Chapter VI

Analysis of Primary Data: Religious Perspectives

6.1. Introduction

The word ‘religion’ is the common word used in all languages and among all people groups in the world. It was there with the people from the beginning even among the primitive tribal communities. They were found following some kinds of religions. It is a general characteristic of all people around the world that they all are religious. The Paniya community of south India are not different from the same. They have their own unique unestablished and unorganized traditional religion. Their religion is called Paniya religion. Paniya religion has all the basic characteristics of other major religions of our country. In this religion it can be observed that all the basic characteristics of religion such as rituals, prayer, worship, festivals, myths, priest, spirit worship and worship places.

In this chapter the researcher studies the various aspects of Paniya traditional religion and its recent changes. The questions 122 to 137 of the interview schedule refer to their religious aspects and its present day status. The researcher had studied the same and analysed the data and some observations are made.

6.2. Paniya Religion

The religion of Paniyas is called Paniya religion. The Paniya’s social culture and activities are closely related with their religion. Their religion and the culture are inseparable. So the study of their religion has a significant place to know the different aspects of their social customs and culture of the community.
6.3. Religion as the centre of Paniya Society

Religion is a sensitive subject. It touches the various aspects of the Paniya tribe such as family, economy, relationships, arts, welfare, developments, politics, etc. All these are centred on their religious beliefs and practices.

The religion of Paniyas comes under the category of tribal religion or animism, because the spirit worship is of prime importance in their religion. In general sense tribal religion is not a single religion; each tribe has its own religion with some distinctiveness. It is also established that there are more than 480 tribal religions in India.

The Paniya community does not have any well organized religious setup or system. They do not have any dogmatic beliefs and teachings. They are found flexible in their beliefs and practiced according to the situations. For this reason their beliefs and practices are found different from place to place and time to time. So all that is said of Paniyas in this chapter may be only true to the Paniyas of Nilgiris and Kannur, may not be applicable to the Paniyas of
other part of the country. However some of their basic beliefs and practices are common. Paniya religion is said to be a closed religion that means the other community cannot be converted to their religion. It is regarded as a religion, exclusively for the Paniyas themselves.

The Paniya people believe in the presence of supernatural powers or spirits in every physical thing such as on high mountains, flooded rivers, big trees, rocks, epidemics and in everything. They try to please these spirits by means of different types of propitiations, sacrifices and worships. Sometimes, it was noticed that they worship a deity even without being given any name or image or object. Ancestral worship is found as an important feature of their religion. The Paniyas worship the family deities as well as villages’ deities. They believe in different gods and goddess of different sections such as of crop, animals, sickness, rain, cultivation, wealth and prosperity. They try to please these gods and goddess by offering the sacrifices of different types.

The Paniya religion has all the primitive features of any religion, so it is also called primal religion. There are number of theories of the origin of religion by the scholars. Some of them are relevant to the origin of the Paniya religion.

The Paniyas are still backward with all kinds of primitive traditions. They are found to be very much associated with other communities of the surrounding area. Because of this factor, their religious life is mixed with other religions of the surrounding area. So it can be observed that among them there are some sort of primitive and crude customs in their religion.

6.4. Present Day Paniya Religion

The researcher in his field study observed the different aspects of the present day’s Paniyas religious conditions. There are number of changes taking place in the Paniya religion. There are several reports of conversions among them. Many are converted to Hinduism, Christianity and few to Islam. In the researcher’s interaction with Paniyas, many of them profess themselves as
Hindus. They consider Hinduism as their original religion and some of them call themselves as Paniya Hindus.

The following table gives the detailed religious status of the community.

Table 6.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tribal Religion</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paniya- Hindu</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>42.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

The above table can be represented by the following bar diagram.

Fig: 38

According to the above table the researcher found that 24.7% of the people still hold on their traditional Paniya religion, they are not influenced by the pressures of the modernity. 42.7% of them are Paniya- Hindus; there one can see some influence of the Hinduism. 11% of them expressed that they are
purely Hindus. 21.7% of them are converted to Christianity. This conversion is mostly the result of the charitable work, social service activities extended to them through educational, medical and other welfare programs.

It was observed that majority of the Paniyas follows Paniya – Hindu religion. In this religion the elements of both Paniya and Hindu religion are found.

As already stated many of the Paniyas today have adopted new religions. Their social and economic conditions are also studied by the researcher. The following table shows the details of the socio-economic conditions of the people who are being converted to other religious faith from the traditional religion.

Table 6.2
Socio-Economic Conditions of the Converted Paniyas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Socio-Economic Conditions</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very much improved</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Poor</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data
The above table can be represented by the following bar diagram.

![Bar diagram]

**Fig: 39**

According to the above table 24.7% of them improved the socio-economic conditions, 36.7% of them are better, 17.3% of them are same, 13.3% of them are very poor, and 2.7% of them expressed that they don’t know, because many of them are illiterate.

It was observed that the socio-economic standards of the people who are converted to the other religious faith have remarkably improved. In the other religious faith there is much emphasis on education that may be a possible reason for this transformation.

It is also studied by the researcher that the matter concerning their satisfaction in the life style after adopting new religion. The following table gives the details.
Table 6.3
Satisfaction of the People: After Adopting New Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very much satisfied</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>69.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some what satisfied</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some what dissatisfied</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much dissatisfied</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I cannot say</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

The above table can be represented by the following bar diagram.

According to the data collected, among the people who adopted new religion, 69.7% of them expressed ‘very much satisfied’, 19.3% of them expressed ‘some what satisfied’, 4.3% of them expressed ‘some what dissatisfied’, 0.7 % of them expressed ‘very much dissatisfied’, 6% of them expressed ‘I cannot say’.

It was observed from the analysis of the primary data, that most of the people converted to the new religion are found very much satisfied and happy.
The study shows that Hinduism is not their original religion, but it is an adopted religion. It is proved beyond doubt that there are many elements of Hinduism in Paniya religion. The studies prove that they have adopted Hinduism in the periods of past history. They have been influenced very much by their Hindu land lords with whom they were working as servants. It is also a fact that the Paniya religion is very much different from Hinduism. It was observed that in Paniya religion there is very less worship of images, no extended rituals and sacrificial systems, no caste system, less knowledge of extended Hindu myths and philosophy. It is true that today many of them keep Hindu names for their children and also they go to popular Hindu pilgrims temples. They still have their own god, rituals, worship systems and practices which is very much different from Hinduism. The recent days have found that out they are influenced by the religions of the surrounding communities.

Today in Paniya religion one can see the elements of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. It is mixed or influenced by the religion of the surrounding communities to whom they are constantly dependent for their survival. The 1981 census records states that 99.61 percent of the Paniyas are followers of Hinduism, 0.12 per cent as Christians, 0.01 per cent as Christians and one person was turned to Islam. This shows that the number of Hindus has declined slightly from 99.94 per cent in 1961 to 99.61 per cent in 1981 and the Christians have increased to 0.05 per cent in 1961 and to 0.12 per cent in 1981. (Singh K. S. 1997:976).

6.5. Some Important Characteristics of Paniya Religions

The characteristics of the Paniya religion are studied by the researcher. Lot of details are received from the informants as explained below. The different matters related to their religion are studied such as god, goddess, spirits, spirits worships, prayer, offering, sacrifices, witch craft and magic, taboos, life after death, soul and other beliefs and practices. Their religion is defined as animism, because they believe in different kinds of spirits and worship them. This is also called primal or primitive religion.
Some people categorize Paniyas as backward Hindus. This argument cannot be justified because the study proves that they are not originally Hindus. However, it is true that they have been strongly influenced by popular Hinduism. Some of them have been converted into Hinduism and this process of conversion is called Sanskritization. Inspite of this, most of the tribals still practice their traditional faiths.

The force of Hinduism is strong and it is certainly backed by nationalism. The changes and modifications are taking place in the Paniya religion under the influence of industrialization, modernization, impacts of surrounding religions, and political changes. The Paniya religion is entangled with all these forces.

6.6. The Paniya Religious Focus

The Paniya in general have a three-fold focus in their religion. They are:

First, focused towards God – the Supreme Being. All rituals, sacrifices, folk songs and festivals, they regard as the Supreme God. In His existence they have firm belief. The concept of God here is very strong.

Second, focused towards the tribe – the people. They believe in the institution of the tribe and hence they would do anything to preserve and protect the unity and integrity of the tribe. They believe that, God in his wisdom could not let his creation come to naught: he saved mankind by instituting the tribe. The tribe is sacred, and its taboos bear no infringement. Therefore many of their religious practices are meant for the general welfare and its prosperity of the tribe.

