Chapter III

VATTAKALI PERFORMANCE
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A. TRIBAL DANCE

Dance is part and parcel of tribal life. To begin with there is the cycle of life embracing birth, wedding, and death. Through this dance, the community expresses their feelings of joy and sorrow. The dancing of tribal people is spontaneous and true. This does not mean that they dance anywhere, any time, or any way. There is certainly a method in it all, a rhyme, and a reason, even if not a consciously cultivated one. There are certain stimuli that inspire people to dance. And when they dance they evolve and sustain norms; not from any written or communicated direction but the dancers have gained and assimilated without deliberate effort as a legacy from past generations (Khokar 1987: 14). Some of the general features of tribal dance are discussed below.

1. Features

Joy is the core emotional experience of human beings and one of the spontaneous and transparent expressions of it is in the act of dancing. Festivals and celebrations are the occasions where they experience joy and companionship. In order to express this innermost feeling they take resort to dancing. Love is a primal passion of the human heart. It is another stimuli for group dancing. Ceremonial songs and love songs add the flavour of such community dance performance. (e.g. Vattakali dancing at wedding ceremony).

To promote social coherence, community dance plays an important role. It is a collective activity, which prompts community unity. When we dance together for a long time spontaneously, the group becomes one through their non-verbal communication. The music and rhythm of the dance help them to get out of their personal tensions and ill feelings. The interaction they have between the dance like joking, saying comments, or sharing tea or murukkan (pan chewing) also promote unity.
In tribal societies, certain dances are considered as an exercise of prayer (e.g. Daivam kanal dance). In this context, the dancers go into the stage of trance where they encounter the God. It is a real instance god – experience for them. The dancer (Shaman/priest) becomes a mediator (divine person with supernatural powers) to supplicate the gods for the community. Some dances are sacred as well as related to magic. Exorcism and healing of the sick are done in the form of dance (Gadhika). Ritual dance is a means to exercise authority over nature and super naturals.

The intimate association with nature and life is abundantly mirrored in dancing. A good harvest calls for rejoicing. There are dances suggesting everyday tasks like planting, winnowing, fishing, or pounding the earth. For tribes fighting the enemy is one of their prime concerns and for this they have mimic fights, which is in dance form. Hunting also is sustained through dancing. So dance is a reflection of tribe’s everyday life.

There are many patterns followed in dancing. The most common form is circular dance. The other types are line dance, curve dance, serpent dance, spreading out and returning to the center type dance. Participation in the dance also varies according to culture and contexts. Dances of various types are: Men or women alone dance, men and women together or in separate place dance or man plays instruments woman dance or vice versa. Hands and feet have a decisive role in tribal dance. They take various postures and forms by using their parts of bodies. Clapping is not very common among the tribal groups while non-tribal folk groups use more clapping during dance. For example, the Oppana dance of the Muslim community has various types of clapping which adds the beauty of the dance. In Kerala there is another dance called thiruvathira kali. It is also known as kaikotti kali, which means ‘clapping dance’. It is performed by Nair community during the thiruvathira day in the malayalam month Dhanu. (Folk Arts Directory 1986:98). Kummi dance in Tamilnadu has also various clapping styles. Compared to non-tribal group the tribals use very little of ornaments and costumes. Most of the costumes are taken from the natural setting.

Musical accompaniment is very important aspects of tribal dance. Without music or musical instruments, they cannot dance. So instruments play a key role, control the tempo mood and manner of the dance. Four kinds of instruments are used
in dance. They are percussion, idiophonic, wind, and stringed instruments. For tribes, they themselves make all these musical instruments. Hence, it is quite simple and natural to the tunes of nature. (Khokar 1987: 30).

Tribal dances are group or community dances and not normally solo dances. Dance is a must for every celebration and rituals (life cycle ceremonies) and it is considered as a sacred act in ritual performance. Through ritual dance, the community keeps in contact with the divine powers.

2. Classification

There are three types of dances among Kerala tribes: war dance, ritual dance and festival dance. Onakali, vettu thada of the Malavedars, are war dances. Theyyam, Thira are ritual dances, vattakali, kolkali are festival dances. Tribal dances are quite natural, informal and everybody in the community takes part in it actively.

For each tribal group the dance movement is unique and special. E.g. Paniyas, Kurumbar, Adiyar and Kattunaikar perform Vattakali. But each type is different from the other in style, body movement, and steps. The words used for tribal dance are: ‘Koothu’, ‘Attam’, ‘Kali’ and ‘Thullal’. These are old Tamil words and its meaning is free and emotional expression of human innermost desires like sex, rati and passion. It is a divine dance (leela) with cosmic powers. Many of the adivasi dances are imitation of animal dance (e.g. Karadikali, Pulikali, Mankali, Koorkankali and Thavalakali).

There are dances to cure sickness, to ward off evil spirits (e.g. Gadhika dance of Adiya, Thullal of Paniya). All tribal dances belong to performing art section. It is dramatic also. There will be music, dances, and dialogues in it. In a performance context, transformation or role change is taken place in the space, performers, and audience.

i) Space : Performing stage to sacred space

ii) Performer/dancer : Human being to god or goddess

iii) Audience : Spectators to devotees

Only women folk perform some of the dances like Kummi, Thiruvathirakali. Depends upon the nature of performer’s participation, there are three types of dances: Male dance, female dance, and mixed dance. There are dances related to puberty rites,
(modaya), and marriage (vattakali) or death rites (pole). Through such dance life is celebrated in its fullness. The joys and sorrows of life is accepted and celebrated by people in a ritualistic context.

Dance and music goes together in tribal dance. ‘Music is the dancing of words and dance is the music of the body’ (Iyer, 1968:123). The primordial energy of a society is concentrated in a dance form and through this the social body become one in a non-verbal fashion. This is seen in Paniya’s Vattakali. It is a dance in meditation. Being one with nature and earth and to the tunes of kuzhal and rhythm of tudi they take steps in a mild, sober way. The circular movement is also prayerful and meditative in style. (Rajagopalan 2001:114).

3. Functions

Tribal dance is a cultural event. It is not mere body movements. The whole body, mind and the community consciousness are involved in this performance. In the dance process they all merge together and become one. So it is a community cultural performance. In tribal dance time and space transcends and they go back to the primeval expression of adi nirtham. Some of the functions of tribal dance are:

i. It helps to understand and identify the ethnic identity of a tribal group

ii. It helps to minimize tensions and conflicts in life.

iii. A community dialogue is taking place in a group dance. It is an interaction between the performers themselves the performers and audience, and the performers and the social environment (space).

iv. Some of the dances are ritualistic in nature. They perform this to propitiate the gods e.g.: The harvest dance as ‘polikkala’ of the Malayan tribe is to please the mother goddess as part of their fertility cult.

v. It helps to build up ethnic unity, and strengthen the social identity.

vi. It helps the initiation and training of the younger generation in a society. Through performance elders give them physical and psychological training for the youngsters in community’s norms and customs.
vii. Musical instruments in the performance help human body movements and it inspires them for rhythmic dance.

viii. For healing the sick people dances are used. Certain gods like gulikan, kali or kooli were brought to the thara by shamanistic dance and they heal the sick person by taking away the evil spirits, which cause the disease. This is an inter play of belief and music through dance medium. E.g. Gadhika dance of the Adiya, Muramkuluki of the Malayar community.

B. VATTAKALI PERFORMANCE

Vattakali is an old musical dance form of the Paniya tribes. The word vattam means circle, kali means dance or game or play and vattakali means a circular dance. It is a musical dance performance of the Paniya community. We see this art form in all Paniya settlements in Wayanad region as well as in Coorg and Nilgiri regions with slight variations. It is also called as Paniyar Kali means dance of the Paniyas.

Vattakali is a common name used for a particular kind of dance form. Other tribes caste groups also have similar dance form and they are named after the communities’ themselves. For Kattunaikar it is called as Naikar Kali, for Kurumbas it is known as Kurumar Kali. Christian and Hindu communities in Kerala also have vattakali dance form. vattakali is also performed among Waynadan Chetti and Mullukurumbar community as part of their marriage celebration.

Parichamuttu Kali of Pulaya community, and Margam Kali of Syrian Christians and Thiruvathira Kali of Nair community also have similar dance form but with variation in songs and step-patterns. In margam kali dance Vattakali is performed as an interlude programme. There are many Vattakali songs in Syrian Christian tradition. (Lukas2002: xxxii-xxxv). Nayadi Kali, Naikar Kali, Kurumar Kali, Karadiyattam, Kolkali, also follow circular forms in performance.

Vattakali is a ritualistic and community entertainment dance. The Paniyas perform it during festival occasion, marriage, puberty rites, and other social gatherings. Both men and women of all ages join in this dance. They dance together as well as in separate groups. Three tudi (small drums) and one kuzhal (pipe) are used as musical accompaniments. Usually they dance at night and it lasts till morning. For marriage
occasion, they dance during the daytime also. There is no particular stage or costumes for their dance. It is performed in a natural set-up. For light, they use kerosene lamp or torches (pandham). Sometimes women wear their traditional dress and ornaments for the dance.

**Choreography of vattakali dance**

Women and men form different circle and take steps to the rhythm of tudi. It takes place in the courtyard. The circle move in clockwise direction also each person revolves in circular style (Fig.6). Tudi performers also move in circle, kuzhal player sits in the middle of the three-tudi performers (Fig.7). The dancers stand close to one another but nobody hold the hand of the other, each one is taking steps separately but all in the same rhythm and fashion. The dance stops, when the tudi stops beating. Following the rhythm of tudi the senior woman of the group start the vattakali chollukal and the others repeat it. After each chollukal the whole group make the noise, hoi...hoi...hi...hi...

The performance style is that Mooppan starts the kuzhal, which is followed by three-tudi performance. After some time the women folk come to the performance stage (kalam) and stand in a circle. The elders of the group make a noise ‘hi...hi...hoo...hoo...’ and start shaking and swinging their body, bending forward and move their feet in a circular fashion. There is a specialty in their feet movement such as that they are not taking exact steps for the dance but move their feet clockwise and anticlockwise direction to the rhythm of tudi (Fig.8). There are slight differences in style between men and women dance. In the movement, men are faster than women. In lifting the hands, men lift it above the head whereas the women only up to the forehead (Fig. 9,10,11). Men will not hold the hands together where as women take the posture of touching both hand together (Fig.12,13,14). They perform two to three hours at a stretch. The factors related to vattakali performance are discussed below.

1. **The setting**

    Usually vattakali is performed in the courtyard of the Paniya Ooru (village). It is always perform in connection with a marriage celebration or village festivals. The setting of a Paniya village is: There will be a village head (Ooru Mooppan). He controls the village activities, especially the religious practices. There will be 5-20
Fig. 6 Vattakali – Women
Fig. 7 Tudi and Kuzhal Performance
Fig. 8 Vattakali Steps
Fig. 9 Vattakali Postures – Women
Fig. 10 Vattakali Postures – Women
Fig.11 Vattakali Postures – Women
Fig.12 Vattakali Postures – Men
Fig. 13 Vattakali Postures – Men
Fig. 14 Vattakali Postures – Men
families in a village. Usually they are relatives. They are brothers, sisters, cousin brothers, or sisters. Since they follow patriliny all the children in a family has the right over their father's property. It will be a few cents of land and each one will put up a house in the allotted plot given to him or her by their father. The \textit{patta} (land document) of this land may be with the father or the elder member of the family. It will remain there as an ancestor's property and usually they will not sell this land. There is a \textit{thara} (sacred place) in each \textit{Ooru} apart from one in each house itself. It is also known as \textit{thine}. It is a separate place kept in the house for the gods and the ancestor's spirits. The geography of each \textit{Ooru} is that it is situated either on the bank of the paddy field or on vacant land on the roadside or on hillside. The settlement area will be between 50 cents to 5 acres. Most of the Paniyas are agricultural labourers and they work in the fields of non-tribal landlords in the neighboring area.

Usually the performance is staged at night after supper in a relaxed mood. The \textit{Chemmi} (priest) of the \textit{Ooru} after paying homage to the clan god and ancestors on the \textit{thine}, light an oil wick (lamp) and keep it on the \textit{thara}. Then the \textit{tudi vadhyakaran} (\textit{tudi} player) starts drumming \textit{tudi} and \textit{kuzhal} being played by the \textit{kuzhal vadhyakaran}. Slowly men and women come out of their houses or \textit{verandah} and start the dance. Initially it will be in small groups. Once the dance gets its tempo, they all form in one circle and dance continuously for three to four hours. \textit{Tudi} and \textit{kuzhal} will be played all through the performance. Most of the Paniya settlements are situated among the non-tribal area. Therefore, they have close contact with non-tribals. Hence, for their celebrations also non-tribals participate directly or indirectly.

