4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter we have described various elements of theyyam symbols with a special emphasis on make-up and costume and classifications. In this chapter we deal with the ritual aspect of the theyyam celebration. The ritual of potted theyyam is described as a case study. The chapter is concluded with an analysis of the ritual process on the basis of theory of performance. Rituals are symbolic actions of a culture. What symbol is on the expressive level is ritual on the level of action. Religious ritual is a symbolic effort of a community to establish relationship with reality which transcends words or deeds. For the analysis of the theyyam rituals we use the theory of performance as we have stated in the introductory chapter. Our attempt is to highlight the subtlety and the complexity of ritual process of communication, and the content of what is communicated, applying theory of performance to the theyyam rituals.

We are establishing in this chapter that pulaya theyyam rituals show ritual inversion. The liminal nature of the ritual inversion is a mechanism
invented by every culture, particularly the pre-literate cultures for the resolution of the contradictions in the society and thus to maintain the social structure. Though the ritual status reversal is a cultural mechanism to let-off the pent-up resentment against the authority and to ensure conformity of the individuals to the social norms. The particular individual who performs the ritual can overstep the cultural boundaries and use the same ritual to produce counter-effects. Our field data shows that the very same cultural mechanism that ensures conformity, at times functions as a two-edged sword to create critical awareness of the contradictions leading to non-conformist behaviour patterns. The ritual inversion of pulaya Theyyams, particularly the potten, has a definite role in defining the non-conformist behaviour patterns of the pulayas through their religious conversion to Christianity.

4.2. An Outline of Theyyam Ritual Performance

Usually the theyyam dance is performed at night; there are day-theyyams too. It is invariably a long performance, especially those performed by caste groups like Vannan, Malayan etc. These theyyams last for several days at a stretch. Pulaya theyyams are short and they take about 24 hours. The specific
rituals of theyyam differs with the nature of the myth of the theyyam. However, the theyyam rituals in general have a common frame.

The informant Panayan Balan gave the investigator the following details which were confirmed by several others that the public theyyam celebration in a particular kottam is an annual feature. First of all, the exact date of the celebration is determined by the diviner (astrologer), according to lunar calculations. Once the date is finalized, the preparation of the place begins.

The officiating priests 'enter' the kottam in the afternoon, after a solemn ritual of purificatory bath. They, then, ritually purify the kottam. From then on, they remain within the kottam premise till the theyyam ritual concludes. Their main job is to prepare the toddy-pot (kajasam), and other offerings such as fruits, coconut, grams, flowers, water etc, and also arrange lamps with oil wick (deepam).

As it gets dark the theyyam begins. The commencing ceremony is locally known as thudangal (beginning). This is a melodious recital with the accompaniment of drum or thudi (small drum). This recital is also known as thudangi thottam (thudangi=to begin + thottu = to create). This is an
announcement to the people that the theyyam is about to begin and men, women and children in large numbers start moving towards the kottam.

The second important stage of the ritual is the thottam nilkal (nilkal=to stand). The theyyam dancer with his initial make-up and a special robe called kacha emerges from the green room and stands before the installation of the kottam and recites the myth of the theyyam dance which he is going to perform. This is also known as vellattam (The attam of the youth kolam of the theyyam).

Most of the theyyam begin their make-up after the thottam. When the theyyam gets ready for the performance, there is one more thottam, a kind of warming-up. In most cases this is sung by the theyyam itself.

Fourth important stage in the theyyam performance is known as varavili (vara=blessing/boon + vili=invocation). There are set patterns for varavili. Each theyyam can be distinguished by its varavili. In varavili, a condensed form of the mythical, historic nature of the theyyam is given. After the varavili, the theyyam starts the climax of dance. After the first uranjattam, the theyyam performs the sacrifice. The sacrifice follows another uranjattam which is also known as kalasamthullal (end
performance). At the end of the dance the investigator is told that, the theyyam goes into a trance, and possessed by the spirit makes prophetic utterances, which the elders are to take note of. At this stage, the informants, said that it is no more the dancer who speaks but the possessed spirit itself. The theyyam, then calls out people from among the audience to the dancing-yard one by one in the order of seniority and status and blesses them. The special blessing gets turned into a mini theyyam-dance with the person called out for blessing. The investigator also has been called out for blessing a few occasions.

