THE NAMBUTIRIS: TRADITION AND CHANGE

CHAPTER 3
THE NAMBU TirIS:
TRADITION AND CHANGE

The Malayāli Brahmans, who are called Nambūtiris,¹ were migrants to Kerala.² They were concentrated in what is now called Central Kerala and constituted less than one percent of the total population of the land.³ Though numerically small, they were the dominant caste of the land with enormous possession of land holdings and innumerable social and political privileges. Thurston wrote that “the Nambūtiris form the socio-spiritual aristocracy of Malabar, and, as the traditional landlords of Paraśurāma’s land, they are everywhere held in great reverence”.⁴ The oft quoted view of the Nambūtiri in the Census Report of Travancore, 1875, reads: “…His person is holy; his directions are commands; his movements are processions; his meal is nectar. He is the holiest of human beings. He is the representative of the god on earth…”⁵ Buchanan,

¹ The term Nambūtiri is of modern origin. Ancient and early medieval records refer to them as Nambis. Personal Conversation, M.G.S. Narayanan, Calicut, 16-01-2005. Also see M.G.S. Narayanan, Perumals of Kerala, Calicut, p.148. The Travancore Census Reports included Pottis and Embrāns into the category of Malayāla Brahmans. They too were migrants to Kerala and followed practices almost akin to the Nambūtiris. While the Pottis, who were Vaishnaites, were concentrated in the extreme south, the Embrāns were located in the extreme north. See V. Nagam Aiya, Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891, Vol. I, Report, Madras, 1894, pp.651-52. Traditionally the Nambūtiris treated them as ritually inferior and the Yōgakṣēmasabhā movement started a programme to form a monolithic community by bringing together all these subdivisions.


⁵ Report on the Census of Travancore 1875, TVM, 1876, p.191. The report is evidently panegyric but it reveals the status of the Nambūtiris. The remaining part of the quoting reads: “…His house is his castle. It generally commands an extensive view and is situated in the centre of his large estates of which he is the undisputed Jenn Lord. His tenants, all of them
writing at the beginning of the 19th century, observed that "...the Nambūris, the lowest of whom is of a much higher birth than any prince on earth". However, some of the Europeans equally scorned the Nambūris: "Of the Malayāli castes the most exclusive, and the most conservative, and in the European sense, nearly the most unenlightened is that of the indigenous Malayāli Brahmins called Nambūris...They seem to have embodied in the Sānskrit language rules of life regulating their most trivial actions, and at every step their conduct is hampered and restrained by what appear to European eyes absurd customs. They shun publicity, and it is exceedingly difficult to obtain exact knowledge of what they do, or think, or feel". Their two special characteristics - exclusiveness and simplicity - also struck the European observers.

peaceful and contented on account of his unexacting nature, his genial manners, and considerate treatment, bow down to him not simply as a landlord, but as their royal liege and benefactor, their suzerain master, their household deity, their very god on earth, and pay their customary dues with a goodwill and happy face generation after generation. The walls of his house keep immaculate the purity of his household. His lowborn tenant dare not approach within the polluting distance. He dare not cast his eye upon what passes within the holy precincts. Even the lawless robber shrinks from the desecration of the venerable 'illam'. Such is the popular estimation in which he is held". The same passage is repeated in the Census Report of 1891. See V. Nagam Aiya, op.cit, p.653.


William Logan, Malabar, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, p.119. The European missionary perception of the Nambūris is much harsher than those of Logan or Nagam Aiya. "The Brahmans in Travancore have secured for themselves a singularly high and unfair superiority over all other classes - very different from their present position in British India. Though comparatively so few in number... they are the only class that are free from all social and religious disabilities, and enjoy perfect liberty of action. The whole framework of Hinduism has been adapted to the comfort and exaltation of the Brahman. His word is law; his smile confers happiness and salvation; his power with heaven is unlimited; the very dust of his feet is purifying in its nature and efficacy. Each is an infallible pope in his own sphere. The Brahman is the exclusive and Pharisaic Jew of India. He is professedly the pure and exalted priest, separate from all that is 'common and unclean'". Samuel Mateer, The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People, New Delhi, 1991, pp.31-32.

Fred Fawcett, op.cit, p.33. Exclusiveness was of course a general character of all Brahmans. Gough observes: "The Brahmans exhibit a high degree of internal interaction and external exclusiveness". E. Kathleen Gough, "Caste in a Tanjore Village" in E.R. Leach ed., Aspects of Caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan, Cambridge, 1971, p.35. Gough points out the special customs that characterized the Brahmans which were mostly connected with their belief in pollution and their ascetic philosophy. These included cremation rather than burial of the dead, widow celibacy, the prohibition of divorce, vegetarianism, the prohibition...
A Nambiitiri sought his tradition in the Kēralōṉpathi chronicle and the legend of Paraśurāma. As per tradition, Paraśurāma reclaimed the whole land by himself from the sea and donated it to the Brahmins whom he brought in and made the sovereign janmis thereof; the earliest 32 settlements were founded by him; he made certain innovations in their customs and manners in order to enable them to stick on to the country; he ordained the caste system in Kerala to suit the new conditions; and he regulated the customs and traditions of the Śūdras, such as marumakkathāyam and sambandham, for purposes of personal service and for the benefit of the Nambiitiris. Nambiitiris referred to Śāṅkarasmṛiti, which was held to be written by Śāṅkara, as the authentic and divine scripture that regulated their daily life and life-cycle rituals. It ordained their life in accordance with the 64 Anāḍhārams or irregular customs not observed by Brahmins elsewhere. Thus

---

9 The Śāṅkarasmṛiti, also called Lakhudhāmaprakāśika, in its present form, was a product of about the seventeenth century. M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, op. cit, p.274. It is observed that it is a “law book of uncertain date and unidentified authorship, but which declares itself to be based on the much larger Bhargavasmṛiti attributed to Paraśurāma…out of the thirty six chapters the work is supposed to contain, only the first twelve has come down to us and that neither Śāṅkarasmṛiti nor the Bhargavasmṛiti is mentioned in any of the known works on Dharmasastra. Even in Kerala the latter work is known only by its mention in the former...” S. Venkatasubramonia Iyer, “The Anāḍhāras of Kerala”, Journal of Indian History, Vol. XLVII, Part II, 1969, pp.559-60. Iyer, by quoting Ullūr (Keralasāhitya Charitram, Vol. II, p.37) stated that the author Śāṅkara was the Śāṅkarapujyapada of Payyur and attributed the work to the 14th century. In his discussion with Gandhi over the question of pollution during the time of the Vaikam Satyagraha, Vaḷḷatho! argued that Śāṅkarasmṛiti was not only a concocted work but was not older than 500 years. YK, 15:53; Mar 28, 1925.

10 It is observed that the tradition of Paraśurāma’s violent quarrels with the kṣatriyās, his gift of the whole earth to Kaśyapas, and his creation of the new land from the sea have nothing to do with Kerala. They are associated with places in Saurāstra, Gujarat and Maharashtra because they refer to places of the north up to the Vindhāyas. However, these legends may allude to northern settlements on the west coast of Brahmins belonging to the Kaśyapa and Bhārgava clans. When these Brahmins migrated further south along the west coast, they seem to have carried the Paraśurāma legend with them, with the result that there is an association of the Konkan, Canara and Kerala countries with the alleged reclamation of land by the great sage. M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, op. cit, p.257.

11 Of the 64 grāmās, 32 proper were located in the land of Kerala. See Kesavan Veluthat, Brahman Settlements in Kerala: Historical Studies, Calicut, 1978, pp.21-38.

12 For a list of the 64 Anāḍhārams, see T.C. Parameswaran Mūsšt, Śāṅkarasmṛiti, Triśūr, 1081ME, Section 4, Chapter 12, pp.263-67; Edgar Thurston, op.cit, pp.185-89; Fred Fawcett,
while Paraśurāma bestowed them with their lands, Śaṅkara regulated their daily life and customary traditions.

As the landed aristocracy and the religious elite, the Nambūtiris were keen in keeping up their population low, befitting a true aristocracy, and their marriage and inheritance clearly served to meet this end. They followed primogeniture which was meant to keep the illam property intact: if only the eldest son could produce an heir to the family estate it would never have to be divided. Thus it was easier for them to maintain their position as a landed aristocracy; indeed, any addition by gift or purchase only served to improve a family’s position. These wealthy landlords would have had far less influence and power if their property had been split every generation or two, as was the case among the Brahmans in other parts of India.  

3:1. Migration and Settlements

The Brahmin migration to Kerala has been traced back to the last centuries of the first millennium BC. The first wave of migration took place in the age of Śaṅgam or the period of ancient Tamilakam. It has been observed that Brahmans, along with their Vedic-purānic lore and ritual tradition, formed an influential section of Tamil Śaṅgam society and played a crucial role in policy-making in the

---

Nambūtiris, New Delhi, 2001, pp54-56; L.K.A.K. Iyer, Tribes and Castes of Cochin, Vol.15 (ii) New Delhi, 1987, pp262-66. It was believed that Malabar had 4 Āchārams or good rules of conduct and 60 Anāchārams or peculiarities which were looked upon as irregular and as such condemned by foreign Brahmans. It was held that in the other coast there were only 4 Anāchārams while 60 were Āchārams. The foreign Brahmans ridiculed them as ‘vanarāchāram’, or the practice of monkeys. But the Nambūtiris held that so far as the Śastra-basis for ceremonies were concerned, there was absolutely no difference between the Brahmans of the East and the West Coast; the differences, if any, were only in the minor observances or ‘tantrams’ as contradistinguished from ‘mantram’. V. Nagam Aiya, op.cit, p.677. Thurston writes that these Anāchārams may be grouped into six main classes: 1) personal hygiene – bathing, 2) eating, 3) worship of the Gods and manes, 4) conduct in society, 5) āśramās or stages in life, and 6) regulation of women’s conduct. Thurston, op.cit, pp.189-91.


M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, op.cit, pp.256-57.
courts of the chieftains of Tamilakam during the Saṅgam age. Repeated waves of Brahmins came and settled in Kerala; the second largest migration was during the time of the Kadambas and Chālūkyas from 4th Century AD onwards; the thirty-two traditional settlements of Kerala were established in the period of Chālūkya hegemony during the seventh and eighth centuries AD. The three biggest clusters of the traditional Brahmin settlements are found on the banks of Pamba, Periyār and Pērār which would appear to reveal an early preference for arable land. The Brahmin settlements played a decisive role in the rise of the Cēra kingdom of Mahōdayapuram in the ninth century. These Brahmin settlements were distinguished by their peculiar temple-centered organization; with temple councils having vast regulatory and punitive powers for the administration of communal property; and systematic functioning of villages through regulatory codes called the kacchams.

Vast landed properties came into the hands of the Brahmins as corporate and individual holdings which were administered through village councils and regulatory codes. The landed wealth naturally gave the Brahmins great authority over a large army of tenants, both as temple administrators and landlords. The alliance between the ruler and the priest tightened feudal ties of dependence; the skilful blending of the sense of obligation to the landlord and devotion to the deity certainly made the lord-tenant relationship doubly strong and secure. As in the case of tenants, the Brahmin settlers were in an advantageous position in respect to the temple servants as well. In addition to the priestly hierarchy, large groups of skilled labourers were necessary for the temples. These functionaries, who were remunerated by land assignment on service tenure, became hereditary and gave birth to small sub-castes generally known as Ambalavāsis.

16 M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, op.cit, p.258.
Besides control of landed property and human resources through temple patronage, the Kerala Brahmins also enjoyed political power through the constitution of Nālu Taḷi (the Four Temples), which functioned at the capital town of Mahōdayapuram. The Nālu Taḷi were the seats of the representatives of the four important Brahmin settlements of Műzhikkulam, Airañikkaḷam, Paravūr and Irinjālakkuda and acted as the advisory council of the Perumāḷs. Whether the council of Nālu Taḷi had the power to control the sovereign, as is claimed by Kēralōlpaṭhi, is not certain, but the status of this institution as the integral part of the Perumāḷ’s ministerial council is established by epigraphic evidence.

The strange phenomenon of a numerically small community, unarmed and totally non-violent, with starkly simple life-styles, spreading wisdom and learning, with conspicuous generosity, genes among all around and establishing such complete cultural domination over a territory, has naturally prompted several theories in explanation. The conventional and popular one is that it was the superiority of the intellect of the Brahmins that led them to the conquest. As extension of this explanation, it is pointed out that they were the confidantes and councilors of the kings, and, in course of time, biologically also their fathers. So the Nambūtiri prominence was because they were independent and sacrosanct which enabled the release of the forces of production. Recently, historians have sought a materialistic dialectic to explain it, by postulating that the Nambūtiris contributed to increased production of wealth, by innovating and propagating new technologies of agriculture and by ‘knowledge production’.

A significant feature of the Cēra period was the rise and development of numerous brāhmaṇical temples. This was also a period in which Vedic ritual had lost its popularity all over India and the Agamāic mode of temple worship

---

19 M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, op.cit, p.263.
assumed importance. A curious amalgam of the two may have developed in Kerala too; while the Vedic forms of community ritual survived in certain pockets as a relic of ancient tradition, the new forms of Agamic temple worship dominated in the social realm. In addition to routine worship and special offerings, the temple was also the major proprietor of the land in Kerala, regulating conditions of tenure and influencing rate of interest, prices and wages. Attached to them were also institutions like the śālai or Vedic college and the Kūthambalam or theatre. Soon the brahmanical temples grew into gigantic establishments controlling every aspect of social life and culture.

After the collapse of the kingdom of the Perumāls and with the disintegration of the central government, political power fell into the hands of several feudatory chieftains. The Brahmin community, with its numerous interrelated settlements and temple corporations, became the only pan-Kerala power. They had established a system of legal immunity which in a sense elevated their status even over that of the ruling class. Most of the settlements continued to be economically prosperous, although the increase of wealth often weakened the sense of solidarity and led to licentiousness. A few Brahmins emerged to political authority as chieftains (like those of Edappalli and Ambalappuzha) and as influential families (such as those of Āzhūvānchēri). The political influence of the saṅkēta or temple corporation also became very powerful in this period.

---

23 M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthath Kesavan, op.cit, p.265.
24 The great Śālais of Kerala such as those of Kāntāḻur, Pārthivasēkharapuram, Tiruvalla and Mūžhikkulām promoted Sanskritic and Brahmanical studies. Teachers called Bhattās imparted learning to their disciples who were known as cattās or chastras. See Ilamkulam Kunjan Pillai, Studies in Kerala History, Kottayam, 1970, pp.267-77.
25 While the Śālais catered to the educational needs of the Brahmin community, the Kūthambalam fostered the arts of singing, acting, dancing and storytelling. A large number of Chākkīyārs, Nambiyārs and Nangiyārs were attached to the temples. Women called dēvadāsīs or ēvadichikāl, also were attached to the temples. Ibid, pp.278-83.
27 Ilamkulam described this period as the orgiastic season of the Nambūtiri elite. Ilamkulam Kunjan Pilla, Kērala Charitrathintē Irulādanija Ėdukal, Kottayam, 1963, p.81.
The Brahmin settlements also engaged in fierce competition with one another, the feud of the two neighbouring settlements of Panniyūr and Chōkiram is a classic case on this point. It developed in the post-Cēra period but its origins are unclear.28 When the Zāmōrin patronized the Panniyūr faction, Vaḷḷuvakkōṅātiri, who was an ally of the Cochin Rāja, supported Śukapuram. The intensity of the feud is indicated by the fact that the two grāmās followed opposite ways in everything from sacrificial rituals to the manner of cutting vegetables. They never dined together, and they did not intermarry. The Panniyūr Brahmins ultimately lost the privilege of performing Vedic sacrifices. Moreover, Āzhvāṅchēri Tambrākkal, who was the spiritual leader of the Śukapuram group, also became the chief ecclesiastical functionary in the coronation ceremony of several Rājas in medieval Kerala, including the Zāmōrins of Calicut and the rulers of Vēṅgād.

