

**INTERPRETATION OF VETTAKKARAN KALAMPATTU TEXT:
FROM ORAL TO PERFORMANCE**

A Dissertation submitted to the University of Hyderabad in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of

Master of Philosophy

In English

By

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled “**Interpretation of Vettakkaran Kalampattu Text: From Oral to Performance**” submitted by Clinta P S bearing Regd. No.13HEHL09, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English, is a bonafide work carried out by her under our supervision and guidance. The dissertation has not been submitted previously in part or full to this or any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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DECLARATION

I, Clinta P S, hereby declare that this dissertation titled “**Interpretation of Vettakkaran Kalampattu Text: From Oral to Performance**” submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. D Murali Manohar, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my dissertation can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

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For Amma, Achan, and Chintu.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Narratives are omnipresent in social environments. They exist in all communities, in all sizes and formats silently performing their respective functional roles. This dissertation ventures to record and study a group of narratives that are situated in a ritual; that are in action. The scheme is to have a better understanding of how seemingly irrelevant narratives in oral tradition influence and control the human behaviour and thereby the social organization. The collected narratives centre on a deity called *Vettakkaran* who has been worshiped through different rituals in Kerala one among which is *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style. This chapter tries to locate *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style in the larger context of the *Kalampattu* ritual in general. It also briefly presents the methodology followed along with an overview of the chapters.

Kalamezhuth, the ritual

Kalamezhuth is an age old indigenous Hindu ritual practice of Kerala conducted mainly associated to temples, sacred groves and noble Hindu households. The word *kalam* in Malayalam signifies ‘picture’ and the term *ezhuth* can be literally translated to ‘writing’. So etymologically the word means ‘writing a picture’ or, to be more appropriate to the process in the ritual, ‘drawing a picture’. During the ritual process a large picture of the deity to be worshiped or a geometrical figure that stands for the deity will be drawn with five coloured powders on a sacred floor prepared for worship. The colours are white, yellow, green, black and red. All the five colours are made from natural products and it turns the ritual a celebration of the vibrant nature and directly connects to the agrarian economy of the land. For white and yellow rice flour and

turmeric powders are used respectively. Powdered green leaves make the colour green. Burnt husk of paddy is used as black and a mixture of turmeric powder and quick lime serves as red. Each colour has its own symbolic connotation when it is used in the ritual. The dexterity of the artists in drawing these figures is remarkable since they do not make use of any tools except their hands to draw the *Kalam* with appealing perfection.

The word *Kalamezhuth*, taken literally, only indicates the process of drawing which is only a part of the complex whole. The ritual is invariably known as *Kalampattu*, *Kalamezhuthpattu* and *Kalamezhuthum Pattum* also owing to another main process involved in the ritual which is the oral rendition the second structural unit in praise of the deity. The word ‘*pattu*’ means ‘song’ in Malayalam. The third structural unit of high magnitude is a stylized performance by a performer as the deity. From here on in this dissertation the word ‘*Kalampattu*’ is employed to indicate the ritual since the thesis is trying to address the literary as the prime motive and through it also attempts to situate the ritual as a whole in its context.

Communities from different strata of caste hierarchy follow the tradition and more than one community is involved in a single performance itself. In majority of the cases the practice is named after the community who draws the *Kalam*. The purpose served and the structural organization of the ritual varies from community to community. At the outset they all continuously follow a structural unity. It generally starts with the preparation of the solemn place to draw the *Kalam* and invoking the presence of the deity to the place followed by drawing of the *Kalam*. The picture captures in full glory a magnificent figure of the deity being worshipped. The deity will be praised by the narrative verses sung by the performers with the accompaniment of musical instruments. Some communities have a ritually stylized performance, after the main song sung in praise of the deity, when the person doing the performance, the oracle, will be

equated to the deity. The ritual ends with the performing personae blessing the devotees and erasing the *Kalam*. This basic structural unit of all the *Kalams* of all the communities is just a peripheral look at the language of the ritual. Each parole is different in its own way in embracing the linear flow of events. The entire process involved in the ritual can be appropriated to the three stages of life: the creation, the maintenance and the destruction.

Kalampattu is a vocational, climatological and socio-cultural observation and is unique to geographical particularization. As a vocational enterprise of a community the myths, lyrics of the oral rendition, the dimensions of the pictures and the sacred place were all transmitted orally down through generations. The secretive tinge of the procedure was enjoyed by each community as their private pride and superiority factor. Nonetheless this accounted for the lacuna in textual productions available on the ritual to date. *Kalampattu* is common in the central part of Kerala, especially in Thrissur district. When it comes to the northern Kerala *Kalams* are mostly employed as a structural composition of other rituals. But in southern Kerala the traces of the practice is a rare phenomenon. Though there is no normative restriction on the time of the year in which the ritual is to be observed most of them are performed between the Malayalam months *Vrischikam* (Scorpio) and *Meenam* (Pisces). The reasons for this temporal restraint are that monsoon in Kerala comes to an end by *Vrischikam* and temple festivities begin by the month of *Meenam*. Mostly the proceedings of *Kalampattu* stick to a time frame between eight to twelve hours beginning either in the morning or in the afternoon so as to make the final performance fall at dusk. But really elaborate ones nearly consume almost a complete day. The patriarchal build of the social anatomy is projected with the exclusion of women's participation in the performance of the ritual. An exception is the *Naga Kalams* of certain lower class communities where women partake in oral rendition and performance.

Though it is evident that the tradition of *Kalampattu* is a very old one much historical data is not available on it. Just like any other cultural practice this tradition also must have undergone a lot of transitions over a period of time. The lacuna of records on the practice and the secular and community bound nature of the tradition make it difficult for a diachronic study on the same. What are available as of now are some assumptions based on the existing formats of the practice. Owing to the facts mentioned above different scholars are of different opinions, which contradict each other most of the time, as far as elements of *Kalampattu* are concerned. Take for example the very origin of the tradition. There are scholars who say that it is Aryan in origin, another group argues it is Dravidian yet the third states that it has tribal roots. The view that accommodates the possibility of the practice as a coherent mixture of the three is also not to be ruled out. Each of these observations is valid as per the supporting points they put forward to substantiate their views. Since *Kalampattu* is a practice that survives through apprenticeship training and oral transmitting tradition most of the time one has to take into consideration all the possible interpretations on it as far as it holds the claim throughout the argument. So is the case with any ritual practice. Temporal and spatial milieus that constitute the context and the community associated with the ritual characterize the ritual. So any study on a ritual necessarily calls for the ethnography of it.

