Namboodiri Brahmins: An Analysis of a Traditional Elite in Kerala

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Introduction

Social structural change, either radical or gradual, has long been an interest of anthropologists. This field has received considerable impetus during the past 10–15 years as more anthropologists have worked in complex plural societies of a type which can be described as follows: (Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966:6)

Social fields with many dimensions, with parts which may be only loosely integrated or even virtually independent from one another and that have to be studied over time if the factors underlying the changes in their social relationship are to be identified and analyzed.

Bailey has shown in the case of the Kondmals that where more than one structure works in the same field, conflicts may take the form of contradictions, and lead to the modification of the structural forms. He further indicates how in a situation of change, the conflicts project people out of one structure and into another. (Bailey 1958)

In this paper, I should like to isolate and examine selected features of the traditional social structure of Kerala with particular reference to the patrilineal Namboodiri Brahmins, a wealthy aristocratic landed caste group of highest ritual and secular rank, who maintained their position by the practice of

1 Research among Namboodiri Brahmins in Kerala was conducted during the summer of 1962 on a special small grant from the American Philosophical Society. Field work among Nayars in Kerala was undertaken in 1958–60 under the joint auspices of the American Association of University Women and the United States Educational Foundation in India. Additional work was done during the fall of 1962 as part of a larger study being carried out as a National Science Foundation Postdoctoral Fellow. A preliminary version of this paper was read at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Denver, Colorado in November 1965. The write-up and analysis of this data was completed while the author was Co-Principal Director of a project sponsored by NIMH.

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primogeniture and a complex relationship with lower ranking matrilineal castes. Following this I shall first examine some of the changes that have taken place in Kerala since the advent of the British, indicating why the Namboodiris (as compared with the matrilineal Nayars or patrilineal Tamil Brahmins) were able to maintain their traditional structure and life pattern until the early part of this century. That is, I shall attempt to show how the structural features of primogeniture, plus their wealth in the land and their high socioreligious status, were decisive in influencing Namboodiri conservatism and in leading them to resolve a status conflict between their religious and political roles by retreating. Secondly, I shall indicate how the dichotomy between the traditional and modern has in effect led to a radical reform movement among the younger generation who favour a complete break with the traditions of the past. This break is leading to a sharp breakup of Namboodiri “theocratic supremacy in Malabar and the... [destruction of] the landed aristocracy of Malabar.”

Traditional Social Structure

Certain salient features of the social structure of Kerala were crucial in delimiting the traditional roles and statuses of the Namboodiri Brahmins in Kerala. Perhaps the two most critical features were: a) the existence of a loose, feudalistic type of political organization, permitting considerable local autonomy and b) the system of primogeniture found in South India solely among the Namboodiris. This system permitted the consolidation and maintenance of power and wealth in individual families.

In Kerala, due to ecological factors, the settlement pattern has always been of the dispersed type, with each middle and upper class family living in its own spacious compound set off from neighboring houses. On the whole, authority tended to run from the large landlord family to those under him, in a way reminiscent of the European feudal manor. Village organization was always very loose, and it has always been difficult to say where one village began and another ended. Village unity was always a nebulous concept. Any given village (and the word translates badly in the context of dispersed settlements) tended to be dominated by either a high subcaste Nayar family or group of families, or else by a ruling Kshatriya or Namboodiri family.

K. P. Padmanabhan Menon (1924:III, 357) describes Malabar prior to the arrival of the Portuguese as:

1 In 1937, S. S. Ayyer wrote in a chapter dealing with a Malabar village in Thomas and Ramakrishna, eds. (p. 275).

"A strong and growing protestant party (especially among the younger folk) who want to break away from the traditions of the past. They take to English education, are in favour of marriage in the community for all, and want even partition of illom property... Some of the Nambudiri youth preach radical social reform – inter-dining, inter-marriage between communities, widow remarriage, breaking of purdah for their women and so on. These reforms, if successful, will result in the breakup of Nambudiri theocratic supremacy in Malabar and the partition of their estates into fragments which will destroy the landed aristocracy of Malabar".

