

VEDIC CULTURE OF NAMBOOTHIRI SOCIETY

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Abstract:

The paper is about Vedic culture of Namboothiri society. Culture is ordinary; every human society has its own shapes, its own meanings, and its own purposes. Cultural studies are interested in lifestyle because the lifestyle is about everyday life defines identity, influences social relations and bestows meaning and value to artifacts in a culture. The Brahmanas of Kerala are known as Namboothiris. Historical evidence, as well as their own traditions, suggest that they came from North India and settle down in Kerala, migrating along the west coast. In fact, one sees this tradition all along the WestCoast from Sourashtra on; and the Brahmanical traditions in the Canarese (Karnataka) and Malabar Coasts are nearly identical to one another. Rigveda is a collection of poems, hymns, and invocation of deities, reflecting myths, rites, battles and insights of many kinds. Texts are procedures for rituals and rites of Brahmanas are generally derived from it. In yagam, Hothan through a chant of Rigveda manthrams invokes the God into the yajnavedi and their divine virtues into our souls(minds). The Vedic culture in Kerala is unique and self-contained. The Ghats, with an average elevation of 5,000ft; and roughly parallel to the west coast, some 30 km from the sea in the northern and about 60 km in the southern part of Kerala. There is one main gap, through which most east-west communication takes place. There is one main gap, the Pallakad gap, through which most east-west communication takes place. The Namboothiri are probably unique to have a sub-caste of Brahmanas who are excluded from vedams. A.D. Devoted to their rituals, tantric as well as Vedic, from which outsiders are excluded, they were relatively unaffected by modern education. Most Namboothiri's have been settled as peaceful villagers, country aristocrats, small landowners, connoisseurs of literature and the traditional arts (like Kathakali) scholars and gentlemen. The most conspicuous characteristics of Namboothiri are simplicity and exclusiveness, obviously, the former predicate does not extend to their rituals.

Keywords: vedic culture, tradition, kerala, education, myths etc

Culture is ordinary, every human society has its own shapes, its own meanings, and its own purposes. Cultural studies are interested in lifestyle because the lifestyle is about everyday life defines identity, influences social relations and bestows meaning and value to artifacts in a culture. A society is an entity which is to be studied on the basis of all its diversities as well as the idiosyncratic traits of its ambiance. Nowadays culture is considered as the source of art and literature. The culture of a community includes various aspects: economic, spatial, ideological, erotic and political. Culture is not a natural thing – it is produced. The production and consumption of cultural artifacts define one's identity. When a study goes digressed the authenticity of the concept of society is lost. Thus it propagates something that is molded out of the prejudices that lay in the psyche of the researcher. Many a one has initiated a study on Kerala's society and attempted to define the society on the basis that it is more reformative in nature thanks to its protesting character and progressive politics. All these studies went unconsidered the underlying structure of the society which is set up on the very Brahmanical concept of "jati". The ever-widening gap between the various social groups finds its origin in the promulgation of 'the need for cast' for the sake of establishing a society where power lies in the hands of a few who by birth emerge as the deserved.

The Brahmanas of Kerala are known as Namboothiris. Historical evidence, as well as their own traditions, suggest that they came from North India and settle down in Kerala, migrating along the west coast. In the historical inquiry, this is the extent of linkages between the two regions and their cultures. It is stated that thirty-two of the sixty-four grammams are in the Tulu- speaking region in Kerala.

Vedic culture is believed to have been developed by a group of people who crossed the mountains that separate central Asia from Iran and Indian- subcontinent, around 1000 to 1500 years before Christ. Whether this theory is believable or not, it is a fact that a new Vedic civilization was evolved called after the four vedams: Rigvedam, Yajurvedam, Samavedam, and Atharvaveda. Written in pure Sanskrit, these vedams are poems, hymns, and innovations of deities reflecting myth, rites, battles, and insight of many kinds. Some of the areas dedicated to ethics in life and some others for advice. These mantras are repeated several times in several forms of occasions, as it is believed (even now universally) that repetitions increase effectiveness. As described in the book 'Agni' by Frits Staal, the Vedic ritual is not only likely to be the oldest surviving ritual of mankind but also provides the best source of a theory of ritual. Vedic ritual is not primitive. Frits Staal, from the Netherlands and now settled in the United States is in the whole Vedic history the first non-Namboothiri allowed to see and attend the 1975 yagam a Vedic ritual. He organized attended and studied the Athiraatram at Paanjaal in Thrissur district performed between 12th and 24th April 1975. "The Namboothiri performances are not artificial or scholarly reconstruction as having taken place in some other parts of India".