Classification of Communities participating in *Kalampattu*

There are different communities, ranging from the upper to the lower, who follow the practice of *Kalampattu*. The purpose, structure, content and the deities worshiped vary from community to community. A broad classification based on the caste hierarchy will divide the communities into four categories: the upper, the interim, the middle, and the lower. The upper caste stands for the Brahmins. Their *Kalams* are symbolic in the sense that they don't draw

figures of deities but geometrical representations that signify deities. The *Kalams* are known as *Padmam* and *Chakram* which are mathematical permutations and combinations. Brahmins have three types of *Kalams* based on their purpose: for propitiation of deities, for sacrificial offerings and for magical rites. The interim castes who participate in *Kalamezhuth* are *Theyyampati Kurup*, *Theyyampati Nambiar*, *Kallat Kurup*, *Varanattu Kurup*, *Nettur Kurup*, *Theyatti Nambiar*, *Theyattunni*, *Brahmaniyamma* etc. They occupy a social status between the Brahmins and *Nairs*. *Marars*, *Nairs* and *Panickers* draw *Kalam* for *Paana*, *Mudiyettu* and *Kaliyoottu*. The lower castes include castes like *Kaniyaan*, *Vannaan*, *Pulluva*, *Malaya*, *Pulaya*, *Maavilar*, *Cheravar*, *Paanan*, *Mannaan*, *Parayan*, *Paniya*, *Velan*, *Kuravar*, *Koppaalan*, *Aaviyar* and *Munnootaan*.

Patronage system

Like many other rituals *Kalampattu* also follows the patronage system by the upper caste as more than two communities are involved at the same time in every *Kalampattu*. Since the ritual is a vocational one of the community each family in it is given rights to perform at particular temples and noble households. This arrangement demanded families to reside in the jurisdiction of the temples/ patrons, which in a way curtailed the migratory freewill of the generations. In the earlier period these interim and middle caste communities who were associated with temples were given lands without levying taxes by the patrons. The performers are entitled to have as wages things used in the ritual which they have to distribute among all the people who participated in the observation of the ritual. Lately in the changed social set up patrons began to offer money along with participants' usual rights on the materials.

Affinities and affiliations to other rituals and art forms

Kalams are also structurally an integral component of some other rituals like *Paana*, *Mudiyettu*, *Theeyattu* and *Kaliyoottu* which are very popular in northern Kerala. *Kalams* are believed to be the inspirations of mural painting and face painting in *Kathakali*. Equivalences can be drawn between the colour distribution and detailing in the drawings of the later two in those of the former. The horizontal images in *Kalams* must have gradually progressed to a vertical plane of murals and then to the ambit of three dimensional space of *Kathakali*.

Kalams use the medium of coloured powders for drawing, with floor as the canvas. The north Indian tradition of *Rangoli* and south Indian Hindu practice of drawing *Kolam* also exploit the same style of drawing and all the three can be enlisted under *dhulee chithram* or powder drawing. The purpose served by the three is also related in the sense that they all attempt to please the deities to invoke their presence and blessings. But *Kalams* are only a part of bigger rituals whereas the other two exist as a domestic routine in Hindu households.

Pookkalam, floral carpet made by Keralites in front of their house for ten days during the festival of *Onam* to welcome the mythical hero *Mahabali*, is yet another tradition that has affinities to *Kalams*.

The dissertation

This dissertation tries to analyze the *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style and myths related to it through a structural-functional approach. *Kallat* style is the name given to the *Kalampattu* of *Kallat Kurup* community. *Kallat Kurup* is an interim caste who comes between the Brahmins and the *Nairs* in the caste hierarchy. They as an ethnic group hail from central

Kerela, especially from the districts of Palakkad and Thrissur. The traditional vocation of the community is participating in *Kalampattu* at temples and noble households and doing other odd jobs related to the temples. As mentioned earlier the tradition is named after *Kallat Kurup* community owing to their major participatory function in the ritual process. The other castes include *Namboothiri, Marar, Nair, Nambeesan, Warriar, and Karakkura Nair*. *Kallat Kurups* through their *Kalams* worship Shaivites, Upadevas and Snake/*Naga* gods. They have 18 different *Kalams* for Shaivites, 11 for *Upadevatas* (“minor deities”), 29 for *Nagas* and a special one exclusively for *Thiruvilayarattu Bhagavathi*. Each *Kalam* is a parole of the language that constitutes the organic whole of axioms and structural system. Every individual parole has a mythical narrative as its core, the variants of which are recounted by each community participating in it to legitimize their association with it.

Among all the *Kalams* of the community the one consuming the most elaborate spatial and temporal setting is the *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*. *Vettakkaran* is believed to be Lord Shiva in the form of a *kirata* (“hunter”) when he appeared with Parvati to deliver a weapon known as *Pashupathasthra* to Arjuna. “Vana Parva” (“Forest book”) of the *Mahabharata* gives a reference to this event. Another version of the tale narrated by the communities partaking in the ritual features *Vettakkaran* as *Vettaikkorumakan*, the son of Shiva (in hunter’s form) and Parvati. The hymns during the ritual refer to the deity more often as *Vettaikkorumakan* though the ritual as a whole is titled *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*. Linguistically analyzing, it is possible that the phonemes in the word ‘*Vettaikkorumakan*’ underwent an ellipsis and transformation through its usage over a long period of time and became ‘*Vettakkaran*’. However the oral rendition, pictorial representation and performance cues of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* articulate through these mediums the legend of a hunter and are appropriated to the Shaiva cult. One of the stories in

Eithiyamaala, an anthology of myths, by Kottarathil Sankunni testifies the right of *Kurup* community to worship *Vettakkaran* by drawing *Kalams*(736).