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The feudalism of Malabar resembled the corresponding continental system of Europe in
the 13th and 14th centuries... The petty chieftains more or less exercised the right... not
simply of taking up arms between themselves but also were so far free and independent
as to wage war against their own feudal heads themselves.

Politically, even the largest state in Kerala prior to European contact, that of
the Zamorin of Calicut (who was in the process of territorial expansion and
consolidation with the help of the Muslims on the coast and the Namboodiris of
Central Kerala, at the time the Portuguese arrived) was loosely organized and
depended considerably on the allegiance of the various local chieftains. These
local chieftains were usually either Nayars or Samandans, though in a few places
in Central Kerala there actually were minor Namboodiri sovereigns. In certain
other places in Central Kerala, there was a peculiar institution known as the
Samketam. A Samketam was a kind of temple corporation made up of a group
of Namboodiri households (known as illams) in a given locale. This corporation
constituted a self-contained and independent community exercising sovereign
powers and “Owning no sovereign except the Yogam” (i.e. the board of the
Samketam) (K. P. Padmanabhan Menon 1924:1IV, 103).

The history of the Namboodiri community still presents certain puzzles,
and major disagreements exist among historians as to their exact date of arrival
in Kerala. According to the legendary Keralolpatty (a traditional account of
Kerala history, said to have been set down in writing in the 18th. century),
Brahmins were brought to the southwest coast of India by the sage-warrior
Parasurama, and settled in thirty-two grammam in the north (in what is now the
South Canara District of Mysore State) and thirty-two in the south in what is
now Kerala State. (It is hard to define a Namboodiri grammam in simple terms.
Each grammam, at least each of the major ones, had its own temple, and its own
set of authorities for both religious and secular law and its enforcement, though
some of the smaller or lower-ranking grammam deferred to the authorities in the
major ones. Most grammam were somewhat localized geographically, with their
illams located within a radius of 10 to 25 miles of the grammam temple. But since
the territory of one grammam might overlap that of another, these cannot be
thought of as communities in the usual sense.) There clearly is no sound basis
for the legend of Parasurama, and indeed, the majority of modern historians
hold that the Namboodiris came to Kerala sometime between the first century
B.C. and the 4th. century A.D., though there are some, notably Elamkulam
Kunjan Pillai, who hold that they came even later. (E. K. Pillai, 1953).

The geographic distribution of Namboodiris in Kerala was never completely
uniform. Certain areas were noted for containing thick Namboodiri concen-

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1 Some illams of particularly large grammams might be located more than 25 miles from the
grammam temple. This was certainly true after the end of the 18th. century. At least in
some areas it is hard to be certain of the distribution of Illams prior to this because of the
disruptions caused by the Mysorean invasions. There was some slight preference for
grammam endogamy, though considerations of rank, status, and wealth were more critical
in arranging a marriage. It was not common to marry a daughter to an illam more than
two or three days' journey away by foot.
trations, whereas others might contain only a few widely scattered illams or none at all. The area of thickest Namboodiri concentration was in parts of South Malabar and Cochin where they also had the most direct political control. Namboodiris located in some areas were said to rank higher than those in other parts. There were no Namboodiris south of the Alwaye River on the Cochin Travancore border who possessed the right to perform the Yaga sacrifices. (It is conceivable that there were some higher ranking Namboodiris there earlier who were converted to Christianity during the early centuries of this era, as many of the Travancorean Syrian Christians claim to have been converted either from Namboodiris or from high Nayar subcastes.) In parts of Trichur taluk where there was the densest Namboodiri concentration, the area was for a long time dominated by the so-called Yogiatiripads or ecclesiastical heads of the Vadakunnathan and Perumanam Devaswoms (temple boards). Where Namboodiris did not rule directly, or where they had direct rule but were weak, they would align themselves with different rulers. At an earlier period of uncertain date, two groups of Namboodiris came to assume central importance in Kerala: those belonging to Panniyur grammam, said to have been loyal to the Zamorin of Calicut, and those of Chovaram (now Sukupuram) grammam said to have been loyal to the Maharaja of Cochin. At one point, the Panniyur grammam Namboodiris greatly displeased the Zamorin. Using some religious matter as a pretext, he managed to get them degraded and replaced, at least in part, by the Sukupuram grammam people, who also were more than eager to break the power of their rivals. On the other hand, on other occasions different rulers would court Namboodiri allies. Thus, when the Zamorin was in the process of expanding his kingdom, he found it necessary to win the allegiance of the heads of two of the largest temple boards of Cochin in order to maintain his power in that area. When the Maharaja of Cochin with the help of Travancore recaptured that part of his kingdom, he found that in order to consolidate his power, he had to break the power of the Namboodiri Illams in Trichur.