The successful domination by the Nambūtiri community of medieval society and polity was the outcome of a grand alliance between the Nambūtiris and the ruling groups. It would appear that the Brahmins of Kerala had ‘aryanized’ them, giving them Sānskrit names and sānkrritic culture. These ruling families, which had been following the matrilineal form of succession, now started getting their women usually married to Nambūtiri Brahmins, with the result that all the rulers in Kerala were sons of Brahmins. This was also true of the Sāmanta and Nāyār kings, chieftains and landlords. Therefore the priestly educated group of Nambūtiris had a direct hold on politics, war and administration, in addition to their functions as councilors and messengers. Thus as relatives of the rulers, administrators, and warriors, the Brahmins occupied a unique position which enabled them to command respect and influence.

28 According to tradition, the spirit of competition led Panniyūr Brahmins to accept Paradēṣī teachers, and this paved the way to disputes and violence. Finally they polluted the temple of Śukapuram, as a result of which they lost ritual privileges and came to be looked down upon by the rest of society. M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, _op.cit._ pp.270-71.
By acquiring a command over the society and administration and having established their supremacy over the tenant and temple classes, the Nambūtiris emerged as the wealthiest and the most protected section of the society. They did not take to priestly function since it was beneath their dignity to take up such an occupation. Temple arts and culture prospered at the patronage of the Nambūtiris. The Brahmin ownership of temple, coupled with sambandham relations with temple-serving classes, accelerated the dissemination of brahmanical Hindu culture. Throughout the medieval period the Nambūtiris contributed much to creative activities and achieved a high standard in science, philosophy, the arts and literature. However, most of the Nambūtiris followed worship and learning by proxy, concentrating their attention primarily on worldly affairs and the pursuit of arts and leisure.

3:2. Subdivisions

At the top of the traditional hierarchy in Kerala were the Nambūtiri Brahmins. They were never a homogenous community; they were fragmented into numerous groups on the basis of ritual hierarchy. There were 8 subdivisions among them in addition to several other groupings. Aiyappan observes this Kerala pattern as the ancient rank order.

29 Mencher says that they were divided into ten endogamous sub-castes with diminishing privilege and prestige. But she does not list the groups separately. Joan P. Mencher, “The Nāyars of South Malabar” in M.F. Ninkoff ed., Comparative Family Systems, Boston, 1965, p.166. Innes observed that they cannot be regarded as sub-castes, since marriage between them was not prohibited. C.A. Innes, edited by F.B. Evans, Malabar, Thiruvananthapuram, 1997, p.108. Iyer stated that these divisions, to some extent, were based on occupation. To some Brahman families were assigned the learned professions and the privilege of making sacrifices, to others the professions of medicine, sorcery, and magic, to a third astrology and astronomy, to a fourth the duty of performing pujas in temples and so on. While some had the Government of the land, others were armed to protect the country from foreign incursions and internecine quarrels. There were also others who were endowed with special spiritual functions. He also noticed that they were slowly losing their social prominence. L.K.A.K. Iyer, Tribes and Castes of Cochin, Vol.15 (ii), New Delhi, 1987, p.275.

30 A. Aiyappan, “A Case Study for a Sub-discipline: Brahminology”, Man in India. 63:4, Dec.1983, p.344. Aiyappan noted the nature of social ranking in Kerala with the highest being those proficient in Vedic studies, the next those skilled in the Vedic sacrifices, the next one the
1. Tambrākkal: The lordly Brahmins of the illustrious houses of the Tambrākkal were the most important of the Brahmins of Kerala. Of the two Tambrākkal families of South Malabar, namely, Kalpanchēri and Āzhvāṇchēri, only the latter one has survived. The Āzhvāṇchēri Tambrākkal thus became the supreme authority, the pontiff of the community, whose decision on any matter relating to caste or to ritual was final. They had supervised the coronation ceremony of many of the chieftains of medieval Kerala. As spiritual samṛāts, they were entitled to (1) bhadrāsanam, or the highest position in an assembly, (2) brahmavarchassu, or authority in Vedic lore, and consequent sanctity. (3) brahmasāmṛājiyam, or lordship over Brahmans, (4) sarvamānyam, or universal acknowledgement of reverence. Once in six years he was bestowed by the MahaRāja of Travancore with the greatest honour of being invited to take part in the Mrūjāepam. Though considered higher than all other subdivisions, they formed, with the Āddhyans, an endogamous community.

2. Āddhyans. They form eight families, called Aṣṭaddyas. The fund of accumulated spirituality inherited from remote ancestors was considered to be so large that sacrifices (vāgas) as well as vānapraṣṭha and sanyāsa were reckoned as purōhits, then those proficient in śastra, arts etc, and finally those working as pūjāris in the temples.

31 See Thurston, op.cit, p.164. This family also is facing extinction. Since succession is patrilineal, there will be no male heir to inherit the title after the present Tambrākkal (who is 84 now) and the term of his only son. The son do not have male offspring but only a daughter who cannot succeed him. Personal conversation, Āthavanād, 11-10-2005.

32 Buchanan wrote that after meeting the Tambrākkal he soon discovered him to be “an idiot, who grinned with a foolish laugh when the most serious questions were proposed to him”. Buchanan, op.cit, p.424.

33 Thurston, op.cit, p.164.

34 Nagam Aiya, Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891, p.657 lists the eight families as 1) Pūvallī, 2) Olappamaṇṇa, 3) Varikkāssēri, 4) Kūdallūr, 5) Porayannūr, 6) Oraḷāchēri, 7) Mēppāṭtu and 8) Edamana. But he goes on to state that “these Ādhyans are now a numerous body, having multiplied from the original eight families of Paraśurāma’s time, though now known under other new names of ‘Illoms’”. In fact the number 8 does not seem to be sacred; Iyer gives a list of 8 clusters of Nambūṭiri houses consisting of 20 houses. L.K.A.K. Iyer, Tribes and Castes of Cochin, Vol.15 (ii), New Delhi, 1987, p.171.
being supererogatory for even the last in descent.\textsuperscript{35} The Tantris of Kerala were Āddhyans with temple administration as their specialized function. They were constituted to act as gurus of the temple priests and were the final authorities in all matters of temple ritual. In conversation they are always referred to with the suffix ‘Namboori’ (such as Pūmulḷi Namboori, Olappamaṇṇa Namboori). Their women were distinguished from other Namboori women by peculiarities of dress and caste marks\textsuperscript{36} and they marry their girls only into other Āddhyan families.

3. Viśiṣṭa. The members of the community (irrespective of whether they were Āddhyans or not) who had performed yāgas or yajnas, and had attained exceptional knowledge of the Veda, Vēḍânta, and śastra, were known as Viśiṣṭa or distinguished. These were of two classes, Agnihōtris and Bhaṭṭathiris. The former were the ritualists, and were of three kinds – Akkithiris, Aditiris and Chōmātiris. The Bhaṭṭathiris were the philosophers and were the great religious teachers of Malabar. Another set of people that came under this head was the Vādhyaṇs or heads of Vēdic schools, such as those at Trissur and Tirunavaya; the six Vaidikans who specialized in the interpretation of the rules relating to the caste and its observation by the members thereof; and the Smārtas who were specially appointed as presidents of tribunals constituted for conducting Smārtavichāram.

4. Samanyas. Thurston calls them as the Nambūtiri proletariat.\textsuperscript{37} They were the common people, constituting the bulk of the Nambūtiri population. They were subdivided into the Ōthullā (fully entitled to Vedic lore) and the Ōthillātha (not entitled to Vedic lore) varieties. They performed pūjas in temples and practiced Mantra-vādams. They were also Tantris in temples.

\textsuperscript{35} Thurston, op.cit, p.165.

\textsuperscript{36} They wore silver bangles instead of the common practice of wearing bell-metal bangles. There are also several differences between the Ādyans and non-ādyans. For details see Thurston, op.cit, pp.169-70. For a flimsy and highly flattering description of women’s dressing patterns see Kānipayūr Śāṅkaraṇ Nambooripād, Entē Smaraṇakal, Vol. I, Kunnankulam, 1963, pp.171-79. VT gives a few more details. See VTyudē Sāmpūṭṭa Kṛitikāl, p.176.

\textsuperscript{37} Thurston, op.cit, p.166.
5. Jātimāṭras. This category include the eight leading physician families of Malabar, or Aśta Vaidyans (also called Müss); the class of Nambūtiris called Yātraṇaḷiṅkāṛ (or śāṣṭra Nambūtiris), who were half-kṣatryyas, in as much as they received the sword from Pāraśurāma for the defense of Kerala; and patita Nambūtiris, who had abandoned the study of the Vedas owing to poverty, disease or physical debility. All these groups, though not entitled to undergo the full course of the Vedic studies, were admitted to the first or the primary course known as mutālmūra.

6. Śāṅkētikans. They were Ernabrāns and were of six kinds such as Thiruvalla Dēśikaḷ, Trippūnithuṛa Dēśikaḷ, Akkara Dēśikaḷ, Ikkara Dēśikaḷ, Karṇāṭakaṇmar, and Thōvāḷanmar. They were degraded by Pāraśurāma for they had refused to stay on the land, finding it uninhabitable, but returned after some time.

7. Śāpagramastanmaṛ. They were said to have questioned the divine nature of Pāraśurāma. They were neither entitled to any caste honours nor to the study of the Vedas.

8. Pāpiṣṭanmaṛ. They were descendants of those who vicariously bore the burden of Pāraśurāma’s sin in having massacred kṣaṭryyas and consisted of such minor subdivisions as (a) Uṛilpariṣa Müssath; (b) Grāmaṇi Nambūtiris who conspired to murder Bhūṭhārya Pāndi Perumāḷ, one of the sovereigns of Malabar; (c) the Nambūtiris of the Pannīyūr village; (d) Nambidis, who murdered the sovereign to please the Brahmins; (e) Iḷayats who condescended to perform the rites and ceremonies of the Śūdrā class.

All the eight orders of Brahmins may be classed under two large subdivisions with reference to their right to the study of the Vedas, namely those who had the right or Ŷṭhullāvaṛ and those who had not or Ŷṭhillaṭhavaṛ. While the former were entitled to recite and propound the Vedas and perform and conduct the 16 rites or the sōḍasākriyas, the latter were denied the right to both the study of the Vedas and to superintend the performance of the 16 ceremonials. The Jātimāṭras and the
Śāpagrastās belong to this second class. They were however, allowed to observe the ceremonies for themselves. The women of one class did not eat in the company of the other class whether males or females.

It is recorded in the Cochin Census Report, 1901 that certain special privileges in regard to the performance of religious rites and other matters of a purely social nature serve as the best basis for a subdivision of the Nambūtiris in the order of social precedence as recognized amongst themselves. For this purpose, the privileges may be grouped under two main classes, as given in the following mnemonic formula:-

**A**
1. Ėdu: the right of studying and teaching the Vedas and Śāstraś
2. Piccha: the right of officiating as family priests
3. Ōthu: the right of studying the Vedas
4. Adukkāla: the right of cooking for all classes of Brahmans
5. Kaṭavu: the right of bathing in the same bathing place with other brahmans.

**B**
1. Ādu: the right of performing holy sacrifices
2. Bhikṣa: the right of becoming a sānyāsi
3. Śānthi: the right of performing priestly functions in temples
4. Araṅgu: the right of taking part in the performance of Śastraṅgam Nambūtiris
5. Panthi: the right of messing in the same row with other Brahmans

Those who enjoyed the privileges of No.1 in A were entitled to all the privileges in A and B; those enjoying No.2 in A had all the privileges from No.2 downwards in A and B; Those having No.3 in A had similarly all the privileges from No.3 downwards in A and B, and so on. Those entitled in No. 1 in B had all the privileges except No.1 in A; similarly those entitled to No. 2 in B had all the privileges from No.2 downwards in B, but only from No.3 downwards in A, and so on.  

---

38 Cited in Thurston, *op.cit*, pp.167-68.
The sixteen families of Payyannūr formed a distinct group among the Nambūtiris. They were called Tirumumbus or Ammōmans and were matrilineal. They were Yajurvēdis and had no priesthood. Even in their own temples, they did not officiate but employed Nambūtiri priests. Though one of the earliest Brahmin settlements in Kerala, they were treated as ritually inferior by other Nambūtiris. It was supposed that they were not pure bred, having Kṣatṛiya blood in their veins. They were not invited to partake in the Murajapam. But they too observed all the 16 samskārams and all the 64 Anāchārams; wore the sacred thread, kept the frontal tuft and were addicted to the mania of purificatory bath. Married and unmarried Tirumumbu women observed ghōsa like the Antarjanams. They followed all the marriage rites prescribed for Nambūtiris, but being matrilineal, marriages were matrilocal. Tirumumbu women were always married to Nambūtiris just like the Nāyaṛ sambandham but it was rare that Nambūtiri women were given in marriage to Tirumumbus. Nambūtiri husbands stayed on and were maintained by their wives’ families; they were largely sexual partners only. Males married outside the caste, from the matrilineal castes especially Nāyaṛs, and their children did not belong to the father’s caste or tarawād. But their marriage was ‘virilocal’, for the husband brought the wife home and lodged in a separate

39 Among these only 7 survived in the 1970s. They were Thāzhēkkāṭṭ, Rēramangalam, Kunjimangalam, Kunathu, Thalīyiḻ, Thāvathu, and Thēlakkāṭṭ. Fr. J. Puthenkalam, Marriage and Family in Kerala, Calgary, 1977, p.192. Earlier, in 1912, Iyer had noted that only the first four manas survived. L.K.A.K. Iyer, op.cit, p.195.

40 Their marriage was as much a sacrament as the marriage of the Nambūtiris. To adopt it to the system of inheritance through females, they used the well-known formula of the sṛṣṭis applicable to the marriage of a girl whose issue were intended to become the children of her father. The marriage formula “this girl, without a brother, I give you...the children born of her shall be my children” the Payyannūṛ Brahmins used after omitting the words ‘without a brother’. Ibid, p.189.

41 Besides considerations of caste, which were itself weighty reasons, there might have been also economic deterrent against such marriages because the Tirumumbu males had no right in the family except for maintenance and the Nambūtiri woman lost all her financial rights in her father’s illam on marriage. Ibid, p.188.

42 Nambūtiri bridegrooms of Tirumumbu women were baptized Tirumumbus and in almost all cases these lost touch with their illams. Ibid, p.189.
house called madham.\textsuperscript{43} Adultery was severely punished by a court of trial called Smārthavicāram as in the case of the Nambūtiris.

3:3. Caste Council

The caste council of the Nambūtiris consisted of the Tambrākkaḷ, Vādhyāns, Vaidikans, Smārtans, Mimāmsakās and Akakōyana.\textsuperscript{44} All the posts were hereditary. The council dealt with cases of caste offences including incest and adultery and disputes within the community. Though it functioned at four levels – at the locality, grāmam, territory and state – almost all the affairs of the caste were settled at the grāmam level. Minor offences were punishable by infliction of penance, fasting or doing special pūja. Graver offences were dealt with excommunication from the caste, which was the most terrible punishment. Against the decision of the Smārtans, there was no appeal. Adultery between a Nambūtiri woman and a man of inferior caste was perhaps the most serious of all caste offences.

All Nambūtiri families of Kerala were affiliated to two Yōgams - Tṛiśṣūr and Tirunavaya – and owned spiritual allegiance to two ecclesiastical heads or Vādhyāns of these two yōgams.\textsuperscript{45} Their office was hereditary and they belonged to two ancient Nambūtiri families - Yērkkara and Changiliyōdu illams respectively. The two mutts (Tṛiśṣūr and Tirunavaya) owned immense estates and the revenue from these were spent by the Vādhyāns for the Vedic instruction of hundreds of Nambūtiri youths who were fed and boarded there.

\textsuperscript{43} But she along with her children had to vacate the house at the death of her husband and to return to her natal home. Ibid, p.194.