Like in the case of any given religious activity *Kalampattu* has endured a lot of setbacks in reaching out to the open and secular spaces. It remained bound only to the lives of the people of the communities who participated in it. As a community affair apprenticeship training transmitted the ritual down the generations. Decline of the influence of the caste system in the social sphere and a movement towards social equality brought about a change in the life of the people. There came a period in which people can make a better living by getting adapted to the changing time which pushed the younger generation to break away from their community's vocational preoccupations. The vistas opened by modern education accessible to any Indian citizen facilitated people to march in tune with the technical advancements. Eventually the younger generation opted for more sophisticated careers. As far as the communities are concerned, the *Kalams* they draw are colourful, not the life they live only doing it.

***Kalampattu* as addressed by the society**

The threat of extinction of the practice put thrust on the public domain, especially the academy, to take over the guardianship of it for posterity. As a result, *Kalampattu* has now been identified as an exotic art form, a cultural cross-section of the oriental. To identify, document and pupolarize *Kalampattu* Kerala Lalitkala Akademy organized a forty five day long *Kalamezhuth* Festival in November – December 2010. The festival brought together nearly five hundred *Kalampattu* artists from across the state. As a proceeding of this festival, Academy came up with a massive book *Kalamezhuth: Ritual Art Practice of Kerala* that carries articles on the tradition along with the pictures of one hundred and forty different *Kalams* drawn for the festival and two

DVDs that documented the performance in motion. Following this model Kendra Lalitkala Akademi's also conducted a Kalamezhuth festival in 2014 in New Delhi. Kochi-Muziris Biennale featured *Kalam* as an art installation in both of its editions so far in 2012 and 2014. Tourism Promotion Council of Kerala showcases *Kalam*s in its festivals along with other indigenous art forms.

All these attempts towards taking the tradition to a secular platform are appreciable looking at its wider reach to connoisseurs and art enthusiasts. At the same time the reification imposed upon it shouldn't be underestimated. The cultural exhibitionism gets the art commodified. Snatching the tradition from its original milieu and interpolating it is suicidal as none of the rituals decontextualize. They begin to articulate a different text once it is taken out of its real context. In the sanctum sanctorum of a shrine and in a public setting the same signifiers disseminate different constructs. A ritual never accommodates an audience; everyone has the stature of a participant since they are all informed audience. Participation in a ritual is reestablishing of one's identity and membership to the community. The collective unconscious, shared memory, factual information regarding the tradition and their membership to their community succeeds a person in interpreting the archetypal imageries. Whereas, the onlooker of the ritual in a decontextualized terrain is an audience, who should be served by a catalyst to reach the threshold of signification.

Literature review

*Kalam*pattu is a multiple genre which is approachable from different disciplinary domains like painting, folklore, literature, performance studies, architecture etc. Still the lacuna of research works and texts on the ritual is a hurdle to approach it from an epistemological

concern. The books that survey the culture and folklore tradition of India and Kerala enlist *Kalampattu* as an entry in them with a passing reference. *The Folk-songs of Southern India* by Charles E Gover and *Meet My People- Indian Folk Poetry* by Devendra Sathyarathi are examples. Encyclopaedic works like *Sarvavijnanakosam* briefs the ritual in it along with descriptions of individual *Kalams* like *Bhadrakali Kalam* and *Ayyappan Kalam*. Another work to be read to derive the preliminary understanding of the ritual is Chelнат Achyuta Menon's *Keralathile Kaliseva*. M. V. Vishnu Namboothiri's *Nadodi Vijnaneeyam* elaborates the *Kalams* of geometrical combinations in tantric rituals.

Kalamezhuthile Chithradarshanam written by Radhakrishnan Chembra is a work dedicated to the analysis of pictorial representations and its connotations in *Kalamezhuth*. The book titled *Kalamezhuth, Ritual Art Practice of Kerala*, a massive work edited by T. A. Sathyapal, carries a collection of articles on the tradition along with photographs in colour of the same. A work that is exclusively dedicated to the study of *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style is Babu Mundekkad's *Kallatta Kuruppanmarude Kalamezhuthupattu*. It is a book version of the author's Ph.D thesis submitted to the University of Calicut. The work addresses all the individual *Kalams* of *Kallat* style together in general and analyses the songs based on its prosody and rhetorical devices employed. An advantage of the book is its annexure of songs in *Kalampattu*.

But none of the works produced so far recorded a detailed ethnography of any of the *Kalampattu* of any community. The inability of the works to address any individual *Kalampattu* as an organic whole of different events and genres is also to be noted. This asserts the scope of the current study.

Methodology

Since much textual material was not available on the ritual as a whole the primary methodology followed by the researcher for data collection was participant observation. A team of *Kallat Kurup* community, hailing from places near Guruvayur in Thrissur district of Kerala, was identified and was followed to different sites for fieldwork for about three months. Understanding the ritual without any background research and data support was impossible. The literature on *Kalampattu* and other rituals of Kerala aided to shape the way in which the tradition is to be approached and observed. In the field formal interviews and informal conversation with other performers, people related to temples and devotees and the public helped to make the sense of the proceedings better. Photographic, video graphic and audio recordings of different performances and the one under current study were done from the field. Selected photographs are included as a part of this dissertation in Appendix II. The telephonic conversations and interactions with academicians in the field provided an insight as to how to address and narrow down the area of study. Since the only textual matter available on the specific area of this thesis was Babu Mundekkad's book, all the doubts regarding the songs were clarified with reference to the book in consultation with the practitioners.

Chapter Overview

The dissertation is divided into five chapters with a conclusion. The first chapter is an introduction to the ritual and dissertation in general. The second briefs the basic assumptions, theoretical concepts, and ideas used in the dissertation. The third is an ethnographic *thick description* of a select performance of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*. The chapter also has an introduction to the relevance of contextual theories in studying a cultural phenomenon. The

fourth chapter with two parts engages with a narratological analysis of myths and the ritual. It constitutes of mythologies related to the ritual and different castes associated to the ritual along with a structural-functional overtones of them. The fifth is a continuation of the functional analysis which undertakes the task of bringing out the structure and anti-structure of hierarchy by juxtaposing the power relations in the normal social context and in the ritual context. The conclusions are drawn from the discussions in the four chapters as well as from extensions of those analyses.