Apart from their direct political control, they were often able to exercise considerable indirect power because of their status as the highest spiritual authorities in Kerala. The custom of organized Pattini or fasting by a group of Namboodiri Brahmans was an instance in point here. K. R. Pisharoti (1934) provides a clear description of this.

When a local chief becomes very aggressive and trespasses on the elementary rights of the people, the Brahmin leaders all assemble together in a hall especially built for the purpose where every arrangement for a grand feast has already been made. Then they all sit down...

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1 It is striking that the largest number of illams, including almost all of the high ranking ones, were located in the area where the greatest amount of land could be given over to rice cultivation. This is not entirely a coincidence. Apart from gifts by local rulers, most of the wealth of the Namboodiris came from the land. On the other hand, they refused to have anything to do with the land directly, preferring to leave the management of agriculture to tenants. It is a fact that throughout Kerala, rice and occasionally coconuts have been given or to tenant cultivation, whereas the majority of cash crops such as pepper have been cultivated directly by landowners with the help of laborers hired by the day, week, or year. Such crops usually require direct supervision in the fields.
After all have been given water and before they have performed their pranahuti (oblation to the vital airs), the leader amongst them stands up and publicly announces the name of the chief who has hurt them. Then he narrates the wrongs he has done and finally calls upon the assembled guests to get them redressed before they touch their food. Thereupon the Brahmins all throw down the water in their hands; they rise up and take a vow that they will not eat until their wrongs are avenged... There are indeed some conditions imposed upon the fasters and one of the rules is that the period of fasting should never exceed seven days. If the... chief does not turn over a new leaf before the week is out, there is yet a higher rite prescribed. On the eighth day all the strikers leave the hall in a body and [purify themselves]... meanwhile they have got ready a wooden or stone statue of the wicked chief; this is then invested with life... and then hanged in front of the temple... This final rite over, the Gramakkars all leave the village in a body in search of a new abode, where alone they break their fast. This final rite is supposed to be potent enough to bring instantaneous destruction of the offender... Pattini then is a sanctified weapon of defence which religious leaders in Malabar have instituted against oppressive chiefs.

Another indirect consequence of their spiritual supremacy was that they were often able to function as "neutrals" between different regions. Thus they had the unique role of being considered above and beyond territorial concerns. Rulers from all areas would give freely to the Namboodiri, as it also brought merit to them to give to Brahmins. Every village, even ones without Namboodiri illams, used to have a temple, and as one Namboodiri put it:

"Every month one temple or another used to have a feast for Brahmins. Namboodiris would go from one to another and carry messages, even between regions which were at war with one another. We were good diplomats. One will say: "Are you going to see the Raja? I have a very good friend, tell him about this man." And another will say: "Y is going to sell land, I think you should tell Z, he might be wanting to buy."

In other words, the Namboodiris had an essential communication function for the preservation of the system. Therefore the Nayars had a value in preserving the position of the Namboodiris as crucial points of the communication network. Indeed, prior to the British, Sanskrit, the language at which the Namboodiris were expert, was the medium for all official communication.

Namboodiri skill in Sanskrit was fostered by the local rulers who often helped subsidize Vedic sacrifices, recitations, etc. Furthermore, it was often a Namboodiri who taught Sanskrit to the children of ruling families. It should be noted in passing that, because of the close relationship between the Namboodiris and the matrilineal castes in Kerala, there was a far greater Sanskritic influence among non-Brahmins than has been noted for the east coast. Nayars, especially in Central Kerala where the Namboodiris were most concentrated, were strongly influenced by the daily customs of Namboodiris including their interest in Sanskrit education; in consequence the Nayars of Kerala were far more literate than their equivalents on the east coast.