Third, focused towards the ancestors – the spirits. They believe in the existence of the spirits of their ancestors. These spirits stay at home, in the houses of their descendants, and supervise their welfares. Therefore some of their religious practices are focused on appeasing their ancestor’s spirits.
6.7. The Beliefs of Paniya Religions

The whole belief systems of Paniya religion are categorised as follows for convenient.
1. Belief in gods and goddess.
2. Belief in spirit world.
3. Belief in magic and witchcraft.
4. Belief in worship, prayer and sacrifice.

6.7.1. Belief in Gods and Goddesses

They have strong belief in their own gods and goddesses. At present the Paniyas worship a pantheon of Hindu gods. The important local deities they worship are *valloorkavu bhagavathy* and *kottiyoor perumal*. They also make regular visits to the some of the local Hindu temples, especially on the first day of the every month. When they face with some kind of problems that come to the life they go and offer some money or things in the near by temple box or on a festival day sent offering through someone. They worship Lord Ayyappa of Sabarimala temple and also found many have even made pilgrimage to this temple, which is about 350 km. away from their settlement. They also have the concept of a high god called *daivam* who is Omnipotent, Omnipresent and preceptor of all the deeds of human beings.

The chief gods of Paniya is ‘*Kulian*’ and other goddess which they worship include ‘*Kuttichatan*, *Kuliyan*, ‘*Kuttu Bhagavathi*’ or ‘*Kali*’, ‘*Malakkari*, ‘*Mariyamma*’ and ‘*Ayyapan*’ ‘*Bhatha*’ ‘*Thamburatty*’. They believe in the following characteristics of the *Kulian*: live in air, presences in every where, he is invisible to human sight, but people can feel his power, rule over all Paniyas, make small sound and calls people, some time possess some people. Whenever people face any difficulty they call on him in prayer and he hear them and answers their prayers. Mostly they offer cock as sacrifice, in order to please him.

Paniyas are having number of gods or goddess. Some of them are *Thampuratty* or *kooli* which is a female deity who is worshipped to protect
them from all kinds of undue sufferings and be with them always showering love and grace. It is also believed that if she slackens her vigilance malevolent spirits can exploit the situation. She is propitiated with fowl, tender coconut and rice pudding added with jaggery on annual festival occasions like Onam and Vishu. The Paniyas do not generally engage themselves in any socio-economic activities without propitiating thampuratty.

The stone or rows of stones representing kooli are generally placed on a raised square platform called koolithara or daivathara. Sometimes such images are placed beneath a tree or some isolated spot on the banks of a river. Paniyas of a hamlet have to perform an annual appeasing ceremony for these deities on a hamlet basis around the daivathara. It begins on a Monday evening and ends on Tuesday morning. The Paniyas also worship kuttichathan (mischievous imp) and kuliyan (a demon). High fever and headache are attributed to the displeasure of kooli. The influence of kuttichathan is believed to be the cause of vomiting, dysentery, diarrhoea etc., fever accompanied by shivering, headache and severe body ache (which may even lead to sudden death) are attributed to kuliyan. This arrogant demon is supposed to move around in the night in open fields. It is believed that if any one confronts it he is likely to be fatally attacked.

6.7.1.1. The Supreme God

Paniyas belief in the existence of Supreme Being or High God or Supreme God to whom they call ‘Daivam’. In fact, the belief in the Supreme Being forms the very core of the Paniya religion. They have no written dogmas or scriptures about the supreme God. Their idea of God and faith in the Supreme God is well expressed in their folk songs, myths, folk-tales, names, and so on. The supreme God is called by different names locally.

The Supreme God is also attributed as God of mercy or divine mother who gives life to all humans, blesses and cares every individual at all situations, cares not only humans but also cares for the entire universe. They believe that
God is the ultimate hope of everybody and source of all wisdom and knowledge.

6.7.1.2. Attributes of Supreme God

The followings are some of the attributes of the supreme god which are believed among the Paniyas.

- The supreme God is the ruler, king lord and God of heaven. He dwells in heaven and controls everything of earth.
- He is the Judge of heaven and earth. He awards every soul according to one’s work on earth. A person who leads a life of righteous on earth is awarded with a heavenly home to live eternally after death. But the unrighteousness person is sent to a place of eternal torment. Both life and death are within the power and jurisdiction of God.
- He is the creator, sustainer and controller of this universe and it is He who supplies the material blessings to humans. He is also the Mother Earth who is the source of all things.
- He is the creator of the universe. He created the sun, the moon, the star and all the planets.
- He is the all goodness, law and power. He also controls all the other spirits.
- He is all-loving and all-merciful mother / father. He does not displease even by wrongs committed by his children.
- He is the ruler of the human as well as the animal kingdom. He looks after all the welfare of humans and protects their cattle.
- He cares for all the crops and without his favour no harvest would be reaped.
- He is unearthly and formal. He is in us and around us. He is infinite. We cannot see him nor can we hear him.

- God is indivisible and, therefore, he is one, being indivisible there can be no other gods.
6.7.2. Belief in the Spirit World

The spirit world is real for the Paniya people. They believe in a variety of spirits which inhabit their houses and villages, as well as stones, trees and mountains. They believe in all the kinds of spirits and each one is different from the other. Therefore, they are treated at different levels as they feared, worshipped, appeased, etc. However they also believe in benevolent and malevolent spirits.

They believe in the dead’s spirit called ‘Chudala Guli’. Belief in the existence of the spirits or spirit occupies the core of tribal religion. Because of this belief, their religion has been categorized as animism by many anthropologists, sociologists and Christian missionaries. They believe that there is a spirit behind in every thing, living and non-living things. They have belief in two kinds of spirits: helpful and harmful.

6.7.2.1. The Benevolent Spirit

The benevolent spirits are called in their language ‘kulian daivam’. This Spirit is generally thought to be the Spirit responsible for the welfare and prosperity of the people. It guards and protects the village from disease, pestilence and natural devastation like failure of crops, storm, and floods. This Spirit not only creates blessings also sustains and controls the earth. In short, this Spirit is the inner controller of the universe. Thus the Spirit is worshipped and sacrifices are offered by people not because of fear, but worshipped out of reverence and love also.

6.7.2.2. The Malevolent Spirits

The malevolent spirits are called ‘kuli’ in their term. They are always thought to be dangerous and destructive to all human affairs. These are the spirits, of persons who die of childbirth or in pregnancy and infants die in
mother’s womb or before the cleansing ceremony is completed or those who die of accident such as drowning, falling from tree, killing by wild beasts, etc.

6.7.3. Belief in Witchcraft and Magic

Belief in the spirit world leads to believe in witchcraft, magic, sorcery, etc. The magic man is called *mathrakaran* among them. The witch doctor is an important and powerful person among the Paniya society. He is a religious expert, a native medical doctor as well as a magician. He practices both white magic to help and heal people as well as black magic to harm and to kill them. People are afraid of witch doctors but people also need them, in some different occasions. The religious life of the entire society is dependent upon him.

6.7.3.1. Magic

Magic is a specialized art governed by a system of rules and rituals, mantras (chants), and special worship, which includes offerings and blood sacrifice, to manipulate supernatural powers (including evil spirits) to accomplish things the magician wishes to do. Magic is the art of trying to manipulate and pervert true power. Magician is a person who has learnt the art of this manipulation of impersonal supernatural power and one who actually possesses the power.

Having faith in magic is the most important characteristic of the Paniya religion. In magic they use variety of methods by which man is able to influence the supernatural. The magical act is carried out to twist the nature into a specific way to satisfy human desires. There are different types of magicians and witches are found among them. There are some recognised magicians of the Paniya community in their settlement. Through the magical acts they believe that they can contradict the effect of epidemic and all other harms which the people confront. They make some symbolic elements of epidemic and carry it to the nearest river or jungle and throw. By doing this the people believe that all epidemic and diseases including fever can be thrown out from their colonies.
Some among the Paniyas are believed to be gifted with the magical power of changing themselves into animals and there is a belief among the Paniya dwellers in the plains that, if they wish to secure a woman whom they lust after one of the men gifted with this special power goes to her house at night with a hollow bamboo and encircles the house three times. The woman then comes out and the man changing himself into a bull or dog works his wicked will. The woman, it is believed, dies in the course of two or three days.

The Paniyas are believed to be very strong in doing magic. There are people among them specialized in doing magic is called ‘Mathrakaran’. Magic is strictly traditional and is handed down from generation to generation. It still remains in the hands of specialists.

