

# NEO-BRAHMANIC DISCOURSE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KERALA SOCIETY - *THE MARGINALISED AND THE QUESTION OF IDENTITY*

K.M VISHNU NAMBOODIRI \*  
ASST. PROFESSOR OF HISTORY  
MAR THOMA COLLEGE TIRUVALLA  
KERALA, INDIA

**Abstract :** Swami Vivekananda was the first to enumerate the concept of Neo Brahmanism, in light of colonial interferences and the growth of a new civil society of the *Bhadraloks* and *Babus*. The middle class society had been the main beneficiary of the colonial modernity. At the same time the prevalence of a Brahmin – Colonial nexus determined the power structures, at least in the case of ‘parts of central India and Malabar’. The middle class was able to capitalize on culture and class consciousness, by being the part of structural changes, in the sphere of education, social legislation, economic growth, so on and so forth. This was, in a literal sense, a conge for the Brahmin society from the sublime contradistinction attributed to it in the past. But the new social order was conscious of the issue of identity and subscribed to the view that caste constituted the essence of a timeless community in India.

**Index Terms –** NEO BRAHMINIC, DISCOURSE, IDENTITY, KERALA, CULTURE

## I. INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda was the first to enumerate the concept of Neo Brahmanism, in light of colonial interferences and the growth of a new civil society of the *Bhadraloks* and *Babus*.<sup>1</sup>The middle class society had been the main beneficiary of the colonial modernity.<sup>2</sup> At the same time the prevalence of a Brahmin – Colonial nexus determined the power structures, at least in the case of ‘parts of central India and Malabar’.<sup>3</sup>The middle class was able to capitalize on culture and class consciousness, by being the part of structural changes, in the sphere of education, social legislation, economic growth, so on and so forth. This was, in a literal sense, a conge for the Brahmin society from the sublime contradistinction attributed to it in the past. But the new social order was conscious of the issue of identity and subscribed to the view that caste constituted the essence of a timeless community in India.

The polemics of class and caste, dabbed the identity of the newly formed Indianness and issues of nationalism. While colonialism certainly did not create caste its docility and divulgence as an instrumental force in, reconstituting caste as a feign entity, that could encompass the imbroglia of Indian religious and cultural practice, is worth mentioning. In the colonial interferences the caste didn’t exhaust rather, as an idiom of individual and collective identification, it underwent a significant transformation.<sup>4</sup> In literal sense the manifest destiny of the western rationalism was to supplement non western cultures.<sup>5</sup> The restructuring of caste connected to the colonial desire to ‘map’ the land and the custom of India, its marriage system and kinship pattern, funeral rites, adherence to Brahmanic priesthood and principle, and the Geo spatiality of different groups.<sup>6</sup> This was in parallel to the changes addressed in the structural facets of India.

<sup>1</sup> According to Vivekananda the social ideal of this newly awakened Hinduism can only be Brahmanism. Yet, he doesn’t mean Brahmanism by birth but by spiritual qualification - in the sense of other Hindu reform movements and particularly of the Buddha.

<sup>2</sup> K.N Panikker, *Culture and ideology*, p.2115.

<sup>3</sup> Sunil.Elayadom, *Cross – Current within; A Cultural Critique of Kerala Renaissance*, p.3.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Conclusion and the making of modern India*, p.79.

<sup>5</sup> L.E. Llewlyn, *The Legacy of women’s uplift in India*, p.184.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolas .B. Dirks, *Op.cit.*, p.46.

Identity conceptually is multi structurally conditioned and condensed, which is over determined than the concept of class that is singularly determined by economic relationship.<sup>7</sup> Symptomatic analysis that explain the success of ethnic and politico-religious movements as signs of socio-cultural disorders, cultural weakness and/or lack of appropriate modernization fail to familiarize these super structural elements, in its right sense. Both the critics and champions of modernity take west as their point of departure, and political language that deviates from the accepted repertoire of public expression are negated to the full. Historically specific and culturally nuanced experimentations are vital in dealing with the concept of identity.<sup>8</sup> Generally, the westernized elites in India fail to appreciate the functions of these non-materialistic aspects such as the religious values, in the role determination of the mass. They resort to equation, slotting and comparison of structures and systems undermining their distinctions.