It is striking that in Kerala, Brahmins were not expected to participate in the important life crisis ceremonies of castes lower than themselves, as did their counterparts in the rest of India. One never saw a Namboodiri coming to purify an ordinary Nayar taravad after a death (though an Embrandiri from South Canara might do this.) There was some exception to this in the case of the highest
Nayar or Samandan families, at least for participation in coronation ceremonies, but the Namboodiris who involved themselves in deaths in those families were considered to be very low by members of their own community.

In contrast to Brahmins in other parts of India, the Namboodiris were always wealthy landlords, with even the poorest of them living in relatively spacious compounds and owning land. It would have been rare to find a Namboodiri illam without many servants. Occasionally in the wealthiest illams a few servants might come from poorer illams, but most of the servants were Nayars or east coast Brahmins. Though Namboodiris were ranked in several diverse ways on the basis of their rights and privileges, their wealth, and in part their occupations, they cannot be classified into different sub-castes. All Namboodiri males had the right to dine together, and there was free mingling among the males of different ranks. From the point of view of this article, I deal with all Namboodiris in general, though some distinction is made between Vedic and non-Vedic Namboodiris.

Structurally, one of the most significant differences between the Brahmins of Kerala and other Brahmins in South India was the practice of having only the eldest son take a wife or wives from his own caste. The younger sons either remained celibate, or else formed permanent or semi-permanent liaisons with women from the somewhat lower matrilineal castes, who constituted close to 20 percent of the population of the coast. These liaisons, though regarded as marriages by members of the matrilineal castes, were not considered as such by the Namboodiri community. Unfortunately, a full analysis of Namboodiri marriage customs is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is clear that this practice was crucial in maintaining their position as a landed aristocracy and

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1 In his discussion of Nayars and Newars, Dumont has distinguished between what he calls status groups and castes or subcastes. "Among the Nayars, an exogamous lineage or cluster of lineages of a certain status cannot be called a sub-caste... All these are actually status groups which may be absolutely (or practically) endogamous at the one end and exogamous at the other." It is clear that this holds with even more force when one deals with Namboodiris. Though it was not a preferred choice, a girl for whom no other suitor was available might have been married to a lower ranking illam. True, after her marriage she might no longer be allowed to enter the kitchen and puja room in her father's house, but she was not outcasted, nor did her family suffer on account of having arranged such a marriage for one of their daughters. As regards occupation, it is true that some Namboodiris rank lower than others, such as the ones who had taken to the practice of Ayurvedic medicine, but it is also true that some other occupational divisions merely marked off specific illams in a larger group, as for example, the two illams in charge of the schools in Trichur and Tirunavaya respectively. And certainly a group like the eight illams having the right to practice medicine could hardly be called a subcaste. I think that Dumont's concept of ranked status groups is more applicable here than the concept of subcaste. (Dumont, 1964 p. 98)

2 The custom of only the eldest son marrying was justified traditionally by the Anacharam which stated: "The eldest son should marry and enter Grahastasramam (a householder's life)." Thus it was claimed that traditional law only required that the eldest son need or ought marry. This was very strictly followed except for certain specified and clearly defined instances such as when the eldest son has died without producing an heir, or has married three times but only managed to produce daughters.
their local power base. Only permitting the marriage of the eldest son meant that the property of the illam was never subject to partition. The large Namboodiri estates thus remained intact, and any new addition by gift or purchase only served to increase a family’s position. These wealthy landlords had far more influence and power than they would have had if their property had been split every generation or two, as was the case with the Brahmins of other parts of India.

Younger sons, especially those belonging to families of importance, would tend to form marital liaisons with women belonging to royal matrilineal families such as that of the Zamorin of Calicut, or at least to important local chieftain families. By means of those liaisons, and the interpersonal relationships so engendered, an individual Namboodiri might gain critical and direct entry into policy. Often through such connections men got themselves appointed as advisors, ministers, etc. to the rulers. Besides, a clever father or brother-in-law of the ruler could exercise considerable indirect influence, even if without actual political office.