6.7.3.2. Witchcraft

There are also people practing witchcraft among the Paniyas. Witchcraft is a special type of magic with more evil effects. It is simply a black art applied for the purpose of harming other persons. Witches are thought to be able do extraordinary things which are beyond the capabilities of ordinary humans. They are capable of travelling great distance instantly or having the ability of turning themselves in to animals, going out in spirit and killing a victim or make themselves invisible while their bodies remain at home.

Witchcraft is the possession of some mysterious supernatural power which is used by its possessor exclusively for evil and anti-social purposes. A witch is a person, usually female, who works evils by employing the help of spirits. The sorcerer or magician is different from a witch in that they practice evil magic against others by using or working with an impersonal supernatural power. Witchcraft, on the other hand, employs a mysterious power which can be used by the possessor to harm others.

The Paniyas believe that illnesses can be caused by skilfully using some of the demons as mercenaries. A man who has command over a demon is
generally called *vaishyakkaran or manthrakaran* and is feared by the rest of the people. Usually *kuliyan or kuttichathan* is sent as mercenaries.

They also attribute *vaishyam* (a kind of sorcery affected by object intrusion) as a cause to illness. Personal conflicts such as rivalry over a woman, public humiliation etc. can be reasons for hiring the services of *vaishyakkaran or manthrakaran*.

To perform *vaishyam* specimens of a rival’s excrement, urine, nail clippings etc. are mixed with a little salt and after reciting magical spells this mixture is inserted into a raw coconut through one of its ‘eyes’ after pouring out the water. The coconut is then sealed. The *vaishykkaran* holding this coconut jumps into neck deep water of a pond or river and leaves the coconut in the water. It is believed that within a few days the victim will be affected with sickness all over the body followed by death. In another method of *vaisyam* the rival’s excreta is collected and dropped into a small pit. Then an *onthu* (calottes) is caught and killed by the *vaishyakkaran* and dropped over the excreta and the pit is sealed after a magical spell. It is believed that as the body of the calottes decays the intended victim’s body too is likewise afflicted. A third method is to cause pain in the abdomen of a rival resulting in difficulties in excretion. Here, a *vaishyakkaran* collects soil from a spot where the intended man has urinated and adds it to the blood of *arena* (green lizard) after uttering a magical spell. In yet another practice, the intended man’s nail clippings are collected and put into a new grave after uttering magical spells. This is supposed to produce acute fever and shivering of the body on the individual concerned. The Paniya suspect *vaishyam* when odema all over the body, difficulties in excretion, acute fever with shivering etc. are noticed in a person. They also believe that diseases can be inflicted by mixing objects such as nail clippings, stones, powdered glass, claws, dried droppings of tiger, herbal poisons in the rival’s food, after reciting magical spells. (Viswanathan Nair, N. 2008:97)
Magic is the essential part of Paniya religion. It is the most important characteristic of their religion. They have very strong faith in magic. The people who do magic are called Mantrakars, are also considered as sacred specialists who assist the semi (priest) in the birth rituals, puberty, marriage and death rites. They have varieties of methods in magic in order to influence the supernatural for the things to get it done. The magical act is used among them in order to satisfy human desire up to certain extent. Mostly magic is also associated with witchcraft. There are some specially assigned people among them, who are trained in magic and witchcraft.

Magic is performed in variety of methods. A magical act is a rite carried out to twist nature in a specific way to satisfy human desire. Different types of magicians and witches are there among them. There are magic done to harm or afflict other people. There are also magic performed for the betterment of the people such as for health and healing, to solve the problem in the family, to get good crops etc.

6.7.4. Belief in Worship, Prayer and Sacrifice

The Paniyas have to appease the evil sprits and ancestral spirits so that they will not harm them. Therefore, worship, prayer and sacrifice have become a part of their religious life. Sacrificing chickens is widely practiced among them. These sacrifices are made by the entire community or village.

6.7.4.1. Worship and Prayer

In the Paniya religion they have worship and prayers which are most important part of their religion. The worship of ancestral spirits takes very prominent place in their religious system. They also worship family deities and village deities. Besides these there are also goddesses of crops, god or goddess of natural powers and deity presides over rains. They try to please these gods and goddesses by offering the sacrifices of different types of animals and birds to them. According to their belief there is some impersonal power behind every material object and the living beings. Paniya are very much afraid of these spirits. They respect and worship them out of great fear.
Though they have believed in many spirits and gods, they have faith in a supreme spirit. It is commanded among them that the supreme spirit needs to be worshipped to maintain peace and prosperity among the people.

They try to please these powers by means of different types of propitiation rituals and worships. Sometimes, they are found worshipping some objects which believed to be having spirits, even without being given any proper name. The researcher have observed in his field visit, in several places some fetish objects were kept in their homes, those are believed to have some sort of power and so they worship them.

They please or appease the spirits by offering sacrifices and praying to them. The Paniya religion of the past and present the ancestral worship is one of the important elements. They believe that the ancestral spirit can easily come and visit the family and the living relations.

### 6.7.4.2. Nature Worship

The Paniya religion is very much close to the nature in which they live. One of the best characteristics of the Paniya religion is nature worship. They respect and worship sun, moon, rivers, mountains, stars, trees, animals and birds and other natural things. The banyan tree, some kinds of towering tree and fig tree are reverenced by them, believed to have as much as evil spirits haunt them. It is believed that these kinds of trees should not be cut down, if any body attempted to do so will fall sick or die.

### 6.7.4.3. Spirit Worship

Spirit worship takes a major place in the Paniya religion. Believing in good and evil spirits of all sorts are common in the Paniya religion. They also worship many Hindu gods and goddesses. They also give reverence especially to the god of the jungles, *Kad Bhagavadi*, a deity called *Kuli* a malignant and terrible being without any sex whose shrines take the form of a stone placed under a tree or sometimes a cairn of stones. At their small shrines
they contribute as offerings to the swami (god) rice boiled in the husk roasted and crushed half-a-coconut and small coins.

6.7.4.4. Temple Worship

They do not have their own temples in most of their colonies. But they have small shrines kept open for the people to come and worship. They also build a high place with in their settlement under the tree or in a rocky place for worship, believe that the presence of God is there. They call it as ‘Daivam thara’ or ‘Kulithara’. They also go to some near by Hindu temples for worship. They never call Hindu priest or pujari to their house for any religious rituals. They have their own priests to conduct the rituals. They have their main temple in Valliyurkkave in Bethary in Kerala, where people go as a pilgrim for major rituals, worship and festivals. They also worship their village deities in their settlements itself. Their sacred religious specialists are called Attali or Komaran, the Paniya priest, and they perform life cycle rituals, cure diseases and ward off evil spirits.

Generally they have no specific temple, their deity is kept under the tree or open places. For this reason they believe that their god is also unfortunate like them. They also do not own dwelling place, suffer under the sun and rain just like them. They and their god also has same fate.

6.7.4.5. The Sacrifice

The Paniyas do not have any particular temple but they have small family shrine where they make all usual sacrifices. They also go to some near by Hindu temple for doing sacrifices. In this place they worship, sacrifice, give offerings and ceremonies are done. Some times they are also found sacrificing to Hindu deities in the temple, offer sacrifices in the graveyard, fields, river side, mountain top etc. A particular place of worship is not very important for them. They have a general belief that God can be worshipped anywhere and at any time. He is not limited to any place. The whole earth is the worship place.
There is a practice of sacrifice among the Paniyas called as ‘Marikkothikozhikuka’, which means they bring coconut as offering, keep a lamp in front of it, then a person walks to and fro, finally he takes a knife and cuts it into pieces at one cut. In any sacrifices, there are both social and spiritual significance. They are referred to ensure the followings:

1. Peaceful relationship with God and for his protection.
2. The good health and welfare of the community.
3. The fruitfulness in their product or plentiful harvest.
4. A better life in the next world, and so on.

6.8. Beliefs of Paniya

The followings are some of their basic beliefs of Paniya.

6.8. 1. Life after Death

Paniya tribes believe in the life after death. They believe that soul of a man survives in and around the home and colony even after the death. Some people also believe that the soul enters in to the body of some men, animal, bird or other living being. They believe that the soul of a dead person enter into the one of their next family members or Attali, (trance dancer) then speak to the family members. He enquires of their welfare and gives necessary suggestions to the nearest relatives. He also tells openly that the dead soul is happy or unhappy. The spirit of the dead are called ‘chulalaguli’.