During performance, the songs are sung in their own dialect. Betel chewing \textit{murukkan}\footnote{Giving \textit{murukkan} to the elders is a custom in Kerala. It consists of betel leaves, areca nut, tobacco leaves, and lime.} is part of the performance. Young and old chew betel leaves with areca nut and tobacco. For marriage and other village celebrations their relatives from far and near also will be present and they too join in the dance performance. Using liquor is quite common but in a controlled way. It is being served among the elders only.

To have a good \textit{vattakali} performance for a marriage is one of the criteria for a good marriage alliance. From side, brides, and bridegroom, \textit{vattakali} troupe will perform the dance and it is a prestigious matter for them to perform it in a perfect
style. As part of the celebration, they will clean the whole village and the courtyard will be decorated with coconut leaves and flowers. Pandal will be erected at both parties’ house. Marriage celebration lasts for four days. All the four days there will be vattakali. It is performed as a ritual as well as an entertainment dance.

2. The Social Context

Vattakali is performed on various social contexts such as for puberty rites, marriage, village festivals, temple festivals, social gathering, and death ceremonies (pola). At puberty rite, the girl is taken by the elder women for purification- bath and as she returns, men and women start vattakali with the accompaniment of tudi (drum) and kuzhal (pipe). (Somasekharan Nair 1976:91) In the Death rituals during the arapula (half pollution rite) that is done on the seventh day, young men perform vattakali with tudi and kuzhal. Women do not join in this dance. (Nizhal Konduvaral).

a. Vattakali in Marriage

At marriage ceremony, there are many occasions where the Paniyas perform this dance. At bridegroom’s house on the previous day of the marriage, the whole night vattakali is performed. The same performance will be there in bride’s house too. It is to express the joy and companionship of the community for this auspicious occasion. As part of the deivam kanal ritual for the wedding, the community has to perform this dance. There are two purposes for this performance namely; first, to propitiate the gods and ancestor’s spirits for this marriage, second is to bring together the community for next days marriage function. Then when the groom set out to the bride’s house, on the way if they are walking, in order to ease out the tiredness of the journey they perform this dance.

The second phase is at the bride’s house. As soon as the boy’s party reaches the girl’s house, they will be welcomed by the priest, the parents, and the uncles of the girl’s party. They will be given water and tea to drink and murukkan will be kept there. Then the chemmi asks the boy’s party to perform vattakali. This is to acknowledge the groom’s party and to assess their performance skill. One Mooppan told me that there is a belief with regard to this custom, that is, “a good performing community is a good living community” (Chimban (80),Vilambukandam). If they are satisfied with the performance then the boy is invited into the house of the bride and he will be given
food with the girl. The second performance is during the marriage time. Once the marriage ritual get over the Chemmi will ask the group to perform *thiruvanaketuu vattakali.*\(^2\) Then they will be given marriage meal that is followed by Murukkan. The third kali is performed before leaving the girl’s house to boy’s house. The bride and groom get the blessing from the Chemmi and the parents and relatives of the girl’s family. The girl’s uncle entrust the girl to the boy’s uncle giving all the instruction for a happy family life and sharing their expectation with regard to the newly married one. Then to express thank and joy the boy’s party perform *vattakali* and leave the house.

The third phase is at the boy’s house. While reaching at groom’s house, after all the religious rituals the Chemmi holding the hands of the boy and girl lead them in to the house. Then they were seated on the *pandal,* the group perform the *Vattakali* and disperse the gathering. On the fourth day while doing the thanks giving ritual (*deivathinu kodukal*) for the spirits of the ancestors and gods they perform this dance. *Deivathinu kodukal* literally means ‘giving to god’, that is, giving thanks to gods for all their blessings during the special ceremony. This ceremony lasts for three to four hours. The Chemmi and other *Mooppans* prepare the thara for this ritual. The Chemmi will call each god one by one and do the necessary rituals and dance get his or her blessing and send them away. For this ritual various types of tudi rhythms like *vellatu, muthassi, mari, kurathi, payattu,* etc. and similar *kuzhal* tunes are used. Therefore, for Paniya marriage, *Vattakali* performance is an essential factor in all ways. It has got both religious and social significance.

**b. Vattakali in religious festival**

For village festivals like Ucharal, Vishu, Mariamman festival, and Harvest festival also there will be *vattakali* at night in their respective places. It is being done as part of the celebrations. During the temple festivals like *Valliyoorkavu* festival and *Mariamman* festival at Kalpetta, Bathery and Meenagadi Paniya perform *vattakali* as part of the religious ritual. It is being performed in the *Kavu* premises and on the road. They do it as part of the ritual as well as to express their joy in participating in these festivals.

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\(^2\) *Thiruvanaketuu* is a Paniya word which means marriage. A slightly same word *thirumanam* is used in Tamil for marriage. For Paniya there is a special *tudi, kuzhal* and *vattakali* performance soon after the marriage ritual.
In vishu celebration there are three particular occasion where they perform vattakali as part of the religious function. The first is at gulikan kavu on the first day. The whole villagers gather here that is one km away from the village, to give homage to the gods and their ancestors. The function starts in the morning around 10 a.m. and goes up to 2 pm. At the end of the function in order to express their joy and thank to all the gods they perform this dance. Chunda Morathi (90) told me the details of this kavu ritual. She was the chief priestess for this function. The second occasion is on the second day at the village where the vishu celebration is organized. The rituals starts at the first day night itself and it will go on till the second day morning. Around one o’clock in the morning, they started this special dance where the whole villagers, male and female, young and old participate as part of a religious obligation. They believe that during this time they are dancing with all gods and ancestors who have come there to attend this auspicious celebration. The third occasion is on the fourth day as a conclusion of the celebration in order to thank gods (deivathinu kodukal) they have this dance. Here only women perform the dance.

c. Vattakali in non-ritual occasions

On social gatherings and tribal festival occasions vattakali is performed as an entertainment programme. Each Paniya settlement will organize a troupe for the performance. Nowadays vattakali is seen in cultural processions organized by Government or NGO group or in political gathering organized by various political parties. During the tribal festival organized by TUDI, Vattakali performance of various villagers is an important event in the celebration. They come to the festival ground in groups in procession, performing this dance on the way. The climax of the show is in the ground. All groups in their traditional dress and costumes perform this dance in a competitive spirit and it will go on for one hour.

3. The Performers

There are no professional troupes for vattakali. Everybody in the village, young and old, male and female know this dance. They learn this art-form by seeing and imitating it with the group performers. We could say that vattakali is present in each Paniya’s blood. We could see the elders, male or female carrying their children in their shoulder or hands taking steps in the dance. Thus a Paniya gets the rhythm and style of Vattakali from childhood onwards.
Usually in a performance, there will be 10-20 persons. They form groups as male and female alone or mixed group. Spontaneous group formation is taken place in a performance context. Sometimes three to five groups can be seen in the courtyard. They all dance in the same pattern according to the rhythm of tudi.

In some places, they allow non-tribes to take part in the dance. It is easy to learn the steps and form of the dance. The steps are to move the feet in clockwise and anti-clockwise directions without lifting it from the ground. In gent’s steps they move the feet in the same fashion and occasionally take the steps also. The form of the dance is swinging and shaking the whole body to the rhythm of tudi, lifting the hands in a rhythmic pattern. There is no strict rules for the performance. No special training for the performers. All learn it by themselves by being in it and observing the elder’s performance. Being a community dance the elders are the models and experts in this dance. For each performance, they may take new steps and forms depending upon the mood and context of the group.

During the performance, some even go to the stage of trance. They get the spirit of the ancestors (their own family members) and foretell some of the personal matters pertaining to the community or family. The performance last for three to five hours, but they don’t feel tired by this dance because it is a slow, rhythmic type, which do not need much body exertion.

The accompaniments, tudi and kuzhal give the real spirit and mood for the group to continue the dance for hours. The tudi beat creates resonance in their body as well as their mind. Use of betel leaves, tobacco and areca nut, for chewing is common for such performance. Some of the performers (male and female) drink alcohol as part of the celebration and join the dance freely. These will not disturb the tempo or rhythm of vattakali.

4. The Audience

Depending upon the context, the audience of the performance varies. In a marriage context, the audience will be mostly tribal people of the locality and their relatives. Some non-tribals of the neighboring place also will be invited there. They constitute the landlord and his family, the Hindu, Christian or Muslim neighbors but all of them will be only spectators.
For a village celebration like Vishu or Ucharal (harvest festival), the audience will be the tribal people themselves. They may encourage the performers by their comments and jokes. When the young ladies shows reluctance to dance the senior women used to comment that she is in quarrel with his *kuzhalan*³ (husband). When some girls shows special interest to perform the dance some ladies would comment that her lover is in the group and she is dancing for him. During the dance itself there will be jokes and cynical comments between ladies and gents about their illegal relationships or love relationship.

For a social festival context, for example in the TUDI tribal festival there will be tribals of various communities, non-tribals of the nearby places and the invited people from far and near will constitute the audience. It will be a heterogeneous group. There will be positive and negative comments from the audience during the performance. Some simply mock at them. I had one instance where a group of non-tribal persons were teasing and disturbing the girls who had come to participate in the dance. I informed the organizers and they came and chased them away. In a public place (e.g. In a public function or meeting of the political parties) the audience will be a mixed group. There will be tribes and non-tribes in it. Usually the performers do not care for the comments of such audience. Generally the Paniyas are timid and shy people. But when they come out to the performance stage they forget themselves and perform *vattakali* in a perfect style.

5. The Costumes and Ornaments

In the strict sense, there is no particular costume for this performance. Being a community dance anybody in the community is free to take part in it. Usually nobody compels, but spontaneously one participates in it. On marriage context the dancers will be in their usual dress. Elder women wear their traditional dress, the middle aged ones will be in sari and blouse and the younger generation is in churidars, skirts, and nighties. Gents wear dhoti or pant and shirt. As ornament now they wear according to the present fashion and also what is available to them. So there is no special costumes or ornaments for the performance.

³The word is used in many meanings. *Kuzhalan* means the *kuzhal* performer or the husband or the lover. *Koyalan* is the Paniya word.
On special occasion like village festival or social gathering or a tribal festival, women wear their traditional dress and ornaments and come for the performance. Men wear their ordinary dress, that is white dhoti or lungi or pants and shirt. For women their traditional dress is, two white dhotis (one for the lower portion and another for the upper portion of the body) with a red or black waist belt called arati and a red blouse. Ornaments like bead necklaces, coin – chains, glass bangles, ear rings and nose ornaments, padaswaram (ankle chain), pottu, various types of hairpins and slides are used for the performance.

The village priest (Chemmi) and the village head (Mooppan) have special dress and ornaments, which express their social and ritual status. They wear a red sash on the waist and red towel on the head, bells on the legs, hold a cane or sword in their hand.

6. Musical Instruments

Two musical instruments, tudi (a small drum) and kuzhal (a wooden pipe), are used for this performance. Usually in a group there are three tudi and one kuzhal which are performed by the Paniya menfolk (Fig.15). They are made by the Paniya themselves. There are experts for this work. The wood of kumil or jackfruit tree (plavu) are used for the tudi maram. Chunda plant is used for kuzhal. Skin of goats or monkey is used for the tudi membrane (Fig.16).

Only men are trained to play these instruments. But not all men are expert in playing tudi or kuzhal as this requires special skill and training. All may not get the rhythm of tudi beating, for various occasions and contexts the rhythm varies. There are more than twenty tudi rhythms and eighteen kuzhal tunes (chollukal). One informant said that there are 101 tudi rhythms and kuzhal tunes but today nobody knows the whole tunes or rhythms. Among the three tudi, one will be big in size, one will be medium and the other will be small. (More details about the instruments will be dealt in chapter five).

7. Performance order

The performance order is very simple and natural. There is no special stage for vattakali. Usually the courtyard of the village is used. The Mooppan of the village, he may be the priest (Chemmi) also, do the rituals and prayers on the thine that is inside
Fig. 15 Tudi Performer
Fig. 16 Kuzhal Performer
the house. The *tudi* and *kuzhal* are kept on the *thine*. After the prayer, the priest places a lighted lamp (wick) on the *thara* that is outside the house on the courtyard. (*thine and thare* are sacred places for the Paniyas where their gods, ancestor’s spirits, and clan deity are placed). Then the *kuzhal* performer, usually the *mooppan*, tunes the *kuzhal* and starts playing it. It is followed by *tudi* drumming (beating). When the *tudi* and *kuzhal* reaches certain tempo and mood the women of the community start the *kali* (dance). They are followed by the men folk and children. They all will be dancing in separate circles sometime they dance together too. The circle can be small or big according to the number of the participants.