The end performance is followed by theyyam blessing the landlord, the elder in the family. This stage is known as mumpustanam vili (mumpustanam = the one the in the first place of honour). Any significant person connected with theyyam celebration (the chief of the clan, the landlord, elder in the family) is known as mumpustanam. The theyyam blesses first the mumpustanam and all the other devotees who go to the theyyam by giving prasadam (some substance which possess divine power). It is normal that the devotee reciprocate the prasadam with cash-offering.

The last stage of theyyam is known as
The theyyam performs a dance of a vigourous kind with the accompaniment of drums and at the end removes the crown which is technically known as mutiazhical. (removal of the crown)

4.3. The Nalini Potten Theyyam - A Case Study

The purpose of the case study is to facilitate a description of the status reversal in potten theyyam and to analyse it in the light of performance theory. Potten is the unique theyyam of pulayas and it embodies the ethos of the pulaya social life and their behaviour patterns.

The elements that are to be highlighted through the case study are the following: the ritual inversion and social process, the ludic elements in the rituals, liminal nature of the ritual celebration, absorption and integration of the high-caste rituals, and the predominance of the circular movements in the rituals celebration.

The potten theyyam is the clan deity (kuladaivam) of the pulayas. Though the malayas, another caste group also performs the potten theyyam, partrimony is attributed to the pulayas. In fact, the potten theyyam performed by the malayas is a sanskritised verion of the pula potten theyyam.
4.3.1. *Potten Theyyam* Ritual

The investigator is told by the *theyyam* experts, Kanjan Pujari and Panayan Balan and others confirmed, that there are two kinds of *Potten theyyams*: Ordinary *Potten* and *Thi-potten*. *Thi-potten* is more solemn and also expensive. *Thi-potten* *theyyam* is never performed alone especially in important *kottams* common to different clans. It is always performed with other subsidiary related *theyyams*: Gulkhan, kurathi, vishnu murthi and dharma daivam. In *kottams* which are financially well off, many more *theyyams* are added, such as, other *Bhagavati theyyams* and hero *theyyams*.

*Thi-potten* is supposed to be the incarnation of siva. It is the most prestigious *potten* as it 'falls' in the fire (*Thi*=fire). The *thi-potten* is an expensive *theyyam* for the fire-heap in which the *theyyam* 'jumps', is supposed to be made of special fire-wood of tamarind-tree, which is very costly. (fig. 4.1.6. fire heap). For the narration of the informants we can infer that the *thi-potten* is an amalgamation of three stories or three manifestations of siva into one *theyyam*. The *theyyam*, therefore, appears in three different masks one after another the duration of which is roughly twelve hours. The three masks are called (1) *Pula-Marutham* (2) *pula-potten* (3) *pula chamundi*. (Fig. 4.2.3)
pulamaruthan is the manifestation of the bull (nandi) the vehicle of siva and pulapotten is said to be the manifestation of siva as pulaya and pulachamundi, the manifestation of siva as sakti or Parvati; taking the cue from the myth as pulaya woman (chandala stree).

In all the theyyam celebrations there are two functions running parallel to one another in perfect harmony and synchronization. They are: the theyyam performance and the ritual in the kottam. The former is led by the kolakaran and the make-up team and the latter is, by the karmi or tantri (fig. 3.5.8). The instrumentalists (drum and thudi) (fig. 3.5.3 & 3.5.4) form the accompaniment for both theyyam dance and ritual.

The investigator is told that the potten theyyam proper is prescribed to begin its performance after the mid-night, other theyyam performance begins at the turn of the twilight into darkness. "The first theyyam to appear in a solemn potten theyyam celebrations is dharma daiyam", said the informants.

As seen by the investigator, the thottam of dharma daiyam begins first. As the thottam begins the one who is to take the form of dharma daiyam comes and bows, and goes round the kottam three times (parikarma) and asks for blessing to perform the theyyam. The priest lights the wick soaked in oil
(kothiri) and gives it to him and the kolakaran begs the deity to bless him. Then the officiating priest blesses him by throwing rice on him. The theyyam performer then goes for make-up to the green room (Fig. 3.5.6 & 3.5.7).