Conclusion

Social environment is primarily and necessarily a space of continuous discourse formation and evolution. The capacity of a society to produce indefinite number of discourses is an inherent characteristic of it. The control over the discourse formation and propagation is most often steered and monopolized by certain strata of the society. A particular group of people gets to control the others on the basis of certain privileged possessions. The list of possessions can extend from the religious to the economical compartmentalization covering up a whole realm of specifications. At the very same time there are some discourses in any of the societies where all these categorization of hierarchy are disturbed in varying degrees. All the social discourses that questions and subverts the established norms of classifications in the society are facilitated and practiced majorly by those who are affected by them. The prime motive of the subjugated in participating in these subverting tendencies is that they want to feel and enjoy what the others, say for example, the privileged, often do. In a context where the underprivileged get to undergo the otherwise tabooed experience they enjoy it even if the experience is momentary. And the good feeling that they derive out of these practices creates in them an urge to recreate and relive

the same contexts as often as possible. This repeated reliving gives this activity the rank of a ritual.

Kerala with its geographical stature and tropical climate is best suitable for agrarian population. The peoples of the state are very much bound to the land they reside in. Even after the crawling in of urbanization the subconscious of every Keralite shows resistance to have a complete break away from this. As per the Marxist insight of production relations this basic production mode which is the base structure gives rise to the superstructures that have their roots in the former. This argument is true to every word as far as the religious practices of the state are concerned. Ritualistic and cultural observations reflect the agrarian economy of the state to a large extent. In this context it is necessary to study the rituals not just as religious traditions but as social discourses to understand their significance in an ever changing society.

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Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

This chapter presents the outline of assumptions and theoretical schemata used in the dissertation. Owing to the dynamic nature of the subject approached multiple theories are employed to study it. The chapter is composed as a defense of oral narratives, especially mythologies, pointing out their significance as cultural discourses. This scheme runs through all the following chapters where the ritual is analyzed from different perspectives with application of concepts discussed here.

Narratives are one of the integral constituent components of a progressive society without which its cultural arena will be near to decease. Narratives include both the oral and written accounts of and by the individuals in a social group. The oral survives in memory of peoples through repetition and recalling while the written are seized and awarded permanency through graphic codifiers. So authorship and thus authenticity are usually cited as the primary divide between the two and the superiority claim of the latter. The anonymity of genesis and dynamicity conferred on its content in every recounting event generates a sense of improbability to oral narrations and pushes them to occupy a position below the written ones. Thus the epistemological concern of academics is more annexed to the latter and is referred by the term literature.

This nomenclature and acceptance by the scholarly circle highlighted the importance of written texts over the oral and appropriated the oral narratives as a part of folklore. Also literature began to be viewed as the narratives of the literate and folklore as those of the illiterate. As a result of the development of different streams in academics written texts or literature became the part of Humanities and folklore the part of Social Sciences. And from there they entered the further divisions into specific disciplinary domains. Written documents are dealt mainly by the Language, Linguistic, Literature, and Philosophy departments and oral narratives that form a part of folklore mainly by Anthropology, Sociology, Cultural Studies and Folklore departments. Though there are interdisciplinary activities happening most of the departments like to define their borders and minimize border crossings. This dissertation ventures to assert the significance of oral literature, by taking the case of mythologies, to be addressed by Humanities disciplines in general and Literature Departments in particular. They are rich with literary qualities, psychological under currents, shared social convictions, and cultural produce. Vladimir Propp observes that “Folklore is the prehistory of literature...Literature, which is born of folklore, soon abandons the mother that reared it. Literature is the product of another form of consciousness” (14).

Oral literature is a treasury of knowledge that throws light upon the society in which they are narrated. Under it comes all narratives of a discourse community like myths, fables, folktales, folksongs, legends, proverbs, and fairytales. Being a building block of folklore they form an integral part of what is called culture. They are the milestones in the development of human beings from the natural to the cultural self. Narrations were born and evolved from every stage of this linear development and the scope of narrative mediums were exploited by man not only for

immediate communications but also for many other purposes that ranged from transmission and preservation of knowledge to identity makers.

As observed by Joseph Campbell in his work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, mythologies have been addressed by different academic disciplines and academicians in different ways.

Mythology has been interpreted by the modern intellect as a primitive, fumbling effort to explain the world of nature (Frazer); as a product of poetical fantasy from prehistoric times, misunderstood by succeeding ages (Muller); as a repository of allegorical instruction, to shape the individual to his group (Durkheim); as a group dream, symptomatic of archetypal urges within the depths of the human psyche (Jung); as the traditional vehicle of man's profoundest metaphysical insights (Coomaraswamy); and as God's Revelation to His children (the Church). Mythology is all of these. The various judgements are determined by the viewpoints of the judges. (382)

This is why the studies on them become significant.

But before moving into the dissertation content some clarifications are to be made on the assumptions, concepts, and terminologies used in the dissertation. The study engages a cultural text in action as a form of verbal art. Many of the basic assumptions regarding the concepts of discourse and text used in the dissertation are based on the essay "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text" by Paul Ricoeur. The essay opens with his ideas on the concept of discourse. He says language is either spoken or written as discourse and thus discourse is viewed as a 'language-event'. Adopting the observations of the French linguist

Emile Benveniste, Ricoeur enlists four traits of discourse. They are- discourse is a temporal activity, they are always realized in a present; discourse is self-referential of its speaker; discourse is always about something, it describes, express, and represent a world; discourse is a communicative act used to exchange message, it has a speaker and an interlocutor to whom it is addressed. And these four characters make speech an event (91-92).