The dance style is rhythmic and circular in form. They take steps according to the rhythm of *tudi*. There are different timings such as *parakameethal, kaya tudi, nakku tudi* for the dance. They also sing couplets or four lines songs namely *chollukal* according to the rhythm of *tudi*. During the dance, the women sing small songs called *chollukal*. One takes the lead and the others repeat. Men also make some extemporary *chollukal*, depending upon the social context and the mood of the group. A few sample of *vattakali* chollukal is given below. It is sung by Paru Chachamma (82), Pallikunnu, Wayanad.

Example 1

1. **Theke velliku thengana poolu-poolu**
   South Velli gets coconut pieces

2. **Vadeke velliku mangana poolu-poolu**
   North velli gets mango pieces

3. **Theke velliku nee iripu**
   You wait for the south Velli.

4. **Vadeke velliku nanipe** (Eyha hoo hoi... eyha hoo hoi....)
   I go for north Velli.

Example 2

1. **Aasam kuthi ponnoke**
   Sky is filled with shining star.

2. **Pooyai kuthi ponnoke**
   Earth is filled with glittering flies.
3. *Poomikuoru poli muram*

Earth has a beautiful canopy.

4. *Aasam koru poli muram* (Eyha hoo hoi..... Eyha hoo hoi....)

Sky has got a beautiful canopy.

Usually the dance takes place at night after the night’s meal. It goes on for hours. In the meantime they take a break for betel leaf, tobacco chewing or to drink tea. In a marriage context the dance will go on till the next day morning. *Tudi* and *kuzhal* are needed for *vattakali*. When they stop *tudi* beating, the dance also stops automatically.

**C. CASE STUDIES**

I have seen *vattakali* performance since 1996. Each performance was unique with some specialties. As the Paniya community concerns this performance has some special role and influence on them. While going through certain concrete performance cases let me examine this art form, its socio-cultural significance and its impact on shaping the Paniya culture. For each *vattakali* performance there are three stages such as before, during, and after the performance. in my observation and analysis I follow these stages.

1. **Case One: Marriage ceremony of Appu and Sindhu**

   **Place** : Mr. Appu’s (25) house, Alumthatta, Wayanad

   **Date** : 23-3-2002 Saturday, 8 p.m.

   **Context** : Marriage ceremony of Mr. Appu

**Alumthatta Village**

It is one of the biggest Paniya Villages in Muttil panchayath, Kalpetta Taluk Wayanad. There are 45 families having 252 people live here. Many of them are agricultural labourers in the nearby coffee estate, which belongs to Sri. Shanthi Varman, a Jain believer. Coffee estate, paddy field, and a small stream surround the village. The total area of the village is 4.85 acres and there is no good road up to the village, no electricity connection, no proper drinking water facilities available there.
About 40 families have tiled houses; most of them are not in proper condition. Their literacy rate is 31%, most of the children study unto to primary level and become dropouts. They have their own religious system that consist of thine, thare and kavu institutions. Each house has its own thine, for this village there are four thare, and their kavu is situated in the coffee estate. Their village gods are Gulikan and Mambiyathi. The clan name of the bridegroom is Chanjalodan (father’s family) and Koleriyans (mother’s family). The neighbours are: Santhivarman’s estate (west and south), Edapatty estate (east and north). (Mapping of Alumthathatta Village is given in Fig.17).

Contact persons: A.T. Vasudevan (60). He is an active social worker and political leader among the Paniyas. He is the president of Pattikajathi Pattikavargga Samyuktha Samithi. Appu (25), Kumaran (58), Raju Naduvil (30) and Vasantha (25), brother-in-law and sister of Appu, the bridegroom.

a. Before the Vattakali Performance

First Phase

I visited the village on 20th March 2002 Wednesday with Mr. Raju Naduvil, the brother-in-law of Mr. Appu. We went to Appu’s house in the evening had tea from the family. Raju introduced me to the family members. I know Raju’s wife Mrs. Vasantha. After the tea we went around the village, met some people, met Mr. A.T. Vasudevan, talked to him about tribal life, about the village and listened to his life experience. Around 8.30 p.m. we left the village. We had gone there by a motorcycle and told them that I was interested in participating in Appu’s marriage, and promised them to come for the marriage on 23-3-2002. I also agreed to take photograph for the marriage celebration. They welcomed the proposal. The visit was quite normal and cordial. Through Raju, I could easily made rapport with the villagers as well as Appu’s family.

Second Phase

On 23rd March Saturday 2002 I reached Alumthatta village at 5.00 p.m. Mr. P.J. Thomas, a College Professor and my friend also accompanied me. He is known to Mr. Raju my contact person. This time we did not take vehicle. By bus we came to the nearby place and walked towards the village. Appu’s house was already decorated;
Fig. 17 Mapping of Alumthatta Village

Paniya House

Non-tribal house
**Pandal** was built for the marriage. There was a good crowd. Appu, Raju, Vasanta, and Appu's parents received us. Tea was served. I kept my bag on the *varandha*, but Vasanta took it inside the room and kept in a safe place.

After tea at 6.00 p.m. we made a short walk inside the village, met people, talked to them and finally went to see Mr. A.T. Vasudevan (60), one of my informants. We spent about two hours with him, discussing on the social, political life of the village, their history, struggles, and issues they present today. They had electricity connection ten years ago but it is not there now. It was disconnected due to some troubles. They have drinking water problem. There was a municipal water connection but now it is not functioning. It is because people are not united, they are divided on party politics, said Mr. A.T. Vasudevan. He also gave us black tea. I met and talked to Kumaran (58), Gopalan (40), Velli (35), Santha (30), and Ponni (60) from the same village. They shared about their past and present life, their customs and traditions.

Around 8.00 p.m. we come back to the marriage house. I talked to the children, took their photos, joined the youth for chewing betel leaves. 9.00 p.m. we were given supper. It was simple vegetarian meal with rice, *sambar*, pickle and *pappadam*. After the meal we talked to the people for sometime. By 10 p.m. Professor left the place and I stayed back.

**Third Phase**

After the night meal I was resting in the *varanda* of the groom's house, along with some youngsters. They asked me to take a photo. I took one group photo. Suddenly I heard a loud noise in the courtyard. The aunty of the groom called Vellachi (54) was quarrelling with the uncle on some issue. There were people on both sides and some were drunk. Both group started beating each other. I was curiously watching all the incidents a little away from the crowd. Suddenly a young fellow named Balan (30) ran towards me, trying the snatch the camera that I was holding, thinking that I was taking photos of the quarrel scene. He pushed me to one side, immediately those who knew me came to my rescue. They scolded the other fellow and pushed him away from the scene. He was also drunk. The situation was rather tense. The aunt's group wanted to disturb the function. I did not know what to do at that context. I just kept quite.
After an hour with the request of the groom’s father the Chemmi (priest) performed the ritual at thine inside the house, lighted the wick and kept on the thare. He requested the performers to play tudi and kuzhal. Slowly the crowd became relaxed, some left for having meal, others started performing vattakali on the courtyard. Elders, youth and children formed their own group and started the dance spontaneously. The group became large, while going round the courtyard, watching the dance, to my surprise I saw Mrs. Vellachi (one who made the problem) dancing with the women group! Later she joined the women for chewing betel leaves, cracking jokes as if nothing had happened before. She was quite relaxed (Plate 3.1).

b. During the Performance

The performance started around 11.30 pm. and continued till next day morning 6 am. In the initial stage the performers were in high spirit. There were five groups for the performance that including the instrument players. First group was of the children both boys and girls joined in this group. Second group constituted of young girls. There were eight persons in the group. The third group was of the men folk. Young and old people were in it. The fourth group was of the women folk and they were twelve of them. The aunty, Mrs. Vellachi, also present in this group.

The sequence of Vattakali in a marriage context

In a marriage ceremony there are eight occasions where the community perform vattakali. It is spread out to four days. In between these performance people will be participating in other programmes of the marriage. Very important matter is that there is no special ready made group for vattakali performance in a marriage context. All the members gathered there for the wedding can participate in the dance. Regarding the style of the dance or the steps taken for the dance, various types of dance steps are taken at various occasions for vattakali dance.

Vattakali by the relatives and friends on the previous night of the marriage
At the time of bride groom leaving his house for the marriage
On the way to the bride’s house if the marriage party is walking
After the reception by the Chemmi and the bride’s relatives
During the marriage soon after the wedding ritual
Before leaving the bride’s house to the groom’s house
PLATE 3.1

MARRIAGE CEREMONY OF APPU AND SINDHU - PHASE I

1. 'Thine' in Appu's house
2. Appu getting the blessing from his uncle at 'Thine'
3. 'Thare' infront of Appu's house
4. Tudi performers at Appu's house
5. Appu dance with the group
6. Kuzhal performer
7. Vattakali at Appu's house
8. Vattakali - men and women groups
After entering the married couple into groom’s house

During the thanks giving ritual (deivathinu kodukal) to the gods on the next day of the marriage

In the marriage context, there are two functions for this performance. One is the ritualistic function and the other is the entertainment function. Here nos.2,5,8 are purely for ritualistic purpose and nos.3,4,6 are for entertainment and nos.1,7 have a mixture of both functions. There are variation in the style of vattakali in nos.4,5,6. When the bridegroom enters the bride’s house the group perform a special tudi and kuzhal which is called as muttu tudi and kuzhal. According to the tune and rhythm the vattakali style will be different. For marriage proper, thiruvanakettu tudi and kuzhal is used. Here also the vattakali style is different in a slight manner. After the marriage before leaving the bride’s house they perform kaya tudi and kuzhal for vattakali. There is some difference in this rhythm and style of performance. All the other occasions the vattakali style is the same.

The performance proper

Three youths namely Raju, Balan, and Chandran started the tudi performance. Velli mooppan was the kuzhal performer. They played the instruments for fifteen minutes and by that time a special mood was created there for people to dance. The elder women group came forward to the courtyard and started the Vattakali. They stood in a circle, started swinging and shaking their body, moving their feet clockwise and anti-clockwise direction, and lifting their hands up to the forehead and saying ‘hoi...hoo...hai...’ together. The whole group were rhythmically moving in a circular fashion. Some women were carrying their young children in their hands. They too were enjoying the dance. The dance went on for thirty minutes and they stopped it to take a brake. By the time the children were ready for the dance they formed one circle, there were boys and girls in it and they asked me to take their photographs. One girl named Sindhu asked me to give her a copy of the photo and I agreed to her request.

The instrumentalist started the performance again this time more form the community joined the vattakali. The young girls formed one circle. This gave enthusiasm to the men folk and they too started the dance in a separate place. The men’s performance was in a different style. Their movement was faster than women.

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They took small steps and rotated oneself and with the whole group. The male youth teased among themselves saying about their lovers or expressing their wish to find one from the group. During the performance the group especially the women folk sing small songs (*chollukal*) to entice the group. And the group repeats these lines. At the end of each couplets they make the noise “hoi-hoi...hoi, hoi...hi...hi...”. These songs are full of jokes and cynical remarks, which give vigor and life to the whole performance. Some songs are made on the spot. One Chachamma (old lady) started the *chollukal* in her heightened spirit and others in the group repeated it with great enthusiasm. The example for the *chollukal* are:

**Vattakali chollukal .1**

1. *Mothiram utta monni viralum*
   The little finger with the ring
2. *Kudiye appaku kattikoduthe*
   Is shown to the father in law.
3. *Araati kettutha valli naduvum*
   The waist tied with arrati
4. *Kudiya appaku katti koduthe*
   Is shown to the father in law
5. *Aalili murukam vanthakula*
   When people started speaking about it
6. *Kudiyanku thane vonachu aatha* *(Ya..ha ha.. Hoi hoi .. Hi.. Hi...)*
   I thought of going with father in law.

**Vattakali chollukal .2**

1. *Athi pagam pazhuthu veentha kuyala*
   Athi fruits ripened and fell down
2. *Koli pagam pzhuthu veentha kuyala*
   Koli fruits ripened and fell down
3. *Pillitu pothu kuyala payutu pothu kuyala*
   Cover it with grass, cover it with mat
4. *Nammake thinnam kuyala nammake ikkam kuyala* (Ya..ha ha.. Hoi hoi .. Hi..)

Let us eat kuyala, let us sit kuyala.

These songs have created great interest in the group. Other group also sang their own *chollukal*. One performer Madhu told me that some of them were extemporary creation.

Since the courtyard was not spacious enough, they had to form circles in a row. Those who were playing the *tudi* and *kuzhal* were mostly male youths. They took turns for the performance. For the youth it was an occasion to show their skill and get the appreciation of some young girls. According to the rhythm of *tudi* the group danced. When the *tudi* stopped they also stopped the dance. After an hour of dancing, some retired to pan chewing and refresh themselves for the next performance. On the whole, the performance was quite natural and informal. Anybody could join the group at time and leave the group at their convenience. While in the dance mood they form one circle and this circle would create certain bond or unity among them. This unity is due to the physical contact and the group communication, which is verbal and non-verbal.