Elements pertaining to colonialism such as atavism, albinism, cultural hegemony, resource-capitalization and the similar have a bearing on Brahmanic Institution and system. The desire to win control over the fellow being and rest of the kind is an inherent trait of human being and is remarked as Atavism, this is attributed in the form of pressure applied for pleasure. This aspect is pertinent in Brahmanism. The Derma-pigmentation of the Brahmins separated the relevant category from the rest. Their complexion, to a little extent, provided them with a psychic advantage over the others. Albinism, proved a great deal in legitimizing their authority. They had generated a systematic, 'complex whole' of culture which the mass aspired to, and even in the days of limited interaction and by the opening given by colonial modernity stood fantastically complicated structure endlessly variant, out of a very small number of elements. Brahmanism as a colonizing structure became interactive and in light of independence from British rule became the benchmark of Hinduism and cultural revivalism.

Culture for the revivalist meant not only spiritual escalation against the growth of externalities, but also human needs that become associated with religion, lingua franca, lineage and the aspiration for territorial reign. The leadership of the new movement upheld the patriarchal norms and the *Varna*, caste system but not interchangeable, in essence, going to the extent of beheading a *Panchama* for preaching austerities and aspiring for heaven.<sup>9</sup> They turn hostile against the concept of secularism, and rate the religion to be the zenith of Indian cultural identity.<sup>10</sup> The 'imagined Community' of the *Hindurashtra* model moved from a religious versus cultural issue in National Identity.<sup>11</sup> A great deal of patch works came up in codifying and letting loose, the social aggrandizement, in intellectual, philosophical, mystic, scientific, humanitarian, and aesthetic realm. This is indeed the new discourse on which deliberation is done in the proposed piece of writing. Neo Brahmanism stood in the line of drafting Institutional spirituality to form an organizing content among various groups within the particular religion.<sup>12</sup> This hegemonic discourse proved to a great deal in de-orientizing the Brahmins and orientizing the non-Brahmin Hindus of India.<sup>13</sup> *Smarthas* were now to be placed as supposedly legitimate representatives of the nation, who were to be placed as patrons of rituals, symbols, *pujas*, and *yatras*, for the unity of *Sanadhana dharma*. These gimmicks, for a fundamentally hinduized society and people, perhaps represent the modern manifestation of the psychic polarity between disciplined control and violent power embedded in the sway of Brahmanism on the mass culture. This enquiry into 'cultural identity is an unconscious human acquirement which becomes consciously silent only when there was a perceived threat to its integrity'.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Madan Sarup, Tasneem Raja, *Identity, culture and the postmodern world*, p.54.

<sup>8</sup> Saba Mohammed, *Cultural studies and ethnic absolutism*, p.1.

<sup>9</sup> Suvira Jaiswal, *Semitizing Hinduism; Changing Paradigm of Brahmanical Integration*, p.30.

<sup>10</sup> T.N Madan, *Secularism in its place*, p.748.

<sup>11</sup> Asutosh vashney, *Democracy, Development and countryside*, p.230.

<sup>12</sup> Chetan Bhatt, *Liberation and Purity*, pp.226-27.

<sup>13</sup> Jukka Jounki, *orientalism and India*, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Sudhir Kakkar, *Colour of Violence*, p.144.

Megan Vaughan's asserts that customs and traditions were created out of face to face encounters of the colonizer and colonized.<sup>15</sup> Homi Bhabha, places the term interaction instead of encounter for this process.<sup>16</sup> The interaction between the non Brahmanic customs and the practices of the Smarthas tradition can be placed in the same regard. Franz Fanon feels that 'the adaption of language and form of representation of the colonizer has further negative effects on the indigenous subject in the representational stereotypes that are constructed, which tend to infantilize, primitivise, decivilize, and essentialize them'.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the assimilated cultures of the neo Brahmanic scheme, the subjectivized, distinct systems are indeed in a spite of bother. The system such as the *Kaulachara* has now been pressed down to the status of secondary systems. This indeed creates a division and alienation in the self identity of the redrafted sections of the society.