\textsuperscript{45} Though they were the principals of these Vedic schools, they were invited to attend caste councils during the time when very serious cases affecting the community were resolved. Ibid, p.209.
For dealing with offences against caste regulations, there was a council consisting of six Vaidikans and eight Smārtans.\textsuperscript{46} The seat of the Vaidikans was hereditary; they came from such families as Thykād, Cheṟumukku, Perumpadappu, Kaplingād, Pandal and Kaimukku and belonged to three villages, with two from each village. The first two belonged to Chovvaram village, the second two to Peruvanam and the last two to Irinjālakuda. They dealt with caste offences, disputes on custom and took vigil on enforcing ethical codes. They were supposed to be men of great learning and ability, and well versed in caste matters as laid down by Smṛitis and long established usage. For heinous infringement of caste rules, they excommunicated the offenders; for smaller aberrations they laid down expiatory ceremonies such as fasts, baths, japam, dānam and penalties. No decision could be passed except by the two Vaidikans sitting together. The decisions of any two of these Vaidikans, so far as their villages were concerned, were final in all caste disputes.\textsuperscript{47}

In addition there were six Smārtans (originally 8), who presided over the assemblies at which caste offences, particularly related to incest and adultery called Smārtavichāram, were tried. They were in fact Vedic judges but acted in accordance with the advice of the Vaidikans in the matter of caste rules during the caste trial. The Mimāmsakās were religious preceptors who were particularly well versed in caste rules and they accompanied the Smārtan to the place of trial. The Akakōyma was the local caste headman, in most cases, the biggest landlord of the area, who presided over resolving local disputes and caste offences.

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{46} Though it is the traditional number, the real number of them is different. Mathur gives the list of 11 vaidikans at the level of 7 gramams all over Kerala. \textit{Ibid}, p.222.

\textsuperscript{47} Writing at the end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Logan observed that during the last few years the decision of such an assembly, which in former days had yielded no appeal to any other authority, was called in question and there were attempts to overrule its decision. \textit{William Logan, op. cit}, pp.121-22.
\end{footnotesize}
3:4. Inheritance and property Rights

The law as followed by the Nambūtiris differed from the Hindu Law of Mitākṣara followed by Brahmins elsewhere, in that it barred the members of an illam from demanding partition of the family properties. In this respect the law of the Nambūtiris was the same as the marumakkathāyam law. But whether the Nambūtiri law was an adaptation of the marumakkathāyam law or a continuation of the old Hindu Law before it was subjected to modification into the Mitākṣara law is not certain. Its variations from the strict Hindu law and its resemblance to Marumakkathāyam law was fully stated in Vāsudēvan v. Secretary of State thus:

"As to the question, what law is to be applied to Namboodri Brahmans, the Judge has found that they are governed by Hindu Law as modified by special customs which they have adopted since their settlement in Malabar...succession is traced among Namboodries through males and property passes from father to son...Again legal marriage is the basis of the law of succession among the Namboodries as among Brahmins of the East Coast...Thus the notion of paternal relation founded upon legal marriage as the cause of inheritance obtains both under Hindu law and among Namboodri Brahmans. Further, a Namboodri woman in common with a Brahmin on this side of the ghat, takes her husband's Gōtṛam upon her marriage and passes into his family from that of her father; and perpetual widowhood and incapacity to remarry on her husband's death are the incidents of marriage both among Namboodries and Brahmins of the East Coast...Moreover the same rule of collateral succession obtains both among Namboodri Brahmans and other Brahmins in southern India...Moreover, Namboodries and the Brahmins on the east Coast recognize alike the authority of the Vedas and of Smritis and they have faith in the religious efficacy of ceremonial observances and of funeral and annual obsequies. We may also refer to the ceremony of investiture or Upānayanaṃ and to the notion of second birth as common to both. The view therefore, that when Namboodries settled in Malabar, they carried their personal law with them though they changed it in some respects after their settlement on the west coast, is supported not only by the foregoing facts, but also by the fact that Gotrams of

48 It is argued that the Nambūtiris carried with them to their new home the Hindu Law as it prevailed at the time of their migration in the place from where they went. The Mitākṣara was written certainly long after the Nambūtiris had gone to Malabar. The Hindu Law in this respect was subsequently modified and the right to division of joint property was recognized. See P.R. Sundara iyer, A Treatise on Malabar and Aliyasanthana Law, Madras, 1922, pp.210-13.
Namboodri Brahmins are said to be the same as those of Brahmins on the east Coast, indicating thereby common descent from the same original male ancestors...the personal law which they presumably carried with them was the Hindu law as received by Brahmins at the time of their settlement in Malabar, and that it is not the Hindu law as modified by customs which have since came into prevalence among Brahmins on the East Coast. For instance, the form of marriage called *Sarvaswadānam* marriage which is referable to the ancient Hindu Law of Putrikaputra or of the appointed daughter and her son, is still in force among Namboodries as a mode of affiliation, though it is obsolete on this coast...Under Hindu Law both ancient and modern, partibility is an incident of ordinary Hindu property, coparcenary depending for its continuance upon the mutual consent of co-sharers; but among Namboodries, as among Nairs, family property is not liable to be divided at the instance of any one of the coparceners. Again, self-acquired property merges, on the death of the person acquiring it, into family property as is the case among Nairs...among Namboodries, the eldest brother alone usually marries, and the others, as is the case among the Nairs consort with Nair women otherwise than with the sanction of marriage. Having regard to the evidence on both sides, the conclusion that we come to is that Namboodries are governed by Hindu Law, except so far as it is shown to have been modified by usage or custom having the force of law, the probable origin of the special usage being either some doctrine of Hindu Law as it stood at the date of the settlement though now obsolete, or some *marumakkathāyam* usage”.

Thus, the customs of Malabar Brahmins did not differ very widely from the customs of the Nāyaṛs. Except in the constitution of the family, which in the case of the Nambūtiri *Illam* followed the law of descent through sons and in case of *marumakkathāyam tarawād* followed the law of descent through sister’s children, so far as the rights to property was concerned there was no difference whatever between Nambūtiri *Illam* and Nāyaṛ *tarawād*. Impartibility of family property was the rule prescribed and community of interests could not be severed by partition without the consent of all the members of the *Illam*. As in the *marumakkathāyam tarawād* the right of the junior members both male and female was the right to be supported in the family house out of income of the property of the family, and the

---

*Sarvaswadānam* was the final solution to overcome the situation in which an *Illam* ceases to have a male member to produce progeny. A man of another family was brought into the family and married to a daughter of it, who after the manner of the ‘appointed daughter’ of old Hindu Law, handed on the property through her children. The man brought in was henceforth a member of the family he had joined and as such he performed the Śrāddha ceremonies. See Fred Fawcett, *op.cit.*, p.47.
absolute control of the family affairs was vested in the senior member, who represented the family. The manager of a Nambūtiri illam, as in the case of a karaṇavan of a marumakkathāyam tarawaḏ, had no power to alienate permanently by sale, gift or otherwise any portion of the common property without the consent express or implied of all the members of the family.  

The main points of difference have also been noted. The radical difference between the two systems was the rule of succession. In case of the Nambūtiris, inheritance was through eldest sons whereas in a marumakkathāyam tarawaḏ it was through sister’s children. The manager of a Nambūtiri illam had higher powers than a tarawaḏ karaṇavan in making temporary alienations for fixed customary periods. Of course the alienation must be for proper family purpose. On marriage, except in Sarvaswadānam form, the female member of an illam passed to the illam of her husband and she lost her right in her paternal illam, whereas among the Nāyaṛs the female members did not lose their right by marriage. Again, legal marriage was the basis of the law of succession among the Nambūtiris, while among the Nāyaṛs, there was no recognized connection between marriage and inheritance.

Since the Nambūtiris followed primogeniture, with the eldest son alone retaining the right both for legal marriage and manager-ship of illam property, the junior sons were entitled to nothing beyond maintenance. Illam was the unit, and, as the senior male succeeded to the management, it may happen that a man’s sons do not succeed directly as his heirs. The eldest son alone could inherit the family property after his father. If the eldest son should be younger than any of his

52 Ibid, p.268.
53 The system could be traced back to the 9th-10th centuries. See M.G.S. Narayanan, Perumals of Kerala, Calicut, p.148.
54 Francis Buchanan, (A Journey From Madras Through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, Vol. II, New Delhi, 1988, p.425) observed that in order to prevent themselves from losing dignity by becoming too numerous, the younger sons of a Nambūtiri family seldom married. Fawcett noted this arrangement as an excellent one for the material prosperity of the
father’s brothers, then the uncle succeeded to the right of governing the family. If the father died before the son attained the age of majority, and if there were no adult males to look after the affairs of the family till he came of age, then the eldest female of the house succeeds to the right. The head of the family may be a female in other circumstances as well – in the absence of members belonging to the other sex.

In the event of the first son failing to beget a male progeny, even after repeated marriages, the second son was allowed to go for swajātivivāham for the sake of perpetuating the illam. In such cases the son of the second son became the next successor of the illam property. Two other devices were also used for the same purpose in the absence of a male offspring. They were 1) the rare form of marriage known as sarvaswadānam and 2) adoption of a son who then became heir to the illam. In both cases, the new heir was considered to be related to his old illam, and thus there was a relationship between the two illams involving restrictions on marriages between them as well as mutual obligations to observe ritual pollution. Nevertheless, many illams did become extinct.\(^{55}\)

Exception to the general rule of inheritance was the 16 Nambūtiri families of Payyanṇūr who followed the marumakkathayām or the nepotismal law of inheritance.\(^{56}\) Males had no right in the family property except for maintenance. The children had no right to inherit their father’s properties, while they became

---

\(^{55}\) Ilamkulam calculated that there were considerably more illams in the fourteenth century and larger Nambūtiri population. See his “Brahmin Population in Ancient Times” in Studies in Kerala History, Kottayam, 1980, pp.193-99.

\(^{56}\) Other Nambūtiri families of Payyanṇūr did not follow inheritance through female line and the matrilocal system of residence. P.P. Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Aryans in South India, New Delhi, 1992, pp.152-54.
entitled to the properties of their mother’s family. Nambūtiri fathers of Tirumumbu children had no right of guardianship, the right being vested in the senior male of the mana who was the manager. When families were getting extinct without women, the custom was to adopt girls from other Tirumumbu manas or from Nambūtiri illams.57

One of the special characteristics of the Nambūtiri Law as distinct from the Mitākṣara Law was the collateral ownership of the female members over the illam property.58 If the rule of the ordinary Hindu Law was applied, the consent of the female members was unnecessary for alienating property through gifts, for according to it, the ownership vested only in the male members, and the female members had only the right to maintenance, and were entitled to object to an alienation only if it affected their right of maintenance, and not otherwise.59 In the case of the Nambūtiri families, the patriarchal propensity of the law made males and females in much the same position; the right of all except the patriarch was only for maintenance. When he died, no doubt, another male member would succeed to his position, and a female might be disqualified for that office. That is, males would have a superior right to manage the family estate, and only in the absence of males would females be entitled to manage. But this was only the recognition of a superior capacity in the male to manage and did not show any superior ownership in him.60 The Madras High Court decreed that according to the

57 There were two instances of Nambūtiri girls from the south being adopted, one to the Reramangalam mana and the other to Kunjimangalam mana, both in the beginning of the twentieth century. After being adopted according to sarvaswadānam, the Nambūtiri girls lost their Nambūtiri status.
58 P.R. Sundara Iyer, op.cit, pp.216-17. But this was in sharp contrast to the marumakkathāyam law where proprietorship was vested in the female members only, and the males had no ownership rights.
59 When the ancient Hindu Law was transformed into Mitākṣara Law with provision for partition of ancestral property among the males of the family, it evidently discriminated women who were denied the same rights and were entitled only to maintenance and marriage portions. See Lucy Caroll, “Daughter’s Right of Inheritance in India: A Perspective on the Problem of Dowry”, Modern Asian Studies, 25:4, 1991, pp.791-809.
60 In a number of verdicts, the courts in Travancore and Madras recognized the co-ownership right of females in the illam property with respect to two questions: 1) where an alienation was
archaic Hindu Law which prevailed among the Nambūtiris of Malabar the women of the family had no less right than the males excepting the patriarch.61

As a result of the rule of primogeniture the proliferation of lineage segments among Nambūtiris was necessarily much slower than that noted in other patrilineal societies.62 Since only one male in each generation was allowed to marry it was rare for branches to form, though they did form in some cases. If the eldest son did not beget a son after repeated marriages, the second son was allowed to take a Nambūtiri wife, and in that case, his son was expected to perpetuate the family. If at that point the first son succeeded in begetting a male child, the first male child (i.e., the son of the second son) still retained the rights of the eldest son, though in occasional cases this led to a schism in the family, and thus a new illam could be formed. Occasionally also, a younger Nambūtiri son might be sent off to form a branch illam in order to develop land owned by the family in some distant place; this was especially common in the unoccupied forest areas of north Malabar before the twentieth century, but was otherwise rare.

3:5. Livelihood

The Nambūtiris formed the landed aristocracy of the country and claimed the lands by janmam or birth right,63 tracing their title to the legend of the original gift by Paraśurāma.64 But they did not cultivate the land by themselves, instead, they

impeached as not binding on the family, and 2) in the case of right to succeed to management where there were no adult males competent to manage. In Devaki Antarjanam v. Sambhu, the Travancore High Court ruled that the Nambūtiri ladies possessed greater rights than a right to maintenance and that the empowerment of all the members was necessary to preserve the property from being wasted or alienated. P.R. Sundara Iyer, op.cit, pp.217-21.

61 In Vasudevan v Secretary of State, ILR, 11, Madras, 1887 cited in ibid, pp.220-21.


63 It is observed that the higher castes held the higher landed interests and the Nambūtiris had the greatest holdings of janmam land. Adrian C. Mayer, Land and Society in Malabar, Bombay, 1952, pp.96-97.

64 Fawcett wrote that most of the Vālūvanād taluk was the property of the Nambūtiris. Fred Fawcett, op.cit, p.33. Report on the Census of Travancore, 1875, p.192 observed that most of the janmis south of Quilon belonged to the Pōtti class. Report on the Census of Travancore,
let them out to tenants, mostly Nāyaṛs, on various tenures. Seldom did they earn their livelihood by personal exertion. “They were such a favoured class that from the king downwards to the lowest peasant everyone would forego even his necessity to pander to their luxury. Instead of scorning delights and laborious days are ordained by Śāṅkarasmṛiti they make their utmost endeavour by deed and word to impress on others the idea that all excellences in the world are their birthright and that whatever is low and mean is the portion of the lower orders. In fact, it is the Nambūtiris, of all Brahmans in India, who strictly follow the injunctions of Manu, ‘never serve’. The difficulties incidental to an effect of land division have made the Nambūtiris ‘a litigious population and the ruinous scale of expenditure necessary for the disposal of girls, be it of the plebian kind, has brought their general prosperity to a very low level’.

They were also temple priests; but it was only the poorest of them who would consent to act as priests in temples. But they did not involve in any other vocation going into the world to earn a livelihood in the ordinary way. Fawcett observed: “Unlike the Brahmans of the remainder of the Presidency, who so largely absorb

1881, p.193, while referring to the occupation of the Malayāḷa Brahmans listed 931 as following agricultural occupations; but clarified the point that it meant management of landed property and not farming or cultivating land.

The traditional agrarian structure was based on a three-tier relationship between jannis (landlords), kāṇakkār (tenants) and veṟṟuṟakkaṟ (sub-tenants). Most of the land was controlled by the Nambūtiris as jānmai or a dēvaswam (temple lands). The customarily enforceable three-tier hierarchical relationship crystallized only during the post-fifteenth century period under the immediate impact of money economy and greater occupational mobility. In the traditional system, the net produce of land was shared equally by jānmai, kāṇakkār and actual cultivators. K.N. Panikkar, “Changes in Family Organization and Marriage System in Kerala”, The Indian Historical review. Vol. III, No.1, 1977, p.36. For more details see K.N. Panikkar, Against Lord and State. Delhi. 1989, pp.1-48.


Travancore Census report 1901, pp.277-78.