Around 3.30 a.m., the *vattakali* came to a slow movement. The rhythm of *tudi* were also very slow and low. Some of the performers gone to take rest in the nearby *varanda* or house. Others were dosing in the *pandal* itself. Those who were still playing *tudi* and *kuzhal* were given black tea and hot water. By 4.30 a.m. the dance came to an end. The *tudi* drumming were there, but in a mild way and low voice. They stopped playing *kuzhal*.

**Observation**

The performers were mostly from the village itself, their relatives also joined the *vattakali*, but a few in number. The elders and invited guests and their relatives were the audience. They sat on the *varandha* and watched the performance. Occasionally we could hear comments from the audience. It was in the form of appreciation, suggestions or instruction to the performers.

The researcher took photos of various groups in various postures. He was encouraged to take photos. But some performers were showed inhibition while taking
photos. Since it was at night not enough light was there at the performance place. The performers preferred dim light to bright light for they were more free at dark space. In fact they are afraid of light and love darkness!. There was electricity connection for the pandal, which was taken from the nearby Nair family. They were very cooperative for this marriage function.

I also was given a place to rest inside the groom’s house. It was quite surprising. Usually they will not welcome a stranger inside a house. They took confidence in I and allowed him to sleep inside the house. At 4.30 a.m. the researcher went to bed to take rest, even then the tudi beating and kuzhal playing was continuing. It was a soothing experience to take rest with the background of tudi beating.

c. After the Performance

At 6 a.m. all the group dispersed, some were taking rest there itself. Some were gone for bath, some were getting ready for the marriage trip, some were busy with preparing food for the morning and afternoon. The whole atmosphere was very serene, pleasant and calm. Being near the forest, coffee estate, we could hear the birds singing and streams music... I got up around 6.30 a.m. went out to the stream for washing. By 7 a.m. the group was ready for the trip.

The bridegroom dressed in new cloths and with their parents and relatives all dressed well stood up for photo. There I saw the aunty (Mrs. Vellachi) in front of the group. The Chemmi started the morning pooja inside the house on the thine, called the parents, uncle and aunty inside the house with the groom. They blessed him one by one. At the background we could hear tudi beat and kuzhal music. 7.30 a.m. They all came out to the pandal in front of the house, chemmi put up a lighted wig on the thare outside. They started tudi beating in vattakali rhythm and the dance started. It continued for 10 minutes. This was an expression of joy. The groom’s party set out for the marriage. They carried tudi and kuzhal along with them. His sister and the brother-in-law accompanied the groom. The aunty was right in front of them! They stood in front of the group and the relatives followed them to the bus stop. At 8 a.m. they got the bus that goes to the bride’s place, (Vilambukandam), that is twelve kilometers away from the groom’s house. There were 42 persons in the group. Of late, some reached the place.
At the bride’s house

While reaching the bride’s house, they stood outside the gate. Later they were received by the relatives of the bride and the Chemmi. At the entrance, the Chemmi stood in his official dress and asked some questions to the groom’s party. Who are you? Where do you come from? For what purpose? What did you bring for the marriage? Did you fulfill all the duties according to our tradition? The Chemmi of the groom answered all the queries in their native dialect. Being satisfied with the answers they are received by the bride’s Chemmi, the bride’s parents and uncles by throwing rice on them and showing the lighted wick to them.

They were seated on the pandal and were given black tea and snacks. Then they performed vattakali in front of the house and they were received by giving betel leaves. *(Murukkan)* At the bride’s house during the marriage ceremony the groom’s party preformed the *Vattakali*. After the marriage both bride’s party and groom’s party together performed *vattakali* to express their joy. After the marriage feast, there was a ritual of handing over the bride to the uncle of bridegroom. After that function, the groom’s party asked the permission to take the girl with them. The girl’s parents allowed them. As a mark of joy and gratitude they again performed *Vattakali*. At this moment the men folk also joined the performance (Plate 3.2).

For this marriage, there were some problems in the girl’s family. The girl’s father was not cooperating with the marriage. So much so, the eldest uncle (Karikan) took the initiative for the marriage. So when the question of bride’s price or bride’s wealth *(penpanam)* came there were differences of opinion. Tension mounted to the extent that the groom’s party planned to leave the place without taking the meal. The mediators intervened and consoled them. Marriage meal also was not ready in time. Some came fully drunk and disturbed the function.

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4 It is the money and other prescribed items given to bride’s family by the groom’s family. It is known as 64 *nichayan* or 64 *kodukal*. The custom is that the boy has to feed the girl for 30days after the engagement. *Valli* consists of 30kg rice, 30 bunch firewood, 5 areca nut, 1 bunch betel leaves, 1 tobacco leaf, 1 piece of cloth, oil, soap and grocery items. *Valli* has to be given in once a week and this custom is known as *valli pokal*. *(told by Chimban Mooppan on 13-04-2004)*
PLATE 3.2

MARRIAGE CEREMONY AT APPU AND SINDHU - PHASE II

1, 2. Tudi - Kuzhal performance before the groom's journey to bride's house
3. Tudi - Kuzhal performance at bride's house by groom's party
4, 5, 6. 'Vattakali' at bride's house by groom's party
7. Groom with his friends at bride's house
8. A family is bride's village
I had witnessed all these events and observed their vattakali performance. I myself was taking the photos of the function. I participated in the whole function taking the role of a photographer of the groom’s party. Once they start tudi beating and kuzhal playing the congregation forget all ill feelings and joins the vattakali dance! That was the beauty of the whole event.

At bridegroom’s house after the marriage

The marriage party reached back to Appu’s house at 6.30 p.m. Chemmi performed the ritual and received them. The couples were led into the house by the Chemmi and they paid homage to the ancestor’s spirits on the thare. Then they were brought back to the pandal and seated on two chairs. The priest placed a lighted lamb in the pandal and the men and women folk started the vattakali dance. It went on for 30 minutes. Then all were given meals and they left to their home at night (Plate 3.3).

The next day evening for the ancestors the Mooppan and Chemmi did the pooja on both party’s house, and for this ritual also they performed vattakali with the accompaniment of tudi and kuzhal. It was a thanksgiving ritual. The family and their relatives gave thanks to their kuladeivam (clan god), mariamma, gulikan god, idivetti deivam (god of thunder and rain) and Padachavan deivam.

Observations

1) For all the important stages of marriage ritual vattakali is performed.
2) Vattakali kept up the tempo and mood of the marriage group in a relaxed, jovial way.
3) Vattakali kept up the unity of the group in the midst of misunderstanding and disagreement.
4) Vattakali assumes a religious, sacred status at certain time. The whole congregation sometime experiences the dance of spirits in vattakali.
5) Vattakali had become so natural and informal that every body in the group had participated in it some time or other during the marriage celebration.

Case Two: Vishu Celebration of the Paniyas

Place : Kurumbalakotta Village, Eachome, Wayanad
PLATE 3.3
MARRIAGE CEREMONY OF APPU AND SINDHU - PHASE III

1. '64 Vekkal' ritual at the beginning of the marriage ceremony
2. The married couple at bride's house with Sindhu's grandmother
3. 'Penpanam Kodukal' - giving bride's wealth
4. Marriage ceremony
5. Blessing the couple by the elders
6. 'Thiruvanakettu' - marriage ritual
7. Appu and Sindhu with his relatives and friends
8,9. Vattakali of men and women after the marriage
Kurumbalakotta Village

Kurumbalakotta village is situated in Eachome, Panamaram panchayath in Wayanad. It is a hilly, rocky region, situated on the top of a mountain called Kurumbalakotta. This village has got 14 families that consists of 74 people, inhabit in an area of less than 5 acres. They are all coolie workers, working in the estates and paddy fields of the neighbors. Many do not have proper houses, drinking water facility, and electricity. For drinking water, the whole families depend on a natural stream, which comes under a wild tree. For bath and washing cloth, they go to the other side of the hill, which is one km. away from the village. There is no cultivation in their land except some plantain tree, tapioca, and coffee plant. Both women and men get work two or three days in a week.

Kurumbalakotta village is a historical place. It was used as a fort (Kotta) when Tipu Sultan came to Wayanad from Mysore. Children go to the nearby school, but there are dropouts among them. The literacy rate is 32%. During off-season, they live in poverty and starvation. Tribals were here from ancient time onwards. There were three Hindu families; they were the local rulers and landlords. Tribals worked under them. Much of the lands were belong to them. Some of the families are Malankara, Edachana, Vemoth, Athirathil, Eachome. Their kavu is called Kottekavu, in Kezhavayal, which is one km away form the village and their clan gods are Mambiyati and Kottelamma. The thare is kept in front of Velukkan’s house where Chunda Chachamma stays. The names of their family are: Cheladiyan, Erumadan, Anchilan, and Kidacholian. The neighbours are: Kurian Nedumkandathil (west), Kurichiya village Kezhavayal(south), Jose Puthuparmbil (east), Joy Paliyath (north). They are mostly non-tribals. Marxist party’s presence is seen in the village during the election time.

Key Informants: Velukkan (65) – Village Head (Mooppan), Gulikan (72) – Priest (Chemmi), Chunda (90) – Mother of Velukkan, Chandran (35) – Grandson of Chunda. (The mapping of Kurumbalakotta Village is given in Fig.18).
Fig. 18 Mapping of Kurumbalakotta Village

- Paniya House
- Non-tribal house
a. Before the Vishu Celebration

I visited the village three times with a friend Biju, a non-tribal, before the Vishu celebration. Thus he got acquainted with the people, identified some key informants. Mr. Chandran (35), a coolie worker, father of four children was the researcher’s contact person in the village. Chunda (90), the oldest person in the village, mother of the mooppan, Velukkan (65). She shared the past history of the place. Sang some songs, told stories etc. When I expressed the wish to participate in the Vishu celebration, the Mooppan joyfully invited me for the function.

On the first trip, I could not climb up to the top of the hill. My friend went up and enquired about the old woman Chunda. She was not there. On the second time I could meet her. She came down to the grandson’s house (Chandran). I gave betel leaves and areca nut (murukkan) to Chunda (she is called as Chachamma) and others as a gift. They all liked it. To the children I gave sweet. They gave me black tea. I spent hours with them. They sang Vattakali pattu and Urakka pattu and some other folk songs. I recorded the songs. It was sung in Paniya dialect. (See appendix-I). During the third trip, I met the youth of the village, talked to them, asked them about vattakali and other art forms of Paniyas. They all agreed to have a performance during ‘Vishu’ celebration. With the children of the village, I went to see the temple and pond on the other side of the hill. It was the festival season. They were cleaning the temple premises. I was invited for meal. Thanking for their generosity we came back to the village. This time also, I was taken some sweets and murukkan for the villagers. To build up a relationship and rapport with the group, I found those things were very helpful means. The non-tribals on the way to the village (Ooru) asked me about my intention of going there. Then I explained to them about my study programme. They appreciated the idea.

b. During the Performance : Vishu day Celebrations

Vishu is a harvest as well as a spring festival for Kerala. It is celebrated by the Hindu community on ‘Medam 1’ (Malayalam month) in April. Tribal communities also celebrate this festival in their own way. For them it is part of the fertility cult ritual. It is a rest day for the Mother Earth. They believe that it is the day of menses for her. They have 4 days of rituals and celebration in connection with Vishu. After
the Vishu they start cultivation and the ritual is called Vithu ideel (sowing the seed) in the prepared soil.

1 Day Celebration (14-04-2002)

Early morning Ooru Mooppan (Village head) Velukan prepared the Vishukani. It is considered as an auspicious time to see Kani on Medam 1. People of the village gathered there in order to see the Kani and received Prasadam from the Mooppan. On that day, the landlord or village head suppose to give Vishu kaineetam to the members of the village. It will be one rupee coin, clothes and Murukkan. During the ritual, the tribal children played tudi and kuzhal. Mooppan performed the ritual ‘deivam kaval’ and people had Vattakali for a short period of time.

Afternoon they prepared a vegetarian meal as Vishu saddya and served to all village people. The non-tribals nearby supplied some of the items for the preparation of the meals. The tribals themselves collected the rest of the items required for the saddya. After the meal, the youngsters started beating tudi and playing kuzhal. The women folk performed Vattakali dance. Some men also joined the dance performance. The researcher joined them for vishusaddya. There were 60 people in the first day.