Ricoeur provides a distinction between oral discourse and written discourse that can be used to understand why social groups confine to oral tradition as far as their traditional knowledge and belief systems are concerned. He says in oral discourse reference is “ostensive” that gives direct connections to its environment- its context and people involved in it. The speaker or the narrator has a great control over the text and this restricts the scope of interpretation of the content of oral discourses. But when it comes to writing, once the text is written the author loses his control over the text and text becomes an independent entity for the perusal of its readers. In other words, in oral discourse what the speaker intends and what the text intends harmonize where as in written formats they needn’t necessarily be the same (95-97). In this observation Ricoeur echoes the concept of ‘the death of the author’ by Roland Barthes discussed in his eponymous essay. Barthes says “To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with a final signification, to close the writing” (147). Oral narratives inherently have the ‘author’. The dissertation takes this idea of Ricoeur to look at the oral tradition of the narratives and knowledge domain of a community as a way to exploit the scope of its ostensive property. Through the oral tradition they not only restrict their availability but also the narrative authority, interpretation, and interpolation of them by outsiders.

Another main argument of Ricoeur is that meaningful human activities can be addressed and analyzed as texts. He draws parallels between human actions and discourses and equates

them to utterances and comes to the assertion that all human actions can be read. He gives four criteria through which a meaningful action can be considered as a text. The first one is the fixation of action. Meaningful actions can be objectified in the same way a discourse is fixed by writing. He says “by objectification, action is no longer transaction to which the discourse of action would still belong. It constitutes a delineated pattern which has to be interpreted according to its inner connections” (98). The second is the autonomization of action which constitutes the social dimension of action. The third one claims that “a meaningful action is an action the importance of which goes “beyond” its relevance to its initial situation” (102). That is “the meaning of an important event exceeds, overcomes, and transcends the social conditions of its production” (102-103). The final one regards human action as an ‘open work’ “the meaning of which is addressed to an indefinite range of possible ‘readers’” (103). On these concepts of meaningful action as text, the dissertation tries to look at the ritual as a text.

This dissertation is a synchronic study of an existing ritual through fieldwork. It is synchronically approached due to the dynamicity of the subject under study and the difficulty to trace the historical development and transformation of it through ages. Not much empirical data is available on the practice about its genesis or evolution. As mentioned the basic notion of the research is that being a cultural discourse or meaningful action the ritual can be viewed and studied as a text. The text taken for study is the *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style. Among all the *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style this is the most elaborate one with the most number of narratives and castes involved in it. As the first step mythologies related to the ritual were collected and recorded. By collecting the narratives related only to the ritual the dissertation does not intend to negate the possibility of more narratives on the deity or similar narratives in other parts of Kerala or even India. But since the dissertation has defined its frame it can accommodate

only the ones on the specific ritual performance. It is true that codifying the oral narratives into written documents will curb its dynamicity, but as far as this study is concerned it was a basic necessity. Special care was taken to collect all the available versions and variants of the narratives through fieldwork from the performing communities.

Mythologies have a lot of inherent characteristics that give validity to their origin and transmission. The myths collected from the field, though they exist separately in social world as cultural products, are also housed in different forms in a *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* and are more functional through it than in their individual existence. As separate entities they stay mainly in the memories of those who know it and thus their lifespan will be based on the choice of the informed individual. This memory has a shared aspect as many people from the same group will know them, but the passing time can take their number up or down since recounting, distorting or just not bothering about them are all personal preferences of the informed individuals. There are myths that died, got appropriated, distorted, and got transformed into something entirely opposite of what it used to be. This happens because every time a myth is being narrated it is narrated for a purpose. Based on the purpose the ways of narrations and medium will vary. And to understand how they operate in the given frame of time and space they are to be put in their context with details of varied elements that the context accommodate. Context “is an indissoluble whole, constituted through performance: an ephemeral, recurrently produced whole around which society takes shape” (Hufford 544).

Contextual theories are largely an Anthropological approach to a discourse that believes that discourses in any form are relative; taken outside the context they fail to communicate properly or turn completely meaningless. Academicians like Bronislaw Malinowski, William Bascom, Clifford Geertz, Dan Ben-Amos, and Richard Bauman popularized this approach

through their contributions. “How people frame narratives and how narratives in turn frame people have become the proper object of contextualism in folklore” (Hufford 530). As an application of contextualism ethnographic ‘thick description’ of a select performance of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* is included as a part of the dissertation. ‘Thick description’ is a term borrowed by Geertz from Gilbert Ryle to denote the method of recording discourses popularized by him. In his essay “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” he enlists their characteristics. He says “there are three characteristics of ethnographic description: it is interpretive; what it is interpretive of is the flow of social discourse ; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the "said" of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms” (20). Along with these three he also adds that they are “microscopic” too, yet he does not debar the existence of “large-scale anthropological interpretations of whole societies” (21). But he mainly practiced them as microscopic. For him ethnographies are interpretations as objective as possible to give the content and context of a discourse to an outsider. The ethnography chapter of this dissertation is modeled on these ideas of Geertz as well as on the ethnographic models used by Victor Turner to study Ndembu ritual of northwestern Zambia.

The chapter also aims to fulfill one of the motifs of the work which is the recording of the cultural phenomenon. Special care has been taken in capturing and converting the ritual performance into written text with minimizing all the nuances and inconveniences brought about by the dynamicity of the medium. As pointed out by ethnographers, writing ethnography was not as easy as it seemed to be, especially when dealing with a ritual and discourses related to it that are not much exposed to academic interrogation. The informants sometimes contradicted each other, some were suspicious about the purity of the intention, and some were really helpful. The

ethnography is composed in a way fulfilling the responsibility and fidelity to the informants and the information gathered as well as being unbiased to keep the objectivity of the academic endeavour. Events are reported in present tense from the perspective of an informed participant observer to give the readers the feel of immediacy.

The ethnography chapter tries to contextualize the ritual performance of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*, on which the fieldwork was carried out, in the exact context of its occurrence with specificities about the place, peoples, and different stages of it. Just like any theoretical approach contextual theories also had criticism from some theorists. They argued that contextualization gave too much importance to context that they often left the text completely out of consideration. But as far this study is concerned ethnography is only one of the many techniques devised to understand the phenomenon. Of course the dissertation has a chapter on the text, accommodating the varied meanings of the term.

