiya pointed on the Parasurama legend to discuss the conflicts between the original inhabitants of Kerala namely the Nagas with Namboodiris, and he argued that in course of time there took place a form of assimilation between them and the Namboodiris accepted Naga worship.\footnote{V.NagamAiya, \textit{The Travancore State Manual} (1906), Gazetteers Dept., 1999,p.215} In his \textit{Report on the Census of Travancore-1891}, Nagam Aiya presented the Namboodiris with characteristics like simplicity, innocence, unobtrusive, unassuming and hospitality.\footnote{V.NagamAiya, \textit{Report on the Census of Travancore} 1891, Vol.1, pp.686-688} 

C. Achutha Menon argued that despite Namboodiris fromed a small community numerically, thorough ritual power they achieved high wealth and social position and they became dominant in the society.\footnote{C.Achuthamenon, \textit{The Cochin State Manual}, Ernakulum, Cochin Govt. Press, 1911, p.196} Menon judged that changes occurred in the position of the Namboodiris in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century was because of their caste exclusiveness and conservatism. He stated that Namboodiri’s influence in Kerala state councils was decreasing and on account of Namboodiri aversion towards English education, they were being elbowed out by other castes from almost every walk of life. Menon confirmed that Namboodiri women (\textit{Antharjanam}, indoors-people), continued to wore \textit{ghoshas} (veil) in Cochin and also undertake the trial of \textit{smarthavicharam} in Cochin.\footnote{Ibid,p.196, Like European writers Menon also noted the characters of the Namboodiris as god-fearing, truth loving, law abiding, simplicity and inoffensiveness. He further added that, when speaking to or of a Namburi or a Raja person had to be referred to as blessed, his eyes, his head, his nose, his face, his arms, his legs, his feet. Most of his actions and belongings, such as his sleep, bed-chamber, bed, boat, carriage, palanquin, study, hunt, sword, etc are worshipfull. His food is ambrosia; his walk is a procession, and so on. In contrast to them a Nayar has to use terms of deprecation when speaking on himself to a Namburi or}
Observation of Sardar KM Panikkar on the *sambandham* system of marriage of the Namboodiris was that in no other parts of India Brahmins practiced exogamy. However, in Kerala they were allowed in a sense exogamy, through *sambandham.*\(^\text{151}\) Panikkar argued that social and economic interests of the Namboodiris forced them to keep their property undivided and led to their custom of primogeniture, and this again induced them to use their temporal power and sacredotal influence to perpetuate the matrilineal system among Nayars.\(^\text{152}\) KM Panikkar in his *Malabar and the Dutch* (1931) observes that though considerable changes occurred in the conditions of various sections of Malabar society by 18\(^{th}\) century, the spiritual dominance of the Namboodiris continued with out much change. The sacredotal power enjoyed by the Brahmins in Kerala was reflected in the pomp and luxury by which Murajapam ceremony was conducted at Travancore.\(^\text{153}\)

The social status enjoyed by the Namboodiris was well attested in the writings of Anantha Krishna Aiyar, who made a detailed study of Namboodiris during 1900-1910. He was of the view that the power of Namboodiris was steadily declining and it was only because of the hospitality and generosity showed by the rulers of Kerala that Namboodiris met their daily needs. He even opined that if the Namboodiris were not awakened and developed according to the modern conditions they would loss their

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\(^{152}\) Ibid,p.265

\(^{153}\) K.M.Panikkar, *Malabar and the Dutch*, DB Taaporevalasons&co, Bombay,1931,p.32
present status.\textsuperscript{154} Anantha Krishna Aiyar remarked that until the beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century the Namboodiris were considered as the holiest human beings, representative of God on earth (\textit{bhudevan}), whose person and property was sacred.\textsuperscript{155}