II day: (15-04-2002)

Before noon, people from Kurumbalakotta village under the leadership of Mooppan, came to the Kotte kavu at Kezhavayal. Kurichiya tribe is settled in this place. They cleaned the bushes in the kavu and prepared the thare for the gods: Gulikan, Mari, Bhagavathi and ancestors spirits. By noon under the guidance of Polan, Kaima, Gulikan, Velukan and Chunda they started the rituals and pooja. They brought the lamp and sword from the neighbouring Kurichiya village.5

In the background of tudi and kuzhal under the shades of the tree they started the ritual dance. Men and women joined the dance. Velukan and Kaima became the Shaman (Velichappadu). They started going round the sacred tree (Atthi maram) and thara in a dance form and others followed them. The dance continued for three hours. Some of the performers went in to the stage of trance. The Velichapadu came and

5 Kezhavayal Kurichiya community has certain rights and duties over this kavu. For vishu celebration they are supposed to give oil, aval and plantain to the deities of the kavu. It is said that in olden time the Paniyas of Kurumbalakotta were the dependents of the Kurichiyas here.
freed them from the spirits. All the tribals gathered there went to the thare (Gulikan thare) and received the blessing from the god. Finally there was a community dance (Vattakali) with a different rhythm of tudi and Kuzhal. (mari tudi, vellattu tudi) At 4 p.m. they started the procession form Kotte kavu to the Kurumbalakotta Ooru. Mooppan led the procession.

Non-tribals also gathered there; Christian, Hindus and Muslims. They also participated in the ritual with devotion and respect and contributed some money as offering for the celebration. I went to the village and to the kavu with a friend in the morning and enquired about the timing of the programme. Then the tribals were not sure of the time of the function, and there was not any preparation for it. But to my surprise around 12 noon they all gathered at the kavu and started the function (Plate 3.4).

Evening by 6 p.m. they started the programme at the village. They have chosen Velukan Mooppan's house for the gathering. There were about 90 people gathered there. Some were their relatives and guests came from the neighboring villages to participate in the function. In the courtyard they prepared a thare and a temporary temple structure using plantain tree and coconut leaves. The priest started the rituals, placed the lighted wig before the temple, performed pooja for the spirit of the ancestors and gods.

After the night meal they started the programme. First item was chasing away the poojary (priest) who was not regular in coming to the temple and conducting the pooja. He was chased by snakes and evil spirits (satan). Second item was deivam kanal (seeing the god) by the priest. With the accompaniment of kuzhal and tudi, the priest worn in velichapadu dress, invoked the gods for blessing the function. Third item was bringing all the gods and goddess and the spirit of the ancestors to the Vishuthara – It was a long ceremony that lasted for two hours. Two priests (Chemmi and Kaiyathan) sat face to face with bells in their hands, started the Othu Chollal (Mantras). Gods from seven worlds below and seven worlds above were brought to the vishu thara. Seven youth were prepared to receive gods of the seas and lands. They stood in line wearing red sashes on their forehead and waist. They were all possessed by gods' spirit and started dancing in a circular form with tudi beating. Around 12 midnight, the community dance started. All men and women, young and
PLATE 3.4
VISHU'S CELEBRATION - PHASE I

1. Preparing the Kavu for festival
2. Kottekavu
3. 'Deivam Kanal' ritual at Kottekavu
4. Chunda Chachamma giving instructions to the priests
5,6. Vattakali of the devotees
7. 'Chemmi' doing penance
8. 'Chemmi' blesses the people
old joined the dance. According to the rhythm *tudi* and *kuzhal* they moved clockwise and anticlockwise direction. It was somewhat similar to *Vattakali* dance. The dance went on for two hours. The tempo of the dance varied at different times according to the rhythm of the *tudi* and *kuzhal*. It was a great experience for the group. There were some spectators (Plate 3.5).

As there was no electricity, all these programmes were performed in the light of kerosene lamp. The dance was so vigorous and some fell during the dance. Sometimes they were holding hand in order to control the group. During the dance time, people were coming to the *Velichappadu* to get his blessing and advice. The programme continued till 4 a.m. in the morning. Most of the participants took rest there itself.

III day (16-04-2002)

There were more entertainment programmes on the third day. It started at 4 p.m. The youth and elders of the village came together, costumed themselves, applied make-ups and conducted *Kurathi Natakam*, *Porattu Natakam*, *Thenga Muttukali* and *Kolkali*. The costumes were very simple, for the women roles, they used sari, blouse, chains and bangles that is collected for the women there. For the make-ups they use charcoal, turmeric powder, rice powder and lime stone. The make-ups were so natural and they used only natural materials. The purpose of all these programmes was community entertainment. The whole community took part in it. Around 6.30 p.m. they started *Vattakali*. It was in a grand form. Three *tudi* performers and two *kuzhal* players were there. Young and old joined the dance. Women formed one group and men in another group.

At night the women prepared *Karayappam*. For this *Vennakallu pooja* (blessing of the marble stone) had done by the *Mooppan* and *Chemmi*. It is taken ceremoniously to the kitchen and *Chunda Morathy* received the stone and kept it in the Oven. There were some 'drinks' for these days and the elders consumed a bit that gave boost to the celebration. About 9 p.m. all were dispersed after the night meal.

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6 It is special cake made out of unleavened rice flour. It is prepared only on *vishu* celebration and distributed to every body as god's *prasadam* (blessing). It is a typical tribal ritual, which is very special to the Paniya society. It resembles with the *feast of the unleavened bred* of the Jews.
PLATE 3.5
VISHU CELEBRATIONS - PHASE II

1. Vishu ritual at Kurumbalakotta village
2. Kuzhal performance at the ritual
3. Tudi performance at the ritual
4. Vattakali performance
5. Youngsters waiting for the gods and ancestors
6,7. Dance with the gods and ancestors
8. 'Vennakallu Pooja'
9. 'Karayappam' prepared as 'prasadam'
10. Audience at Vishu celebration at Kurumbalakotta village
Afternoon they had the thanks giving ceremony. It is known as deivathinu kodukal function. Mooppan did the deivam kanal ritual; gave instructions to the people; blessed them to have success and prosperity for the new year. Mooppan took the oath in front of the spirits of the ancestors and gods for the villagers. Then he thanked the gods and send them back to their worlds. He went into the house (thare) and thanked the spirits of the ancestors. During this ritual he said some prayers in paniya dialect and prostrated before the thare. With the tudi background he performed the thullal (the dance of god) for twenty minutes. Along with the dance he was saying some prayers in a chanting style. At end he paid homage to the gods of four direction bowing and throwing rice to four directions. Then they were given Karayappam as prasadam. Finally, there was a Vattakali performance by the whole community as finale (Kalasakkottu). It lasted for 30 minutes. Around 6 p.m. the congregation dispersed (Plate 3.6).

There was a sense of satisfaction, joy, and serenity in their face. They pay homage to the spirits and gods by touching the sacred sword and lighted lamp (wick). They took an oath before the gods, to live a peaceful, brotherly, good life for the whole new year, according to the wish of the ancestors. Till this time the Mooppan was not taking any food except black tea. After the ceremony, he took bath, ate some food, and went to take rest. He took four days of rigorous fast and abstinence for the welfare of the community.

I thanked the village community and came back to his house around 8 p.m. He took photos and video of the programme. There was not enough power for the video. So he could not record the whole programme. (Baby, Wilson and Biju helped me on different times.)

c. After the Vishu Celebration

After two days of the Vishu celebration (20th April 2002), the researcher visited the village, met the women and Morathi (Chunda) asked about their experience of this celebration. Generally they were happy. But they said this year we could not do much for the celebration due to lack of work and money. ‘We could not feed the people who came for it.’ remarked one lady. Men also complained the same. Another comment
PLATE 3.6
VISHU CELEBRATION - PHASE III

1. Kurumbalakotta Hill
2. 'Vishuthara' at Kurumbalakotta village
3. Make-up session of the performers
4. 'Pulikali' performers
5. 'Pulikali'
6. 'Thengamuttukali'
7,8. 'Porattu natakam'
9. Blessing of the 'Chemmi'
10. Chunda Chachamma with her family at Kurumbalakotta
was by Chandran (35) our contact person. He said that nowadays the youth are not
interested in such celebration and entertainment items. They want to see cinema all
the time. Mooppan said: "Next year we will make this celebration better." Young
women were reluctant to answer my questions. They also enjoyed the programme.
Children were happy and they actively participate in it. Generally they are contented
and they believe that the gods are satisfied with our small celebration and they will
bless our village, ward off from all evil spirits.

Generally they welcomed me. I joined in their meals and murukkan. But due
to some other reasons (Priest, Christian, Ex-director of TUDI, non-tribal environment
and influence, miss-leading of politicians and non-tribes), I could not fully enter into
their world. They too kept a distance from me. The Paniya language barrier also was
another impediment.

They said, next year we will make this celebration in a better way. I promised
them to come for next year also. I agreed to them to give the photos of the celebration
soon. I invited for TUDI's festival which was held at Eachome, Wayanad in May
2002. They gave tea and murukan. I thanked them, gave Murukkan and sweets to the
group Chandran recorded some songs (Vattakali) for me (See Section II in Appendix-
I).

3. Case Three : TUDI Tribal Festival

TUDI is a tribal cultural movement working in Wayanad since 1996. It
organizes Tribal Festival annually to promote and safeguard tribal culture. During the
festival various tribal communities gather in a village called Eachome, Wayanad for 2-
3 days; perform their traditional art forms, share their life experience and join in
sports, games and other cultural programmes. For folk performance they come in
their traditional dress and there will be competition between different village
communities (Ooru) to present their art forms in a better way. Some of the items are
Vattakali, Kambala dance, Kolkali, tudi and kuzhal performance, Kurathi natakam,
etc. I had been participating in this festival since 1997 onwards. The festival that I had
taken for the case study was conducted on 11 May 2002.

Place: TUDI campus, Eachome, Wayanad, near Nellickal Paniya village.
Date: 11-05-2002, evening
Nellickal village

Nellickal village is situated in Panamaram panchayath, Wayanad. It consists of 13 families, which has a population of 52 people. It is situated in 0.5-acre land that is on the Sarvodaya roadside with 12 tiled houses and one asbestos house. The village has got two wells and electricity facility. The sanitation facility is very poor so much so, that many get sick often. They are all agricultural laborers but they do not get work regularly. Many families find very difficult to meet their both end. Children go to the nearby Sarvodaya High School, and there is one boy, Raju who passed SSLC in the year 2002. The literacy rate of the village is 48%. Their family names are: Cherattaniyan, Chachalodan, Karamadan, Chemanda, Kadaran a and Kizhangodan. Their kavu name is Kottekavu and the village god is Mambiyati. Congress and Marxist political presence is seen in the village. Their neighbours are mostly non-tribals like Achappan Puthenveedu (É), Raveendran teacher (W), Joy Payyanattu (N), Appachan Kochupurakal (S) (The mapping of Nellickal village and TUDI campus is given in Fig. 19).

a. Before the Festival

There was one month preparations for this festival. TUDI team with the help of the tribal village council (Ooru Sabha) organized this festival. Along with the team this time, I visited 12 Paniya villages and 2 Kurichya villages. The visit was in the evening. During the visit I made contact with the village head (mooppan) and village council. (The elders and youngsters are in the council). They were all enthusiastic about the festival. The preparation for the competition and cultural programmes were done in each village itself. As part of the festival two village meetings (Ooru Sabha) were held in each village under the presidentship of the village head (mooppan). There they plan out their participation in the festival. TUDI team shared the direction and plans of the Central Organization Committee.

In connections with festival, there were study seminars, sports meet, cultural competition, etc. Tribal organizations from different part of Wayanad District were invited for the festival. There was non-tribal participation too. The Government
Fig. 19 Mapping of Nellickal Village and TUDI Campus

- Paniya House
- Non-tribal house
officials and political leaders and social leaders were also participated in this great event.

This year the Committee organized a *Vattakali* performance competition as part of the festival. Each Paniya village prepared a team for the performance. There were 12 teams for this year. The winners were given special prizes and others, consolation prizes were distributed. It was a colorful event. The main event was on May 11th 2002 (Plate 3.7).

**b. During the Vattakali Performance at the Festival ground**

The performance started at 4 p.m. and it was for 60 minutes. It was an attractive, colorful and exciting event. The beating of *tudi*, playing of *kuzhal* and the "hoi-hoi" sound of the performers made the whole atmosphere lively and festive. The whole congregation was in dancing mood for one hour. There were tribals and non-tribals as audience for the great performance. A sense of satisfaction, self-esteem were seen on the face of the tribal people. They all felt as one community through this event. There were three judges (Sankaran Nellarchal, Joji Mathew and George Joseph) for the performance, and I was one of them.