Meanwhile as a perfectly synchronized element of a process, the officiating priest gets ready in the kottam the following offerings: He sets up an improvised altar/table (paripeedam) by placing a wooden plank on two stones, spreads new white cloth on it. On this altar eight small pieces of plantain leaves are spread in a row. The leaves represent: "The eight original pulaya kottoms" said the informants. Along with the leaves glass of toddy (panchaneer) on the left and rice beer on the right which are to be given to the theyyam performer are also placed. On either side of the altar two oil lamps are lit and on the altar the three masks of the potten are placed in a row in the order, first pulamaruthan, pulapotten and pulachamundi, and also their characteristic instruments: mudikol on the left and the sword (kathi) on the right side. The priest recites a magic formula (mantra) and the investigator is told, it is to turn them into an offering (pradhista).

Below the altar in front, near the left lamp, 1
1/4 measure of rice, two or three plantains, coconut, betel leaves, arachut etc. are placed for Ganapatthi (which will go to the theyyam performer as his share the investigator is told). The offering near the lamp on the right, boiled rice, coconut etc. will go to the priest. In the middle, karpuram, chaprani, beaten rice, (panchngal), sweet rice (payasam) etc. are placed as offerings. The informants are not able to give the symbolic meanings of these offering. "it is traditionally so", is their answer.

Farther in front of the offering on the leaves, a mat is spread and on its corners four lit-up lamps (kothiri) are placed and near each wick on pepper leaves, beaten rice and popped rice offered. On either side of the unhusked rice, coconut is offered. Both left and right of the unhusked rice, thurisu is offered and on the thurisu, coins are placed. These are the initial offerings. (Fig.4.2.3. offerings). As far as the symbolic meanings are concerned no clear explanations are offered by the informants. These symbols appears to have relation with prosperity and fertility.

As a mark of beginning of the Ceremony the dharma daivam emerges from the green-room. About this time those who perform the potten theyyam and other theyyam (gulikan and kurathi) take the blessing from the elders (mupustanam) and go for their ritual
bathing, wearing new white dhotis. On their return they take three rounds of the kottam.

As the theyyam dancers (kolakar) return after their ritual bathing the priest proceeds towards the next important ritual, the ritual offering of fowl. The place of the offering of the fowl (cock) is just in front of the kottam farther in front of the offering already arranged. In preparing for this rite, the place is arranged with the following offerings: eight pieces of plantain leaves with burning wicks, two brass vessels (kinnams), one tender coconut, toddy pot and flowers. In the brass vessels on either side, one is filled with red thurisu and the other with black thurisu, (fig. 3.5.8), the investigator is told, they are for the deities kurathi and kuttichattan respectively.

The theyyam performer brings the fowl for offering. The beak and the legs of the cock are properly washed and the magical formulae of kukkuda mantra, garuda mantra and hanuman mantra are recited. The lamp at the four corners are lit and the cock is given both toddy and rice beer. The ritual cutting off of the head of the cock follows. The oozing blood is put in the brass vessel with thurisu, first in the red thurisu and then in the black thurisu. The eight leaves also are smeared with the
The feathers are burned in the burning oil wick that are on the plantain leaves. Once the cock is dead it is removed and the toddy is given to the theyyam performer. Then, follows the recital of potten thottam (fig. 3.5.9).

When the thottam of dharma daivam is over, the theyyam performer of potten theyyam takes fire from the kottam and makes parikarma of the fire and set fire to the heap of wood, it is into this fire the potten theyyam is to 'jump'. After this the theyyam performer of potten goes to the green room for his make-up. As the first part of the potten theyyam thottam gets over, the dharma daivam begins the performance, first, without head dress vellattam and later with head dress. During the dance the theyyam goes round the kottam several times and also the installation (Thara). At the end of the performance the theyyam goes for blessing the elders and other devotees and gives them prasadam. This is the time the theyyam relaxes a bit by drinking kalaśam and coconut water. This is followed by the concluding dance (kottikalaśam) during the kottikalaśam too the parikrama is repeated several times and eventually the removal of head (mutiazhikal).

Meanwhile the gulikan theyyam gets ready. As soon as the dharma daivam finishes the dance, gulikan appeaars and the same process continues.
At the end of the pottan thottam, which is scheduled to be over after mid-night, the potten theyyam appears with full make-up. The potten theyyam make-up is done with tender coconut leaves and the make-up is rather unique. All the covering of the body and make-up is done with tender coconut leaves and the make-up pattern is designed with a view to 'falling' in the fire unhurt (fig. 4.2.4). The potten theyyam comes in front of the kottam without a mask and takes three rounds of the kottam and begins the invocation of the spirit. After the invocation, and thottam, the theyyam proceeds towards the ritual offerings of the fowl (fig. 4.2.4 potten).