Also the attempt of the ethnographic approach could be criticized as homogenizing the dynamic phenomenon by codifying a single performance into graphical symbols of a language. Bauman responds to the argument with the concept of ‘the emergent quality of all performances’ in his essay “Verbal Art as Performance”. He says “the emergent quality of performance resides in the interplay between communicative resources, individual competence, and the goals of the participants, within the context of particular situations” (302). Adopting ideas from Albert Lord to substantiate his arguments, he asserts that

the study of the factors contributing to the emergent quality of the oral literary texts promises to bring about a major reconceptualization of the nature of the text, freeing it from the apparent fixity it assumes when abstracted from performance

and placed on the written page, and placing it within an analytical context which focuses on the very source of the empirical relationship between art and society.

(303)

Thus the ethnography should be exploited as a textual medium to analyse the emergent quality of the ritual presented for perusal through it.

The ritual performance is treated as a discourse which shares the same narratological thread in way of content with some other cultural discourses like a group of myths and an epic. These discourses are divided into two events based on the classification proposed by Roman Jakobson known as 'narrated' and 'narrative' events; the events narrated through narratives and events of narration itself (44-45). The ritual is basically a group of narrative events that use different mediums for narration that break the chronological order of the narrated events. The narrated events in the form of mythologies are included in Chapter III followed by an analysis on their structural parallelisms and function.

The scope of structural analysis is exploited to study the myths as well as the ritual. The myths are mostly analysed from the level of narrative units. What a particular unit is trying to convey through it, what is its structural importance in the myth, what function does it perform in the society are all explained through the analysis. In structural analysis the myths and the ritual are approached through the techniques proposed by Vladimir Propp and Claude Levi-Strauss in their studies on mythologies. Although efforts are made to bring out the parallel structures in the myths the main focus is given to the interpretation of them since the aim of the study is more towards finding out the functional aspect of narratives than on drawing a unified structural formula of the myths. Binaries in the main narrative and their horizontal and vertical relations are

also pointed out there. The ritual is put under structural analysis in the later part of the chapter using Alen Dundes's method of analyzing a folklore item from the three different layers of texture, text, and context. The idea of myth as a second-order semiological system propounded by Roland Barthes is also used to interpret the sign system common to the myths and the ritual.

These interpretations of the myths and ritual are done with the motif to discover the function accomplished by them in different layers ranging from individual psyche to the larger canvass of the society. The supreme function served by both is the creation as well as subversion of some power relations the functional values of which goes beyond the context of the narrative events. Since the ritual and myths are viewed from the level of discourse theoretical concept on discourse analysis is borrowed from Michael Foucault. The ritual atmosphere and the behaviour of individuals during the ritual performance are analyzed using the ideas by Mikhail Bakhtin and Victor Turner. Though the ideas of *carnival* by Bakhtin and *communitas* by Turner differ from each other in a number of ways *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* exhibit the characteristics of both during its performance making it necessary to have a combination of both the concepts to understand the function of the phenomenon better.

Thus multiple theoretical concepts are employed to study the mythologies, ritual, and their functions. And based on these analysis conclusions are drawn on the importance of these myths and ritual in today's context. They all point fingers to the power of narratives in a society and thus reiterate the importance of studying oral literature. As Propp remarked "Folklore is creative by its very nature, but creation is not an arbitrary process; it is governed by laws, which scholarship must explain" (13). This dissertation is an effort to meet this requirement.

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Chapter III

Ethnographic Thick Description: Contextualizing the Ritual Text

This chapter is an ethnographic description of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* performed on 4 January, 2014 in front of the *Vettakkaran* shrine at Kakkad Sree Mahaganapati Temple, Thrissur, Kerala. The account captures in detail all the events of the ritual in their performance context. Since the thesis is on a cultural phenomenon emphasis should be given to the context of its occurrence. None of the existing works so far on the topic have recorded the ethnography of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* so that this thesis can refer to it in the following chapters. So it is inevitable to include it as a constituent of the thesis itself. As an introduction the necessity of the ethnography is explained in the light of contextual theories.

A ritual is a complex whole and a study on a ritual becomes complicated when it comes to the selection of the approach to analyse the ritual. The domain of it is so vast that a single approach often fails to meet its dynamics. There have been multiple approaches provided by different disciplines to address this issue. One of the prominent one is the contextual approach that facilitates the functionalist criticism. “Context is an indissoluble whole, constituted through performance: an ephemeral, recurrently produced whole around which society takes shape” (Hufford 544). Contextualization of a ritual, performance, narration, event, or behaviour is accomplished through the medium of ethnographic records.

Ethnography is an academic enterprise to capture a cultural phenomenon in its performed context, in its spatial and temporal settings. It can be explained as “a method of studying cultures

in which researchers immerse themselves in ways of life to perceive them as they are lived and then recount and interpret their fieldwork to help their readers understand what it is like to be a part of the cultures studied” (Cunningham 247). From this explanation it can be perceived that the purpose of contextual analysis through ethnography is not giving an explanation of a cultural behaviour but providing an interpretation of it. Ethnographies invite the off-site personals to share the experience of the on-site personal as proximate as possible to analyze them. Ethnography as a device is essentially crucial for the indigenous and vernacular cultural context in interpreting them through ethnographic text.

Bronislaw Malinowski is one of the pioneers of contextual approach who constantly refined his views on the same. He in his essay entitled “Myth in Primitive Psychology” observes about the nature of storytelling that “the text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless” (82). He also remarks that a performance “has to be placed in the proper time-setting- the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales” (82). His distinction between context of situation and the context of culture helped many later researchers one among who is William Bascom. Bascom observes “Malinowski's remarks touch upon the functions of folklore and upon the relations of folklore to culture, as well as upon what I distinguish as the social context of folklore” (355). Richard Bauman is yet another scholar who scaled the magnitude of context in performance. “We view the act of performance as situated behaviour, situated within and rendered meaningful with reference to relevant contexts. Such contexts may be identified at a variety of levels- in terms of settings, for example, the culturally-defined places where performance occurs” (298).