Report on the Census of Travancore, 1891, p.687 stated that generally the Nambūtiris looked after their household duties or the occupation of the ‘Gṛihabharanam’. But of course the winds of change were visible in the south. Report on the Census of Travancore, 1881, p.193, listed 239 as being employed in government service. The case of Malabar fitted perfectly to the general stream. Fawcett noted the solitary instance of a Nambūthiri occupying the position of Secretary of the Cotton Mills at Calicut. But he went on to note that “this fact in no way contradicts what has been said”. Fred Fawcett, op.cit, p.49.
all appointments under Government worth having, who engage in trade and in, one may say, every profitable profession and business, including the stage, the Nambūtiris hold almost entirely aloof from what the poet Gray calls: "the busy world's ignoble strife", and more than any class of Brahmans retain their sacerdotal position, which is of course the highest". 69 The Report of the Malabar Marriage Commission denounced the Nambūtiris for not "taking the lead in every intellectual pursuit, as do the Brahmans in other parts" and observed that "the Nambūtiri has become enervated to such an extent that it would be difficult to find more than a few who have mastered the grammar and syntax of the Sāñskṛit, which is the chief vehicle for their sacred text. Most of them get no further than committing a number of slōkās to memory. Not only do they refuse altogether to tread the path of knowledge opened up to them by the barbarian Government, but it is rare to find one of them who has studied the literature, such as it is, of his own vernacular". 70

Even an encomiast of the Nambūtiris like Iyer lamented that they did not adapt themselves to any of the requirements of modern days: "Having left off their old ideals, they have not been entering into any of the pursuits which are thrown open to them in these days." 71 But he found a hope for the future from the rare example of the Deśamaṅgalam family. He wrote: "Fortunately in the state, there is one aristocratic Vedic family the members of which, maintaining the religious life, are following trade, and are the proprietors of a tile factory. They had at one time invested a few lakhs of rupees in the construction of a cotton mill at Calicut and still have many shares in that Joint Stock Company. They are besides traders in other articles. One young member of that family is the editor of a popular monthly.

69 Fred Fawcett, op.cit, p.33. However, Fawcett remarked that by not entering into any of the ordinary pursuits of livelihood, the Nambūtiris were able to maintain their high position and to exercise their influence on the entire society. Ibid, p.49.
70 Cited in ibid, p.48.
71 L.K.A.K. Iyer, op.cit, p.278.
Their example may well be followed by others of the caste who are not wanting in the necessary capital. The members of the non-Vedic class, on the other hand, are more enterprising and some of them are gentlemen farmers and traders. Their children are reading in schools.\textsuperscript{72}

Every Nambūṭiri was theoretically, a life-long student of the Vedas; under close study between 7 and 15, or for more than 8 years of his life, and nothing whatsoever was allowed to interfere with this. They were probably more familiar with Sāṇskṛit than any other class of Brahmans; but their scholarship might not have been of a high order.\textsuperscript{73} Knowledge was not supposed to be a source of livelihood for the Nambūṭiris; they could learn and teach but normally receiving fees from the students was considered despicable. Learning and transmission of knowledge was a mission, or had become a ritualistic act; its quality had greatly deteriorated by then, it had lost its vitality and was had become unproductive with an unnecessary stress on parrot-like recitation.\textsuperscript{74}

3:6. Life and Rituals

Fawcett described the Nambūṭiri residence and its surroundings thus: The Nambūṭiris chose sites the most secluded for their habitation, compatible with living in touch with the world. The abode of the Nambūṭiri is known as an illam, while that of the Nambūṭiripād was a mana. Some of the Nambūṭiri houses were immense structures, almost palatial, while hard by its temple, an adjunct of the house. At the eastern side of the compound was the gate entrance, sometimes almost a small house in itself. In all the larger houses there was a room in this

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Fred Fawcett, \textit{op.cit}, p.49.
\textsuperscript{74} William Logan, \textit{Malabar}, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, pp.107-08. But he acknowledged that “...the teaching which the Nambūṭiri Brahmans receive is wholly religious. The study of the different sciences seems to have descended in particular families, and astronomy in particular has had great attention paid to it, and the knowledge of it is fairly exact. These Brahmans had a monopoly of learning for many centuries, and doubtless this was one of the ways in which they managed to secure such commanding influence in the country”.
gate house', as it was sometimes called, kept as a guest chamber for strangers. From the gateway to the house was a raised walk of earth or hardened mud. The yard in front of the house, which faces the east, was plastered with cow-dung, and kept perfectly clean.\(^75\)

The domestic architecture of an illam house did not differ fundamentally from that of a tarawād house. It was a square or quadrangular building and was constructed in the typical Kerala model of ‘Nālukeṭṭu’ or ‘Eṭṭukeṭṭu’. It consisted of several courtyards in the centre with rooms on all sides. There were not as many bedrooms as in the case of a tarawād house, since only the eldest male member married and used to sleep in the illam house. On the east or west of the courtyard, an annex called Pathāyappura served as drawing room and the dormitory of the unmarried members of the house. These out-houses also served to house the Nāyaṛ women and children in the regions of patrilocal Nāyaṛs.\(^76\) The rest of the house was zenana to the stranger. There was a tank in the north-east or south-west of the compound near the house.\(^77\) The construction of the house perfectly served to segregate the Antarjanams; the location and passages to the bedrooms, the position of the kitchen, the location of the well inside the kitchen and the proximity of the bathing tank close to it with separate arrangements for them to bathe in the tank, all allude to this presumption.\(^78\) There was a separate room inside the house for the worship of God. In the compound, was a place set apart for the serpent god, the figure being represented in carved granite.

\(^{75}\) Fred Fawcett, Nambūtiris, pp.43-45.

\(^{76}\) M.S.A. Rao, Social Change in Malabar. Bombay, 1957, p.82.

\(^{77}\) Thurston wrote that in most of the Nambūtiri houses, there were three or four of them, the largest being used for bathing and the other for general and kitchen purposes. Wells were never used for bathing and a hot-water bath was avoided as far as possible, as plunging in a natural reservoir would alone confer the requisite ablutional purity. Thurston, op.cit, p.173.

\(^{78}\) T.K. Anandi, “Home as a Sacred Space – The Household Rituals and the Namputiri Women of Kerala” in K.N. Ganesh ed., Culture and Modernity. p.147. “The construction of the kulappura is such that women cannot be seen or interact with anybody outside the compound. (For the women of other castes, kulam serves the purpose of interaction, gossip and counseling centre where man-woman issues were discussed and exchanged)”. Antarjanams were allowed to worship in the illam temple alone, which also highly restricted their scope for social interaction.
Little difference existed between the ways in which a tarawād and an īllum was managed. There was single common kitchen. It was the duty of the kāraṇavan to supply all the materials necessary for the kitchen, to supply clothes to all the members, and to arrange for the payment of the washerman, barbers and physicians. The life of the Nambūtiris was crowded with rites and ceremonies. The heavy expenditure on the sixteen samskāras and other annual ceremonies connected with the family deities were all met by the income from the family property.

Within the patrilineage consisting of male brothers, unmarried sisters, children of the eldest brother, father, mother, father’s brothers, certain characteristic behaviour patterns were visible. The eldest brother, as the kāraṇavan, expected the maximum respect and absolute obedience from the juniors. The younger brothers regarded the sons of the eldest brother as their own since they performed funeral ceremonies for the former. The female members of the house observed purdah and strict segregation was maintained. The younger brothers were not supposed to talk or even see their eldest brother’s wife or wives.

Even from childhood, boys and girls were brought up in an atmosphere of rigid rules and set standards of conduct. The traditions of family intervened in every aspect of behaviour. Boys were put to study scriptures with the performance of Upanayanam. They assisted their father in the religious observances. Girls grew up more under the supervision of their mothers. They assisted their mothers in the household work and received training in all the household tasks before marriage.

---

79 A staunch critique of the Nambūtiris, P.K. Balakrishnan, viewed the purdah system among the Antarjanams more brutal than that which was imposed on Muslim women by the medieval sultans and as perfectly conforming to licentious male-wantonness. While commanding conjugal tradition on all the Hindu castes, Nambūtiris mercilessly denied majority of their women marital prospects and sexual pleasures. It is a paradox that while Nambūtiri men reaped the benefits of sexual anarchy they had created for themselves, it was their women who had to suffer its worst consequences. P.K. Balakrishnan, “Kēralathile Jātivyavastiti”, Mātrubhūmi Weekly, 30 Nov. 1975, p.13.
After they came of age their sphere of movement was confined to the female section of the house. After marriage they went to their husband’s house occasionally to return to their natal *illam*.

When talking among themselves, Nambūtiris used the vernacular in the ordinary way, but, when a Nambūtiri talked to a Nāyār, or with one of any other caste, the manner in which the conversation must be observed, strictly according to custom, is such that the Nambūtiri superiority was apparent at every turn. Thus, a Nāyār addressing a Nambūtiri spoke of himself as a ‘foot servant’. If he mentioned his rice, he should not call it rice, but his ‘gritty rice’. He must call his house ‘dung pit’, his cloth as ‘old cloth’. But he must speak of the Nambūtiri’s rice as rice and his house as his *illam* or *mana*. The Nāyār calls his sleeping lying flat’ and the Nambūtiri’s ‘closing his eyes’ or ‘resting like a Rāja’.

The Nambūtiris were Vedic Brahmans: their scriptures were the Vedas. They were also *śaivās*, but not to the exclusion of Vishnu and the lingam was the ordinary object of worship. But their religious practices differed basically from the north Indian tradition to be explained either as a “degraded form of Brahmanism” or an “elevated form of earlier Dravidian religion”. The Nambūtiri religion was of the Vedas from the north, tinged of course by the Dravidian medium in which it existed. Sacrifice was the heart of it. Hymns, prayer, praise, etc., were subsidiary to sacrifice. The Nambūtiri’s life was a round of sacrifices, the last of which was the burning of his body on the funeral pyre. Various kinds of sacrifices for various objectives in life were performed. Thus *Putrakāmeshti* was for begetting male issue, *Mṛtyunjaya Śānti Yāgam* for restoring good health and *Aja yāgam* for salvation. In sacrifices, the essence of organic substances seems to be offered through sacred fire to the deity and in which the fire-god and the officiating priest are invoked as it were to witness the due observance of the rites attending it.

---

80 Fawcett, *op.cit.*, p.78.
A Nambiitiri had to pass through sixteen ritual acts, or life-cycle rituals, which are collectively called Šōḍaśa-kṛiyas, of which 11 are concerned with birth. Of the remaining four, Upanayanam and marriage are the most important ones. Upanayanam is the ceremony of ‘leading a boy to his guru’ and was the formal ceremony in which he was invested with the sacred thread by which he was made the ‘twice-born’, the true Brahman. Without it he was not able to study the Vedas, to take part in any religious rite or to recite the Gāyatṛi. The boy was thus initiated as a Brāhmachari — unmarried religious student. It lasted for eight years, from the eighth to the sixteenth year. The samāvaṛtanaṃ ceremony was significant of his return to his own family, and after it he may be married.

The Nambiitiris used to have a special pattern of dressing. While there was a uniform pattern for all the males,8¹ women had two styles of dress.8² There were strict restrictions in wearing ornaments. Beyond plain finger rings and a golden amulet (Ēlassu) attached to the waist-string, the Nambiitiri wore no ornaments. His ears were bored, but no ear-rings were worn unless he was an Agnihotri. Rudrakṣa necklaces, mounted in gold, are sometimes worn. The ornaments of the Nambiitiri had several peculiarities. Gold bracelets were proscribed even for the most wealthy. Hollow bangles of brass or bell metal for ordinary Nambiitiris, and of solid silver for the Āḍḍhyans, were the ones in use. The chittu was their ear-ornament. A peculiar neck-lace called Cheru-tāḷi was also worn. The Nambiitiris did not bore their noses nor did they wear nose-rings.

The Nambiitiri had plenty of leisure, though their daily routine was full of various religious practices. At the palaces of royalty, and the mansions of the aristocrats, the Nambiitiri consorts of the several women of the households came

---

8¹ It was called tattudukkuka and was the kind of dressing worn during religious hours in which the cloth worn had a portion passing between the thighs and tucked in at the front and behind, with the front portion arranged in a number of characteristic reduplications.

8² Viz., okkum koḷuthum vetcchudukkuka for the Āḍḍyans and njoṇinjuddukkuka for ordinary Nambiitiris.
together and spent their idle mornings in disputations and discussions. While the licentious culture bred laziness and intellectual ruin, it greatly helped the Nambūtiris to generate a corpus of knowledge in various subjects.

The daily life of the Nambūtiris at an illam was highly dependant on the ceremonial kind of service of the Nāyār families. Quoting Rāman Uppi, Fuller points out that the Nāyār tarawāds were linked by hereditary duties of a ceremonial or ritual nature to Nambūtiri families dominating the villages. By virtue of these duties, the tarawāds gained a ‘reflected’ prestige dependant on the status of the Nambūtiri family.83

3:7. System of Marriage

Like all Brahmin communities, gotra exogamy and community endogamy was the rule of the Nambūtiris in marriage. They were keen in observing three chief rules in marriage. The parties of the marriage must not be of the same gotra,84 they must not be related to each other through father or mother; the bridegroom must be the eldest son of the family. Mencher outlines the basic structural characteristics of Nambūtiri marriage as under: 1) an extreme emphasis on patrilineality and primogeniture; 2) large dowries with a high incidence of exchange marriages; 3) an absence of distinct affinal terms for male speakers; 4) the total amalgamation of the female with her husband, so that she used the same terms for his relatives as he did; 5) the prohibition of cross-cousin marriage; 6) the absence of positive marriage rules; and 7) a duality of organization (i.e., apart from the internal marriage and kinship system, Nambūtiri social structure included a symbiotic relationship with matrilineal families following a different set of rules, so that a man could even form an alliance with the daughter of his own father – his half-

84 L.A. Krishnayyar, Kerala and her People, Palghat, 1969, p.95. It is said that there were seven original gotras, called after the sages Kamsha, Kashyapa, Bharadvāja, Vatsya, Kaundiniya, Atri, and Tāṭā; and that other gotras have grown out of these.
together and spent their idle mornings in disputations and discussions. While the licentious culture bred laziness and intellectual ruin, it greatly helped the Nambūtiris to generate a corpus of knowledge in various subjects.

The daily life of the Nambūtiris at an illam was highly dependant on the ceremonial kind of service of the Nāyār families. Quoting Rāman Unţi, Fuller points out that the Nāyār taṟavāds were linked by hereditary duties of a ceremonial or ritual nature to Nambūtiri families dominating the villages. By virtue of these duties, the taṟavāds gained a ‘reflected’ prestige dependant on the status of the Nambūtiri family.\(^3\)

3:7. System of Marriage

Like all Brahmin communities, gōṭra exogamy and community endogamy was the rule of the Nambūtiris in marriage. They were keen in observing three chief rules in marriage. The parties of the marriage must not be of the same gōṭra;\(^4\) they must not be related to each other through father or mother; the bridegroom must be the eldest son of the family. Mencher outlines the basic structural characteristics of Nambūtiri marriage as under: 1) an extreme emphasis on patrilineality and primogeniture; 2) large dowries with a high incidence of exchange marriages; 3) an absence of distinct affinal terms for male speakers; 4) the total amalgamation of the female with her husband, so that she used the same terms for his relatives as he did; 5) the prohibition of cross-cousin marriage; 6) the absence of positive marriage rules; and 7) a duality of organization (i.e., apart from the internal marriage and kinship system, Nambūtiri social structure included a symbiotic relationship with matrilineal families following a different set of rules, so that a man could even form an alliance with the daughter of his own father – his half-

---


\(^4\) L.A. Krishnayyar, \textit{Kerala and her People}, Palghat, 1969, p.95. It is said that there were seven original gotras, called after the sages Kamsha, Kashyapa, Bharadvāja, Vatsya, Kaundiniya, Atri, and Tāṭrī; and that other gotras have grown out of these.
sister – through a matrilineal woman). The wife joined her husband’s gōṭra, forsaking her own altogether. Women may remain unmarried without prejudice. Needless to say that this was not favoured by Brahmans outside Malabar. But the Nambūtiri girl or woman who died as a spinster had to undergo certain rites of marriage before the starting of her funeral rites.

