

NAMBOOTHIRI – NAIR ALLIANCE IS IT HOLY OR NOT

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ABSTRACT

The caste structure in Kerala stood in sharp contrast to the North Indian scenario. In India there existed the fourfold divisions like Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra , while in Kerala there was no significant Vaisya caste . In the absence of Vaisya caste trading and commercial functions were largely in the hands of the intermediate caste of the Ezhavas and the Christians and Muslims. Besides the Namboodiri Brahmins, the Kshatriya chieftains , the Nairs and the Ezhavas , there were the different craftsmen group of Mannan, Thatthan, Kosavan , Kollan , AsariKshuakanets as well as the agristic castes of Parayan,

Pulayas, Cherumans etc. the untouchables who together constituted the caste hierarchy . Each caste maintained a stipulated distance from the Namboodiri's and were differentiated by their dress, food and housing as well as rituals and practices.

Keywords:Nairs ,Namboothiri,Ambalavasi,Kshethriya.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Nairs and Namboodiri's were crucial in Kerala. The Namboodiri Brahmins and the Nairs were related together in liaison relationships called as Sambandhams, byogamous for the Namboodiri male and hypergamous for the Nair female. The Nair men, however ,were not allowed to contract a similar relation with the Namboodiri women. For reasons , exclusively of advantages to the Namboodiris , only the eldest son wed from the caste while the younger sons contracted sambandhams. The Namboothiris followed patrilineal system and the Nairs followed Marumakkathayam system of inheritance.

The Brahmin custom and tradition permitted only the eldest male member to get married, he could marry up to four Namboothiri women from the same caste. Only he could inherit the family property. This enabled them to maintain their landed property and other wealth intact and avoided its division. This helped them to uphold their social economic status too in the society.

The younger Brahmin males go for sexual relationship with the ladies of the Nair classes. Those Nair ladies would not leave their house to join their husband's family nor do the Brahmin husbands have any right or interest on her property. The children born are known as the son or daughter of that particular lady. This practice of younger Brahmins getting married to Nair classes known as Sambandham. Though Brahmins considered Sambandham as one of the 64 Anacharams[bad habits] gradually Sambandham became common within Nair community also. Those Nair woman who allowed younger Brahmin brother's to enter into sexual relationship with them, would marry a Nair as well , then have two husbands [Nair and a Namboothiri] and in essence,a system of Polyandry came into being. However ,as a consequence of this practices the number of Namboothiris decreased and the number of Nairs increased because the children born in a Namboothiri Nair marriage would belong to the Nair woman's family.

In a Nair taravadu the Karanavar was highly interested to keep a Sambandham relationship with a Brahmin because after that Sambandham relation they get a higher status in society. The Brahmins appointed Nair's as their body guards , so the Nair's get high privileges in society . The Nairs look after the land of Brahmins. They collected tax for Brahmins from the Kudiyan's .

The Namboothirimen , however ,were not endogamous or monogamous and contracted Sambandham relationships with Nair women, this also having a bearing upon the relationship between the two castes.

The Nairs employed in the supervision of the cultivation of the land by the Brahmins. It was therefore the interest of the Brahmins to hold the Nairs close to them. In associating the

Nairs with them, the Namboothiris had other objects also to serve. They wanted to secure a strict entail of their properties so that they might never be reduced to indigent circumstances or their estates be frittered away by frequent partition. For this object, they ruled that only the eldest son of a Namboothiri family need enter into holy wedlock, and it was ordained as privilege for Nayar females to allow the younger brothers of a Namboothiri family to consort with them.