Reaction to the British

During the mid-eighteenth century, Kerala underwent a major upheaval as the Mysorean Muslims under Hyder Ali and his son Tipoo Sultan invaded the northern half of the State, and were in the process of pushing on towards Travancore in the South when the British entered the war and defeated them. When the British came to Malabar, the Nayars were deprived of their traditional occupation as soldiers. As the Trichur gazetteer puts it: (A. S. Menon 1962:174)

But the Nairs, notwithstanding the decline in their political and military power, still formed the chief community of the land... [they] had renounced the sword and shield and taken to the plough.

As soon as western education became available, they rapidly saw it as a way to compete for position and status vis-a-vis one another. Western education could lead to a man’s entering the modern world as either a professional or white collar employee; and these rapidly became suitable roles for the younger males in matrilineal households. By the mid-nineteenth century there were numerous Nayar males who were lawyers, doctors, or teachers, in addition to those who held political office. In the same way the Tamil Brahmins, both in Madras and Kerala, lacking the great estates of the Namboodiris, often took to western education as a means to enhance their position economically and socially. On the other hand, the Namboodiris, especially those of higher status, completely withdrew from the social and political arenas. As one Namboodiri put it:

When the British came, we were sitting with hatred in the mind toward this education. Only when it came to the point that there was no other go, when we had to make a livelihood, or now when we are going to lose our land, did we accept it.

Using religious purity as their justification, most Namboodiris withdrew
haughtily to their estates, and refused to allow their sons and daughters any
form of modern education.

As the British assumed political power in Malabar, or as centralization of
power took place (as in Cochin and Travancore), and the Nayars lost their role
as soldiers and political advisers, the Namboodiris along with them lost their
political status, though they retained their (A. S. Menon 1962:174)
unchallenged spiritual supremacy. They continued to dominate also the economic and
social life of the country by virtue of their superior position as jenmis.

Put another way, when the power of the Namboodiris as well as the Nayar
chieftains was broken by the Maharaja of Cochin and the British in Malabar,
it created for the Namboodiris a situation where they had nothing to gain and
everything to lose. Entering the new world via western education would cer-
tainly have endangered their ritual rank since it would have involved doing
polluting or semi-polluting things; at the very least, it would have made it
impossible for them to perform certain rituals. They clearly could not preserve
their religious purity if they entered the new political arena with its vastly
different rules. Further, they would deny the basis of their traditional political
status if they went along with the British, because the British (as well as the
newly consolidated states) had no need for traditional governmental methods
based on sacred rights, landed power, and marital relations. They certainly
could not have intermarried with the British. But the replacement of the
traditional political structure by a new one did not in any way curtail their
wealth. They were supplanted, but without land reform or any threat to their
ownership of property. Thus they could resolve their status conflict between
religious supremacy and political power in favour of the former.

The Namboodiri Reform Movement

Around the turn of this century some Namboodiri males, usually younger
sons, began pressing for reform within their community. In its initial stages, the
movement was double pronged, emphasizing the demand for English education
and the right for all Namboodiri males to marry within their own caste. The
following quotation, from an elderly man who had participated in the move-
ment, illustrates some of the prevalent attitudes of that time:

I came here [to his Nayar wife's house] 60 years back. At that time Namboodiris were only
studying Sanskrit. That was their education. Then, the males of this family were studying
for B.A. and such classes, and a few had become eminent because of their education. So I
understood my position. I wanted to study English, but as I was a bit old to begin it, I
decided to learn in Malayalam all about history, geography, and all sorts of books. After
reading all that, I began to write articles and reviews in the newspapers. Then, I said:
"agitate in this society for English education and for marrying in own caste." Marrying
like me, it was just like keeping, not a real marriage. My children cannot make any claim
for the property of my illam. At that time I was all on the side of modernization.

By the turn of the century, Nayar males had clearly begun to have more
power and increased economic independence (Schneider and Gough 1961:647):

In the later nineteenth century, new, small branch-property groups were perpetually being founded through the wives of individuals who had amassed personal property... The Malabar Marriage act of 1896 was an attempt to... give legal support to the increasing demands for recognition of the status of the elementary family.