To keep down the number of the members of this caste, only the eldest son in the family was allowed to formally marry a female of his own caste by Vedic rites and beget children of Nambūtiri status. He was also permitted to marry more than one wife. Traditionally he could have up to three wives at any time, but if one should die he could then take another to replace her. Younger sons were ideally

---

85 Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, op. cit., p.87. Mencher and Goldberg argued that though property was important in influencing the structure of the Nambūtiri community; i.e., the concern over consolidating their property was critical in the development of the system of primogeniture, and the fact that land was never given to a daughter confirmed this, the ongoing kinship structure and the way marriages were used for consolidating power could not be explained with reference to property. Ibid, pp.101-02.

86 This is in sharp contrast to the general Indian tradition where spinsterhood was almost unknown. Pauline Kolenda, Caste, Marriage and Inequality: Essays in North and South India, Jaipur, 2003, pp.352, 381.

87 Iyer writes that post-nubile marriage existed only among the Kanyākubja Brahmans of Agra and Oudh, Kulin Brahmans of Bengal and the Nambūtiris of Kerala. L.K.A.K. Iyer, op. cit, p.197.

88 The reference by Dubois of a custom among the Nambūtiris of course did not find any supportive evidence from elsewhere. He wrote: “The girls of this caste are usually married before puberty; but if a girl who has arrived at an age when the signs of puberty are apparent happens to die before having had intercourse with a man, caste custom rigorously demands that the inanimate corpse of the deceased shall be subjected to a monstrous connection. For this purpose the girl’s parents are obliged to procure by a present of money some wretched fellow willing to consummate such a disgusting form of marriage: for were the marriage not consummated the family would consider itself dishonoured”. Abbe. J. Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies, New Delhi, 1992, pp.17-18. Henry K. Beauchamp, who edited the work, denied the authenticity of this statement by referring to Logan’s Malabar and in consultation with the leading members of the Nambūtiri community. In fact Abbe must have been confused the tāli-tying ceremony before the funeral by a competent relative, which was noted by many writers (Fawcett, p.61; Logan p.128), with the act of consummation of marriage.

89 The custom of polygamy, known among the Nambūtiris as Adhivēdanam, finds its parallel among the Bengali Brahmans in the form of Kulinism. The Kulin Brahmans, an aristocratic caste with rigid marriage rules, were highly sought after as bridegrooms and were able to marry as many women as they wished. Geraldine Forbes. The New Cambridge History of India IV.2: Women in Modern India, Delhi, 2000, pp.22-23.
expected to remain celibate and devote their lives to religion, but in actual practice, they normally formed permanent or semi-permanent liaisons, \textit{sambandham}, with women belonging to matrilineal caste groups, particularly the higher matrilineal sub-castes such as Kṣatryyas, Ambalavāsis and high caste Nāyars.\(^9^0\) The children of such unions were attributed the caste-status of their mothers.\(^9^1\) So, unlike other patrilineal communities, not all the children of all the sons belonged to the family. The eldest son in a Nambiitiri family might also form liaison with women from matrilineal castes, along with his legal marriages. From the point of view of the Nambūtiris, these liaisons were definitely not marriages, though they were often viewed as such by the matrilineal castes.\(^9^2\) For the

\(^{90}\) Shaikh Sainuddin attested the universality of \textit{sambandham} among the junior sons of the Nambūtiris as early as the 16\textsuperscript{th} century. See \textit{Tuhfat al-Mujahidin}, Calicut, 2007, p.41. Some attribute \textit{sambandham} to the military colonization of the land by the Nambūtiris which had necessitated the absence of the younger sons from the house. G. Ramaswamy, \textit{Kerala: Past and Present}, Trichur, 1942, p.33. On the basis of Ilamkulam’s findings, Uṇghi suggested that the presence of a much larger Nambūtiri population in Kerala in the fourteenth century may have made both hypergamous and polyandrous marriages more common at that time. K. Rāman Uṇghi, “Polyandry in Malabar”, in Manis Kumar Raha ed., \textit{Polyandry in India}, Delhi, 1987, p.288. He argued that the peculiar marriage custom among the Nambūtiris led many women to remain unmarried, the affiliation of the children born of the Nambūtiri-Nāyar union to the Nāyar tarāwād, high sickness rate due to the custom of purdah and outcasting of unmarried women for charges of immorality were some of the important factors which reduced the numbers of the Nambūtiris by half in every two hundred years. But M.G.S. observed that the tendency to practice \textit{sambandham} could have been prevalent even during the Chera times even though it is condemned outright in all the law codes. M.G.S. Narayanan, \textit{Perumals of Kerala}, Calicut, p.148.

\(^{91}\) The husband had no exclusive rights in his wife and in wife’s children. Kathleen Gough, “The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage”, \textit{Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute}, Vol. 89, 1959, pp.32-33. Gough observed that these hypergamous unions were regarded by Brahmins as socially acceptable concubinage, for the union was not initiated with Vedic rites, the children were not legitimized as Brahmins, and neither woman nor her child was accorded the rights of kin. For the same reason Yalman calls it as pseudo-marriage. Nur Yalman, “On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar”, \textit{Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland}, 1963, p.34. But for the matrilineal castes, however, the same unions were regarded as marriage, for they fulfilled the conditions of ordinary Nāyar marriage and served to legitimize the child as an acceptable member of his matrilineal lineage and caste. Kathleen Gough, “Nāyar: Central Kerala”, in David M. Schneider and Kathleen Gough ed., \textit{Matrilineal Kinship}, Allahabad, 1972, p.320.

\(^{92}\) Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People}, New Delhi, 1991, p.30; Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, \textit{op.cit.}, p.89. Mencher & Goldberg writes that since Nambūtiris never regarded liaisons with matrilineal castes as
Nambūtiri it was concubinage and for the Nāyaṟ it was true marriage. The Nāyaṟ woman and children must observe death pollution when the Nambūtiri male in question died, but he did no such thing when his sambandham wife died. Here the differential evaluations of the strength of the same relation according to the dominance and differentiated privilege were implied by the ‘direct order of castes’.

The liaisons were useful to the Nambūtiris in two ways: 1) most obviously, to provide sexual partners for their younger sons, and 2) to create useful connections with important families. The Nambūtiris could gain considerable power through these alliances with important matrilineal families such as local chieftains, and even ruling houses. They also helped to forge some kind of unity among all caste-Hindus. But it is pointed out that the suggestion of a mutual economic and political advantage involved in such unions was partially misleading, since the only advantage to the sambandham family was usually one of social prestige; all the other advantages in this one-sided affair went in the Nambūtiri’s favour.

marriages, there were never any restrictions on their relations with matrilineal women. Though rare, cases have been reported of a Nambūtiri son forming a liaison with his step-sister, i.e., a daughter of his own father through a Nāyaṟ union. Ibid, pp.99-100.

It is observed that the peculiar system of marriage have had its genesis in the past situation of scarcity of women in the early phase of their migration and settlement in Kerala and when communities were less closed. They also must have recruited non-Brahmin wives, and stopped the practice when they had an adequate supply of women. A. Aiyappan, Personality of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1982, p.150.


Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, op.cit., p.100. The Nambūtiri was often from a poor illam and was well aware of such advantages. One Nambūtiri described: “we were having a good situation with that family. The women were pretty, they fed the husbands well, and they were useful people to be close to...”
Infant marriage, which was the rule with other Brahmans, was unknown among the Nambūtiris. But girls were married both before and after they reached the age of puberty. Daughters retained membership in the *illam* so long as they were not married. But thereafter they became affiliated to their husband’s *illam* and took on the *gōṭa* of the husband. Unlike the Nāyārs, the Nambūtiris did not hold public pre-puberty rites for their women, such as that of the *tālīkēṭtu-kālyāṇam*. There was also an absence of cross-cousin marriage. Property alone was the real thing to be considered, but land never played any part in arranging marriages. Since a woman could not inherit land and since her dowry was always in the form of movable property, there was never any need to use marriages in order to consolidate holdings. In order to get his daughters married at all, a Nambūtiri must be rich, for with each of them he has to pay the bridegroom a heavy dowry and many an *illam* resources have been drained in this

---

98 But this view had been refuted by a competent authority. Mārār wrote: “...marriages are always celebrated before puberty. There are instances, though rare, of infant marriages among them”. Justice K. Nārāyaṇa Mārār, “Nambūtiris”, Malabar Quarterly Review, 1, 1, 1902, cited in Thurton, *op.cit.*, p.197.


100 Nur Yalman, “On the Purity of Women in the Castes of Ceylon and Malabar”, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Britain and Ireland, 1963, p.53. Pre-puberty marriage was taken to be a necessary measure to safeguard the purity of women and to secure their positions in the caste before any conceivable threat to their sexuality could be contemplated. For the Nambūtiris the *ghōṣa* system served the same purpose. Iyer observed that in Malabar, the Tamil Brahmans and the Nambūtiri Brahmans showed two methods of dealing with the danger of female un-chastity: the former married them in their childhood, the latter hided all their women. L.K.A.K. Iyer, *op.cit.*, pp.170-288; 289-343.


102 Fawcett writes that while among other Malayalis, youth with university degree had a command in the marriage market, a Nambūtiri was bothered only about how a matrimony bring advantage to his family. Fred Fawcett, *op.cit.*, p.61.

103 Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit.*, p.98. Mencher and Goldberg pointed out that among the Nambūtiris the term ‘alliance’ meant a different thing. In fact marriages did not bring about permanent alliances between families; neither the bride’s nor the groom’s family took interest in retaining family ties as among other castes and communities. What the girl's father was concerned with was minimizing the amount of dowry which had to be paid and yet not arranging a marriage for his daughter which would cast aspersions on his family as being a miser. In fact no Nambūtiri wanted to be branded as a miser in regard to marriage and feast.
way. To avoid the intricacies of dowry, they developed a common practice known as exchange marriages by which the exchange of dowry amount could be avoided.

In fixing marriages between families, status and nobility were major determining factors. Though it was uncommon for Nambūtiris who had the right to recite the Vedas to intermarry with those who lacked this right, it did occur from time to time. In the past, if a Nambūtiri belonging to a higher ranking illam gave his daughter to an illam of a lower rank, then the girl was not permitted to enter the kitchen or pūja room of her father’s illam, nor to participate in the religious rites conducted there; but such hypogamous unions did not reflect badly on her family, except perhaps to indicate that they were not doing so well financially. But since among the Nambūtiris marriages were not of primary use in cementing caste relations, or in maintaining alliances between families, or in helping the family politically, such differences in status or nobility was often


105 See E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha*, p.29. It is noted that dowry was harmful in 2 ways: 1) it made adhivēdanam attractive and 2) those who could not pay a heavy dowry were forced to sell their daughters to unknown men in far-off lands. K.P. Sṛidēvi, “Kēralathilē Nambūtiri Strīkāl” in 500 Varṣhatē Kēralam: Chīla Aṛivadavālangal, Kottayam, 1999, p.298.

106 For details see E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, *Ātmakatha*, pp.20-21; P. Bhaskaran Uṇṇi, *Pathombathām Nūṭāndilē Kēralam*, Trissūr, 2000, p.28. Sankarji in his story, “Eṭṭē Enthā I Kāṭṭaṇathū?” (UN 11:19, Nov. 1, 1929, p.2), described the case of such a marriage. An Āddyan Nambūtiri girl was given in marriage to an Āsyān family. While her parents were about to return after attending the ‘kudiveypu’ ceremony, the bride embraced her mother in tears. At that time, her father rebuked her: “when one goes out shouldn’t he be pure?” Though being their daughter, she had become ritually impure to the parents once she was married to an Āsyān Nambūtiri.

107 This appears to be a pan-Indian tradition with slight regional differences. Cohn observes: “Members of lineages are tied to other lineages through marriage, but, by and large, marriage within the marrying groups of a caste does not establish peer relations between the two families who have established marriage ties. Generally speaking, the boy’s family, by accepting a girl from another family, establishes a higher status within the marrying group than the family that gives the girl…” Bernard S. Cohn, *India: The Social Anthropology of a Civilization*, New Jersey, 1971, p.112.

108 Joan. P. Mencher & Helen Goldberg, *op.cit.*, pp.89-90. Mencher explains that in contrast to other parts of India, where the decisions of caste councils were influenced by various
disregarded and what in fact counted was the amount fixed as dowry. There was also the tendency for \textit{Yajurved\textit{di illams}} to give their daughters to other \textit{Yajurved\textit{di illams}}, either in the same or in different \textit{gr\textit{amam}}. Similarly, Namb\textit{b\tiriris} north of the river K\textit{oprappuzha} never gave their daughters in marriage to \textit{illams} south of the river, though the opposite did occur occasionally.\textsuperscript{109}

There was no divorce.\textsuperscript{110} Remarriage of widows was also strictly forbidden.\textsuperscript{111} But a widow was not disfigured; her \textit{t\textit{\=a}li} alone was removed. However, the restrictions upon their behaviour, conduct and sexuality were extremely stringent; the danger to Brahmanical patriarchy insisted on strict control over female sexuality. Like an unmarried girl who had attained puberty, an unguarded widow was also an object of moral panic. Therefore a widow had to be marked and marginalized. There were severe regimentation and strict routine in life. Public symbols and the peculiar code of conduct that marked a widow were meant to make them powerless.\textsuperscript{112}

3:8. Position of Women

The Namb\textit{b\tiriri} women were called Antarjanam, the literal meaning being "people within". The entire Namb\textit{b\tiriri} life was patterned in such a way as to ensure the virginity of the Antarjanam. Their movements were restricted; their

\begin{footnotes}
\item[109] For details of the wedding ceremonies see Thurston, \textit{op.cit.}, pp.196-210.
\item[110] It is suggested that the \textit{Par\textit{\=a}s\textit{\=arasm\textit{\=r}it\textit{\=i}}} and \textit{N\textit{\=a}radasm\textit{\=r}it\textit{\=i}} contained a verse which permitted the wife the right to divorce in traditional Hindu law. It stated that ‘another husband is ordained for women in five calamities viz. when the husband is lost (unheard of), is dead, has become a sanyasin, is impotent or is a patita’. Arvind Sharma, “How to Read Manus\textit{m\textit{r}it\textit{i}}?” \textit{Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences}, Vol. IX, No.2, Winter 2002, p.32. But none of these conditions were met in real life.
\item[111] In sharp contrast to the Namb\textit{b\tiriris}, widowhood as an enforced system did not exist among the \textit{marumakkath\textit{\=ayam}} communities. A woman who used the freedom to get out of a \textit{samb\textit{bandh\textit{\=a}m}} was not looked down upon. So were widows who had freedom to remarry, and not be treated as inauspicious. K. Saradamoni, \textit{Matriliny Transformed}, New Delhi, 1999, p.65.
\item[112] Mayer Fortes and R. Firth have suggested that symbols, private and public, constitute a major instrument of power when used directly or indirectly. Cited in Uma Chakravarti, “Gender, caste and Labour: The Ideological and Material Structure of Widowhood” in Martha Allen Chen ed., \textit{Widows in India}, New Delhi. 1998, p.65.
\end{footnotes}
travels were limited to temples or to houses of their close relatives, but that too had to be in the company of a maidservant. While travelling, she had to take all precautions to protect her chastity. In the life cycle ceremonies and other aspects of life, female discrimination was present to a shocking level. The first ritual ceremony after conception is *pumsavanam*, a ritual for the expectant mother to give birth to a male child. This discriminatory attitude against the female child continued throughout her life and was woven into the fabric of Nambūtiri lifestyle with all details up to the end of her existence. Female children were brought up to understand that they were not only not free but were also a step below their brothers. The girl child's education was just reading, writing and basic arithmetic while that of the boy child was an elaborate process continuing throughout his life. The girl children moreover were made to feel that they occupied only second place at home and in society, and the rites and rituals were patterned after this belief to instill in them this feeling. The Antarjanam also had separate places for worship, and their rituals had restrictions placed on them: women were not allowed to chant, for instance, and to do other ritual performances like those of males. In addition, after her attaining puberty, a Nambūtiri girl was not allowed to leave the *illam*; she was not allowed to visit even close relatives. She was neither allowed to see men nor allowed to be seen by them. Cooking food, serving the husband and looking after the children were taught to her as the essence of womanhood. The wife should eat from the same plantain leaf used by the husband; the water used for washing the feet of the husband was considered to be *tirtham* (holy water) for the wife.