The ritual offerings of the fowl is exactly as described above in the case of the priest, the only difference is that this time it is done by the potten theyyam.

The following offerings are arranged in front of the kottam where the ritual offering of fowl takes place by the theyyam: beaten rice, popped rice, plantain, rice, oil lamp, toddy in a special brass vessel, bell, flowers, mask sword, (madikkil) staff and eight pieces of plantain leaves, each one with a lighted wick. The ritual offerings of the cock is followed by the masking of the theyyam with the
first mask of the pulamari than. One can notice that the step and gestures of the theyyam at this stage resembles that of the movements of a bull (nadi).

Around 4 o' clock in the morning the theyyam puts on the second mask of the pulapotten. With this masking the quality of movement and the mood of the crowd changes theyyam becomes very aggressive, at times violent and runs round the kottam several times reviling the elders (munpusthanam). The theyyam laughs at the superiors and authority mocks at people, frightens women; now clownishly, now seriously, now derisively he speaks and behaves. He calls out for the land lord and makes him to do all sorts of funny things (fig 4.2.5, potten - 2).

Next important function is the 'falling' in the fire. First, the priest goes up to the heap of fire glowing charcoal and ritually purifies it with oil lamp, incense and tender coconut. The theyyam, then, goes around the fire several times threatening and pretending to jump in the fire, thus he builds up suspense in the crowd especially in the children and women. This is followed by his 'play' with the fire (fig. 4.1.6: 4.2.7: 4.2.8). He goes to the fire with his back which is safely covered with layers of tender coconut leaves. As soon as he goes to the fire two men on his right and left pull him out of the
fire and the 'play' goes on for some time. Then he takes a break to mock and revile the authority.

The theyyam calls out the landlord and asks him to do things which the old man will never do in his normal life. He makes the landlord kneel and lie-down in the dust. The language of the theyyam becomes very cutting bordering on obscenity, now playing the role of comedian, now that of a divine person, he continues to amuse the crowd. The success of the theyyam informants said depends on the capacity of the theyyam dancer to laugh at and humiliate the people in authority and thus, amuse the crowd. (Fig. 4.2.7. theyyam abusing the landlord).

The theyyam assumes a second spell of 'jumping' in the fire with added vigour till the elders and important men and women tell him, "enough" and beg of him to stop the "heroic and dangrous" feat. Once the most significant event of 'jumping' in the fire is over, the theyyam gets back for blessing the elders and other devotees and giving prasadam; and also guidance and counselling for personal as well as family problems.

As the potten theyyam goes out of the thara into the ground amoung the audians for blessing the kurathi comes for the performance before the kottam and the thottam begins, most often being sung by the
theyyam itself. At the end of the kurathi theyyam's performance there is what is called the dancing together of all the theyyams known as koodiattam (dancing together). It should be taken note of that the dancing movements are spiral, punctuated by parikramas.

At the end of the koodiattam after spending some time in giving prasadam, the theyyams together go to visit the house of the elders and other people who request for the presence of the theyyam in their house. At the end of the house visits, all except the potten, wind up the performance by removing their crown after the concluding dance (kottikalasam), in the order of their appearance for performance.

When all other theyyams remove their make-up, the potten puts on the third mask, pula-chamundi (fig. 4.2.6). After a brief dance, the theyyam acts out an important role of a house-wife such as, washing clothes and bathing children, combing the hair etc. At the end the mask (mukapali) is removed, and the theyyam distributes to all the important people the rice to be showered on him as a symbol of blessing as the theyyam removes the head-dress (mudi).

With the concluding dance (kottikalasam) (fig. 4.2.9), the theyyam falls on the ground in front of
the kottam and all the people throw rice as blessing and wish the theyyam prosperity, and thus the long celebration concludes.