Travancore Census Report prepared by Subrahmanya Iyer agrees with Anantha Krishna Aiyer on the poor condition of the Namboodiris and the traditional hospitality showed by the rulers of Malabar towards them.\textsuperscript{156} He pointed out that tenants respected Namboodiris not merely as their landlord but in their eyes the Namboodiris were the representatives of rulers, their family deity and in short their god on earth.\textsuperscript{157} L. Anatha Krishna Iyer argued that Namboodiris enjoyed considerable political influence and acted as neutral channels of communication between various chieftains.\textsuperscript{158}

K.P. Padmanabha Menon, on the other hand viewed Namboodirs as a class who seldom earn their livelihood by personal exertion. He remarked that Namboodiris were such a favoured class that from royalty to downward to the merest peasants, every one would forgo even his necessity to pand to their luxury. He further argued that by strictly adhering on \textit{Sankara Smrithi} the Namboodiri always showed aversion to labour and they tried to make aware of others that all excellences in the world were theirs by birth right, and that whatever was low and mean was the portion of the lower orders. Menon judged that it was only the Namboodiris among the Brahmins in India who

\textsuperscript{154}L.K Ananthakrishnalyzer, \textit{Cochin Tribes and Castes}, Vol II, London, 1912,pp.277-78
\textsuperscript{155}Ibid,p.170
\textsuperscript{156}Travancore Census Report 1901, Vol I, p.302
\textsuperscript{157}Ibid, Vol I, p.653
\textsuperscript{158}L. Anatha Krishna Iye, \textit{A Short History of Kerela}, Ernakulam, 1966, p.129, Kunjiraman Nair, the chief secretary of Travancore, in the fourth volume of \textit{Travancore Revenue Manual} and the memorandum added to Travancore Revenue Manual by T.MadhavaRao also pointed on the dominance enjoyed by the Brahmins over the people of Travancore over centuries. Brahmin power over the land rights of Kerala was portrayed in these Manual.
strictly followed the injunction of Manu “never serve.”

Padmanabha Menon, like other early writers who had noticed the position enjoyed by the Namboodiris considered Namboodiris as Bhudevanmar; ‘god on earth’. He further added that Namboodiris were specially favoured people in Travancore as the chief actors of Murajapam ceremony. He was of the opinion that Parasurama legend was utilized by the Namboodiris for strengthening their sacerdotal position. The chief characteristics of Namboodiris as a class according to Padmanabha Menon were caste haughtiness, arrogance and self assertion, and led a life of piety and unworldliness and who kept himself strictly within the satraic ordinances that regulate his life.

T.K.Gopal Panikkar supplemented the comments of earlier writers by saying that Namboodiris as a class mostly landlords and priests in temples scarcely follow any other pursuits and the Namboodiris lived in places away from the busy hum of town life and invariably have a temple close by their houses. Gopal Panikkar pictured the backwardness of the Namboodiris by saying that the articles of western furniture such as chairs, tables and teapoys, which so rapidly found their way to Malabar households, were not seen in the Namboodiri houses. Namboodiris were satisfied with their traditional simple articles such as cots, mats etc. Simplicity and ignorance of Namboodiri were pictured by Panikkar by attributing a story to Namboodiris that they even blindly believed that the true descendents of the British were the monkey army of Ramayana.

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159 KP Padmanabha Menon, History of Kerala, Vol III, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2001, p.60
160 Padmanabha Menon considered Thiruvananthapuram as the happy hunting ground and land of grace for the Namboodiris.
161 Ibid, pp.119-120
162 Ibid, p.122
163 TK Gopal Panikkar, Malabar and its Folk, Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, 2006, p. 241
164 Ibid, p.241
165 Ibid, pp.69-70
Along with manuals and history writing mentioned above there began to emerge an array of fictional writings in the form of novels, short stories and narratives on Namboodiris in the second half of 19th century. In many of these writings Malayalam novels Namboodiris were pictured as a class not suited for modern life.