Ethnography of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*

The spatial setting of the ritual is Sree Mahaganapati Temple, a temple located in a typical village of Kerala where people of different religion and caste cohabit. The temple is supposed to have a history of more than five hundred years and has Ganapati and *Vettakkaran* as the main deities along with *Upadevatas* like *Bhadrakali*, *Durga*, *Raktheswari*, and *Navagrahas*. Apart from daily worship the temple observes annual festivals with fervor. It is the tradition of the temple to do *Pantheerayiram Kalampattu* on the first Saturday of January every year. In 2014 there were performances of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* in an abridged version continuously for five days and on the sixth day the ritual in full swing was performed with *Pantheerayiram*. The ritual started at around 7:00 a.m., 4 January, 2014 and was over by half past three the next morning.

Before moving to the ethnography it is important to make some general remarks on the ritual. The first among them is the fact that there is absolutely no participation of women in the ritual performance. The only places where women can get associated with the ritual are the preparation of powders for drawing and cleaning the *Pattarangu*. But of course the devotees include women folk too. The men participating in the performance are supposed to wear white dhotis and leave their upper body uncovered. This is a common practice in temples of Kerala which is applicable to the male devotees too if they wish to enter the temple premises. In the ritual only *Karakkura Nair*, the oracle, dresses up differently. All the oral renditions by *Kurup* are summarized into prose pieces in reported speech to suit the style of ethnographic text. But they are in reality direct addresses to the deity rendered rhythmically with the accompaniment of the musical instruments *Nanduni*, *Chengila* and *Kuzhithalam*.

Main stages of the ritual

Pattu Nischayikkal

Pattu Nischayikkal is the fixing of the date of the ritual. For the performance under documentation it was done on the morning of 23 December 2013. All the people related to the ritual performance come to the temple. After lighting a bell metal lamp in front of the *Vettakkaran* shrine *Thandri*, priest, *Ooralan* (the patron), *Kallat Kurup*, *Marar*, *Karakkura Nair* and the other people who live doing the miscellaneous jobs in the temple announce that they have decided to do *Pantheerayiram Kalampattu* on a particular day. They promise the deity that they will make sure that the ritual is performed on the fixed date irrespective of any odds that may happen. This act of fixing the date goes beyond the agreement between the patron and the practitioners to the joint responsibility of them to the deity. Once the date is fixed *Ooralan* gives the others *dakshina* to do the ritual.

Construction of the *Pattarangu*

On the day of the performance the first thing to be done is the setting of the place for the performance. *Pattarangu* is made near the temple shrine in the morning of the performance. It is something that resembles a four legged open roof system of stage, under which *Kurup* draws the *Kalam*. A strict measurement is followed in making a *Pattarangu*. For the *Pattarangu* carpenters make the four legs and the beams for the roof frame from wood. The legs are usually of six feet length. The roof frame should either be square or rectangular in shape depending on the deity and the body posture of the deity as portrayed in the *Kalam*. The dimensions usually used are 12 *Kol* and 8 *Viral*, 14 *kol* and 8 *viral* and 16 *kol* and 8 *viral*. These dimensions denote the peripheral area of the roof as well as the *Kalam*. The portrait of the deities can either be in

standing posture or in sitting posture. Whichever the posture be the *Kalam* is supposed to be drawn within these given peripheral area or any other area that correspond the ratio. And the figure will be drawn with the head of the deity coming to the eastern side.

For making the *Pattarangu*, first of all, the wooden legs will be buried at the four corners of the measured area. Then the four wooden pieces that will make the roof frame will be placed on top of the legs in a way connecting the four legs and making a square or rectangle at the top. Coir ropes will be tied connecting the northern and southern wooden frame of the roof. The number of coir ropes thus tied will always be in odd numbers (usually 9 or 11 or 13). Termed as *Arukkayar*, these ropes are used to hang palm leaves for decoration. Ropes will be tied connecting all the four legs about 15 cms below and parallel to the roof frame along its inner and outer edges. The act of tying ropes in this fashion is called *Utharam kettal*. One row of rope will be tied inside the roof frame along the upper edge of the northern and southern wooden beams too. The coir rope used in all these process is a special type of coir rope called *Choodi/ Vakka* coir. The four legs and the roof frame including the ropes tied parallel to it on the either sides of the wooden beams will be covered with white clothes. The roof frame thus covered is called *Utharam*. Making of *Pattarangu* comes to an end with *Vithanam idal*, covering the roof of the *Pattarangu* with two white cloths leaving a gap along the centre. Once the making of *Pattarangu* is over the place will be purified by sweeping the floor and sprinkling water mixed with cow dung. *Nambeesan/ Warriar/ Nair* community is associated with this cleaning job in temples.

Koorayidal

Next is the preparation for *Koorayidal* and *Uchapattu*. A *peedam* will be placed on the floor a bit westward from the centre of the *Pattarangu*. Two or four bell metal lamps with two

wicks each (one each to the east and west sides) will be kept by the side of the *peedam*'s westward legs. The *peedam* will then be covered with a red silk cloth on which a white cloth called *ina thorth* will be placed. One *Vellari* will be kept on the top of the white cloth. Two small heaves of paddy grain will be placed on floor on the eastern side of the *peedam*. Two *Vellari* with wicks along with rice flakes, *malar*, jaggery and *kadali pazham* on a piece of banana leaf and two coconuts will also be placed at the outer edge of the western side of the *Pattarangu*.

Koorayidal is the act of covering the uncovered area in the roof with a silk cloth. The silk cloth to be used for *Koorayidal* will first be taken into the temple shrine for *pooja* by the priest. Then he brings it out and places it in the *Pattarangu*. Then he brings fire from the shrine in hand lamp and lights up all the lamps in the *Pattarangu*. Now the place is all set for *Koorayidal*. In every temple there will be a *Kurup* called *adiyathira Kurup* who has the hereditary right to do *Kalampattu*. In his inconveniences other *Kurups* with the consent of the *adiyathira Kurup* can do *Kalampattu*. But only he has the right to do *Koorayidal* irrespective of who draws the *Kalam*. Standing at the western side of the *Pattarangu* he asks for the permission of the patron three times. And with the permission of the patron he puts the red silk cloth at the uncovered central area on the roof of the *Pattarangu*. At this time *Marar* blows the conch. With *Koorayidal* it is believed that the *Pattarangu* is sacred enough for the deity to occupy.