Except two teams (Koonamel, Kurumbalkotta) all the performers were in their traditional dress: White dhoti with border, red blouse and red *arati* (waist sash):

They wore ornaments like glass bangles, bead necklace, *mookuthi, kammal, padaswaram*, etc. In some groups, the *Mooppan* of the village played the *kuzhal* and men folk played the *tudi*. I have arranged two persons to take still photos and video. Being in a competition each group tried to perform *Vattakali* in a unique fashion (Plate 3.8).
PLATE 3.7
TRIBAL FESTIVAL - PHASE I

1. Chimban Mooppan does the 'deivam kanal' ritual at the 'thare'
2. Mooppan in his ritual dress leading the festival procession
3,4. Festival procession with the tudi beating
5. Ritual at the festival ground
6. Vattakali and Tudi - Kuzhal performance at the festival ground as ritual
7. 'Deivathinu kodukal' ritual (thanks giving ceremony)
8. Vattakali as part of the thanks giving ceremony
PLATE 3.8

TRIBAL FESTIVAL - PHASE II

1. Vattakali - Kallum motta village
2. Vattakali - Nellickal village
3. Vattakali - Athirathil village
4. Vattakali - Thoongadi village
5. Vattakali - Puzhachalveedu village
6. Kambalam Dance - Nellickal village
7. Kambalam Dance - Tudi-Kuzhal performance
8. Kambalam Dance - Malankara village
Table: 3.1 The name of the villages that participated in the Vattakali performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the village</th>
<th>No. participants</th>
<th>No. Tudi Used</th>
<th>No. Kuzhal used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Nellickal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Athirathil</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Varummel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Kallummotta</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Thoongadi</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Naduvil</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Ettukayam</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Veettikunnu</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Koonamel</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Malankara</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Puzhakal Veedu</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Kurumbalakotta</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c. After the performance

All were in a festive mood after the performance. There were some other items like kambala dance and kolkali. For that also the same group participated. This programme continued till 6 p.m. The weather was pleasant, sun was bright, good audience were there to encourage the performers. Some were anxious to know the result of the competition, which was announced only after sometime.

After the festival when I visited some of the villages I asked about Vattakali performance. People were enthusiastic about the programme. Some pointed out the limitations like no proper costumes, no proper tudi players, unwillingness of the performers (few withdrew at the moment) absence of kuzhal for the group, etc. But they all said that if they get another chance they will perform better.
This performance helped to raise their consciousness on this art- from itself. Some were unhappy, because they did not get first prize. Some were complaining that the cash prize, which was given, is not distributed among the performers equally. Yet, they all look forward to another occasion for a good performance.

Observations

1. During the performance, when the conductor of the competition, blued the whistle the tudi performer abruptly stopped the playing. This has created psychological disturbance on some of the performers. Because they were not in a mood to stop the dance. They needed more time for such dance. Emotionally they were in a climax position. So the sudden stopping disturbed their mind and body. Modern time concept is different from tribal time concept.

2. Another incident took place at Athirathil village during the flag hoisting ceremony of the Tribal festival. After hoisting the festival flag the group started playing tudi and kuzhal and the women folk started Vattakali. When the chief guest of the function arrived the organizer asked the performers to stop the tudi performance. But they did not stop it, they continued it for some more time. While asking about it later, the Mooppan (Chimban) said “Sir, we can’t stop a tudi arachil in the middle. It has to complete its full course of beating, otherwise the gods and spirits disturb the whole function”. Therefore, they continued the beating. From this incident, I realized that tribes follow certain order, time, and rhythm in their life which can not be simply disturbed by any external events or forces.

For Paniya tribe, to begin any thing, first they remember their gods in the thine, which the most sacred place they have, and pay homage to them. With their blessings the Mooppan will light the lamp on the thare, which is in the Paniya village near by. Then the gods will be invited to the stage or to the ground where the function is going to take place. All these rituals have to be done in order and it takes some time. We cannot do it in a hurry.

In order to know the will of gods and spirits whether this time is good or bad, there are three methods used by the Paniya Chemmi namely, thenga ideel, paise ideel
In a ritual he will perform any one of them or all the three. After getting the good sign from gods the Chemmi thank gods, bless everybody and by this time there will be *Vattakali*. Then he gives permission to start the function. (Told by Polan Mooppan, Eachome)

3. Another field incident related to the Tribal festival (Told by Chimpan Mooppan Athirathil village).

a. In connection with Tribal festival, there arose some opposition within the community in a village. Therefore, the *mooppan* did a special pooja for ‘Gulikan’ god and ‘Mariamma’ goddess to overcome all the obstacles. The festival went off peacefully.

b. There was a chance for heavy rain during the festival time. The *mooppan* offered special *pooja* to the *Idivetti deivam* (god of rain and thunder) offering the *tudi* and *kuzhal*. And there was no rain till the programme got over. Afterwards at 2 a.m. there was heavy rain in the festival ground. They believe in God’s presence, and God’s intervention in all the aspects of life.

D. COMMUNITY DISCOURSES

These are spontaneous responses or comments of the participants before, during, or after the *Vattakali* performance. Many of the responses are expressions of a group. Hence it represents the community’s opinion on *Vattakali*. These discourses throw many insights on Paniya culture especially on Vattakali performance. During my fieldwork, I have heard these discourses. Some of them are given below.

1. “Kalikkichakka nanka okke marappu” (When we play we forget everything) (Vellachi (65) Alunmthatta, Wayanad)

   This is the experience of the entire performers who participate in the *vattakali* dance. They forget their agonies, anxieties, ill feelings and pain, when they get fully involved in this dance. In the dance movement the participant forget their personal

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7 These are methods of divination. In *paise ideel*, that is throwing the coin, if we get head, it is a good sign (*thelicham*) and if we get tail, it is a bad sign (*adakam*). To rectify the bad sign the *Chemmi* will do some other ritual. In tribal world view there is a remedy for anything.
identity and become part of the group. Thus they become one in mind and body. They will be fully involved in the dance, move according to the rhythm of tudi.

The immediate context of this comment was just before starting the vattakali on the eve of Appu’s marriage at Alumthatta. His aunty (Vellachi) had a severe fight with one of her brothers and the situation was bit tense and awkward due to the quarrel. She was very angry and furious at that time. But after an hour of vattakali while taking a break she commented, “When we play we forget everything”. This is the magical effect of vattakali performance on the community.

2. “Tudiyum koyalum illade enkakku kali vaara. Tudi aranchalo enkaku kali varum ; pattu varum” (We can’t dance without tudi and kuzhal. If you play tudi, dance will come, song will come) (Chunda Chachamma (90) Kurumbalakotta, Wayanad)

This comment shows the importance of tudi and kuzhal in vattakali. Without tudi and kuzhal music a group cannot take steps in vattakali. Also with the background music of tudi and kuzhal the elders remember vattakali songs. Chuda Chachamma, in a festival context said this statement. It was during the Vishu celebration at Kurmbala kotta Paniya village. All agreed to her opinion and called for the tudi and kuzhal troupe to perform tudi and kuzhal in order to start the function. She expressed this opinion from her 90 years of life experience! I saw Chunda Chachamma leading the group in a vattakali dance, singing very old songs (chollukal) for the group. She was very active in that performance. When the tudi or kuzhal goes off-the track she used to scold them strongly.

3. “Kalikichaku enkaku oruma varum” (When we dance, we become one in the group) (Leela Thoongady (38), Wayanad)

This is an important experience of vattakali. Vattakali promotes communal harmony and friendship. It fosters union of minds and body. At the performance context the members forget all their differences and grievances and become one group. People with different moods, tastes, and temperaments join the vattakali. When it gets over they experience mutual freedom and unity among them. As Paniyas they realize their identity and community consciousness. They feel the strength of being together to fight for a cause.
This is the experience if each Paniya performer when she/he takes part in a dance. They experience one another a strong feeling of community togetherness. In fact I would say vattakali is a community building exercise! When Leela said this in a music-making context all agreed to her comment by nodding their heads.

4. “Okka karyatheku enkaku kali bonam; avayanchu enkala jeevitham” (We need vattakali for all the auspicious occasions, that is Paniya life)

(Chimpan Mooppan( 80), Vilambukandam, Wayanad)

This shows the importance of vattakali in Paniya’s life. They need vattakali for marriage, ritualistic celebration, and seasonal festivals. For marriage ceremony from the beginning to the end on various occasions they have to perform vattakali. Also during free time as part of the enjoyment (entertainment) they perform vattakali in the village courtyard. All know this dance form. It is in their blood.

When Chimban Mooppan expressed this statement in a Tribal festival context, which was held at Eachome, Wayanad in May 2002, there were 12 groups of Paniyas getting ready for the vattakali performance as part of the Festival. To express their joy and happiness they perform vattakali. Since it is a natural performance, for any gathering they perform it spontaneously.

5. “Theyyathina koottavum chachappamara koottavum chachammamara koottavum koodeyanchu naka kalikiche” (In vattakali we dance with our gods and ancestors) (Polan Mooppan (75), Eachome, Wayanad.)

Vattakali is not purely an entertainment item. It has got religious and ritualistic significance. They believe that during special occasions like Vishu celebration, Mariamman festival or Valliyoorakavu festival they dance with the gods and spirits of the ancestors.

In fact through this dance they become one with the divine powers so much so that during the dance some goes into the stage of trance. For Paniyas, there is a sacred touch in every aspect of their life. For any auspicious occasion they remember their ancestors and pay reverence to them. It is their belief that their life will be happy and prosperous only with the blessings of their ancestors.
6. “Kali thudankuthala neeram volinkinchavare nanka kalippu” (Once we start the dance it will go on till morning) (Binu (21) Thoongady, Wayanad)

One of the specialties of this dance is that once they begin this, it will continue for hours. They are not tired of this dance. They need more time to get into the spirit of this dance. We cannot stop it abruptly. If we do it that way some performers lose their control and they even get wild and angry, because this dance has got a rhythm, pace, and completion. It is neither a time-bound dance nor a compact dance. This feature highlights one aspect of Paniya life, that is, the concept of time and speed. In this matter they are different and they have their own time and rhythm consciousness. They have a speed for everything. We cannot alter it suddenly. So one has to be patient with their time consciousness. Binu expressed this in a marriage context.

7. “Evane aarum enkaku padippichu thanthialla; nanka chontham padippiyachu” (No body taught us this dance or music we learned it by ourselves) (Sunita (20) Naduvil, Wayanad)

By being with the community, joining in their performance, the Paniyas learn it naturally and spontaneously. We can say the community is their teacher. The elders hold their young children on their shoulders or waist, during the dance and they get the rhythm of the dance slowly. Also by hearing the songs, *tudi thalams* and *kuzhal* music they learn this performance slowly. So by the very environment, the younger generation becomes experts in *vattakali* dance and music. So they are good singers and dancers. Being a folk society, they pass on their traditional knowledge and talents orally.

**E. FIELD OBSERVATION**

*Vattakali* is an ancient art form of the Paniya community. It is also known as *Paniyar Kali*. The age of this ancient form cannot be fixed. It is very popular in Wayanad and Gudalur area (Tamilnadu). It has got regional variations in its form and in presentation. In Panamaram area in Mananthavady taluk the dance style is that the performers themselves make a full circular movement along with the group movement. They lift the hands only up to the forehead and the hands will be hold together. Where as, in Kalloor area in Bathery taluk, the dancers make only semi- circular movement along with the group rotation. They raise their hands above their head and they do not
hold the hands together. Yet, there are common features in this dance form. Another variation is noticed with regard to the vattakali chollukal (songs). Songs and its singing styles are different when we travel from south Wayanad to north Wayanad.

Musical instrument tudi and kuzhal are essential accompaniment for this dance. When the drumming on the tudi and singing of the kuzhal (pipe) start Vattakali performance begin. The tempo of the dance is controlled by the rhythm of tudi. There are different type of timing. The group dance, according to the rhythm of tudi. The whole body is involved in this dance. Usually the performance starts after dusk and goes on till dawn.

Vattakali is a community dance. All in the village, young and old, male and female take part in this dance. It is being performed during festivals, marriage and life cycle ceremonies. There is no special stage or costumes or lighting for this performance. It is performed in a natural setting.

The dance pattern of Vattakali is very much indigenous in nature. It is different from the dances of the north Indian tribes namely, Santal, Munda, Uraon, etc., and the other south Indian tribes namely, Irulas, Mullu kurumbas, Kattunaikas. Among the Santals the women dance like don, lagane (sowing the seed dance), baga (holi festival dance), durumja (sohari festival) are circular dance but its style of performance are very different form Paniya vattakali. The Karam dance (nature dance as part of the death ritual) of the northern tribes is in circular form but it is different from Paniya dance. There are similar dance forms but with variations, are present in South India. (Naikarkali, Kurumarkali). In Wayanad Mullu Kurumbar tribe perform one dance called kurumarkali during marriage or festival occasion. The main difference is that only men folk participate in this dance. The dance style also is different from that of Paniya vattakali. The rhythm instrument they use is thappu not tudi and the dance movement are set to a very rigorous rhythm. Another dance form similar to Vattakali, which is performed by the Kattunaikar community in Wayanad. It is called as naikarkali. It is a ritualistic dance performed by the men folk alone as part of the pooja. Usually it takes place at night. With the musical accompaniment kuzhal and thappu they dance round in clockwise and anti-clock wise movements. In between, they shout ‘hoi...hoi...hoi...’
Irula tribes in Attapadi area, Kerala (Palakad district) perform a ritualistic dance called karadiattam. Here men and women of all age join together, they stand in a circle and take steps to the rhythm of para and thakil (percussion instruments). They have a kuzhal instrument that is similar to Paniya kuzhal, to give the tune for the songs. It is performed during religious festival to propitiate the gods. The main difference from Vattakali is that it do not have the shaking movements of the body with its rotation movement. (Folk arts directory 1986:28). Some of the observations, on Paniya life that unveil in vattakali performance, are discussed below:

1. Social Life

Vattakali is not an individual performance. It is a community performance. It is a village performance. The whole village actively takes part in the dance as well as they enjoy it. It is a typical Paniya character i.e., through a dance they are reaching out to the other. There is no special trained performer for Vattakali. Everybody in the village learn this dance form by imitation and in the process of enculturation. All are allowed to take part in it without any restriction. So in Vattakali all Paniyas are ‘performers’.