19th century novels and literature like ‘Indulekha’ presented of love marriages as the civilizing force in the immoral environment sustained by the continuation of multiple sexual relationships, especially hypergamous polyandry between Nayar women and Namboodiri men. Hence, the caricature of Surinamboodiri, a profligat womaniser, who wished to enter into sambandham with Indulekha. This was also an indication of growing tension between the two upper castes in Kerala, the Nayars and the Namboodiri Brahmins, who despite their kindred relations (atleast among the elite) were locked in a battle over land and tenancy.\(^{166}\)

Namboodiri characters firstly appeared in Indulekha. Indulekha underlines the growing awareness about the iniquity of the Nayar-Namboodiri marriage alliance. The new generation resented the sexual exploitation by the Namboodiris and questioned the ideological dominance which sanctioned it. Indulekha’s rejection of Surinamboodirippad is a powerful statement of this cultural consciousness. ‘Indulekha’ depicts the educated Nayar community in revolt against the the traditional Namboodiri alliance.\(^{167}\)

‘Indulekha’ of O.Chandhu Menon written in December 1889 had presented two types of Namboodiris.\(^{168}\) The first type as in Kannazhi Moorkillathu Mana Suri


\(^{167}\) KN Panikkar, Creating a new cultural tase: Reading a 19th century Malayalam novel” in R Champakalakshmi and S Gopal (ed), Tradition, Dissent and Ideology, New delhi,1996.p.103

\(^{168}\) Thayatt Sankaran, “From SuriNamboodirippad to VT Bhattachirippad”, in Palakeezh Narayanan(ed), VT orulithihasam,Cherukad Smaraka Trust, Perinthalmanna, 2004, p.51
Namboodiri who was luxurious and wealthy but same time illiterate and foolish. He had a craze towards women and was ready to engage sambandham with any women at any time. Moreover he had been characterized as a person interested in only playing chess and viewing Kathakali; that is, as a person not interested in engaging in any productive labour. The second type of Namboodiri pictured by Chandu Menon was Karuthedathu Namboodiri, the second husband of Lakshmikutty Amma and the mother of Indulekha. He was innocent, gentle and always showed much love to his wife. He deposited his money in a textile company and in a way represents a person accepting the value of emerging capitalism. Meanwhile he was cynical on tradition. He was aware that some changes are going on in the country but unable to understand it and does not know whether he had to support or oppose it. 169 Along with can be included CherusseriIllath Govindan Namboodiri. He was characterized as intelligent and humourous at once never supports Suri Namboodiri. 170 But like Karuthedathu Namboodiri he too is confused with the question of modernity comes. In short, through the characterization of two Namboodiris, Chandu Menon was depicting what Namboodiri must do in the changing conditions of late 19th century.

The novel has presented a severe criticism on the institution of sambandham. SuriNamboodirippad was caricatured as a stupid, licentious land lord of social prominence who aspired to engage himself to Sambandham relationship with Indulekha. This relationship was desirable for her family members but not for the heroine.

The native aristocracy was represented by Panchu Menon and Suri Namboodirippad was inferior to the superiority of the colonial culture. Madhavan and

169 Ibid.,p.53
170 Ibid.,p.55
Indulekha represented the progressive culture of western education. The message of this work is the rejection of the institution of Brahmanical *sambandham* with nayar women. Later, in the 20th century, both the social reformers from Nayar and Brahmin communities rejected *sambandham* as an uncivilized practice. The novel not only highlighted the changing self perception and social status of the Nayars in relation to the upper caste Namboodiris but also touched upon issues of individual choice, love, marriage and sexuality. Suri Namboodiri became the representation of Brahmin population of Kerala.171

Potheri Kunhambu’s novel ‘*Saraswathivijayam*’ points on the need of English education for untouchables as a means of escaping from subordination. It tells the story of Kuberan Namboodiri, who was trialed by the court and Subadhra Antherjananm who was excommunicated and got refugee with Christian missionaries. Kuberan Namboodiri is represented as a man of superficial learning in traditional scriptures and epics, and as a simple minded ignorant type of Namboodiris. Rich landlord blinded by the Varna dharma concept, he is oppressive of his tenant and workers. He sincerely believed that a Pulaya boy taking to education would change the climate, would cause destruction of crops, and would result in poverty. Kuberan Namboodiri failed to understand the demands of his time. The novel is intended to make his class aware of the requirements of the time for their own good and the good of others suffering under their ideology.