4.4. Analysis

4.4.1. Theyyams and Ritual Inversion

As we have seen earlier theyyam is the celebration of the untouchables, the highest among them being Velan or Vannan. The local variations can be seen even in this rating. In the day to day life all the theyyam-dancing castes should keep the prescribed distance away from the caste-hindus. The higher the rating of the caste the shorter the distance it has to keep away. Pulayas being the lowest their prescribed distance is 64 feet from the brahmin. At the time when such a detested human being as the pulayas, 'becomes' theyyam, not only is the untouchability temporarily withheld, but high caste take even prasadam from him and ask for his guidance and counselling to solve their problems. Such temporal status elevation of a lower caste through ritual is called ritual status reversal, according to the theory of performance. This happens in the theyyam rituals of all the castes in varying degrees.

The lower the caste in hierarchy, the more intense the ritual status reversal appears to be. The
poten theyyam abuses, reviles, and even physically maltreat the highest authority with unusual aggressive temper which is unknown in the theyyam ritual reversal of other castes. The investigator has watched several theyyams of the high castes such as Vannan, Tiyyan, Malayan, Munnuttan of the Chirackkal region. The higher the caste the more refined the movements and ritual reversal found to be. The very same poten theyyam performed by the Malayans does not display such crude and raw style as that of the poten theyyam of the pulayas.

The ritual status reversal supplies them with two character traits: (1) Conformity in the personal level and (2) Critical consciousness in the social level. These two points we shall develop in the later chapters.

4.4.2. Theyyam Ritual Reflects the Social Process

With the break-up of matrilineality (marumakkathayam), in the post-independant era there was a drastic change in the social structure of the Hindu society at North Malabar. The joint-family system crumbled, families which enjoyed power and prestige extinguished; landlordism disappeared; rich families who fed on the toils of the tenants became paupers almost overnight. The middle class was not affected as much as the richest and the poorest who
4.1 THE BLEND OF LUDIC AND THE ASCETIC

4.1.1. A drunken devotee
4.1.2. A drum is on the thara (Installation of the Deity)
4.1.3. Children playing with the holy objects
4.1.4. A dog among the devotees in the holy place
4.1.5. Theyyam walking through the fire
4.1.6. Thi-chamundi 'jumping' in the fire
4.1.7. Velichapad walking through the red-hot charcoal fire
4.1.8. Putting hand in the boiling oil (Karaveral)
4.1.9. Taking rice from the boiling water (Choruvaral)
were dependent on the rich landlords.

The change affected the theyyam celebration too. It took almost four decades for the theyyam celebrations to partially regain its lost festivity. The old pulaya kottams are being spotted and renewed. During the field work of four years, every year new sites of pulaya kottams were restored and new ones installed. In the Pre-independance times, informants told the investigator that the land-lords patronized the pulaya theyyam celebrations, and took care of the finances. "Some of the traditional kottams which were under the patronage of the landlords are now being looked after by the people's committees, and through donations the committees ensure finances for the celebrations' said the secretary of the Malini Pottan Theyyam Committee. The investigator could see that the committee members wield a lot of respect authority as the landlords of old. The difference is that instead of one landlord of the old, now they have a group of them, the secretary being the most powerful. Most of the committee members are very obliging and well-behaved, but there are some who behave in such a way that recalls the days of the landlords, the investigator felt.

The investigator found kottams whose administration have been taken up entirely by the
pulayas themselves. New sites are added by those pulayas who can financially afford to look after them. The HP is a fast growing community in every sense.

The materials used for the theyyam celebrations have also been qualitatively changed. Theyyam make-up artist told the investigator that there were times, when they were not allowed to use colours, other than those made by them from charcoal and rice powder. Now they use colours which other high caste use and are bought from the shops. The materials for theyyam make-up were of throw-away type, but now there is a noticeable tendency to make them durable. For example the head-gear. Those head-gears which have been made by soft wood and glitter paper now have been replaced by metal and paints, the mask, of potten and gulikan made by arecanut sheaths have been replaced by other durable materials, lamented one of the elder theyyam performers who has a store house of Theyyam-make-up articles and an expert in making them.

Another change is noticed in the way of the manufacture of theyyam decorations. Previously it was made by specialized traditional people according to the prescriptions. Now all these decorations are available in the market, the small scale industry has taken up the production on a large scale. Like other
theyyam materials the masks of potten and gulikan are made of two, three kinds of materials and varying designs are sold at different prices.