6.8. 2. Soul

Paniyas believe that there is a powerful soul in every human. They believe that the soul is immortal. The soul can influence the events in this world and also control them. The soul of man survives even after his death. Among the Paniya tribes there is a custom of observing funeral rites which have already referred in the fourth chapter. All what they do in funeral rites are only because of their faith in the immortality of soul. The Paniyas believe that the soul is not destroyed on the death of the body and requires food even after the
death. They have the practice of putting food items into the mouth of dead; in
the tomb they also keep pot of kanji, pot of water, vettila, tobacco and lime.
These are believed to be the items for the daily use of the dead’s soul.

Paniyas concept of soul resembles to human, having personality. The soul
is divine given by God. They believe in the saying that ‘The body is given by
the mother but the soul which is divine is given by God’. In each person a soul
is indwelt and it is the soul that enables a person to be a complete being. The
soul is also not limited by time and space. In the particular function for the
dead they also believe the spirit will possess upon some one called Atali.

Like the living beings, the soul is also subjected to pain and suffering
caused by external influences. In some places when they bury the dead body
they are careful not any stone or mud fall on it, they use to make a cave to
keep dead. It is said that when a person gets sick or comes under the influence
of an evil spirit, his/her soul also suffers. The soul and physical body are
inseparably related to each other. Though both have distinct personality. It is
believed that even after death the soul continues to live and works actively.
The soul of dead ancestors helps them to do fruitful cultivation, rear domestic
animals, go for hunting, healing from sickness, inform them in advance of
troubles, tragedy, etc.

6.9. Religious Practices

The following are the some of the religious practices of the Paniyas which
the researcher has studied.

6.9.1. Omens

An omen may be defined as any phenomenon believed to have
supernaturally inherent warning. An omen is not an immediate event but
rather a warning, or an alerting, of an event to come. The omen becomes a
sign that need to be interpreted. The omen is considered to be a reliable indication of good or evil by the supernatural power through some given signs.

Paniyas believe in omen, which gives of the warning, an alerting to the people by showing some signs. The people are always conscious of what is going to happen in near future in one’s life, in the family or in the society. Therefore, people look forward to the indications and warnings of what is likely to happen in their lives.

For example, the Paniyas believe in many omens which follow certain happenings. If a vulture lands on the roof of a hut, fever or death is expected. If a cultivator going to sow his field meets with a pig on the way, some agricultural disaster will take place. If a pregnant woman meets a barren woman, her child will either be stillborn or will die shortly after birth.

6.9.2. Taboos

Taboos means culturally prohibited things. There are number of things which are counted as taboos practiced among the Paniyas. This is an important characteristic of their religion and culture. The tabooed objects are not to be seen, touched, heard, smelt or tasted. If any body violates, these supernatural powers get angry or give punishment to them. There are different kinds of taboos, some of them are mentioned below.

6.9.2.1. Taboos Related to Supernatural Powers

There are taboos against offending the gods, spirits, cutting sacred trees or groves, against carelessness or rebellion to religious functionaries, against being late to offer sacrifices, against failing to contribute to a sacrifice, against offering to the dead, etc. They also worship Banyan tree, fig tree and some other trees. They hesitate or are afraid to cut such trees and it is believed, if anyone attempts to cut such trees, they will fall sick or die.
6.9.2.2. Taboos Related to Sex

In tribal society, taboo against incest is universal. They are strict in all kinds of incest such as sexual relationship between a mother and her son, between father and daughter and between brother and sister.

6.9.2.3. Taboos Related to Women

A woman is also tabooed during menstruation and childbirth. Before cleansing or purification ceremony, after giving birth, she is not allowed to mingle freely with other people or not allowed to go to temple to worship. Women are also tabooed to hunt, climb on the roof and carry corpse. It is also considered as taboo for men to speaks or touch mother in law and sister in law.

6.9.2.4. Taboos Related to Marriage

It is tabooed to marry men/women from the same clan. Marriages without the permission of parents and blessing of elder are considered as taboo. It is also not allowed to marry their uncle and niece.

6.9.2.5. Taboos Related to Food and Drinks

It is tabooed that the killing or bringing buffalo’s meat inside the house or eating of buffalo meat is considered as also taboo.

6.9.3. Ordeal

It is called in their language ‘Satyaparishanam’ which means to find out the guilty. They use different methods in it Sometimes the persons accused are put to torture in primitive societies to find out if the person is guilty or not. It is done by the help of their god. If the accused persons escape without injury, they are acquitted as they are supported to be not guilty. In some cases, for example, the accused is asked to put his hand in boiling water or oil; and if he can do so without causing an injury to his person, he is let free. But if his hand gets burnt, he is believed to have committed the said crime. The belief behind this kind of treatment is that the supernatural powers help an innocent person
and therefore his hand, even when it is put in boiling water or oil, does not get burnt.

It is believed that the Muppan has supernatural power to find out the guilty person. They expect the Muppen should have the divine and astrological knowledge to do so. When something goes wrong among the people, they approach the Muppan to do the ordeal, in their language it is called ‘Kodichanam Vekkuka’ or ‘Prachanam Vekkuka’ or ‘Adakkakuttuka’. There are different methods he uses to prove who the guilty person is.

One of the methods is said that ‘a long bottle will be placed down, then a finger ring will be put down by the guilty person, if it stays on the bottle, he is innocent. If falls down to the ground he will be declared as guilty.’

Another method practiced is: ‘the suspected person will be brought to the Muppan, a candle will be burned, keep one glass of rice and a coconut. Then Muppen chant some thing, then suspected has to pour down the rice into ‘Moram’ (fan) if the rice go out side he will be declared as guilty. Then the suspected has to break the coconut at a time by hitting on the floor, if it is not broken also the suspected will be termed as guilty’. After this, they will observe the guilty for sixteen days if nothing tragic happens to him, the people think that he is innocent, but if some disaster happens to him or to his family he will be judged as guilty.

6.9.4. Fetish

A fetish is generally defined as an object, natural, artificial, animate or inanimate, believed to possess supernatural power because of being occupied or possessed by a spiritual being. The Paniyas of Gudallur call it as ‘Kappu’. In Kannur it is called ‘rasikkallu’. This object usually is collected from river or hill side, which will have a unique shape. Then it will be taken to Nambuthiris (Hindu priest) is called ‘rasinokkukla’. There it will be revealed that which power or god is in it and how to worship it. The magician manipulates the object in the rituals as a visible sign or the invisible residing
therein. For example, *Thudi* or *Kuzhal* or Sword and Rode of ancestors are regarded as fetishes by Paniyas. It is believed to be the ancestor’s *valum vadiyum* (*Sword and Rode*) possess some power. There are fetishes objects which they believe possess power to heal people and cast out demons.

A fetish could be any object like piece of stone or other tangible and inanimate objects which has the potential presence of spirit or spirits. Thus, fetish could mean a form of religion involving the worship of objects, animate or inanimate. The fetish may be classified in to two types:

### 6.9.4.1. Natural Fetish

Among the Paniyas they search and find out some kinds of natural objects especially a queer shaped stone or any thing else.

### 6.9.4.2. Artificial Fetish

The use of artificial fetish is quite popular among the Paniyas. Such artificial fetish is made by the witch doctors or medicine-men. Anyone can purchase them at a reasonable price from such makers.

### 6.9.5. Divination

In the Paniya religion they practice different methods of fore-telling of the future with the help of the supernatural. They use divination to know of their future or hidden things. When a Paniya person suffers chronically from serious illness without any cure by herbal medicines, supernatural causes are attributed. Such causes are divined and appropriate remedial measures are taken. Sometimes this process may go along with herbal therapy too. The divining measures are *daivamthullal* and *chatramvekkal*.

### 6.9.5.1. Daivamthullal

The *daivakkaran* is asked to divine the cause of the illness through his trance dance called *daivamthullal*. This ceremony is performed after drawing a kalam which usually square or rectangular in shape and is divided into 16 to
18 smaller partitions with rice powder, charcoal of rice husk and turmeric powder. The *daivakkaran* wears a loin cloth of red silk, a white shirt and a new head gear. Strings of bells are tied around his ankles. He holds a sword in one hand as he moves rhythmically to the accompaniment of music on the drum. When a solemn atmosphere is created he shows signs of possession. Then the relatives of the patient express their grievances and shortcomings and ask him for the cause of the illnesses and remedies to affect a cure. In his trance he utters the causes and prescribes the remedies. If the wrath of ancestral spirits is the cause *nikalattam* and if it is of deities’ *vazhipaduvekkal* are performed.