Kuberan Namboodiri of the novel is so simple minded as to complain that, inspite of his observance of the scriptural rites and rituals, he is not capable of securing sacredness. He is at once jealous of the lower castes getting education and is obstinate in

observing the caste rules, like untouchability and unapproachability. He still believes that the spiritual power of the Namboodiris would protect them from all sins. The author holds that there closed life is responsible for their prejudices and cruelties. They deceive the people by the unjust rules written down in Sanskrit, which is not known to the common people and interpreted them according to their own interests. The Namboodiris is of the opinion that the conversion of the so-called Hindus of the lower rung to Christianity is not because of their ignorance of their faith but due to their sins in the previous life. The author quoted freely from the Manusmrithi, Mahabharatha, and Ramayana, to show how the Brahmin perpetuated their hegemony. While the Namboodiris has a shallow knowledge of the scriptures, the Tamil Brahmana character is ignorant of even the epics and Puranans. He is extremely cunning and always motivated by monetary profits as he has been depicted by Kunchan Nambiar.

The author draws a pathetic picture of the Namboodiris. By nature, the Brahmanas, both Malayali and Tamil, are cowards and the Namboodiri brahmana, grows up as good for nothing because of their dependence on others for everything. Most of them depend on Uttupuras (food house) run by Nayars or by temples, for their meals. To hide this humiliation, their argument is that it is to secure the grace of the god to the persons who run the Uttupuras and the members of their families that they are taking food from these Uttupuras. They failed to see the loss of self respect by what they are doing.

By presenting Namboodiri characters as a hard working agriculturist having individuality and self-respect, who is capable of quoting authorities to justify his action,

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173 Ibid, pp.217
174 Ibid, pp.219
the author conveys the idea that no stigma should be attached to any useful work that he likes would add to the prosperity and the whole society. He is actually exhorting the Namboodiris to come down from the dream world to the realities of life and take up useful works to their own advantage.

Kuberan Namboodiri is actually innocent and he has undergone sufficient sufferings for his ignorance and naively and the author absolves him of guilt. The author has no prejudice against the Brahmanas but has only sympathy for them. By the time of his aquital a catharsis has taken place in Kuberan Namboodiri, who is enlightened by his acquaintance with the outside world and the miserable experience of his family and himself. Through the character Kuberan Namboodiri, the author is urging his class to open their eyes to the realities of the changing world around them and to become self aware.\(^{175}\) The novel ‘Meenakshi’ written by CheruvalathChattu Nayar speaks the contradiction between the educated progressive Nayars and the traditionally bounded Namboodiris.\(^{176}\)

KM Panikkar in his novel ‘Parankipadayalikal’ portrays Namboodiris as cruel and oppressive class. The novel pictures a Brahmin who destroys a Nayar tharavad when he fails to get a girl from that tharavad for sambandham.\(^{177}\) Vengayil Kunhiraman Nayanar (1860-1914) also pictures Brahmanas as hegemonic class and the so called god

\(^{175}\)Ibid,pp.220, PotheriKunhambu’s another work ‘Ramayanasarashodhana’(1893) is a retelling of Ramayana as a severe critique of Brahmin chicanery and intrigue. The crucial point in the narrative is Ramas banishment to the forest, the exile of Sita after the return from Lanka, are seen as the outcome of Brahmin intrigue in revenge for Ramas opposition to Parasuramas attempt to establish Brahmin supremacy. Ultimately, Rama was consecrated as an avatar of Vishnu when the Brahmans realized that they could not get better of him. It is important to note that this text was written about the same time as Saraswathivijayam and continues with the theme of Brahmans as the malevolent guardians of Hinduism. Murkkoth Kumaran in the introduction to the second edition of the novel in 1937 observed that Potheri Kunhambu’s hatred was not towards Hinduism but the ‘religion of the Brahmans’.