The Namboothiri Brahmins not only associated with the Nair caste. Namboothiri was associated with Ambalavasi, Kshatriya, PushpakaBrahmins. The Namboothiri's keep a close relationship with Ambalavasi's. Namboothiri men's entered Sambadham relationship with Ambalavasi women's. Ambalavasi's were temple employees but they were not aristocratic like the Namboothiri's. They were simple people who lived at the benevolence of the temple. Ambalavasi's formed an intermediate class between Brahmins and Kshatriya. The term Ambalavasi is derived from two Malayalam words namely Ambalam [Temple] and Vasi [inmate]. The term Ambalavasi [one who lives in a temple] is a generic name applied to all classes of temple servants in Kerala, and is applied to castes, whose occupation is temple service. This caste consists numerous subcastes. They doesn't were the owners or authorities of the temples but were doing the jobs such as cleaning, sweeping, singing, using drums and other instruments etc. they were not allowed to do the poojas which was done mainly by the Brahmins. The Brahmins were the authorities of these temples and they were the people who handle the income of the temple. The temple income was mainly from the state treasury, given by the Kings. This helped the Namboothiri's to live well without necessary for doing any work.

The ambalavasis were actually dependant on Brahmins as they can be denied jobs at any stage by these Brahmins. So naturally they tried to keep the Brahmins satisfied . They practiced the Sambandam relationship with brahmins and they were ready to entertain Namboothiri's with their women lot. Brahmins entered into Sambandham or a concubineship with these ambalavasi's. It was not considered or accepted as marriage by the Brahmin community. Still the ambalavasis preferred to get a Brahmin relation for their women. This was way they have found to keep their job secure and income intact. If the Namboothiri was a learned man and have income it was an added advantage for them. Ambalavasi's were lived in poor living condition so they were entered relationship with Namboothiri Brahmins.

Namboothiri Brahmins always keep Sambandam relationship with Kshatriyas. Kshatriyas, second highest in ritual status of the four Varnas or social classes of Hindu. Traditionally Kshatriya's were military or ruling class. The term Kshatriya comes from Kshatra which means authority and power. This authority and power is not based on successful leadership but more on sovereignty over certain territories. The Namboothiri Brahmin who comes for traditional Sambandham or sex with Kshatriya women.

Namboothiri Brahmins also practiced Sambandham with Pushpaka Brahmins. Pushpaka Brahmins were assigned the job of tending flowers and making garlands in the hindu temples and were given rights to teach sacred texts and Sanskrit language. Pushpaka women are known as Pushpakathi or Pushpini. Pushpaka Brahmins were temple employees but they were not aristocratic like the Namboothiri's . Pushpaka Brahmins commonly known as Arddhabrahmanar Pushpakas lived on the income of the temple and were under its care. Pushpaka Brahmins include various subcastes within itself.

It should be noted that the Sambandam by Namboothiri's with Kshatriya and Ambalavasi's were different than with the Nairs . The Brahmins used to live in the houses of these Kshatriyas and ambalavasi families with whom they have started sambandam usually the ladies does not have other males in relation to her, that is Kshatriyas ambalavasis and Pushpaka's used to make Sambandam with only one Namboothiri at a time if not for the life time. It was like a marriage as the man and lady live together in the same house just like husband and wife even though the Namboothiris does not consider this as a marriage and children born in the relation had no right on the father and also on the property and wealth he ever possessed, This was not the with the Nairs. Not only Namboothiris but anyone from Brahmin to Nair's can have relationship with any Nair women. She can have any number of males as she desires at the same time. These men does not stay at these Nair houses nor they drink water or take food from these houses as it was considered an act punishable with brasht under social laws. The Namboothiris does not enter in relation or mate with a Nair lady if she is a virgin. It's said that they were not ready to pull a lady to prostitution as it was a sin which would fall on them. So the Nair's practiced a custom or ritual just after a lady attain puberty. A ceremony was considered in which the girl was declaired to attain womanhood. Then her mother invites a man from a sub caste of Nairs who would mate with lady and he became the official husband.

CONCLUSION

The Nair Brahmin relation [Sambandham] no doubt improved the Nair breed not only in physical appearance including their height and fair skin but also in their mental acumen. The Nairs achieved high status and wealth from this relationship . The Brahmins always keep such a

bond with Nairs because Nairs were great warriors so they protect Nambudiri's wealth and life like a bodyguard. Brahmins also secure their properties from frequent partition through sambandham relationship with Nair ladies. Broadly we can say the alliance of this two upper castes in Kerala is unholy. Both castes maintained this relationship only to meet their own needs.

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