Traditionally there is no man and woman segregation while dancing. They all join together in the performance. This is the ideal form. No division in the name of gender. But now we see separate groups of male and female on the performer’s context. This is due to the influence of non-tribal culture and values.

Vattakali touches all aspects of Paniya social life. The Vattakali songs are expression of their social life experiences. It is all about their experience in family life, work place, temple place, social gathering, and festival place. Some of the examples are: a paniya women telling her lazy husband: “seeing the rice in the plate you are not going for work, seeing the firewood in the kitchen you are not going for it, don’t come to me asking food or water. I know that you are greedy for food, water and other comforts” (Song No.9 in Section II in Appendix I). This is the family situation of the paniya today. Actually women are taking the burden of the paniya family. Men are lazy and they sit idle seeking the pleasure from liquor and other means. (The detail study on vattakali songs is included in chapter four)
The choreography of *Vattakali* symbolizes the Paniyas' social organization. The *Mooppan* of the village who plays the *kuzhal* will sit in the center of the courtyard and is surrounded by the three-*tudi* performers. They, with the men folk move in a circle around the *Kuzhalan*. The women folk and the children form their own circle and dance in the same mood and tempo. The very interesting factor is that all the groups will perform *vattakali* in a harmonious way following the rhythm of *tudi*. The Paniya society functions similar way. It moves around the *Mooppan*, the head of the village. Their life also is rhythmic and they follow the rhythm of *tudi* in their life.

In the *Vattakali* performance, individual performer is not important as there is no special steps or movements distinctive for any individual performer. The group is important. The whole movement is important as the entire performers dance in the same way. This group's rhythm also is important and nobody in the group breaks the rhythm (Thalam). They dance for hours without failing the rhythm. The communal harmony is experienced in *Vattakali* performance. Indirectly, unknowingly the group becomes one after the performance. This oneness keeps the community going. The members of the village (*Ooru*) free from all worries, tensions, ill feelings, quarrels, distances and become one after the *Vattakali* dance. This dance form inspires to be united and one.

It gives relaxation, happiness, and serenity to the group as well as the village. It is the celebration of a community where it experiences the joy of being in a group. In festival and marriage, I could see this aspect very clearly. There was a sense of satisfaction, joy and self-esteem in their face after the *vishu* celebration in Kurumbalakotta village. Though they were tired after the four days of celebration, they were contented with the experience of belongingness and community strength.

2. Cultural Life

Culture in the general sense is the life and vision of a community. For Paniya life concerned, *Vattakali* is a miniature form of their social and cultural life. It is an expression of their life as well as it gives a vision of life to the community.

*Vattakali* as the name tells is played in a circular form. According to the rhythm of *tudi* the whole group moves clockwise or anti-clockwise direction in a circle, swing their body and raising their hands. The whole movement is very much
rhythmic, musical, and slow, which gives a particular feeling to the performers. The worldview of the tribe is cyclic. They see life as part of a whole. Their belief is that their life is related to keeyulokam and melokam where all their ancestors are present. It is narrated in their ethnic history in the penapattu. They see life and time as a continuum, that is, past, present and future are inter-related. There is a link between the nature powers, gods and human beings. Chimban mooppan told me about the relationship between nature, animals, birds and humans. He has got a charisma to know the movement of the environment. This I experienced during the TUDI festival in 2002, May. The binary oppositions they face in their life like death - life, joy - sorrow, success - failures are quite normal for them. In all such situation, they do not show any panic or uncontrolled emotion. They take life experience in the spirit of Vattakali dance. That is life is a game in the hands of Padachavan (creator god). We have to dance our role with the community.

Vattakali is a rhythmic dance and its movement is totally depend upon tudi rhythms. Once the tudi stops dance also stops. This also depicts their culture. Their life too is rhythmic. They follow the rhythm of the cosmos (nature), so much so, that all their life activities are rhythmic in nature. Their festivals are also seasonal. The Paniyas are very good in music and dance. There are good singers among them. All their song tradition is their own making and it is a process, which is continuing even now.

The choreography of Vattakali is very artistic and interesting. It resembles the 'cosmic dance'. They dance with the cosmic spirits. The rhythms they get are the cosmic rhythms because they are very close to nature in heart and emotions. The music played in the kuzhal(pipe) is very much related to 'nature tunes'. They get these tunes in their dreams. While playing the kuzhal the performer enter into the world of the spirits and they instruct or show to him the tunes and rhythms. As there are 101 gods there are 101 tudi rhythms and 101 kuzhal tunes. There were expert musicians who perform all these tunes and rhythms but now we will not find such persons. Annu and Binu told me this matter.

The whole mood of the performance, the tune of the kuzhal, the rhythm of tudi the timing, the dance style, the songs, movements lead the group in to state of trance. Some of the members really get into this mood. This cultural experience and
expression lead the community into a spiritual experience. A touch of the divine is experienced during the dance. (One performer shared this experience to me). When the dance reaches the climax stage, that is, in fast tudi rhythm, fast movement of the dancers, high pitch of the *kuzhal* tune, etc., some get into trance, i.e., ‘the world of the spirits: world of the ancestors’. They get dreams about them. At that moment, they are dancing with their ancestors.

Being a pre-literate society, the Paniya do not have many art forms. The other art forms they have are *kurathi natakam*, *poratuu natakam*, *kolkali* and *thenaga muttukali*. Kurthinatakam is a dance drama that is performed as an entertainment during the festival seasons. There are three main characters in it namely *kuravan*, *kuraihi* and the *vidhooshakan* (joker). With the musical accompaniments chenda and cymbal they narrate the story of Siva and Parvathi who have come to the world to see the people. Porattu natakam is a drama in satirist form. It is performed during summer season in the paddy field as part of the village or kavu festival. Thengamuttukali and kolkali are performed during the vishu celebration. One informant Chandran told me that they learned Kolkali by seeing the kattunaikar community’s performance. *Vattakali* has developed in a full form and it is prevalent in all over paniya settlements. It stands out as a cultural form. As an entertainment and ritual dance, it has got a prominent place in their life.

3. Religious Life

In all the three cases, which we discussed above, I have observed that the *vattakali* performance started only after the *Mooppan* or *Chemmi* paying homage to the gods and spirits in the *thine and thare* and keeping a lighted wick on it. This I have noticed in other cases too. One of the informants Velli (41) said, “With out the blessing of the gods and our ancestors we cannot do any thing. That is why we do this, and our gods and ancestors are with us on the *thine* and *thare*”. This is an important aspect of Paniya life. Thine and thare are the core institutions of Paniya culture and worldview.

*Vattakali* is an entertainment dance. Yet it has got ritualistic elements. In the *Deivam kanal* ritual (seeing god) for an auspicious occasion, when the *chemmi* invokes god and get the spirits of the ancestors or god along with his ‘*thullal*’ (ritual dance) the group also starts the dance especially women initiate this dance, men joins with them.
They take the form of Vattakali, when the dance continues, some goes to trance. There is a spiritual element in this event.

In the marriage occasion also we see Vattakali being performed as a thanks giving ritual. It is to express their happiness, to propitiate the spirit of the ancestors. During the marriage at three occasions they do special Vattakali for this purpose. After marriage on the third day there is a special ritual to thank gods and spirits (deivathinu kodukal ritual). There also they perform Vattakali. In all these context, Vattakali get elevated into a spiritual realm.

In tribal worldview there is no sacred-secular division. For them every thing is sacred. In another sense all phenomenon has got a temperance stage too. All have to pass through different state of life. The sound of tudi and kuzhal gives a special effect on the Paniyas. When they hear this sound, they are reminded of gods and their ancestors. Therefore, in Vattakali also at some stage they are dancing with gods and their ancestors. Chimban Mooppan says ‘it is a special experience which we can’t explain in words’.

In Vishu celebration I noticed at one point of the dance, the whole group went into the realm of the divine. They were undergoing a transcendental experience. It was taken place after the invocation of gods and goddess from the seven seas below (keeyulokam) and seven lands above (melulokam). In TUDI festival, there was a ritual (pooja) by Moons, before hoisting the festival flag. After the pooja, when the tribal men beat the tudi and played kuzhal the whole group started dancing around the flag stand. There was a religious aspect in this act. (For Valliyurkavu festival, Mariamman festival, etc., Paniyas perform Vattakali as a homage to the goddess).

4.Economic Life

A century back the Paniyas were slaves of the local landlords. During that period all their celebrations were directed and supported by landlords. For Onam, Vishu and other harvest festival the ‘lord’ or the Kariyakars visit the village. They were welcomed by the village head. In honor of the landlord the Paniya community used to perform Vattakali. The land lords used to gave gifts to them.
Similarly when the landlord celebrates *kavu* or temple festivals the Paniya performs *tudi* and *Vattakali*. During this time also the land lords gave financial assistance to the festival as well as to the groups. This system had its own merits and demerits. (This lord-tenant dependency) some of the merits are: Tribals had good celebration, they were given good food and clothes as gifts, their arts forms were encouraged. The demerits are: they used these celebration as a way of controlling them. They were not allowed to perform their arts forms in a free atmosphere. Earlier times the celebrations lasted for more days. Now they have cut short the days due to economic constraints. Many of the Paniyas do not have proper work or proper wage. They live in poverty. So they are forced to limit the celebration. This affects the *Vattakali* performance also (may informants shared this comment).

*Vattakali* is an occasion to reflect about the economics of this community. Generally this group is facing lots of insecurity with regards to the future. This reflects in their performance too. In the Tribal festivals Three villages could not organize the group for the performance. While asking the reason, their leaders said that they did not have money to hire the *tudi* from other village. Also they did not have the economic means to organize the group and bring them for the festival. Yet in their poverty too they try to find meaning in all this celebration.

5. Political life

In the past *Vattakali* was used as a means by the land lords to control their workers. On special occasion they organize programme and the Paniyas supposed to come to their courtyard to performance the *Vattakali*. This was done during harvest season. They were given gifts like paddy, clothes and betel leaves or tobacco, and a good meals. It was a political mechanism practiced by the village rulers and landlords to keep them under their control.

Now political parties, their leaders also make use of the Paniya’s *Vattakali* for their party congress and meeting. In return, they were given money, food and liquor. At one instance for a political party meeting in Kalpetta the Paniyas from Eachome village were asked to perform *Vattakali*. One group in the village opposed this idea saying that they, the politicians, need us only for their needs they do not attend to our needs. So they did not go for that programme.
Vattakali has got greater significance for their self-identity concerned. Through this performance, they themselves feel united and strengthened. Their self-image is grown; they feel proud of their culture. They want to retain their Paniya hood. It is one of the occasions where the Paniyas, young and old, male and female come together under the rhythm of tudi and tune of kuzhal. Emotionally also they become free and one. Art unites people, strengthen people, and help them to come out of their own shelves. In this sense also Vattakali is one of the good means to organize the Paniyas for a political mobilizing. It is an occasion where a Paniya person become aware of his/her inner strength. It can be used as means for conscientaization. To rise up against exploitation, unjust situations this gathering and performance gives them strength and willingness.

Vattakali unites the whole Ooru (village) under the leadership of Mooppan (village head). If they stand together they could demand collectively from the political leaders and Government association also from the non-tribes. This is the experience of the Paniyas who associate with TUDI organization and Tribal festival. As a community performance the Vattakali symbolize a Paniya village in its totality. It inspires the people to come forward to work for a new society and to transform their own life. It is a dance to determine their future. Dance with the cosmic forces to face the problems of life. In all these aspects we could see the ideology, philosophy and politics of the Paniya community. It is the politics of self-identity, self-esteem and self-determination. (e.g. Adivasi struggle for land by Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha at Trivandrum under leadership of Miss.C.K. Janu).