Lacan outlines a theory of identity formation in reference to the image of completeness in the body of another person outside the self. This begins a process of identification with images in the construction of the self.<sup>18</sup> An aspiration towards the 'lofty', 'sublime', Brahmanic sphere is generated and this led to process such as 'Templeisation' of which Vasudha Narayan speaks at large.<sup>19</sup> Stress is given to culture and representation of their past being, central to the creation of both new forms of subject formation and new forms of social organizations which are inevitable for the discourse in the post-colonial era. Neo Brahmanism in this way sustains its activity and function. It as a post-colonial system cannot remain satisfied merely with holding people in its grip and emptying the real 'brain' of all 'forms and content', using a 'perverted logic', it restates the past of the oppressed people and 'distorts, disfigures and destroys' the real identity.<sup>20</sup>

Now it is the time to analyze how Neo Brahmanism assumes the character of a discourse. Michel Foucault is of the opinion that discourses are 'framework of thought which occurs when dispersed utterances of statements begin to coagulate in to more concrete conceptual frames'.<sup>21</sup> He tries to understand the conditions which make such 'coagulation' possible and represents the rule of the formation which turns these statements in to discourses. The four essential conditions that he places for this to happen are<sup>22</sup>-

1. They have a common object of analysis.
2. They have a common mode of speaking which unites all these statements.
3. They employ a coherent system of concepts and finally.
4. A consistent theme unites them.

Neo Brahmanism satisfies all the preconditions of being a discourse. It is indeed a coagulated, conceptual frame composed of dispersed utterances pertaining to social formations in post independent India and the transformations in the frame of the pre independent 'Hindu' society. The religious sphere stands the object of analysis. The Sanskritic, *Smartha*, symbols, images and rituals are the modes of infliction, mystification of the past and the reiteration of the folklores, legends, hearsays and similar elements for uniting the distinct elements in to a lone entity is

<sup>15</sup> Madan Sarup, Tasneem Raja, *Op.cit.*, pp.80-85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Wyrick Deborah, *Fanon for beginners*, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan, fonana*, p.21.

<sup>19</sup> John Stratton Hawley, Vasudha Narayanan, *The life of Hinduism*, p.231.

<sup>20</sup> Ashcroft, Tiffin, Griffiths, *Postcolonial studies reader*, p.154.

<sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, pp.23-32.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

envisaged. Standardization, Generalization and maneuvering of traditions, folkways, mores, communities, groups and cultures follows in the thematic consistency adhered and stipulated.

Hazards and negative effects of the genesis of discourse on the production and permeation of knowledge of sophisticated delivery (of speeches, writings, advices, preaches etc.) prevents certain knowledge from being produced and impose impediments and exclusions around who can speak and on what subject.<sup>23</sup> Discourses produce truths, which are concepts 'deemed' to be truth rather than being actually or empirically true. It forces the speaker in to a subject position in relation to its which undermines traditional notion of ideas and beliefs. The relaxation in purity and pollution notions at least for the renaissanced non Brahmin communities such as the *Ezhavas*, and others can be visualized in this regard. Foucault evaluates the subject position and feels that this determines a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task of in sufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required levels of cognition or scientificity.<sup>24</sup> The two central concerns of post-colonial theory in this regard are identity and representation. Hybridity, ethnicity and cultural locations are the prime issues problematized. Con (textual) analysis and knowledge generation without rating the conventional set in borders enriches the whole activity and the very reason makes the study of the topic Neo Brahmanic discourse and agenda worthy.

This stands in the line of making visible the unseen and by that addressing to a layer of material which had hitherto ephemeral status for history and was rated futile in terms of value in moral, aesthetic and heritage grounds.<sup>25</sup> The neo Brahmanic discourse and agenda hence requires an in-depth understating and study as for the area carries capability of contributing lustroously to the academic society and mass in general.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Cary Nelson, Lawrence Grossberg (Ed), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture*, p.274.