Namboodiri younger sons, through their alliances with the Nayars and other matrilineal families, were being continually exposed to the changes going on among Nayars. In a very real sense, the Nayar males became a reference group for the Namboodiri younger sons, and this was reinforced when the Nayars began objecting to marrying their women to Namboodiris, as they were considered old-fashioned and backward and not able to even partially provide for their wives. In Cochin State, the Nayar regulation of 1920 served to some extent to undermine the traditional relationship between Nayars and Namboodiri younger males, because in part it provided for some legal responsibility for maintaining the wife and children on the part of non-Nayar husbands (A. S. Menon 1962:222). This clearly made Sambandan marriages less attractive to the Namboodiris. Thus, Namboodiri younger sons became aware of their position as second class citizens in comparison to the Nayar males who had English education and were slowly acquiring rights over their own children, as well as in relation to their own elder brothers who were permitted to marry within their own caste.

Namboodiri younger sons, through their contacts with Nayar families, were also slowly made aware of the growing agitation among Nayars for permission to partition the family property. In addition, once they began examining things, they became acutely aware of the vast gap between the position of the Namboodiri women and that of the matrilineal women. Under the impetus of a husband who believed in female education and the end of the purdah system, one Namboodiri woman actually organized a series of meetings for women, thus adding another prong to the reform movement.¹

¹ The following quote is from a Malayalam article in Unni Namboodiri magazine (vol. 28, 1947, pp. 63–73) about Parvathy Nenmarimangalam, a woman from a non-Vedic illam of Trinjalakuda gramam, who became a leader for female education with the encouragement of her liberal-minded husband (English translation by C. M. Parvathy, amended):

"The young Namboodiris objected to the traditional customs, marriage restrictions, lack of education and financial status. Sri E. M. S. Namboodiripad and Sri Kuttan Namboodiripad took the initiative in the search for solutions. The articles and dramas written and acted by young Namboodiris attracted young women, and resulted in a considerable change in their attitudes. The first meeting of antharjanams (married Namboodiri women) was held at Guruvayour... Then came a great commotion among the old orthodox Namboodiri Vaidikars, Odukkans, and Enangans, who became angry and threatened to outcaste them. But... Parvathy Antharjanam presided at a meeting of young Namboodiri women... The meeting held at Karal Mana was attended by about 100 Namboodiri women.

A select committee was formed to inquire into details [in the Cochin Legislature]. After hearing Parvathy Antharjanam's speech which discussed the injustices suffered by Namboodiri women, the bill [against polygamy] was passed without any amendment. Thereafter, a sudden change became apparent among Namboodiri women within a few years' time. They began to give up constantly carrying umbrellas; there was a case of a widow..."
This movement was crystalized in 1917 around a case involving the Trichur Madham (Vedic School) where many Rig Vedic Namboodiris went to study.

You know the date of the Russian revolution. That month, that same year, was a day of revolution for Namboodiris. Until that time, nobody went against the word of the Wadhyan or Vydiyans. But then so many people were against the Wadhyan (the hereditary head of the Madham). Among Namboodiris two parties formed: the youngsters against the Wadhyan and the old Karanavans in the other party. That day, both Karanavan’s orders and Wadhyan’s orders were not heeded. Also, at that time “X” Namboodiripad made speeches that everyone should learn English and for that they made him atone. In 1919 Namboodiri schools were formed. From that day onwards progress came. Next after that was the marriage of younger brother before older brother. That also created havoc. Then the third was temple entry. In Trichur it came first. All Hindus can go inside the temple.¹

It was clear that in order to bring about changes in Namboodiri life, the hold and authority of Namboodiri elders had to be broken. These men, the heads of the two Madhams or Yogams, plus the Vydiyans or supreme authorities on matters of ritual, and the orthodox elders all protested violently against each feature of the reform movement. In order to agitate successfully for social change, the Namboodiri youth had to decide that they did not care about pollution, that they did not care about the maintenance of their spiritual or sacred status, that they were willing to give this up in order to participate actively in the modern world. In this sense, they had to accept a more radical change than the Nayars, whose social position did not have a ritual counterpart.

Today one can find illams almost everywhere on the continuum, from the rare ones that still seem to belong in the early 19th century to those where all castes move freely, both boys and girls are educated, and are in essence hardly recognizable as Namboodiri establishments.² Most of the orthodox Namboodiris, who remarried; girls continued in school even after puberty... But at this time some of the leaders like E.M.S.... left this organization as they were attracted by politics.”