Features

In Paniya worldview there is no clear-cut division of sacred and secular. There is an element of divine touch in all aspects of their life. This is applicable to Paniya dance also. Vattakali is an entertainment dance but it is also performed as part of a religious function. To express the joy of the devotees, they perform Vattakali before the deivam (God). Some of the salient features of vattakali are:

a. It is an entertainment-oriented dance, usually women take the initiative to begin the performance, and men follow them. Where as, in the ritual dance it is the men folk especially the priest (Chemmi) starts the dance (Thullal) and others join.
b. To perform vattakali dance we need *tudi* rhythm and *kuzhal* tune. Without them the dance will not take place. When hearing *Vattakali tudi* and *kuzhal* tunes they cannot but dance. It is in their blood. There is certain order of performance. For e.g. For *vattakali, kuzhal* (tune) has to be performed first, which is followed by *tudi* and the dance. For *Vellattu* ritual (seeing god ceremony) *tudi* has to be played first, which is followed by *kuzhal* (*cheeni*), then the komaram starts the *thullal* (*Urayal*). For Pole (death rites) *tudi* plays first which is followed by *kuzhal*.

c. In Paniya dance the whole body is involved. For *Vattakali*, swinging and shaking the body and moving their feet in a circular fashion according to the rhythm of *tudi* are present there. It is a unique style and I have not seen it anywhere. When the speed of the tudi beating increased the dance also come up in a higher tempo and vice versa. The steps are very simple and sober, (not jumping or jerking type) hence they could dance for hours without much physical fatigue.

d. Dance embraces all aspects of Paniyas’ life. For entertainments, work place, for religious rituals, for marriages, for seasonal festivals they perform dances. Various types of dances are performed on various occasions.

E.g. *Kambalam* dance – work dance; *Vattakali* - marriage; *Deivam tullal* - religious celebration. Everybody in the community knows the dance. They learn it by seeing and imitation.

I have not seen any particular costumes or makes up for *Vattakali*. Usually they perform in their ordinary dress. On special occasion, they wear their traditional dress and ornaments for this dance.

**Classification**

Paniya dance can be classified into two categories namely, entertainment dance and ritual dance.

**a. Entertainment dance**

*Vattakali, Kolkali, Thegamuttukali, Kurathinatakam dances* can be classified as entertainment dances. The main intentions of these dances are community and
individual enjoyment. For festivals and community celebration, they have these
dances. They have special music and rhythm for this dance. There are ten tudi
rhythms specially meant for entertainment dance corresponding to the rhythm kuzhal
tunes also are created, which are also known in the same name.

b. Ritual dance

Deivaamkanal dance, Vellattu kali, Mari kali, Nizhal kali... are the ritual
dances of the Paniyas. This they perform as part of the religious ritual. When the
Komaram is possessed the spirit of the particular god/goddess, he starts the (Thullal)
dance. Specific tudi rhythm and kuzhal tunes are played for each god’s dance. There
are 8 types of ritual dances with 8 varieties of tudi rhythms and kuzhal tunes. (Polan
mooppan and Karikan mooppan demonstrated various types of ritual dance.)

There are two styles of Vattakali performance in Wayanad. People of the south
Wayanad follow one style and of the north Wayanad the other. In the South Wayanad
(Thariyode, Kavumannam, Padinjarethara, Kalpetta, Kurumbala kotta) the dancers
will not take a full circle in the tuning. They turn only half circle and vice-versa.
Vattakali in the north Wayanad (Mananthavady, Bathery, Pakam’ Panamaram,
Pulpally, etc) the performers take a full turn (full circle) in the dance. Also in Bathery
area, swaying of hands (lifting style of hands) also different from other part of
Wayanad. Another version is that in Bathery area they will not lift the hand above
their forehead. (Told by Leela Toongady (38).

Functions

a. To keep the community relaxed and free

Paniyas are coolie workers. They work under their masters from morning to
evening. Olden time they were slaves and not allowed to go anywhere they want. The
landlords and other non-tribal group controlled them. In this background from their
dances these people get lots of relaxation and freedom from all the stress and strains of
everyday life. Their dances and thullal play the role of a letting out of their pent-up
emotion and strains.
b. To build up community fellowship

Paniya dance creates a space for the community to come together and to dance together. This will help to forget the ill feelings towards the other if any and build up a strong community in the village. The sharing of meals and *murukan* also adds the process of community building. When they dance together, the emotional and physical togetherness (closeness) takes the community members into another realm of togetherness (spiritual/transcendental).

c. Religious function

To interact with god the community especially the Komaram (Priest) use dance as a medium. This will help the community to communicate their wishes to God and receives God’s blessing for them. For every religious ceremony, dance is a must for Paniya society. Through the dance and *thullal* they express themselves freely their state of life, agonies and anguishes to their family god.

d. As an expression of joy and friendship

Most of the Paniya dances especially *Vattakali* are expressions of their joy and brotherhood. For marriages and community celebration they dance day and night to the tunes of *Kuzhal* and *tudi*. Everybody in the community will take part in it sometimes during the celebration. There is no formality for this dance. Hence anybody can join at any time and leaves the group at any time. Dance is an occasion for the youngsters (boys and girls) to share their wishes to the dear ones (lovers). They choose their partners also in a dancing context.

e. Identity

In the socialization process of the community Paniya dance play a key role. It helps to organize the group for a social cause. It helps to assert their social identity in a public platform. Nowadays they are invited by the government and political parties to perform Vattakali for their conferences. So it is an occasion for them to interact with the mainstream cultures without losing their identity.
**Tudi rhythms in Paniya dance**

Tudi rhythms are part and parcel of the Paniya dance. Special rhythms are being used for each dance. For *vellattu*, and *vellattu kali* there are two types of rhythms used. For vattakali three kinds of rhythms are used such as *paracka meethal*, *nakku tudi*, and *kaya tudi*.

Many of these rhythms, sounds similar but by close observation and analysis we can make out the difference. Common timings are used in most of the dances. The kuzhal accompaniment makes the difference. Particular kuzhal tunes are being played for each dance types. Being an oral society, the performers take enough freedom and space to improvise each musical performance according to one’s mood, ability, and the context.

**F. VATTAKALI IN OTHER SOCIETIES: A COMPARATIVE VIEW**

*Vattakali* literally means circular dance. Circular dance forms are quite common in India. It is seen among tribal and non-tribal communities. It has got regional variation depending upon the culture, context and motifs. Most of them are entertainment oriented dance forms. Being a folk art from, it has got a ritualistic dimension also. It is believed that many of the ‘modern’ dances are derived from the folk forms of *Vattakali*. (e.g. *Thiruvathirakali*, *Margamkali*, *Kolkali*, *Poorakali*, *Kummi*, *Oppana* etc.) Cyclic pattern is one of the features of the Dravidian culture. Life-cycle ceremonies, belief in rebirth, seasonal festivals, etc., are derived from this worldview (Vishnunamboodiri2000:111-112).

**Tribal Society**

*Vattakali or Kurumbar kali*

It is popular among Mullakurumbar community in Wayanad. It is a community entertainment dance, which is performed during marriage ceremony. Only men folk take part in it. Where as in Paniya *vattakali* the whole community, men and women, take part in it and it is performed for all occasions. *Kuzhal* (pipe) and ‘*Thappu*’ (drum) are the musical accompaniments used here. They wear long shirt, a towel around the head, long dhoti, as costumes and jingling bells (anklets) on the legs. (Folk Art Directory 1986:50). There are difference on the song pattern also. Paniya have only
small stanzas (chollukal) and it is sung by mainly women but the Kurumbar vattakali songs are in song form, long in size.

**Naikarkali**

It is the Vattakali of the Naikar tribes who are inhabited in Wayanad, Gudalloor and Nilambur area. It is a ritualistic dance. They perform it during marriage and other village festivals. It is quite ancient dance form. Usually 15-20 males take part in the dance. When the instrument drum and kuzhal (pipe) starts playing the Naikar begin their performance. With jingling of anklets round their legs they dance in circular form according to the rhythm of the drum. In between they shout “hoi-hoi”. Usually it is performed at night that goes till morning. There is no stage or light for this programme. Colourful shirt, white dhoti with boarder and headgear are the costumes for this dance. There is similarity between Naikar kali and Paniyas vattakali (Paniyar kali), in terms of its nature of performers, its functions, its use of costumes, the musical styles. The main difference lies in the dance pattern or movement of the feet in the performance.

**Karadi attam**

It is performed by the Irula tribes of Attappadi. Both male and female join in this dance. It is a ritualistic dance performed during village festivals and death rites to propitiate gods and spirit of the dead. It is an old art form performed in a circular form with the accompaniment of songs and instruments, para, thakil and kuzhal. They dance around fire, saying the chorus ‘ele le ....... Karadi. ........ ele le ....... Karadi. .... Karadi means the wild animal called bear. The dance pattern is like swinging of the bear. So it is called as Karadi attam. This is performed during ‘Sivarathri’ too. Comparing with Paniya vattakali there is difference in the dance pattern rhythm, and the song style.

**Non-tribal Society**

Developed or modified form of Vattakali can be seen among non-tribal societies too. Dances like Thiruvathirakali, Margamkali, Oppana kali take the form of Vattakali. Each have adapted and modified it, according to its culture, customs, and context. Since all these are in circular from we could classify they under Vattakali genre.
Thiruvathirkali or Kaikottikali

It is a popular ritualistic as well as entertainment dance. It is common among the Hindu communities and later it is performed by all sections of Kerala society. It is performed specially on Thiruvathirakali day in the month of May, which is believed as the birthday of Lord Siva. Women perform this dance. The leader sing the two lines of the song, others repeat it and take steps according the rhythm of the song. There is no special musical instrument for the dance. It is performed at night around the ‘Nilavilakku’. The costumes are white dhoti with boarder, blouse and upper cloth (dhoti) (set- sari). Eyes are blackened with mashi, and pottu on the forehead, hair will be decorated with flowers, chains and bangles are also used. They take betel leaves (Murukkan). It is performed during marriage and festival occasion. Compare to vattakali of the Paniyas it is in stylized form, which needs special training. Only women folk participate in this dance.

Margamkali

It is also one form of circular dance (Vattakali), performed by Syrian Christians of Kerala. It has originated between 1600–1700 AD. Ancient time, it is performed by male only. Now females also do this dance. It is performed during marriage and other festivals, especially church festivals. Twelve persons under the leaderships of Kaliyassan, take steps around the nilavilakku, which has got 11 wigs represent the disciples of Christ. They dance according to the rhythm of the songs. The songs are related to Christ’s life and St. Thomas’ missionary activity in Kerala. White dothi and headgear are the costumes. During the margam kali performance, as an interlude they perform a circular dance and that they call it as vattakali. There are special vattakali songs apart from margam kali songs.(Lucas2002:190-194). Compare to Paniyas vattakali it is also very ‘modernized’ form.

Oppana dance

It is a folk dance of the Muslim community, performed during marriage ceremony. It has got a tradition of 600 years. Men and women perform oppana. Muslim songs describing the beauty of the bride and bridegroom are used for this dance. It is also performed in circular form hence it comes in the vattakali category.
But it is entirely different from Paniya vattakali in terms of its dance style, costumes, songs, and musical accompaniments. Harmonium, Tabala, Ganjira, Elathalam are the musical accompaniments. It is a fast and rhythmic dance. Costumes are very colourful. Bride being adorned with her jewellery and clothed in bridal dress, led to the 'pandal' by the maiden and seated on the 'peedam'. Then they start singing and dancing, clapping their hands. It can be considered as a developed form of Vattakali.

Kolkali

Tribals and non-tribals perform kolkali (Stick dance). It is also performed in the circular form of Vattakali. They take various forms of steps and perform the dance singing appropriate songs. Mullukurambar, Paniya, Kattunaika, Muslim, Christian, Hindus perform this dance. The performance style is that the players stand around the lighted nilavilaku. Each holding a small stick on both hands, they hit one another according to the rhythm of the song. It is a recreational art. Mullukurumbars are expert in kolkali performance. They have a good collection of kolkali songs too.(manu jose 2001).

The Parichakali of the Vadugas of Palakad area is known as Vattakali. Pulaya community in Kerala performs a dance called chovodukali. It is also known as Vattakali. Thachanadan community in Malapuram area performs Vattakali as part of the village festival and marriage occasion. Only men folk perform this dance with the accompaniment of tudi and kuzhal instruments. In Kannyar kali of the Nair community, there is Vattakali which is performed as part of their ritualistic dance (Vishnunamboodiri 2000 :564).

From the above discussion, we have seen that Vattakali is a basic dance form used by many communities in Kerala. Similar dance performances are seen in tribal and non-tribal communities throughout India. Yet, we have found from the case studies that the Vattakali of the Paniyas is unique in its style, music, and performance. We have also seen and understood the significance of this dance form in Paniya Life. The details of the Paniya music tradition with special reference to Vattakali music are discussed in the coming chapter.