Many of the elders both men and women whom the investigator interviewed said that since there was a gap of almost four decades for the revival of theyyam celebrations, many of the thottams and rituals are forgotten by the people. Today's gurus have to put together the bits and pieces they remember, and therefore confusion about the ritual performances. Very few know the meaning of the symbols and rituals, they perform. It is the general opinion of the informants that there is a general relaxation in the rituals of theyyam. No theyyam thottam is fully sung. Only the essentials of rituals are performed. The hurry and worry of modern India have affected theyyam too. In the pre-independence era the date of the theyyam celebrations were strictly followed according to the lunar months, but now they are often adjusted to a week-end to ensure participation, particularly in case of pulayas who still remain by and large day labourers. The gap in theyyam celebration of almost forty years left a leadership vacuum in the art and ritual of theyyam. The youngest performer at that time has become the oldest now and the community has to depend on new entrants in the field. Even an untrained eye can notice the
predominance of youth in the art; but there is also a
general complaint among the elders that the quality
of the performance has declined "what do the
youngsters know about theyyam," said a very old
pulaya woman.

Elders continue to accuse the young artist
saying that the painstaking sahana for the
disciplined drilling of the art, in its many
dimensions is lacking among the youth. The
investigator felt that there seems to be some truth
in the criticism. Bitten by the bug of secularizing
tendencies, the youth lack the single minded
dedication to their trade, as theyyam gives only
seasonal employment. To the traditional performers it
used to be a full-time job, in the off-season they
engaged themselves in repairing and making of the
theyyam costumes. Today's theyyam artist, usually
holds another full time job, thus becoming a teacher-
theyyam artist, or police-theyyam artist, etc.

The theyyam ritual celebration itself is
'disturbed' by the secularizing tendency, say the
elders. Most of the young theyyam performers are
averse to taking the toddy-offering (kalasam),
instead they prefer tender coconut water. Toddy is
an integral part of the theyyam performance for it
intoxicates the theyyam performer which adds to the
liminality and playfulness of the occasion. The intoxicated dance of theyyam performer is essential for the crowd frenzy which makes them to forget the worries of life.

Another important trend noticed in the theyyam ritual is the over-influence of politics. Many of the elderly informants told the investigator expressing anguish and pain that the Theyyam rituals and symbols are progressively used in the political demonstrations and decoration. From Asiad to the lowest political unit meetings, theyyam symbols are used to exploit the emotions of the simple people. For the Cannanore district convention of the Marxist party, the main gate was designed in the form of the two head-gears of the thekken gulikan. Marxist party and Sastra Sahitya Parishad make copious use of the theyyam symbols. All these undermine sacredness of the theyyam symbols, in other words the cultural and social change is reflected in the theyyam rituals, symbols and myths.

4.4.3. The Effect of Theyyam on the Crowd

As we have seen theyyam ritual is a long process. Informants say that shortest celebration is of 24 hours duration; and another 24 hours for immediate preparation. It appears that the theyyam ritual is organized to spend a sleepless night. All
through the night there will be some performance going on for those who want to spend their time without sleep. In all the mystic traditions loss of sleep is an important point for getting in touch with one's inner energy; *Siva-ratri, Navaratri* celebrations of hindu high-traditions, *Ramazan* fast of the Muslims, Christmas, Easter celebration of christians are illustrative. Loss of sleep in rhythmic performances such as drumming, dancing, and singing, relaxes the performers and that leads to a catharsis. The participant slowly go through a process of getting in touch with themselves and their hidden areas of emotions. What the modern people achieve artificially, the *pulayas* get through ritual means: getting in touch with the unconscious.

From the point of view of catharsis, the rhythmic dance, the characteristic features of the painted face of the deities, and torsos, the elaborated headgears, the personifications of the qualities of gods, the ritual offerings of birds and animals, the trance of the *theyyam* all induce in the entire crowd a participatory trance. The symbolism of the painted designs, the colours, the musical accompaniments, the chant, the drum and thudi, the rhythmic jumping and running all go in for a hypnotic effect in the crowd.

The rising crescendo of *thottam* - chanting, the
sound of jingling anklets, the rhythmic deafening musical accompaniments comprising drum and thudi punctuated by shouts and yelling of the theyyam, the spirited expression of the trance from head to foot makes the entire crowd erupt in frenzy of rhythmic fervour, the whole spectacle of sound, movements, colour leaves a lasting effect on the participants.