### 6.9.5.2. Chatramvekkal

Another method of divination is called *chatramvekkal*. A patient’s relatives approach the *daivakkaran* for this and after invoking the patron deities, he takes out a pinch of raw rice or castor seeds from the *poya* in a small winnow and starts grouping the rice grains in pairs. At the end of this, if an odd number of rice remains, the suspected causes of the illness is confirmed while an even number means rejection of the suspected cause. At the same time the relatives of the patient raise questions to the *daivakkaran* about the name of the displeased deities, the prognosis of the disease, and the appeasing ceremony that must be performed. He answers their questions after counting the rice grains or castor seeds.

### 6.10. Ritual Healing Methods

The following healing methods are referred from the book of Viswanathan Nair, N. 2008. who made an extensive study on the topic. The ritual healing methods are *a. nikalattom, b. kettiyattom or velikkala, c. vazhipaduvekkal, d. maraduchavittal, e. vaishyamedukkal, f. thiriminnal* and *g. charadukettal*.

#### 6.10.1. Nikalattom

This is performed by the *daivakkaran* or *attali* around the *koolithara* of the hamlet on a Monday or Thursday evening. The relatives of the patient place
the ritual objects like plantain, beaten rice, puffed rice, and wicker lamps on
the koolithara. Even fowls are brought as offerings. The patient is asked to sit
facing the koolithara. The daivakkaran dressed up in the ritual attire invokes
the ancestral spirits after holding the magical cane. This is accompanied by
the beating of drums and pipe music. He moves around the patient in a
frenzied mood for a while pleading the spirits to leave the body of the patient
after accepting the offerings.

6.10.2. Kettiattam/ Velikkala

This is mainly along with pregnancy and associated practices.

6.10.3. Vazhipaduvekkal

The paying of votive offerings to displeased deities and aggressive
demons is called vazhipaduvekkal. Plantain, puffed rice and fried rice are
offered to appease thampuratty. Coconut, puffed rice, fowl’s blood, wick
lamps are the offerings for kuttichathan and kuliyan. These articles are handed
over to the chemmi or muppan and he performs the vazhipaduvekkal.

6.10.4. Maraduchavittal

This rite is conducted by the daivakkaran for pleasing the ancestral sprits
or deities. Here the patient is asked to sit facing the penathara. The
daivakkaran after burning incense starts invoking the displeased spirits or
deities. After a while he attains a state of trance. Then he is given a few coins
which are to be offered as maraud (fine). In his trance itself he drops the coins
on the floor and stamps on it firmly for a while and asks the spirits or deities
to accept it. If the coin is an offering to pena it is dropped into the penathara
and the stamping is made on the thara itself. After a while these coins are
collected and put into the poya basket and are used for annual appeasing
ceremonies.

6.10.5. Vaishymedukkal

It is performed against sorcery. The vaishyakkaran smears the patient’s
body with turmeric solution and starts rubbing it lightly with leaves of castor
plant. Meanwhile, relatives of the patient place a few coins in front of the penathara as obeisance to the deity whom the vaishakkaran has patronized. He invokes his patron deity and attains a state of trance. Then he bends down to the patient’s body and sucks out swiftly objects like small pebbles, thorns, cotton wicks, meat chops and nail clippings etc. which are believed to have intruded into the body by magical powers. It is believed that sucking out of these harmful objects cures the patient.

6.10.6. Thiriminnal

For thiriminnal the vaishyakkaran chants a magical spell to appease his patron deity. He lights a cotton wick in gingely oil and waves the lighted wick over the patient for an odd number of times like 7, 11, 13, 15 etc. After this the wick is thrown away at a far off place. Thiriminnal is performed to ward off the effect of the aggressive demons.

6.10.7. Charadukettal

As a prophylactic and warding off measure the Paniya performs tying of a thread called charadukettal. For this the stem of karaliyan – a creeper is collected and a few small rings are made with it. Each of them is strung with a white cotton thread. After reciting the requisite magical spell in honour of kuttichathan or malathampuratty this rings is worn around the neck of the patient or an individual. Sometimes, only a charade (thread) made of cotton is knotted at intervals after reciting the requisite spell is also used. (Viswanathan Nair, N. 2008).

6.11. Scriptures

Paniyas do not have any written form of scriptures to follow in their religion. Their religion is mostly based on the myths and legends which are widely spread among them. The disadvantage of this is that they are not firm in their beliefs and practices. It is observed that their beliefs and practices differ place to place and time to time. In the Paniya language recently only
few books were published. So their religion is mostly based on oral traditions, myths, folklore and legends.

During the interview, most of them expressed that they don’t have any religious book in use, only few Christians said that they have portion of the Bible available in their language. The following table reveals the fact.

**Table 6.4**

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>300</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

The above table can be represented by the following bar diagram.

**Fig: 41**

In the field study 21.7% of them expressed that they have some kind of religious book or scriptures, 56% of them expressed that they do not have any kind of religious book or scriptures, 22.3% of them expressed that, they don’t know whether there is any religious book or scriptures.
It was observed that most of the people do not have any scripture. One of the major reasons for the same is many of them are illiterate. Most of them use state language as their educational language.

6.11.1. Paniya Community: An Oral Society

They often do not have a script and therefore have no written history, but they depend upon other means to store their cultural information. Written literature is not available among the Paniyas. Some of these methods include the following:

- Memory: The use of poetry, songs, riddles, and proverbs.
- Symbols: The use of colour, art, paintings, carvings and symbols.
- Stories: The use of stories, dramas and narrative dances.
- Rituals: Rituals are the enactment of their fundamental beliefs and speak of their ideas through actions.

6.11.2. Myths

In the Paniya religion there is no written scriptures. Their beliefs and practices are mostly based on the myths which are spread among them. These myths are been followed by generation to generation. Myths have a great place in their religion. Myths are the imaginary stories or orally transmitted history cooked up and spread among the people of the community and it is believed to be true among the people. Their religious beliefs are based on the myths which are spread among the society. Their myths have the answers to all of their questions. Many of their myths are associated with these ancestral heroes, patriots, institutions and individuals. In these days it is observed that they follow many myths which are related with the legends of Hinduism.

When an individual is born in a society there are many things that accrue to him in the form of cultural heritage. The cultural heritage includes all those elements of culture that a man receives from tradition. Some myths are prevalent in every society. Many of these myths owe their origin to the beliefs
and ideals that are associated with leaders, patriots, national heroes, institutions and individuals.

Myth forms the core of the tribal religion and their social institutions. It plays a great role of carrying religion from one generation to another. It is regarded as the sacred knowledge of a tribe, its lore and doctrine, which are embedded. Myth is a true representative of people’s life, their ideas, their desires and aspirations.

6.12. Folklore

Folklore has an important place in every primitive culture. It is also true with the Paniya community. Through the medium of folklores the culture of a primitive Paniya society is transmitted from one generation to the other. The folklores contain the philosophy and belief of the Paniya community. How the world was evolved is a theme of much folklore of tribes. In most of the folklores, a reference to the mutual relation of the people and their gods is given. Many folklore aims at socialization and point out how different offences are punished by the supernatural powers in different ways. There are number of descriptions about birds and beasts and also the trees, besides human beings, are given in these folklores. In various folklores which exist among the Panyas has been shown how man depends on plants, trees, animals, birds, etc. There are also some interesting folklores about their origin and developments. These folklores show that they possess a good knowledge about the different subject matters, characters and style of a story.

6.13. Proverbs

There are number of proverbs popular among the Paniyas. In India many of the proverbs and myths originate in the peculiar social system that prevailed here for some hundreds of years ago. These proverbs are full of wisdom and their life philosophies; in some extent it guides the conduct of many individuals. In this way, myths, legends, superstitions and proverbs are received.
6.14. Legends

There are number of legends spread among them. The term legend is used to denote the some kind of religious tales. There is no doubt that most of the legends do have a pronounced religious flavour. Its importance is also to their social and psychological aspects. They too are an important element of the cultural heritage. Despite their containing little in the way of any genuine information or truth they profoundly influence the cultural behaviour of the people. It is a form of social myth based, in part on historical fact, dealing chiefly with heroes and events related to the successes and failures of a group of society. In this way, legends are connected with events and heroes.

6.15. Folk Song

There are number of folk songs practised among Paniyas. These songs are used in different occasions such as planting paddy, harvesting, festivals etc. In these folk songs it can be observed some of their beliefs and practices. The Paniyas have lot oral traditions and folk-songs are sung on the basis of their traditional beliefs and myths by both sexes. They also have many Folk-songs attached to the folk tales.