M.P. Bhāṭṭathiripād (Premji) in his drama *Ritumati* vividly portrayed the prevailing social sanctions against a Nambūtiri girl after her attaining puberty. He poetically described it thus:

"The tender girl has come of age;
It is time for her to stop schooling;
To cast away her usual dress;
And to go hiding under her umbrella;
And this cruel hypocrisy is glossed over as morality".

The life-cycle of the Brahmin women all over India provides a more or less uniform pattern with slight differences in detail. Among them, the female child spent her youth preparing for marriage. Her marriage with a man of the same caste was arranged by her parents. Following the marriage ceremony she was sent to her husband's home and was required to adjust to their customs. Her husband was to be regarded as 'the supreme god among all gods' and served accordingly. The fortunate women gave birth to sons while issueless women or those who gave birth only to daughters were treated with disdain. The aging woman watched her children mature and marry and accepted the new roles of mother-in-law and grandmother. If her husband died before her, she became a widow with abstemious habits. After his death she was to devote her life to his memory, her impurity could never be removed, and she was to live out her life as the most inauspicious of all creatures. By faithfully performing her duties, a woman helped to maintain the order of the universe.

But the slight differences are certainly striking. The Antarjanams obtained at least an elementary knowledge of language; some of them could read and write; pre-pubertal marriages, though not uncommon, were not sanctioned by custom. Still, girls had no voice in the choice of their husbands, whom their parents or elder brothers chose for them. Everyday life in the illams was organized in accordance with a highly complex set of rules of conduct upholding various

\[\text{References:}\]

114 It is very difficult to construct the real picture of the lives of women before the colonial rule. Though there are abundant prescriptive texts, fewer documents shed light on their actual lives. Trayambakayajvan's Stridharmapaddhath is the only extant work totally devoted to women's duties. But this work describes the lives of women from the highest ranking, landholding groups only. See I. Julia Leslie, The Perfect Wife: The Orthodox Hindu Woman According to the Stridharmapaddhati of Trayambakayajvan, Delhi, 1989. Leslie observes that the more orthodox ideas concerning women tend to be held even today by high-ranking, land-holding groups among whom patrilineage is strong and wives are economically dependent upon their husbands and their husband's families. Ibid, pp.19-20.

115 But there were a lot of exceptions to the ideal. Some women became educated, attained fame and commanded armies; some were able to live outside patriarchal households and gain status as courtesans. Ibid, p.19.
hierarchies. Sex difference was certainly important, but not the sole base upon which this structure of regulation rested; consideration of age, position in the kin network and intra-jati hierarchy, marital status and other factors were also crucial. The very structure of the regulation itself permitted potentially subversive spaces. “Accounts of reformers themselves reveal faultiness that indicate not so much a total subordination of one sex by the other in the illam, but a more complex, mobile play of power with other factors like age, seniority, ‘moral authority’ in very specific settings etc. in tilting the balance”.116

In patrilineal descent groups recruitment of new members is through the males of the group. Woman, according to the smritis, is herself a form of property through which a son could be obtained for continuity of the remaining property, and for offering food to the manes.117 Women may be regarded as mere receptacles, or they may be believed to contribute nothing more than a favourable medium for the development of the foetus. But there are distinct limits as to how far women may be regarded as irrelevant to the recruitment process, for by definition women do care for the children and men do not.118

The Nambūtiri women are kept in the strictest seclusion.119 Of all the virtues, chastity is accounted as the highest, and any violation of this entails loss of caste, 

116 J. Devika, “Engendering Individuals: The Project of Nambūtiri Brahman Reform in Kerala”, Journal of South Indian History. 1:2, March-Aug.2004, p.84. Devika also argues that the reformers’ account of the Antarjanams as passive characters does not perfectly conform to reality.


119 Regarding the rules of conduct and restrictions on the movement of the Antarjanams, the Census Report of Travancore, 1891, p.684 remarked: “The women are guarded with more than Moslem jealousy. Even brothers and sisters are separated at an early age. When the Nambūtiri lady goes to worship the village god, or visit a neighbouring illam, a Nair maid who accompanies her commands the retirement of all the males on the road while the lady moves all shrouded in cloth with a mighty umbrella, which protects her from the gaze of profane eyes. At home they are simple in their habits, dressing like Nair women up to the waist. A
social status and total separation from the family. Enquiries into cases of conjugal infidelity are conducted by the Smārtan, under a caste tribunal, and the entire course of caste trial was known as Smārtavichāram. A report in West Coast Spectator described fairly well the nature and details of the trial in 1898. Logan stated that a trial sometimes lasted several years, the tribunal met occasionally and the kinsmen of the accused were obliged to entertain the members and any other

Nambutiri lady is thus kept in the strictest ghosha. She is inaccessible and invisible to everyone except those mentioned below. She may be seen and spoken to by all the members of her parents’ families as well as such of those families as observe ten days’ pula pollution; by everyone in her own family except her husband’s brothers; by her parents’ sisters’ sons and grandsons; by her mother’s father and his sons, his brothers and their sons; by her father’s maternal grandfather, uncles and grandfather’s brothers, and their sons. In some places her husband’s uncles too are allowed to see her. Among other virtues chastity is reckoned as of the highest importance, the least suspicion either in man or woman entailing loss of caste, social position and separation from the family.”

Mateer wrote in 1870: “Their women are carefully concealed from the public gaze; and, when venturing out of their house, are enveloped in cloths, or are covered by an immense umbrella”. Samuel Mateer, The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People, New Delhi, 1991, p.30.

It consisted of the Smārtan (the president), two or more Mimāmsakās (Nambūtiris versed in caste laws), the Akakōyāma (local head of the community), and the Purakōyāma (the representative of the Raja).


“Of the several curious customs of the Nambūtiris, the most remarkable is their investigation of cases of adultery. If a woman misbehaved herself, there is no attempt at concealment, although the consequences of exposure are terrible, and not infrequently the informer against the woman is her father, brother or son. The procedure is briefly this. The community being informed of the suspected adultery, the woman is confined in an out-house, pending enquiry. The whole of the family is also cut-off from association with the community. The Raja in whose jurisdiction the case has arisen... being informed of the case, issues orders to the Koyma or the local head of the community, to the Vaidikan (preceptor) and to the Smartan (arbiter), to call a meeting of the community and hold an enquiry. A meeting is accordingly held and the Raja is represented by a deputy. The inquiry is begun by the Smartan...if the dasi admit the guilt, the woman herself, who is thenceforward called sadhanam (thing) is called before the meeting...A very minute examination, often very scandalous and indecent, is then conducted by the smarthan under the instruction of the Vaidikan, cording to certain set forms and the answers are recorded. After all a confession of guilt is wrung out, and the Vaidikan declares that the woman and her seducer, to whatever caste he may belong, ought to be excommunicated...The woman is considered dead to the family, and her funeral rites are performed in her presence. She is then taken to a public place, where a man from the assembly goes and snatches from her the cadjan umbrella...as she is no longer worthy to carry it. Her dasi is ordered to leave her. The Smartan then claps hands in token of being turned out of caste...” West Coast Spectator, 4th August 1898, cited in Fred Fawcett, op.cit, pp.74-76.
Nambūtiris present on each occasion. The kinsmen themselves were temporarily cut-off from intercourse with other Brahmins pending the result of the trial, and all śrāddhas were stopped while it lasted.\(^{123}\) He said that no amount of evidence was accepted as proof of guilt, unless the women confessed. Yet, she was forced to confess. A Pattar Brahman was used to name the adulterer(s). They were immediately banished from their respective castes.\(^{124}\) Expenses for a trial were rarely less than Rs.1000 and had been known to amount Rs.12000.

In fact the Smārtavichāram was a pointer to the kind of anxiety that the Nambūtiris expressed towards regulating female chastity as a means to maintain caste purity. Women were a doubly condemnable creature, feared and hated; young widows were objects of real moral panic. It also revealed the male approach towards women as instruments of procreation and their regimented life pattern in accordance with male priorities. It is also observed that for the women concerned, the vichāram and the consequent excommunication amounted to ‘social death’ since the long process of trial and the psychological impact of the persecution involved in it destroyed her mental stature. It was also a clear message to other Antarjanams enjoining them to be ‘disciplined’ and to be ‘good and moral wives’.\(^{125}\)

By the beginning of the twentieth century, and particularly after the famous case of 1905, the continuation of Smārtavichāram became absolutely difficult due

---


\(^{124}\) Excommunication from caste was normally a matter of ‘social death’. It was the most extreme sanction available to a person and was meant to coerce recalcitrants to obey caste rules. Robert M. Hayden, “Excommunication as Everyday Event and Ultimate Sanction: The Nature of Suspension From an Indian Caste”, Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XLII, No.2, Feb. 1983, pp.291-92.

to the emerging public opinion against it\textsuperscript{126} and to the royal sanction of the Cochin government binding the Nambūṭiri caste council to deposit Rs.10000/- as security to get prior sanction for holding it. Equally important was the royal order, contrary to the traditional practice, to conduct a counter-trial of the accused (\textit{puruṣavichārama}). The \textit{sāstraic} jurisprudence thus received a fatal blow and marked a shift from the traditional jurisprudence to the Roman laws for individual freedom.\textsuperscript{127} Thereafter there was a marked decrease in the number of cases reported and trials conducted\textsuperscript{128} though \textit{vīchārāms} continued up to 1918, when the last of them took place.\textsuperscript{129} In fact there was an increase in the number of cases around 1900; press reports between 1901 and 1905 and the remark that a special court would have to be set up for these trials indicated the increase in such cases.\textsuperscript{130} Reports of the trial of 1905 show that Antarjanams had started to retaliate against custom and had found them as escape routes from the grips of community control, even at the cost of social boycott.\textsuperscript{131}

\textsuperscript{128} Kāṇippayūr wrote that there were five cases of trial in his lifetime from the \textit{Vīchāram} of Tāṭri in 1905 onwards. \textit{Entē Smaraṇakal}, Vol. 3, p.142. Though very active in the reform movement, Kāṇippayūr showed great sympathy towards the practice of \textit{Smaṭtavīchārama} when he started to write his memoirs in the 1960s.
\textsuperscript{129} A.M.N. Chakyar, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{131} In an article “\textit{Manasthitikkku Vanna Māttam Athavā Charitraṁthinē Pōkku}” (\textit{YK}, 17:95 & 96, Sep. 2 & 7, 1927), Kāṇippayūr analyzed the changing approach of Nambūṭiris towards \textit{Smaṭtavīchārama}. Sanctity attached to chastity was declining, accused men had started to question the verdict of the caste councils in the law courts, and in one case the \textit{sādhana} was protected by the accused Nambūṭiri with the blessing of his father. Kāṇippayūr linked adultery with the existing marriage practice; he pointed out that women involved in such cases were of three categories – unmarried women, widows and wives of aged husbands – and reminded the elders that people are righteous not just because they are god-fearing but also because they are disinclined to face disgrace and punishment. In the new circumstances where there was no fear of disgrace and no matter of alienation from the family and no loss of property rights, keeping morality would be a challenging task. If the community wanted to maintain chastity and
3:9. Pollution

Closely connected with the caste system were the rigid theories of pollution, which may be classed under two heads, namely, pollution by approach and by touch. The social distance between castes in Kerala was traditionally expressed in spatial terms. Pollution by approach and by touch. In the treatment of the lower castes, a recognized scale of distance was kept at which each of the polluting castes must stand from a man of the higher caste or his house, the distance increasing in proportion to the low status of the caste. In south India where Brahmans were not only powerful spiritually but also materially, prohibitions against lower castes were very strong. M.N. Srinivas has specified three conditions of pollution and purity – a state of normal purity, a state of impurity and a state of ritual purity. In the latter condition, one might transact with divinities, namely gods and ancestors. Stevenson distinguished pollution as internal and external. Internal pollution results from absorbing polluting substances into the body and is much harder to remove than external pollution, which is the consequence of mere contact with polluting substances or contact with lower caste persons. Other agents causing states of impurity include pollution due to death, birth, menstruation, sexual intercourse, defecation, urination, bodily dirt, and eating. Means of purification include taking bath and wearing pure cloths.

There were strict rules regarding commensality. The Nambūtiris received food from their equals or from those who were superior to them in the sub-caste

morality, the present marriage system, which forced women of 30 and 40 to remain unmarried, had to be replaced with the universalization of *swajātivivāhan*.

134 Cited in *ibid*, p.79.
hierarchy. Custom forbade the Nambūtiri husbands of the *sambandham* marriage to eat with their Nāyar women. This was because (a) this would make them into wives (against liaisons), and (b) they would then pollute the men ‘internally’ through their stomachs.\(^{136}\)

Besides, there was also ceremonial pollution: a person ceremonially polluted conveyed pollution to even members of the same caste. Women were considered as ceremonially polluted during their monthly periods and after delivery; and this they conveyed as a kind of atmospheric pollution. They had to live in seclusion during this period.\(^{137}\) Scrupulous maintenance of ritual purity was imperative, especially in the kitchen and its vicinity, and women were required to observe the necessary rites carefully.\(^{138}\) A death or birth in a family entailed pollution on all the agnates and cognates; normally this lasted for ten days and could be removed by a bath and certain prescribed ceremonies.

The traditions by which the Nambūtiris talked to members of other communities were strictly ceremonial and revealed the character of ritual hierarchy. Even in the 1930s many had followed the practice and were severely criticized for it.\(^{139}\)

Malabar was the most conservative part of south India because pollution rules were observed here with Spartan severity. Nambūtiris distinguished two pollution agents: first, people whose mere approach within certain well-defined distances carried atmospheric pollution; and second, people who only polluted by actual contact. Indeed, ‘indirect pollution’ of a high caste individual by an untouchable


\(^{137}\) Seeing a woman during menses was polluting. Only the mother was an exception in this matter. Even seeing menstruating sisters and aunts were defiling events. Fr. Pallath J. Joseph, “Women and Caste Discrimination: The Nambūtiri-Dominated Period of Kerala Culture and Society”, AHRC Website, dated 16-8-2002.


was carried to an extreme in Kerala where the shadow of a Chełnuman would pollute a Nāyaṛ on the road.\textsuperscript{140} The man of high caste shouted occasionally as he passed by, so that the low caste man may go off the road and allow him to pass unpolluted. And those of the lower castes, Pulayās and others, shouted as they passed by, to give notice of the proximity of their pollution-bearing presence, and to receive the command of the men of high castes, so that they could move away from the road.

Bathing was one of the most important means of driving off pollution and hence was a significant religious duty of the Nambūtiris.\textsuperscript{141} A Nambūtiri only wanted an excuse for bathing. Every Nambūtiri bathed at least twice a day, and sometimes oftener. The fastidious sense of bath purity occasionally took the form of a regular mania, and the Nambūtiri received a nickname jalappiśāchu because of this obsession. Never did a Nambūtiri fail to bathe at least once a day, unless extreme physical weakness prevented him from doing so.\textsuperscript{142}

Houtart and Lemercinier observed that pollution practices translated the relationships of dependence in terms of repulsion.\textsuperscript{143} The more completely the groups were dominated by the higher castes, the more they were looked upon as intrinsically impure, and consequently by their essence disturbers of the social order, to such a point indeed as to justify the physical elimination of any of their


\textsuperscript{141} Bougle summarized the system of caste into three elements: separation, hierarchy and hereditary specialization. The social groups, i.e., castes, pushed each other off in an opposition of pure-impure. A caste remained pure by performing rituals and customs: honouring its gods, making gifts to temples, bathing in order to wash away pollution, performing ceremonies at birth, marriage and death, and observing its rules for intermarriage, eating and dressing. A caste that did not observe similar rituals and customs was considered to be impure in relation to the caste that did not observe them. Cited in Hugo Ks’ Jacob, \textit{The Rajas of Cochin 1663-1720: Kings, Chiefs and the Dutch East India Company}, New Delhi, 2000, p.3.


members who infringed any of these taboos. So much was this the case, in fact, that it was by impressing on these lower groups the conviction of their exclusion from the social unity – an exclusion to which the pollution practices gave both verisimilitude and reality – that the dominant groups ensured their complete dependence. It was really by this means that the unity of the system was maintained.