4.4.4. The Liminality of Theyyam

We have seen in the theory of performance that liminality has two meanings (i) in the sense of manifesting what is hidden; making transparent the opaque surface of social life (social dramas) (ii) in the sense of a situation of a licence during which anything can take place, because all norms of day to day life are relaxed (performance).

Theyyam ritual performance reflects liminality in both senses. The contradictions, and stress situations of seemingly uneventful pulaya social life becomes transparent during the theyyam ritual, when in a trance the theyyam speaks out the frustration and the resentments of the community. Secondly, several devices are used to relax the social norms and to give the whole celebration an air of enchantment to shed all inhibitions and controls. The potten, literally means, "idiot", "deaf and dumb", or "loafer". This entitles the theyyam to
speak-out whatever comes to his mind, and in utter abusive language. He is not restricted by norms as he is expected to speak only idiotic things. Masking is a second device that gives the potten to behave without any inhibition. The true personality of the performer is masked and now, no more the person but the masked effigy of idiotic nature speaks. This provides considerable freedom for the theyyam to speak for his oppressed community. Thirdly the intoxication by the country liquors under the guise of offering gives the theyyam the license to speak out whatever comes in his mind. Even in ordinary life the drunken fellow is tolerated for his misbehaviour and enjoys considerable liminal concession for breaking the norms. A drunken theyyam is expected to behave in an odd manner and the success of the theyyam depends on the extent of his breaking the norms and making the people laugh at himself and the mad society he represents.

4.4.5. The Blend of the Ludic and the Serious

The ludic (playful) nature is integral to liminal stage. The potten theyyam is a perfect synthesizing the playfulness and seriousness. Though the theyyam is expected to speak only nonsensical things which would make the devotees laugh, at the same time what he says will be heeded to seriously.
His jokes are cutting and penetrating social criticisms, his scaring the people is playful. The theyyam is fond of teasing women and frightening children yet he is considered to be the protector of them. Women are easily possessed by potten theyyam and they go into a trance dancing like the potten theyyam. He threatens others by saying that he would jump into the fire. In fact, he 'jumps' into the fire and everybody knows that he is not really jumping into fire so as to hurt him. Yet people look at it with awe and wonder. Even at the serious moments of playing with fire he tries to make people laugh. His behaviour toward the landlord is exactly the same way the landlord behaves towards him in real life. This shift of role amuses the crowd. In this playful dramatising he is enacting the collective wish of the people he represents, in other words the plural reflexivity of the pulaya community takes place in him.

The ludic nature is built into all the theyyam rituals. The investigator noticed that ritual celebrations are not well-planned. There is a laissez faire type of approach to the ritual actions. No one seems to be so sure of what next is to follow—everything somehow takes place. Audience comes drunk for the celebration and they have their own uninhibited performance (fig. 4.1.1); children are
allowed everywhere and they play with holy-instruments (fig. 4.1.3); the muscians keep their drum on the holy installation which they have venerated a while ago (fig. 4.1.2); dogs wander about in on the dias (thara) undisturbed (fig. 4.1.4) Unlike the places of worship of the high-traditions, anybody can go anywhere provided one is bare-footed, the only rule, perhaps, most strictly enforced.

4.4.6 Absorption and Integration

The pulaya theyyams have been very generous in absorbing and integrating, the ritual, myths and symbols of the sanskritic tradition. In every theyyam festival, there are always theyyams of other high-caste deities such as Siva and Vishnu. Vishnu vishnumurti is a popular theyyam with the pulayas and Saiva myths and rituals have penetrated almost all the pulayas theyyam example the pulaya version of the potten theyyam does not speak of Siva; but the potten theyyam at Malayas considers potten as the incarnations of Siva; similarly kurathi is considered as Parvati. The dancing together (koodiyattam) of all the theyyams is a sign of reconciliation of all the deities without difference. In the dancing together (koodiyattam) of potten theyyam, the deities drawn from all traditions are usually included.

The ceremony of ritual offerings at the kottam
that goes on simultaneously, the tandri as the main celebrant, is patterned after the puja of the high tradition. The vegetarian offerings of flowers, fruits and leaves and integrated with the offerings of animals such as goat and fowl. Thus we can see the integration of three traditions, Tribal, Saiva and Vishnava in theyyam celebration.