Folk songs are in vague, not clearly studied or pronounced among the Paniyas. There is no social or religious function which is complete without song and dance. Folksongs are sung according to the different occasions. For example, on marriage occasion, the songs are sung connected with the married-couple, on religious functions, the songs are sung connected with deities and praise to them. In all festivals the women sing folk-songs while working and harvesting in the fields. The thoughts and sentiments of the primitive Paniyas are expressed clearly in these folk-songs. Boys and girls are given practice in singing folk-songs. These folk-songs also help in getting knowledge about the history, beliefs and culture of the primitive Paniya societies.

6.16. Music
Paniyas are considered as people of music. They are very much interested in music. In the leisure time they gather around under the tree or any common place and sing songs along with their traditional instruments. They have their own traditional style in music. They are people well trained in the usage of traditional music instruments. Music has a significant place among the Paniyas. The people of the Paniya societies possess a sufficient knowledge of rhythm and sound. They have special importance to music on all social and religious occasions. Music is considered as necessary before the commencement of every social function. There are some professional musicians also among them, but generally, men and women, all take part in group programmes of music especially in all occasions of festivals and celebration. Along with vocal music, instrumental music is also used. They use the drum (thudi) and musical horn (cheemam or Kuzhal) for rituals.

6.17. Dancing

Paniyas dance is arranged on various social and religious functions. Men and women take part in dancing. Group dancing is also practiced among them in the occasions of all festivals. Paniyas enjoy dancing, because it is a social activity and gives entertainment to all men and women.

In the News Paper ‘The Hindu’ July 10th 2006, carried a report on ‘Paniya Tribal youths and their traditional art forms’. The programme included traditional dance performance by Paniya girls. The dance demonstration was performed by the Paniya youths of the Veliyambra Paniya Colony. They also performed ‘kolkali’, ‘narayappattu’ and ‘manpattu’ staged ‘theyyakkali’, a ritual art form performed by the Paniyas during harvest. The demonstration of the ‘thettuvillu’ was very attractive. The Paniya youths’ performed ‘kaathudi’, a dance performance to the accompaniment of ‘thudi’ (small traditional drum) usually performed during wedding and funeral ceremonies of Paniya Adivasis.

Their social or religious functions are not complete without dance and folk songs. Paniya people generally dance in a group accompanied by band-
music. Different kinds of musical instruments like drums and pipe, etc., are used. They generally dance in a circle. Men and women, all take part in a dance. There a difference in the dress of dancers, their styles and gestures etc. is found among the people. People wear masks of various kinds at the time of dancing for certain occasions. They decorate their heads with horns, peacock feathers and many other things of the kind. The importance of dance in the cultural life of Paniya people is very great. Boys and girls are given training in dancing. Dancing is also taught to the children by the experts.

Dance and folk-songs have great importance in social life, group feeling is maintained by taking part in them and their unity remains firm. It is a means of recreation for them and their sentiments are displayed. It increases their enthusiasm for social functions and it brings joy and colour to the society. Folk-songs and dance remove their tiresomeness at the time of work and make the singers fresh. The social culture of the tribes is communicated from one generation to another through dance and folk-songs. The women dance slowly in increasing tempo to the music of vili (pipe) and muttum (drum) played by the men. They have a rich collections of own songs. (Singh K.S. 2002:1187.)

6.18. Art

There are several kinds of artesian among the Paniyas. Some of them are good at wood art and making craft items, such as fish basket, umbrella, bamboo baskets, etc. The government have given an important place for the exhibition of the tribal art among the cultural programmes on the occasions of national festivals. The government also established several single teacher schools in different places to teach and develop tribal arts to youths as a self employment scheme. Among the development programmes of the tribes, attention is regularly paid to see that their primitive arts do not come to an end as a result of their contact with urban civilization. Many experts, who have worked in the tribal field, have praised their arts and craft items. They also make of drums of various types, pipes, flutes, horns, anklets, brass plates, cane chairs and other furniture.
Making of wooden and stone statues and paintings are also seen among Paniyas. They decorate their bodies with different colours and make paintings for the cultural celebration. Artistic paintings on various things, used at the time of marriage. Their artistic representations also include pictures and images of gods and other religious symbols.

**6.19. Painting**

There are many among the Paniyas talented in painting. They paint the pictures of animals, birds, gods and goddesses. These painting scenes are shown depicted on the doors and walls of their houses, on clothes, floors, and even on the utensils of the Paniyas.

**6.20. Rites Connected with Cycle of Life**

The following are the important rites performed in the cycle of life. Each of them is practised in the community with much celebration.

a. Birth rite,
b. Puberty rite,
c. Marriage rite, and
d. Funeral rite.

These rites of passage mark the transformation of a person from one stage to another, from one responsibility to another in Paniya society. For the Paniyas, all these rites connected to the whole life. It is believed among the people, that they will be able to accomplish the life tasks of each stage by the power of Supernatural being as a person enters into a new stage of life. For this reason they trust in gods to whom people also offer sacrifices to insure blessing from god and to protect them from evil powers.

**6.21. Festivals**
Paniyas are generally emotional beings, who cry when they become extremely sad and when they are happy also. Among the Paniyas all celebrations become extreme emotional, they sing, dance and extreme merry. When they get money and paddy after harvest from their master, they feel the mood of celebration. The main occasion of celebration is the soon after the harvest, time of marriage or any religious significant day etc. In the time of celebrations they sing, dance and feast together with all extended family members. Some time they all will go for movie. They have the habit of celebrating the festival till they finish their money from their pockets. Some times throughout the night they make big noise in the ‘kudumb’. Men make the beautiful sound of ‘thudi’ and ‘kuzhal’ the women folk forget themselves then sing and dance.

Paniyas celebrates the festivals on different social and religious significant days. They firmly believe that the ancestral spirits come and participate with them in all their festivals. Most of the festivals are celebrated with religious importance. Thus festivals are not only for eating, drinking and merry making but are deeply connected with religious ideas and practices. Since the main occupation of the Paniyas is agriculture, all the festivals are centred around the soil, the sowing, removing the weeds and harvesting. All the festivals, though rooted in earnestness, are joyous occasions of prolonged feasting, with bountiful drinking and merry making.

Paniyas give offerings of food to their ancestral spirits during all rituals and festive occasions. They believe that their ancestor’s spirits come and participate in their all celebrations. It is customary to observe a prescribed cycle of religious ceremonies in a year. Paniyas observe a number of festivals in different seasons. Some of these festivals are exclusively as their own like Kudukkachery whereas some others are those which are regionally spread throughout the state, for instance Onam, Vishu, Christmas, etc. The festival celebrated in honour of Mariyamma is conducted during the month ‘Edavam’(May-June). The annual festival in the locality, viz. ‘Valliyurkavu Ulsavam’ is another important festive occasion among them. This is
celebrated in the month of Meenam (April) from 1\textsuperscript{st} to 10\textsuperscript{th}, men and women of Paniyas go and present themselves before Valliyur Amma.

Festivals are of social and religious significance like Vishukolu, which is observed in April-May (Medam) to offer thanksgiving to teyya and karnenmara to ensure constant protection throughout the coming year, performed by semi.

Maarikoolu which is observed in May-June (Idava) for Mariamma to cure and ward off chicken pox and smallpox, and performed collectively. Puttariunu is observed in the month of October (Tulam), soon after the harvest, there they cook the newly harvested rice and also offered to karnenmara (ancestors) for their blessing upon the harvest (cf. Kulirani, 1984).

Most of their festivals are associated with some myth or historical incidents or agricultural seasons. Regarding this the question was asked in the interview schedule that (Q.135.) Is there any myth associated with the religious festivals? The researcher has elicited the answers from the informant; the following table reveals the facts.

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</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td>----</td>
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<td>100</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Primary Data

The above table can be represented by the following bar diagram.

![Bar Diagram](image)

**Fig: 42**

According to the study, 55% of the people expressed that their festivals are associated with some kinds of myth, 39.7% of the people expressed that their festivals are not associated with any kinds of myth, and 5.3% of them expressed that they don’t know.

It is observed that majority of them said that their festivals are associated with some kinds of myth which are spread among them.