\(^{176}\) Cheruvalathu Chattu Nayar, Meenakshi, Trissur, Sahitya academy, 1988,pp.72-73, novel was firstly published in 1890.

\(^{177}\) KM Panikkar, Parankippadayalikal, p.43
on earth, and the one who leads an immoral and luxurious life. He complains that Namboodiris do not consider their notorious practice of having unlimited and unregulated open and secret marriage alliances.178

Kumaran Asan’s ‘Duravastha’ (tragic plight) deals with the story of a Namboodiri woman and is set against the backdrops of the Malabar rebellion of 1921-22. During the Malabar rebellion a Namboodiri woman Savithri, lost her kith and kin and was compelled to flee for life. She took refuge in the house of Chathan, a Pulaya landless agricultural labourer and her sympathy for him turned into admiration and intimacy. Finally she lived as his wife. The caste rules enforced by the society was totally broken as a matter of poetic justice. The orthodox sections of the society raised criticism against this literary work as an affrontery of the poet. In fact this piece of literature was a shock on traditional society. The poetic vision of an inter-caste marriage like this was the result of nationalism and the social reform movement initiated by Narayana guru and others.179 It makes a passionate plea for social change. To Asan it was all due to the degeneration of Hinduism into Namboodirimatham as he called the brahmanical theology as ideology of fascism.180

Achante Chatham’, one of the poems of Cherukad, depicts the predicament of a Brahmin called Pothayan Namboodiri. He send his attendant to produce a cat before him. The animal is inevitable to perform a ritual in memory of his dead father. But the attendant fails in producing one. Pothayan Namboodiri gets angry and explained the situation to an interlocutor. He is worried that the absence of cat will lead to breaking of holly tradition. But he has fears that if he is known to have performed the ritual with out

178 VengayilKunhiramannayanar, Acharaparishkaram, pp.93-94
179 Kurup KKKN, Nationalism and Social change: The Role of Malayalam Literature, Kerala Sahitya Academy, Trissur, 1998, p.67
180 KumaranAsan, Duravastha, pp.128-129
feline presence, others will call him a communist. With all its simplicity, the poem takes a serious problem in to consideration. How can ideology like Marxism are assimilated in a traditional society?, How does a feudalist view the influence of Marxism in a society? and should a society given up entire heritage to make a new ideology part of its cultural life?. The mention of communism promotes such questions; like most of the novels and plays, his poem tries to expose the vanity of feudalism.181 Another satirical poem ‘Kulathozhil’ (hereditary occupation) of Cherukad portrays the career of Namboodiri youngsters (aphan) as, ‘Pumothirippum Murukkithuppum’ (sitting idle and chewing betel leaf).

Vallathol’s ‘Pattilpoothinja Teekkolli’, deals with the story of an antharjanam who became a prostitute and was excommunicated. Vailoppalli’s ‘Kudiyozhippikkal’ is a poem that depicts the story of Namboodiri land lord who was on the verge of eviction. Both works depict the condition of Namboodiri life in the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.

Thus in the late 19th century and early 20th century literature Namboodiris were pictured as the greatest impediment to the material progress of the land. From this background we must see the attempt to revive the Namboodiri identity in the first half of the 20th century. Such depictions on the Namboodiris created a consciousness among them for internal reform. The images of Namboodiris in literature from the early period to the beginning of 20th century reveals that there were different constructions on the Namboodiris - pre-colonial constructed image, colonial constructed image and depiction in the native literature. The image presented is not constant or monolithic but it goes on changing with passage of time and space. Interstingly by these discursive constructions,

181 EP Rajagopalan, Makers of Indian Literature, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi, 2002, p. 70
Namboodiris began to think and act for reforming themselves and their community. It is this aspect that the thesis will discuss in the next chapter.