4.4.7. Theyyam Ritual Celebration—A Wholistic Experience.

The pulaya world is permeated with spirits of different nature, particularly the ancestor spirits. Pulaya worship trees and animals not themselves but as the abode of different spirits. The pipal tree is associated with fairies, with gulikan, chempakam, nimb tree, with kali. Informants said that the theyyam was originally celebrated under the pipal tree or banian tree, later on it was celebrated in sacred groves. Tree symbolism plays an important role in the theyyam celebration. Theyyam makes extensive use of the leaves, flowers and fruits. Potten and gulikan theyyams are decorated almost totally with tender coconut leaves. Many of the facial decorations are either in form of a leaf, flower, or fruit of venerated trees. prakezhethu in the form of elengi flower. The mudi, is patterned after the shape of fruit of a leaf. The heart shape of the pipal tree
4.2 THE SEQUENCE OF POTTEN THEYYAM

4.2.1. A new improvised pulaya grove
4.2.2. A modern shrine (kottam)
4.2.3. Offerings arranged in front of the masks of potten theyyam
4.2.4. The potten theyyam with the mask of pulamaruthan
4.2.5. The potten theyyam with the mask of pula-potten
4.2.6. The potten theyyam with the mask of pulachamundi
4.2.7. Ritual inversion: potten theyyam lying in the fire makes the landlord to kneel down
4.2.8. Potten theyyam blessing a woman
4.2.9. After the theyyam performance, the theyyams visiting the houses
leaf is a common pattern. Some of the theyyam dancers, for example gulikan begins dance by paying respect to the tree, chempakam. The glowing charcoal heap for the potten theyyam to 'jump' in as a ritual is made out of the special wood of particular trees such as tarmerind or chempakam.

The spirits are propitiated under the symbol of animals. Tiger theyyam are important theyyam. In the potten theyyam too, one of the mask is of a buffalo. In the make up of theyyam animal shapes and features are frequently used. The patterns and designs of facial decoration are named after different organs of animals. Sangum valum (shell and tail), prancharulu (dove-fold) are some examples. In the muthappan theyyam the mudi of the vellattam is patterned after the horn of a buffalo. Dog is constant companion of Muttappan. Goat and cock are offered in the theyyam rituals.

Informants told the investigator that the dancing was in the beginning an imitation of the movements of the respective animals whose theyyam was to be performed. Later on it became sophisticated according to the talent of the dancer. Even now the pulimarinnjathondachan and potten theyyam dance according to the movement of tiger and buffalo respectively. Thus we can see in the theyyam the
celebration of the Nature, human beings here understood as an integral part of nature.


The essential movements of theyyam dance as well as the pattern of decoration are circular. Going round (parikrama), bowing down (anjali) and blessing (anugraha) are the three patterns of movements and gestures, and all these are circular in form, the former is horizontal circle, the latter two are vertical circles. Theyyam begins the dance by going around the stanam of the murthi. This movement is rhythmic with the accompaniment of the percussion instruments. All the theyyam deities are danced into existence.

The formation of the audience is in the circular pattern, the thara (the dancing ground) is in the circular form. The sacrificial offerings are arranged in the circular pattern.

The general pattern of the theyyam symbols are circular in shape. Mudi most of theyyam are circular in pattern, and it is called so, round crown (vatta mudi). The circular patterns can be clearly seen in the facial and body-make-up. Most of the facial writings are circular in pattern and some of them are
clearly squaring of circles (8.1.4). The *palottu* kolam has five circles on his facial make-up, and it is known as *anjupully* (five circles). Almost all the popular designs of make-up that are often used are circular in pattern.

4.5. Conclusion

From the *theyyam* celebration and the ritual status reversal the pulayas acquire two important character traits, conformitty to social norms which makes them normally submissive, care-free and playful. The *potten theyyam* enacts a style of coping with the social stress situation through playful and care-free responses through ritual performance. Theoretically it may be safe to hold the view that the cultural celebrations reflect the social process (Turner, 1977), but in practice, the behaviour pattern of the people is shaped by the heroes of ritual celebrations. One can say, from the field experience, that there is a dialectical relation between the ritual celebrations and the behaviour pattern of a people.

The second trait, the protest element, that the pulayas acquire through developing critical consciousness through *theyyam* celebration will be discussed in detail in the following chapter (V).