**6.22. Religious Functionaries among the Paniyas**

A religious functionary is a person who gives more time to religious expression than the average man, and who possesses skill, personal qualities and knowledge of folk lore and ritual beyond that of the ordinary tribal person. Some religious functionaries become acknowledged leaders while others, although not leaders may be recognized and feared. The following are some of the different categories of functionaries.
6.22.1. Formally Constituted Religious Functionary

The priest, medicine-man and diviner come under this category. They are recognised and initiated by the society; hence, they are categorized as formally constituted religious functionaries. Their roles and function may be discussed below:

6.22.2. First category

The tribal priest, ritualist, shaman, sacrificer, healer, and diviner are coming under this category. They are been accepted by the entire community, believed in and responsible for its welfare. They are chosen by traditional and respected procedures.

6.22.2.1. The Priests

The priests are those who offer prayer and make sacrifices on behalf of the Paniya community in their respective shrines or sacred graves or any other sacred places. The office of the priest is hereditary among the some of the people while among others the office is on the term basis for a specific period. The priests are normally selected from each clan in each village according to the need of the village. The followings are some of the functions of the Paniya priest.

a. Naming ceremony of child

Naming day varies from one group to another. Usually a child is given name after three days. This naming ceremony is performed by the priests. The priests offer sacrifice and name the child according to the opinion of grand parents or parents.

b. Offer Sacrifices

Sacrifices occupy a central place in tribal religion. People invoke god by offering sacrifices of jungle animals, cock, etc. Sacrifices are made to get blessings, prosperity, good health, etc. in one’s life and community. All these sacrifices are performed by the priests.
c. Administer Festivals

There are number of festivals which are observed by the Paniyas. They are not just social festivals for cheerfulness, but they are observed as a sign of thanks giving to God for all that he had done for human. Hence, appropriate offerings are made. All these are administered by the priests.

d. Conduct Marriage Ceremony

The priests perform marriage ceremony. They kill the cock and hen to find out the fortune of the couple. They also invoke God’s blessing and prosperity upon the life of the newly married couple.

e. Heal the Sick

The priests are usually called upon whenever a person gets sick in the community. They offer sacrifice to propitiate spirits.

f. Work as the Medicine-men

The medicine-men could be both man and woman. They are specialists in the use of herbal medicines. Their tasks are to discover the cause and cure the disease or any misfortune falling upon his/her client and play as intermediary between humans and invisible spirits who are supposed to be the author of all kinds of human miseries and misfortunes.

g. The Diviners:

The person who carries out the process of divining the unknown is made known by the diviner. All the priests and priestesses are usually diviners but all the diviners are not priests or priestesses. The role of a diviner is to detect the causes of sickness of a person, natural calamities, future events, etc.

6.22.2.2. Attali
‘Attali or sometimes referred ‘Komaran’ is a priest of the Paniya community. He acts as a religious human symbol and helps the kuttan in getting correct answers from the culprits of the case, comes to a dispute solution to the ‘kottani’. He at the instance of the ‘kuttan’, act as a ritual dancer in the rituals conducted in honour of the gods and spirits. Attali is an expert religious singer, who must know various songs to invoke the gods and spirits. He also knows astrology and he only fixes auspicious dates for different ceremonies. In the Paniya community organization, Attali plays important role as a religious adviser to the Kuttan.

6.22.3. Second Category: The second categories of religious functionary are witches and sorcerers. They are a temporary phenomenon in primitive religion. Few people wish to have these functionaries play their role in the day-to-day lives. Witches are commonly regarded as trouble-makers, nuisances, fearsome creatures and posing danger. Sorcerers become so by irregular and secret procedures over which the community has no control.

6.22.4. Third Category: Other practitioners such as magicians who claim to do only good (white magic) and would seem to be nearer to the first category, but their secret lore keeps them outside public acceptance. Magicians who work evil seem nearer to the second category. Many magicians work both white and black magic.

6.22.5. Political Functionary among Paniyas

6.22.5.1. Kuttan

The Kuttan, also referred as Muppan in some places is sole authority in a Paniya settlement. If he is rich then is also referred to as Janmi, the master. He is regarded as a non-hereditary headman of the Paniya settlement. Sometimes he also represents a cluster of a few small Paniya settlements. In the early days, during bonded labour stage, the Kuttan was usually selected by the
landlord on whose farm they are settled. According to the Paniya informants of the studied area, the Kuttan was also appointed or selected as gang leader by the Paniya farmers having large numbers of bonded labourers. Such appointment was done at ceremony in which a ritual is conducted in a temple and the possessed ‘attali’ (religious specialist) gives sacred paddy grains both to the master and the prospective Kuttan. The Kuttan was given a pair of armlets as the insignia of his ‘Kuttani’ office. As long as these armlets are within him, the Kuttan was rested with power and authority over the Paniya bonded labourers in his gang and was bonded loyally to look after the interests of the master.

Nowadays, the Kuttan is elected the Paniya elders called as ‘muppanmars’. The ‘muppanmars’ usually small agricultural labourers usually appoint a senior Paniya as Kuttan (also frequently referred nowadays as ‘muppan’) by giving one armlet, called as ‘vala’. Then they request the ‘attali’ to call Paniya gods and goddesses and then attali gets possessed and he throws paddy grains on the elected Kuttan (muppan). The Kuttan work is not remunerative, but responsible and respectful office, mostly other Paniya are polite to him. His wife also gets respect and is addressed by other Paniya women as Kuttatti or Muppatti. (Parthasarathy. 2003:44.)

6.22.5.2. Koyama

‘Koyama’ literally means a ‘ruler’. He is the hereditary headman of the Paniyas who represent a traditional group of Paniya village. He mostly lives in Wynad area (Kerala) and often visits the Gudalur regions Paniya settlements at the request of the respective Kuttans. Koyama represents higher repository of power on the whole of the Paniyas of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
6.22.5.3. Chemmi

Chemmi is another functionary of the Paniya community organization, who always assists the ‘Koyama’. Most of the duties of the Koyama, at interior settlement level are performed by the chemmi. Chemmi, in a sense, sometimes, acts as a liaison officer of the kottani in between ‘koyma’ and ‘kuttan’. His presence and participation validate the Paniya community. (Jekka.2003:44).

6.22.6. Medicine Man or Marunnukaran

The Paniya herbalist is called marunnukaran and he invariably happens to be a daivakkaran. It indicates how closely herbal therapy and religious roles go hand in hand among the Paniyas. But a few daivakkaran are ignorant of medicinal recipes. Marunnukaran (who holds the role of headman, priest, and oracle is highly articulate man who wields a lot of influence. The following account of the marunnukaran gives us an idea of their status, way of functioning and how they acquired their knowledge and skills.

Masavan is a reputed marunnukaran of Ambalakunnu hamlet of Nenmeni. He is 64 years old, married and living with his wife and the youngest son. He is the chemmi and is known as mothali Masavan. He is also the daivakkaran of the hamlet. He acquired the knowledge and skills from his father and he in turn has passed on this to his eldest son. He started treating illness from the age of 28. He is considered very efficient in treating jaundice, bone fracture and also in conducting of warding of rituals. He makes home visits and receives remunerations for his services. He administers the herbal medicines in its raw form as well as in preparations such as potions and salves. (Viswanathan Nair, N. 2008:99).

Kurukkan Paniya of Chadakappura hamlet is an established marunnukaran. He, aged 62 years, is living along with his married sons and daughters and grand children in a cluster of huts. He obtained his knowledge
and skills from his father. He keeps a medicine chest at home. He does accept remunerations in cash and is frequently called to attend to patients at their homes. He is an expert in massaging sprains and bandaging fractured bones and treats other diseases particularly jaundice, rabies, and snake bite. He collects herbs while on his way for home visits. He is known for his skill in charadukettal and always carries along with him a lump of cotton thread. Rarely does he offer his services to the non-tribals. His eldest son has already learned the practice from him and has become a potential replacement for him. (Viswanathan Nair, N. 2008:100).

6.23. Sanskritisation

There are many Paniyas converted to Hindu religion. The process of adopting Hindu religion, customs, and culture is generally known as Sanskritisation. It is the process by which a low caste or tribal or other group takes over the customs, rituals, beliefs, ideologies and life style of a Hindu and become low caste Hindu.

Present days among the Paniya community there are many influenced by the customs, practices, names and beliefs of Hinduism. Sanskritisation leads to changes in position not structure. Apart from Paniya groups, this phenomenon of conversion to Hinduism has been witnessed even by other tribal communities over the last few centuries.

In the interview schedule question no. 131 studied on sankritization. The question asked was, ‘Is there any effect of sankritization in your tribe?’ The following table gives the details of the respondent’s answers.