3:10. Challenges of the Modern Age

The Nambūtiri hold on Kerala society remained fairly strong as long as they possessed the major part of the landed estates and influenced behaviour and belief through the management of temples. The first serious challenge to their power was administered by the Mysore invasions and the occupation of Malabar in the second half of the eighteenth century. Large numbers of Nambūtiris left their ancestral homes and lands to become refugees in Travancore. Large numbers of them were forcibly converted.144 It was only after the defeat of Tipu by the British that the Nambūtiris could return from Travancore. In fact, the Mysorean occupation of Malabar was significant in that the traditional social system received a rude shock and the Brahmins were for the first time made to understand that they had no immunities and that they were no better than other human beings. Though the period was brief it was adequate to show to the people of Kerala that the Hindu order was alterable and could be changed.145

With the beginning of the nineteenth century the firm establishment of British rule in Malabar and British supremacy in Cochin and Travancore took political, social and cultural initiative out of Nambūtiri hands.146 The Nambūtiris withdrew

---

144 Logan wrote that in 1788 about 200 Brahmans were 'seized, confined, made Mussalmans and forced to eat beef'. Logan, Malabar, Vol. I, Madras, 1951, p.449.


146 In Travancore, for example, the 1812 Decree which confiscated the extensive landed properties of the three hundred and seventy eight biggest temples had the impact of breaking the power of Nambūtiri and Nāyar chiefs. The legislation which coincided with the
more and more into their own shell of old world rituals and beliefs in the seclusion of villages. In Malabar, the Nāyaṛs, who had lost their traditional military functions, discovered new opportunities in English education and the British administrative set up. Thus these Nāyaṛs were increasingly alienated from their Nambūtiri mentors and masters. Indulēkha depicts the educated Nāyaṛ community in revolt against its traditional Nambūtiri alliance. In fact it was landlordism that made the Nambūtiris feel secure even in the face of challenges and remain calm and retired in the midst of disastrous storm.

The difficulty of the Nambūtiris in adapting to the new situation has been illustrated with considerable sympathy thus: “Following the loss of political control and socio-economic supremacy, the Nambūtiris were fast becoming the relics of the old world. For as long as they could, they clung to their lands, temples and caste privileges and turned their back to the ‘mleccha’ system of modern English education. They could not participate in the social reform movement, since it was largely directed against their dominance; and with their aversion to manual labour they were strangers in the world of industry and commerce. Even in matters connected with their landed property they had become dependant on a professional class of lawyers, composed of the tenants and caste subordinates. With their sensitivity sharpened by

147 The Cochin State Manual observed: “The Nambūtiris form but a small community numerically, but owing to their character, intelligence, wealth and social position, their importance considerably exceeds their numerical strength. This importance however has been on the decline during the past half century, which is mainly due to their caste exclusiveness and conservatism. Their influence in State councils, which was once supreme, is now a negligible factor, and on account of their objection to English education, they are being elbowed out by other castes from almost every literate walk of life”. C. Achutha Menon, Cochin State Manual, TVM, 1995, Reprint, p.251.

148 MozhiKunnath Brahmadathan Nambūtiripād attributed the indifference of the Nambūtiris to modern culture to landlordism; all Brahmans except the Nambūtiris responded to the challenge posed by the modern age immediately and could overcome the crisis economically and culturally. See his Khilāfat Smaranakal, pp.234-35.

149 “...Indulekha underlines the growing awareness about the iniquity of the Nayar-Nambūtiri marriage alliance. The new generation resented sexual exploitation by the Nambūtiris and questioned the ideological dominance which sanctioned it. Indulekha’s rejection of Suri Nambūtiripad is a powerful statement of this cultural consciousness...” K. N. Panikkar, “Creating a New Cultural Taste: Reading a Nineteenth Century Malayalam Novel” in R. Champakalakshmi & S. Gopal ed., Tradition, Dissent and Ideology, New Delhi, 1996, p.103.

150
Moreover, the network of traditional caste occupations and caste cultures was weakened by the impact of modern transport, education and commerce. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the wind of social reform unleashed by the Izhava reform movement under Dr. Palpu and Sri Nārāyaṇa Guru in Travancore shook the very foundations of the caste hierarchy over which the Nambūtiris had presided for so many centuries. While Nāyaṛṣ agitated for the abolition of tarāwād, marumakkathāyam and sambandham, Christian missionary work among the lower communities accelerated the dissolution of caste. Even in Travancore and Cochin, where the native rulers still exhibited special consideration towards Brahmins, the latter had now been dismissed from all positions of power at the court and the palace. Nambūtiri dominance continued only in rural agricultural life and in the religious life of the orthodox section of the people. Even the hold on agrarian life was soon threatened by the rise of the tenancy movement and the reform of land tenure which came first in British Malabar and spread to Cochin and Travancore.

Thus the Nambūtiris had been pushed to the defensive and was seen as the greatest impediment to the material progress of the land. "The traditional and quasi legal rights and privileges conceded to Brahmans in Travancore, constitute a formidable barrier to the general progress and political improvement of the country. They are exempt in a native state from capital punishment for any offence whatsoever, and their crimes are very leniently dealt with, while those committed against them are severely punished. The laws as to caste distance also, as far as they are carried out, cannot but put a stop to the elevation of the lower orders, and..."

 misfortune, they grew more and more cynical and sought refuge in the palliatives of archaic faith and culture in the timeless haven of Koodiyattam, Kathakali and the feasts and festivals associated with the temple; and in purificatory rituals as if to shut out the noises of modern society by chanting mantras and ward off its sights by closing their eyes in meditation...the majority Nambūtiris observed the rigid caste rules...harsh treatment of women and compulsive ritual observance". M.G.S. Narayanan and Veluthat Kesavan, op.cit, pp.276-77.

151 E.M.S. pointed out that by the time of the establishment of the British power in Kerala, the Nambūtiri janmis had become a socially unproductive class and their presence itself had become a great hindrance to the general progress of the society. E.M.S. Nambūtiripād, EMSnte Diary, Vol. I, Thiruvananthapuram, 1996, p.107.
necessarily limit the natural freedom of large classes of individuals..."\textsuperscript{152}

"...Ordinary cleanliness is doubtless a virtue, and the pretty tanks close by the temples are, when supplied with clean water, both ornamental and useful. But the idea of ceremonial caste pollution sadly hinders the people from social intercourse with one another and from improving intimacy with other nations. Europeans, because they eat flesh and mingle with all castes, are excluded from access to the interior of a native house, or entering beyond the common reception hall of a Hindu palace. After shaking hands with a European, the caste Hindu must bathe to remove the pollution; and there are special occasions when it is highly inconvenient to them to meet foreigners even in the most casual manner."\textsuperscript{153}

3:11. The Yōgakṣēmasabha Movement

The awakening among the Nambūtiris was evidently defensive; it was stimulated by two broad categories of factors. By the close of the nineteenth century new forces had started to dislodge the existing socio-economic environment paving its way for new ideals and new tendencies. To continue in the old order with the old traditions was not only difficult but also suicidal. Secondly, other communities – both lower and upper caste Hindus and non-Hindus – had already been awakened and had far transcended the path of modernization. The entire context had become so adverse that reform was the only means of survival.\textsuperscript{154}

Efforts of the Nambūtiris to respond to the changing social milieu had its organized beginning with the founding of the Yōgakṣēmasabha. The Sabha was born on 18th Kumbham 1083 ME (2nd March 1908) on the day of Śivarāṭrī in a

\textsuperscript{152} Samuel Mateer, \textit{The Land of Charity: A Descriptive Account of Travancore and its People}, New Delhi, 1991, p.32.

\textsuperscript{153} Samuel Mateer, \textit{Native Life in Travancore}, New Delhi, 1991, p.332

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Census of India, 1931 Vol. XXI Cochin}, Part I Report, p.263 observed that the chief aim of the Sabha was "the reformation or the rejuvenation of the old and worn out Nambūtiri caste by means of social and other reforms calculated to bring the life of the community into adjustment with modern conditions".
meeting at the illam of Cheřumukku Vaidikan in Aluva presided over by Dēsamangalath Valiya Śankaran Nambūtiripād. Kuṟūr Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād and Chittūr Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiripād were prominent dignitaries of the first meeting. Other prominent participants included Vadakkillath Jatavēdan Nambūtiripād, Kaplingōt Vaidikan Neelakantan Nambūtiri and Kirāṅgāt Vāsudēvan Nambūtiripād, all of whom were Nambūtiri husbands at the Cochin royal family but were liberals and reform-minded men. Almost all the prominent Āddhyan Nambūtiris, Āzhvānchēry Tambrākkal, Vādhyāns and Smārthans participated in the early activities of the Sabha. For about ten years Kuṟūr Uṇṇi Nambūtiripād led the Sabha as its undisputed leader.

There has been considerable debate over the immediate factor that had led to the founding of the Sabha. Most of those who have written about the origin of the Sabha have referred to an incident that took place in the Trīpūnitūra palace. During a usual nighttime talk among the palace ladies and their Nambūtiri husbands, one of the women rebuked the Nambūtiris for their conservative outlook and lack of modern education and expressed her disgust over her fate of being the wife of such a backward-looking and diehard man. This rebuke is interpreted to have provoked the sambandham Nambūtiris and forced them to find ways of overcoming this disgrace by getting organized and by reforming customs so that they could adapt themselves to the changing times. But this argument does not conform to realities and fails to explain satisfactorily the circumstances that had led to the origin of the Sabha. In fact C.K. Nambūtiri’s citation of the palace lady’s rebuke reveals more details. She criticized the Nambūtiris not only for their obtuseness but also for their lethargy which had been the cause for the erosion of

156 P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, op.cit, pp.35-36.
157 C.K. Nambūtiri, Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabhadhavude Mumbum Pimbhum, pp.7-8; Mādamb Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, Yōgakṣēmasabhā Charitram.
their privileges, holdings and belongings. She was referring to the tenancy laws which would affect the Nambūtiris adversely, the material progress of other communities through English education and modern vocations, the proposed legislations which sought to attach Dēvaswam properties, the refusal of the lower castes to serve the Nambūtiris during ritual occasions, etc.\textsuperscript{158} In fact the rebuke itself reveals the defensive character of the response of the Nambūtiris; they were besieged by numerous forces and were denounced even by their wives.

Some people consider the Tāṭri case as an important factor causing to generate conditions for the origin of the Sabha. Mādamb observed that it in fact shook the entire community; provided the Nambūtiris with a common cause to come together; and more importantly, it provoked the liberal sections to find ways to regenerate the community through modern organizational and normative lines.\textsuperscript{159} VT held that two women had played their decisive roles in the awakening of the Nambūtiris – Tāṭri and Indulēkha – both in almost identical ways: by exposing the moral and material decay of the community.\textsuperscript{160} But the impact of the incident seemed not to have played any overt role in the birth of the Sabha; even if it had anything, it was certainly concealed and negative; the Sabha had refused to take up women’s issues on a revolutionary footing and rather stressed on ‘disciplining’ women through new norms and behavioural patterns. If the community had learned anything from the issue, it was the lesson that immorality had become a serious menace to the stature of the community and that some makeshift

\textsuperscript{158} C.K. Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.8.
\textsuperscript{160} VTyudē Sampūṟna Kṛītikaḷ, pp. 626-27. VT places the Tāṭri case more decisive than the Cochin Raja’s proclamation of 1080 in provoking the Nambūtiris to unite together. M. Govindan, taking his position from VT, argued that the origin of the Sabha was intimately associated with the Tāṭri case; it enforced the Nambūtiris to associate on modern organizational lines and to take measures to cleanse the community off the vices and to work for a cultural renaissance. M. Govindan, “Strīyē, Enikkum Ninakkum Tammil Bandhamenthu?” in M. Govindantē Upanyāsangal, pp.730-31.
arrangements had to be made in order to save its tottering image. On the other hand, there is some plausibility in Mathur’s argument. He writes: “Doubt may arise whether physical force was employed by the traditional caste elders for their progressive views particularly relating to caste matters. It is said that most of those ostracized belonged to a factional group which was responsible for establishing the Nambūtiri Yōgakṣēmasabha immediately after this excommunication case... Perhaps, the traditional caste elders wanted to take revenge on the liberal castemen who refused to recognize the authority of the former. It is observed that one of the liberal castemen who carried the English book to the Vedic school was one of the 63 excommunicated persons... It seems highly improbable that, in a closed society such as Nambūtiris, a woman could have 63 men and yet the things would remain a secret for such a long time. It is quite probable therefore that the whole case was made up by some interested parties”.

The entire social situation was turning against traditional privileges and the easy-going nature of the Nambūtiris. Even the patronage given to them by the governments was slowly being lost. This was first expressed in Travancore where the government was not as committed to the Nambūtiris as in Cochin; it was here that the tenancy legislation had its origin. Even in Cochin, the first decade of the twentieth century saw the initial steps towards tenancy reforms. In fact it was the royal order enforcing the tenancy issue (29-11-1907) that had sparked off conditions for the origin of the Sabha. This assumption is supported by the fact that the Sabha gave its first priority to the tenancy question by appointing a committee under Kuṟṟṟ Nambūtiripād to take necessary measures in this regard.


162 Ibid, pp.21-22.

163 Kuṟṟṟ Uṇṇī Nambūtiripād is reported to have said: “In addition to their traditional occupations of gaining knowledge in Sanskrit, offering pūjās, chanting Vedic hymns and performing holy sacrifices for the welfare of the society, the Nambūtiris should concentrate on learning English to acquire the ability to present their own cases in courts of law in order to protect their
The provision that “nothing should be professed, followed or resolved in the Sabha that would adversely affect the traditional customs, procedures or nobility status of the Nambūtiris” also indicated that the prime concern of the organizers of the Sabha was not the refashioning of the community in tune with the norms and ideals of the emerging social order. Even otherwise, a cursory analysis of the demands and decisions of the Sabha would reveal that all of them—such as English education, marriage reform, and family regulation—were interlinked with the main agenda of the Nambūtiri movement—defense of privileges and was meant to keep the old structure intact.

The Sabha in its formative phase lacked a solid institutional base and programme of action. Moreover, it was constituted mainly by the patriarchs who had been concentrating on the defense of their community’s interests in relation to others and the modern state system. Though the statute of the Sabha defined that its aim was “the educational, moral, political and economic progress of the Nambūtiris”, reforms within the community affecting the family structure and property relations were only leisurely and cautiously taken up. The issue which received immediate attention was English education; even the ultra-conservatives were coerced to submit on this issue on the ground that safeguarding community interests in the new era warranted knowledge of English language. The priority given to English education was a tacit expression of the appalling fact that traditional knowledge was ineffective in defending community interests and to confront the emerging issues. Though resolutions were presented/passed in the

---

164 Ibid, p.17.
166 P.K. Aryan Nambūtiri, op.cit, p.34.
Sabha on such matters as reform of marriage customs and changes in ritual observances, serious efforts were not made to put them into practice just as in the case of the English education.

The history of the Nambūtiri movement could be differentiated into its moderate and extremist phases; while the period from its origin till the birth of the Sāṅgham was marked by moderation and caution in objectives and methods of action, the subsequent period was radical in all respects. In the first phase the Sabha was led by the elders, took English education as its foremost goal and had been based on the tacit assumption that reform and reconstruction should be accomplished only with the full support of the community. This period, however, was marked by the undisputed leadership of Kuṟṟ Damodaran (Uṟṇi) Nambūtiripāḍ. Radicals emerged in the Sabha by angrily protesting against its life-long and slow-moving leadership and its undue insistence on making speeches and passing resolutions. They demanded changes at two levels: one, expanding the agenda of the movement by incorporating marriage reform and partition of family property and second, taking to direct action rather than sticking on to passing resolutions and appealing to the consent of the community as a whole. The period was also marked by attempts to link the Nambūtiri movement with the civil and the nationalist movements. If the first phase was formative and foundational – but frustrating in terms of results – second was pragmatic and dynamic and capable of bringing about revolutionary changes.