¹ "The Rig-Vedic Namboodiris, in fact all the Malayala Brahmins belonging to the thirty-two southern villages [Kerala grammam] as opposed to the South Canara grammam, own spiritual allegiance to two ecclesiastical heads or Vadhyans as they are called. These two heads are known as the Trichur and Tirunavayi Vadhyas... The two Yogams... own immense estates endowed from very ancient times, the proceeds of which are spent by the Vadhyans upon their Vedic institutions containing hundreds of Namboodiri youths who are fed and lodged there and who may remain there as long as they wish to continue the study of Vedas. These mutts are thus the seats of Vedic learning in Malabar." (The State Manual of Travancore 1906, p. 272) Thus, when the younger generation rebelled against the authority of the Trichur Wadhyan, they were in effect rebelling against the religious establishment.

² The movement was not even and people in some areas took to the new ways more rapidly than others despite the opposition of the older generation. It is striking though not unexpected that more rapid change occurred among the poorer non-vedic Namboodiris throughout Kerala, and that among the higher ranking Namboodiris it occurred most rapidly in Central Kerala (the area between Trichur and Calicut) particularly among those belonging to the Riq Veda, whose children studied in either Trichur or Tirunavaya. The two regions which stand out as the most backward are around Irinjalakuda in the southern part of Cochin and in parts of North Malabar near Taliparamba. Interestingly, in both areas the majority of illams belong to the Yajur Veda. Yajur Vedis most often studied...
plus the majority of elder sons (even in modernized illams), have tended to align themselves nowadays with the Congress Party. The same has been true of those Namboodiris belonging to the most wealthy families where even after partition of property each member still has a substantial share. Among younger sons, on the other hand, there has been a marked tendency to accept Marxist or Communist ideologies. Those reformers who have stayed loyal to Congress have consistently tended to side with the more socialistically minded of that group.

One of the prime reasons why many of the reformers, especially the younger ones, have tended to side with the Communists is that the orthodox wing among the Namboodiris, especially those most concerned about the maintenance of their caste purity and caste privileges, have been consistently on the side of Congress since 1947, with respect to economic and social matters. To some extent, the adherence to Marxist ideologies seems to correlate with the degree of frustration which the individual Namboodiri suffered during his earlier years, and to some extent with a genuine involvement with and concern for the lower caste people in the area. It is striking that in Kerala, where Namboodiri Brahmins, despite their wealth and high ritual status, were considered a backward class for many years, there is none of the anti-Brahmin feeling found in Tamilnad. A Namboodiri who sides with the lower castes is not only accepted, but often looked to for advice by less educated low caste people.

One might postulate that the course of modernization and change in Kerala, particularly among the Kerala Hindus, has differed from other parts of South India, because of the fact that the traditional pattern of social and economic relations in Kerala was more of a feudalistic nature. And that the uneven adaptation during the 19th and early 20th centuries had to do with the way in which different structural elements of the feudalistic society coped with new forms, patterns, and opportunities. To the extent that other parts of South India, such as Madras and Mysore, did not have a similar traditional pattern, their adaptation was of a different nature.

In summary, it is clear that the traditional family structure, ritual status, and political position of the Namboodiris, and more importantly their economic position, have prevented them from making any sort of gradual adaptation to the new situation. With the Tamil Brahmins adaptation was facilitated by a greater flexibility in many respects: since all the sons were expected to marry, in many of these families it was possible for one or two of the senior males to manage the ancestral land while other males took up residence in the cities with their families and worked at salaried jobs. Thus it was less difficult for them to maintain their traditional family life and their ancestral landholdings, which in any case were considerably smaller than those in Kerala because of the practice of frequent partition. When the Namboodiris attempted to adapt to the changed conditions, it almost invariably required much more radical change in family structure, ritual status, and economic position. Among the Namboodiri reformers, it has been necessary to abandon completely the socio-religious prerogatives of Kerala.
Brahmins, and most of them have given up their study of the Veda along with many other ritual observances. Thus the dichotomy between the traditional and modern structures has in effect led to a contradiction, which is now in the process of being resolved by radical social change.

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