Table 6.6

Sankritization among the Paniyas
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sankritization</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source: Primary Data**

The above table can be represented by the following bar diagram.

![Bar Diagram](image)

**Fig: 43**

According to the study 62% of them expressed that their tribe has undergone Sanskritisation in the last few decades, 32.7% of them expressed that their tribe has not undergone any sanskritisation and 5.3% of them expressed that they don’t know.

It was observed that majority of them have undergone Sanskritisation, as a result of this there are number of Hindu influences are found among their customs and culture.

### 6.23. 1. The Effects of Sanskritisation

When sanskritisation take place among tribals, they feel that they go up in their socio-cultural life; they adopt the Hindu lifestyle. This includes food habits, dress patterns, housing, rituals, fasts and feasts, festivals, even
worship, mode of offering and sacrifices to the deities. It is asserted that Brahmanic sanskritisation systematically undermines among some of the Paniya people upon their civilization and culture. Throughout the centuries sanskritisation has eaten away the indigenous culture and vernacular languages.

Sanskritisation displaces tribals from their tradition and culture altering their socio-religious life and bringing into caste hierarchical structures into an otherwise egalitarian tribal society. Hindutva proponents insist that the tribals are Hindu and an uncivilized backward class suited for cheap labour.

6.23. 2. Sanskritisation and the Status of Women

Traditionally the Paniya women enjoyed equal rights and privileges with men in the community. As result of this sankritisiation the status of women came down. The following points are the proof for this fact.

- A woman should not work outside the home unless her family is financially very deprived.
- Give dowry and receive dowry.
- Oppose women’s liberation, as it is another name for ‘loose morals’.
- Oppose equal rights for both sexes.
- There is nothing wrong with domestic violence against women; very often it is women’s fault, we advice women to try and adjust, as her non-adjustment creates the problem.
- Women’s future lies in perpetuating the present, because nowhere else women are worshipped as in India.
- Women’s liberation means liberation from atrocities; it does not mean they should be relieved of their duties as wives and mothers.

6.24. Paniya Religion and Hinduism

It is generally believed that all tribals are Hindus. But when we study carefully this is not true. It can be proved with various reasons that Paniyas are not originally Hindus. The word ‘Hindu’ refers to the sanskritised peoples
of India, who follow the Brahminical religion or the classical Hinduism. The original Hinduism was known as the Brahmanical Hinduism or the Aryanism. To be more accurate the name would be Arya Vedic Varnashra Dharma. The followers of the Arya Vedic Dharma were known as Sanathanies and they are considered as ‘twice born’ people. Nehru stated: ‘The use of the word ‘Hindu’ in connection with particular religion is of very late occurrence. The old inclusive term was Arya dharma.’ Jawarlal Nehru. 1979:263. Gandhi also made a similar statement: “As a matter of fact, Aryanism would have been a better descriptive word than Hinduism.” (Sunderaj. 1986)

These days many Paniyas profess as adherent of Hinduism, when the researcher asked the question of their religion many of them expressed that Hinduism or Paniya Hindu. The fact of the matter according to the study many Paniyas adopted the Hinduism as their religion. The traditional Paniya religion is very much different from the Hinduism. There are number of differences which can be observed when we compare Hinduism with Paniya religion, especially in gods, goddesses, spirit worship, worship pattern, belief system, caste and other ritual practices. In the Paniya religion their supreme god is termed as Ippimala teyya Kuliyan daivam. Their family deity is Guliyan and each illam has illateyyya. Some of them are Kuttichattan, Anjilateyya, Kakuralamma, Valliacan, etc., who are tribal deities. Besides these, they have Tamburati, Pudari teyya, Pulpally Murkan teyyam, Kadu Bhagavathi. In Hindu religion none of these Paniya gods or goddess are worshipped.

### 6.24.1. Government Census’ Definition of a Hindu

The 1910 Census Commission gives the following definition of a Hindu:

- Accepts the supremacy of Brahmins (Brahmins are the priestly caste of the Orthodox Hinduism).
- Receives mantra (Orthodox Hindu rite) from a Brahmin or other recognized Hindu guru.
- Accepts the authority of the Vedas (Vedas are the ancient scriptures of Orthodox Hinduism).
➢ Worships Hindu gods (the Aryan gods such as Brahma, Vishnu and others).
➢ Is served by good Brahmins (pure or original Brahmins – unconverted Brahmins) as family priests.
➢ Does not cause pollution by touch (Orthodox Hindu is considered as High Caste and twice born and his touch with other High Caste Hindu does not cause pollution).
➢ Cremates their dead (the non-Orthodox Hindus bury their dead).
➢ Does not eat beef (they consider cow as goddess and so they worship cows). (Sunderaj.1986:101).

6.24.2. Tribal Converted to Hinduism

Sanskritization is the sociological and cultural adaptation of the Brahminical or the Classical Hinduism in terms of name, food, dress, etc. Prester defines it as “Sanskritization is a process whereby low status people adopt the terminology and procedures embodied in the Sanskrit scriptures.” (Sunderaj.1986:118). It was a transition from tribe to caste and advocated by Brahminical Hindu leaders as a means of assimilation of the tribals into Brahminical Hindu fold. Even though they promise to elevate the tribals into the high caste position yet when they accepted Hinduism they were made the ‘low caste’ or ‘out cast’ or ‘Shudras’.

The Hindu Brahminical religious leaders in the past have tried the sanskritization process to convert the tribals into their religion and they were not without success as we see the big difference in the Census figures before and after 1937. (Ponraj.1996:101.)

This conversion process (Sanskritization) by Hindus did not attract a vast number of tribal people for various reasons as pointed out by Sunderaj.

1. The Sanskrit tradition has a separate origin making it alien to tribal faith.
2. It lacked authority to uproot the primitive religious type.
3. It is not understood by the unlearned and non-literate masses.
4. It created opposition from conservative tribals and factions resulted.

   Tribals in different parts of India were converted to the Brahminical religion. The conversion took the form of the tribal (who are casteless) forced to occupy a lower or the lowest position in the ladder of varnashrama dharma. The vast majority of tribals, however, escaped sanskritization and therefore remain to this day in their native tribal faiths.

   The tribal population in India could be divided into three groups in the context of sanskritization.
   - Those who through continuous and intimate contact had become assimilated into the Hindu hierarchy.
   - Those who are partially Hindunized and have thus ‘suffered moral depression and decay as a result of contacts’.
   - Those tribes that live mostly in the hill sections and are so far free from becoming de-tribalized.

   When the tribals were unresponsive to sanskritization there was another factor which made them Hindus. Up to 1921 the Government Census reporting the tribals were categorized according to their religions, but in 1931 Census most of them were included in Hinduism and thus they were made Hindus against their wish.

6.24.3. Paniyas and Hindu Caste System

   It was carefully found out that there is no cast system among the Paniyas. They were originally not a part of the Hindu social order which is popularly known as caste system. One of the strong reasons for understanding the tribals as non-Hindus is that they are outside Hindu caste system till this day. In fact they were purposely kept outside the caste system to keep the caste system from pollution. For this reason many of the tribals have not even heard about the existence of caste system in India. The Anthropological Survey of India
reports: “The tribes have generally remained outside the Varna System. Only 43% are aware of the Varna system.” (Singh K.S. 2002:4).

In the questionnaire (Q.24) it was asked on caste system, the following result was received.

Table 6.7
Cast System among Paniyas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cast System</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

According to the study 12% of them expressed that their tribe has caste system, 85% of them expressed that they have no caste system among them and 11% of them expressed that they don’t know.

It was observed that majority of them don’t have caste system among the Paniyas and Hindu influences of caste affected only to small minority.

6.24.4. Paniyas Identity

Paniyas in the modern era passes through a time of social change. There are lot of traditional moral values in their culture and religion. Present day trend is to follow what they see in the Medias blindly. It leads into the great deterioration of the traditional values. In this regard the Pancha Sheela of Great Jawaharlal Nehru is appropriate to look at the same. (M.M. Thomas.1965:18). The late Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru wrote in the Tribal Panch Sheela as follows:
1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.

2. Tribal rights in land and forests should be respected.

3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will, no doubt, be needed especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.

4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through and not in rivalry to their own social and cultural institutions.

5. We should judge results not by statistics or the amount of money spent but by the quality of human character that is involved.

These are some of the valuable observations on Paniya religion that are needed to be taken into account. They are important for all who have a greater interest in the over-all matter concerning the religion and development of the Paniyas.