Rigveda is a collection of poems, hymns, and invocation of deities, reflecting myths, rites, battles and insights of many kinds. Texts are procedures for rituals and rites of Brahmanas are generally derived from it. In yagam, Hothan through a chant of Rigveda manthrams invokes the God into the yajnavedi and their divine virtues into our souls(minds). Chanting of the manthrams with the knowledge of their meaning and concepts result in cleansing the mind of its demoniac aspects. Rigvedam teaches to recognize divinity in everyone and everything around you- big and small, living and non- living praising them ensures beneficial results. Rigveda has two branches- saakalam with Aaswalaayanam as Acharya and Baashkalam under Kausheethiki. The branches are commonly known as Aaswaiyaanam and Kausheethakam. The common part of the manthram in the two is called Daasathayee in ten mandalas. The Rigvedam text is divided into mandalam, Anuvaakams of pavamaana mandalas are of special importance and are known as 'cherumaanam' among Namboothiri. Yajurveda has two branches-Sukla (bright or white) Yajurveda and Krishna (dark or black) Yajurveda. This is also called Thaithireeya Yajurveda. The former is non-existent in Kerala. Krishna Yajurveda contains primarily sroutha matters like Agnyaadhanan And has two parts –samhitha and saakha.

The primacy of Saamavedam is in Upasana (meditation) through the singing of hymns (musical stuthi). The science of music is said to have evolved from his vedam through Brahmavu. Gandharva vedam is a subsidiary of Samaveda. As with other vedams, Samaveda originally had numerous branches, but only three exist now- Jaimineeyam, Raanayaneeyam, and Kauthhumam of which namboothiris follow the first. There are only about twenty saamavedi families spread over Panjal (Thrissur district), Mookuthala (Malappuram district), and Kidangoor and Onamthuruthu (Kottayam district) but practiced primarily in panjal. Atharvaveda is somewhat similar to Rigvedam, but with stress on the practical aspects and is probably addressed to a different stratum of society. Each Namboothiri family is a follower of one of the first three vedams; but not Atharvaveda. The four vedams are not similar in nature. Rigveda contains numerous references to rural practices. Most priestly functions and names officiating post for names of priests are mentioned, and there are terms for particular rites and ritual recitations, for altars and especially for rites concerned with soma, the sacred plant. The arrangement and organization of Yajurveda are done mostly with ritual considerations. Saamavedam consists of the largest part, of material taken from Rigvedam and set to music. This adaptation from text to melodies has resulted in numerous textual changes and in the insertion of much new material, originally perhaps necessitated by the requirements of melody. The structure of Samaveda is complex. Atharvaveda itself, though perhaps as ancient as Rigvedam has an entirely different background and was added to later to the three vedams. It is seldom employed in truth.

Yagam is a long and sophisticated Vedic ritual performed by chanting Vedic mantras and offerings to Agni(Fire as God). There are several types of yaagams namely Somayagam, Agni (Athiraatram) and so on. Although researchers have obtained proof of a Vajapeya yaagam performance in the 1st century A.D at Perinchellor (Thaliparamb). Namboothiri's generally perform only Somayagam and Athirathram. The Yaagam procedure consists of multifarious activities, Athirathram. The Yagam procedure consists of multifarious activities, disturbed among priests from different vedams who officiate on behalf of and for the benefit of a ritual patron, the 'yajamaanan'. Yagam and the related rituals belong to 'srothakarmangal'.

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Among the original 32 Namboothiri Gramams (villages), Sukapuram, Perumanam, and Irinjalakuda were the Vedic strongholds. Perinchelloor (Thaliparamba). Gramam has had a strong Vedic base in the 19th and 10th century. In perumanam, the Rigvedam is Aaswalaayanam and Yajurvedam, Buchanan.

A time of span of about two millennia separates the Vedic Indians from the Namboothiri the Malayalam speaking Brahmanas. The difference in lifestyle practices and beliefs between Vedic nomads and Namboothiri Brahmanas is almost total. In terms of caste and religious observances, the Namboothiri has remained orthodox until the beginning of the 20th century A.D. Devoted to their rituals, tantric as well as Vedic, from which outsiders are excluded, they were relatively unaffected by modern education. The most conspicuous characteristics of Namboothiri are simplicity and exclusiveness, obviously, the former predicate does not extend to their rituals.

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