The Nambūtiri movement was marked by the following important features.

1. The principal goal of the reformers was progress. Changing modes of social strength and power led them to attempt a reconstruction of customs and traditions. All the programmes of the movement were designed to regenerate the community as a means to achieve this goal.\(^{167}\) Even the efforts to improve the status of women

---

\(^{167}\) It is an overstatement that the demand for legislative intervention arose at such a dangerous situation when no other measure to save the community from total extinction was possible. See Vasanthakumari, “The Madras Nambūtiri Act (XXI of 1933) – A Study of the Nambūtiri
were posited on the fact that without social reform to substantially improve women’s status, regeneration seemed doomed to failure. But there was an equally implicit refusal to acknowledge the concept of the progress of the whole society since it impinged upon the privileged position of the Nambūtiris.

2. The Nambūtiri movement attempted to rally its members of the community behind certain important issues that needed immediate attention and would immensely benefit the whole community.\(^{168}\) They included a reappraisal of the ideologies, customs and practices, such as the approach to English education, marriage system and the joint family, and a realignment of their ties with other castes and communities, by eliminating pollution and by democratizing social relationships.\(^{169}\) All these were associated with the question of the ‘fall’ of the community and how they retarded progress. Thus community-building was sought to be attained through the promotion of caste-cluster consciousness and by mobilizing the support of the people on common issues of interest.\(^{170}\)

3. The agenda of the movement widened in accordance with the compulsions from within the movement and in response to the pressures from outside; but all these were justified in the name of community interests. The cessation of

---

\(^{168}\) In his “Nammude Dharmam” (\textit{YK}, 13:14, Nov.8, 1922), Kāṇippayūr Śankaran Nambūtiripād called upon the Nambūtiris to concentrate on ‘selfish’ interests, which all others were holding fast to, in order to attain progress and to protect community interests. This they should do also for regaining the lost \textit{Brāhmānyam} which would reinstate the old glory and could be made use of for the good of the whole society.

\(^{169}\) Though the movement succeeded in achieving the goal of endogamous-monogamous marriages, it could not establish a monolithic community by fully eliminating sub-caste differences by introducing a new tradition in marriage. In the case of the Gauda Sāraswata Brahmins, Conlon has displayed how the movement among them had failed in achieving a similar goal. See Frank. F. Conlon, “Caste by Association: The Gauda Saraswata Brahmans Unification Movement”., \textit{Journal of Asian Studies}, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3, May 1974, pp.351-65.

\(^{170}\) Arunima writes: “...such natural ties were to imbue the community with a greater sense of unity and cohesiveness, impossible earlier as caste norms had been divisive, disallowing either the formation of a true sense of the community, or the longevity of one. Therefore, all through this period, caste and community sentiments were being used to foster internal reform and reorganization”. G. Arunima, “Multiple Meanings: Changing Conceptions of Matrilocal Kinship in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Malabar”, The Indian Economic and Social History review, 33:3, 1996, p.303.
sambandham and the promotion of swajātivivāham were aimed at protecting the property and boosting the numerical strength of the community;\(^{171}\) the elimination of the practice of pollution and promotion of temple-entry to all were demanded in order to redeem the community of the sin of discriminating a vast majority of the Hindu population in the name of inhuman and outmoded norms of social behaviour. Nambūtiris were also asked to take part in the Nationalist movement for their commitment to national interests and for chalking out a dominant space for them in the nation-building process.\(^{172}\)

4. No other caste movement had its most dangerous enemy within itself except among the Nambūtiris. It was easy to unite a community if benefits were sought to be achieved from outside; but the case of the Nambūtiris was different.\(^{173}\) The three important areas of reform – marriage, property and custom – needed a prolonged struggle against both the kāraṇavār and the vaidikar. Hence the movement resembled a class struggle, a struggle by the dispossessed against the privileged.\(^{174}\)

5. Among the many caste reform/community-building movements of 20th century Kerala, only the Nambūtiris took up the question of gender discrimination as a serious agenda of discourse and agitation.\(^{175}\) The reasons for this has been

---

\(^{171}\) *Census of India, 1941. Travancore*, p.59 stated that “the preference for endogamous marriages has also a political aspect. The political influence which they can exercise will depend upon their numerical strength; and so long as custom prohibits the younger members among the Nambūtiris from marrying within their community, they will be denied this political advantage. This applies equally well to the kṣatriyas also”.

\(^{172}\) As Panikkar remarked, religious reformation was not an end in itself, it was for social comfort and political advantage. K.N. Panikkar, “From Revolt to Agitation: Beginning of the National Movement”, *Social Scientist*, Vol. 25, Nos. 9-10, Sep-Oct. 1997, p.33.


\(^{174}\) K.C. Nārāyaṇan observed that the movement was in fact a class struggle because the Apphans and the Antaṇanams constituted the true proletariat of the community. See his “Avathārika”, in *V Türkiye Sampūṇa Kritikal*, p.17.

\(^{175}\) K.C. Nārāyaṇan wrote: “...For all reform movements of the 20th century other than that of V.T’s, women’s emancipation was only a marginal issue; but for the Nambūtiri movement, it was the central problem, the very hub of its activities”. *Ibid*, p.15.
interpreted variously, but the greatness attached to it gets faded in the context of the extremely difficult living conditions of the Antarjanams and the implicit male agenda involved in their emancipation. The reform process was greatly determined also by the impact of the European theory that the status of women was integral to the level and strength of a civilization.

6. The movement witnessed the replacement of the old patriarchs from the leadership of the community and the Sabha by energetic young men. Nobility and seniority in age were criterions of authority in the community. When community interests clashed with the attitude of the patriarchs in the new situation, and as modern methods of agitation required vigour and ‘manliness’, young men captured the movement.

7. The movement was noted for its vigorous struggle against the old system of patriarchy. The abdication of the karaṇavaṭ was the essential precondition for both the empowerment of the junior males and the emancipation of women. While the Family Regulation introduced democratic values within the family, swajātivivāham helped to refashion feudal concepts of gender relations.

---

176 K.C. Nārāyanam remarked that what motivated the Apphans was the natural right of women to acquire freedom from male supremacy. *Ibid*, p.18. But the condition of women among marumakkathāyam communities was far superior; they enjoyed greater amount of freedom and autonomy. Poly Hill, “Kerala is Different”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 20:4, 1986, p.789. It is described as “women’s liberation with a vengeance” because divorce was easy and polyandry was not unknown. See Louis Onwerkerk, *No Elephants for the Maharaja*, New Delhi, 1994, p.41.

177 The Rudolphs wrote: “Leadership in the caste association is no longer in the hands of those qualified by heredity – the senior or more able members of the lineage group which traditionally supplied village sub-caste leadership. The ‘availability’ of association leaders is conditioned by their ability to articulate and represent the purposes of the caste association, and for this purpose they must be literate in the ways of the new democratic politics. Men whose educational and occupational backgrounds assure these skills have moved into the leadership positions” L.I. Rudolph and S.H. Rudolph, “The Political Role of India’s Caste Associations” in Immanuel Wallerstein ed., *Social Change: The Colonial Situation*, New York, 1966, p.450.

178 In that sense it was a hegemonic struggle, in the Gramscian theoretical perspective; the struggle looked at gaining a ‘war of position’ against the conservatives as a means to achieve the reform agenda. For a discussion see Bipan Chandra, *India’s Struggle for Independence*, New Delhi, 1989, pp.25-26, 516-17.
8. The methods and ideology employed by the movement for both mobilization and agitation were new. The organizational structure of the Sabha was modern; agitation was through mass mobilization on specific grievances, based on majority opinion. Popular sympathy towards a cause was created through journalistic propaganda and through the deliberations in the annual and other meetings of the Sabha. Support of other communities for reform was also enlisted.

9. Print media played a decisive role in the process of identity-crafting among the Nambūtīris as members of the modern community and the nation. Apart from campaigning through the two organs of Yōgakṣēmam and Uṇṇi Nambūtiri, published works like short stories, drama, novels, pamphlets, reports etc played an important role in the creation of an ideological environment in favour of reform. A major part of the reform discourse was through the print media and it would be safe to say that print culture contributed heavily for the swift and sweeping victory of the Nambūtiri movement.

10. The movement played a decisive role in changing the Nambūtīris into law-abiding subjects of a secular state. Traditionally they had near-sovereign authority and they controlled and were law unto themselves and had considerably influenced the law-making machinery to a considerable extent. Now, with the establishment of the colonial rule, they lost their de facto authority in state matters; with the introduction of the new legislative culture, they had to depend on others even for restructuring their family and marriage traditions. Constitutionalism was intimately associated with modernity, nationalism and the growing civic sense.

---

179 For Anderson, the idea of the nation arrives as a resolution of the problems of both community and equality, generating an imaginary affinity between individuals geographically scattered and socially divided. Thus, the novel and the newspaper become the means for representing and the expression of, the kind of imagined community that is the ‘nation’. See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, Verso, London, 1983.

180 Arunima argues that the rise of the ‘print culture’ at the close of the 19th century had considerably promoted the process of the development of community identities and a public sphere in Kerala. See G. Arunima, “Imagining Communities-differently: Print, language and the ‘public sphere’ in colonial Kerala”, The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 43:1, 2006, pp.63-75.
11. The ideological basis for reform of customs and traditions was the concept of a new society derived from modern science and reason. The question of the continuation of customs and practices was settled on the basis of their adaptability to and utility in the new situation and to the extent they retarded the progress of the community.

12. The entire discourse on reform had been associated with the concept of the ‘fall’ and changes were justified as means to revive the past glory and a supposed golden age. It was argued that the Nambūtiris were a model community in the past having economic power, population strength, vitality and a social aura. Therefore, the new order sought to be introduced was not exactly new; in fact it was a revival of the old tradition in a new form. An appeal to tradition and to the golden age was seen in all realms of reform, whether in marriage, education or in family management.

13. Two prominent issues that determined inter-caste (Nambūtiri-Nāyaṛ) relationship were sambandham and tenancy and both were linked with the question of property. Both played significant role in creating the concept of the ‘other’, since they had trans-caste dimensions.

14. A fascination towards capitalism and entrepreneurship was evident from the beginning of the 20th century, at least among a few Nambūtiri families like

---

181 The volume Nambūtirimār, edited by Pārayil Rāman Nambūtiri, (Trissūr, 1093 M.E. i.e., 1918) to boost the reform process, presented the bygone age of the Nambūtiri dominance as true golden age and expressed great concern over the loss of this glorious past. The work urged the Nambūtiris to revive it in a new way.

182 Arunima observed that history as a mode of organizing community memory was already familiar to the three groups of Semitic origin in Kerala (Jews, Christians and Muslims); the Nambūtiris also used the rich and complex tradition of mnemo-history to organize their collective memory. Quoting Hervieu-Leger, she wrote: “the normativity of collective memory is reinforced by the fact of the group’s defining itself, objectively and subjectively, as a lineage of belief”. This lineage is constituted by the religious act of recalling a past that both defines the present and heralds the future. Ibid, p.66.

183 “In constantly constructing the notion of the Nambuthiri caste in opposition to the Nayars the reformers both exploited the growing resentment against the matrilineal community on other fronts (like tenancy relations) and bolstered their own sense of community”. G. Arunima, There Comes Papa, New Delhi, 2003, p.168.
Deśamaṅgalam and Kuṟṟ, and the Sabha consciously tried to cultivate and boost the spirit of enterprise through the founding of the Yōgakṣēmam Company and the Yōgakṣēmam Bank. The members of the community were continuously, but desperately, urged to invest in industry, trade and agriculture.\(^{184}\) The major thrust of the movement after the Ōngallūr revitalization was large scale investment in industry and agriculture.

15. While the Tamil Brahmins were perceived as a model community in the ritualistic sense, the Christians were a source of inspiration economically. The former deserved to be emulated for their high receptivity to change; they took to English education and accepted modern vocations without compromising the essentials of their customs and caste traditions.\(^{185}\) But the greatest sense of awe was shown to the Christians of Travancore for their enthusiasm, spirit of enterprise, innovativeness and receptiveness to new ideas.\(^{186}\) However, the former were not given enough respect due to their inferior ritual standing in relation to the

---

\(^{184}\) VT's famous resolution on “Yuvākkaḷum Tozhilīlāmâyum” at the 8th annual meeting of the Saṟgham was much appreciated. See YK, 17:29, Jan 5, 1927; 17:31, 1927 Jan. 12. He wanted the Nambūtiris to be entrepreneurial to have a progress in the community and for the success of the reform programme. In an article with the same title “Yuvākkāḷum Tozhilīlāmâyum” (YK, 18:51, Mar 21, 1928), Mōzhikunnam urged young men to enter into trade which was the emerging lucrative profession in the modern period. He pointed at the example of the Māppilas. Opportunities for government jobs were slowly fading out.

\(^{185}\) Mūthiringōd in a series of articles entitled “Samudāya Pariṣkaraṇathil Nām Ārē Anukarikkaṇam?” analyzed various communities including the Nāyars, Tiyyas, Christians and Tamil Brahmins and found the last one as a model community to be emulated. While the Nāyars and Tiyyas were not imitable due to the system of matriliney they practiced, the Christians, despite all their qualities, were defective for their alcoholism. Tamil Brahmins were an ideal community because they were receptive to modern education and ready to accept modern professions, they were intelligent (still not dishonest), they refused to follow customs that would retard their progress, they were independent, and they were not atheists as well. See YK, 18:44, Feb 25, 1928; 18:46, Mar 3, 1928; 18:47, Mar 10, 1928; 18:50, Mar 17, 1928. Even in 1980, the new Yōgakṣēmites repeatedly urged the Nambūtiris to imitate the Tamil Brahmins. See Editorial, YK, 1:9:10, May-June, 1980, pp3-4.

\(^{186}\) E.M.S, “Nambūtiriye Manuṣyanakkan”, in EMS-nṭē Sampūrga Kṛtipāl, pp.280,293; VT Bhaṭṭṭathiripād, “Yuvajanaṅgalum Thozhilīlāmâyum”, YK, 17:31, Jan. 12, 1927. It is been observed that what motivated the Nāyars to fight against marumakkathāyam was the realization that the economic success of the Christian community was partly due to the patrilineal system they were following. See Govindan Kutty. Kinship Systems in South and South East Asia – A Study. New Delhi, 1994, p.119.
Nambūtiris and their cultural exclusiveness, but the latter were looked upon with admiration, and fear, for their economic power and religious affiliations to the colonial rulers.

16. Generally, the Muslims were looked upon with hatred and fear. This might be because of their role in the Māppila outbreaks in which their main target was the Nambūtiris. They were looked upon as wild and unruly. After the Malabar Rebellion, Nambūtiris began to show indifference to the National Movement; eradication of pollution became a significant social issue thereafter and religious conversion and declining Hindu population became issues of heated debate.

---

188 They were looked with fear because they were emerging as an economic menace. In 1921 half the English literates were Christians, and of the fifty small banks operating in Travancore, eleven were in the Syrian Christian centre of Tiruvalla alone. From 1900 Syrian Christians had turned to rubber planting, and in the 1920s to the finance and export of cashew nut. Robin Jeffrey, “Travancore: Status, Class and the Growth of Radical Politics, 1869-1940 ~ The Temple Entry Movement” in Robin Jeffrey ed., *People, Princes and Paramount Power: Society and Politics in the Indian Princely States*, Delhi, 1978, p.146.
189 The Malabar rebellion played a significant role in the formation of modern Hinduism in Kerala. It hastened the anti-untouchability measures and brought forth the temple-entry issue. It gave birth to the frantic call ‘Hinduism in danger’ and stressed the need of taking urgent measures to ‘save’ the Hindu religion.