The next step is the taking of *Churika*, the weapon of *Vettakkaran*, out in a solemn procession from the temple shrine to the *Pattarangu*. In this process the weapon symbolizes the deity himself. *Namboothiri* goes into the temple shrine with a lamp and takes out the *Churika* from there. The procession will have *Marar* beating *Chenda* in the front followed by *Nambissan* with *Kuthuvilak* (lamp) and *Namboothiri* with *Churika*. *Namboothiri* then places the *Churika* at the western side of the *peedam* either on a wooden plank or on a piece of banana leaf leaning it

against the *peedam*. He starts the *pooja* sitting at the western side just outside the *Pattarangu*.

When the *pooja* enters the main stage *Kurup* starts *Uchappaattu*.

Uchappaattu

Uchappaattu is the song sung in praise of deities by *Kurups* with the accompaniment of the musical instruments *Nanduni*, *Chengila* and *Kuzhithalam*. The one who plays *Nanduni* is considered as the leader of the group and is called *Thamburunadhan*. Though the word *Uchappaattu* literally means ‘song sung at noon’, it is sung in morning after *Uchappooja* and has three sections. The first part is a praising hymn to different deities which is common to all *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style. The praising follows a particular order that starts with the hymns in glorification of Ganapati followed by that of Saraswathi, and Vishnu and ends with verses on Shiva. The portion on Ganapati describes him as the elephant-faced remover of obstacles with pot belly and curved eye brows. Saraswathi is addressed as the goddess residing in lotus flower. Hymns on Vishnu are on his incarnation Lord Krishna that accounts both the naughty and grave side of his character through the incidents like stealing the clothes of girls and killing Putana, an ogress. Lord Shiva is pictured as the one with the third eye who lives in cremation grounds with his followers. The second and the third sections called *Niram* and *Sthuthi* are eulogies of *Vettakkaran*. *Niram* talks about the deity’s shrine at Balussery. It mentions his interest in hunting using different kinds of weapons. He is also remarked as wearing pleated red silk cloth. Once *Niram* singing is over *Marar* beats *Chenda*. After that *Namboothiri* offers flowers to the deity and *Kurup* sings *Sthuthi*. This section of the song is an invocation to *Vettakkaran* to come and occupy the *Pattarangu*. It says that the deity born as a hunter was advised by Shiva to go to the land created by Parasurama. So he started from Mount Kailash to the Balussery fort, his supreme shrine in Kerala. From Balussery he travelled to different places to help his devotees and was

acknowledged for the help with temples for the deity by the people. The song mentions the names of some of them. The verses towards the end inform the deity that everything is kept ready for his worship in the *Pattarangu*. It enlists the preparations that includes all his favourite things like lamp, mirror, *Vellari*, flag, smoke, offerings, water, flowers, incense, instrumental music, vocal music, dance and *pooja*. *Kurup* concludes by requesting him to be pleased with the preparations and to occupy the place.

Then *Namboothiri* lights up camphor and does aarti by waving a burning lamp around *Churika*. At this very time *Marar* plays *Chenda* in the background. *Namboothiri* then distributes to the devotees the remnants of the offerings like rice flakes, *malar* (fried paddy), flowers and sandal wood paste. Once this entire process of worshiping is over *Namboothiri* takes *Churika* back to the temple shrine in the same way it was taken into the *Pattarangu* with *Marar* beating *Chenda* and *Nambissan* with lamp walking in front of the *Namboothiri* facilitating a solemn procession for the deity. All the things left behind in *Pattarangu* after the *pooja* like rice, paddy grain and coconut are supposed to be divided equally between *Marar* and *Kurup* as the wages for their involvement in the completed process. Once everything is removed from *Pattarangu* the place will again be swept and purified.

The next step of the *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* is the offering of coconuts to be used in *Pantheerayiram*. All the twelve thousand and eight coconuts to be broken at night will be offered to the deity in the morning itself. A cage to hold the coconuts will be made near the *Pattarangu*. A big bell metal lamp will be kept outside the cage on the eastern side with two burning wicks and the cage will be decorated with banana palms. First of all the tip piece of a banana leaf will be placed on the floor inside the cage. Patron holds the right of offering the first coconuts. And then all the people associated with temple works and devotees respectively can offer coconuts.

One is supposed to offer coconuts in odd number and the coconuts are not to be cracked while offering. Once all the twelve thousand and eight coconuts are kept inside the cage another tip piece of banana leaf will be kept upside down on the top. The wicks of the lamp outside the cage will be kept burning till the entire performance is over at midnight.

Drawing of the *Kalam* and decoration of *Pattarangu*

Kurups then decorate *Pattarangu* with tender coconut leaves. They hang palm leaves on all the four sides of the roof of *Pattarangu*. The *Kurup*, who leads the other *Kurups* in drawing the *Kalam* then lights up a lamp in the south-west corner of the *Pattarangu*. This spot is considered to be the residing place of Ganapati according to *Vastu* and is called *Agnikone*. He draws *Ganapati Chakra*, a geometrical figure with two intersecting triangles in the form of a star inside a circle, and places a piece of banana leaf containing jaggery and *Kadali pazham* (a variety of small banana) on it. *Kurup*, taking a pinch of rice flour between his fingers scatters it from the banana leaf to the burning wick of the lamp. This act indicates that the things inside the leaf are offered to Ganapati. All the *Kurups* who participate in the drawing of the *Kalam* are supposed to do the offering part of this before they start drawing. The drawing of the *Kalam* starts with the drawing of a line that vertically divides the whole area into two equal parts and is called *Soothravara*. The whole figure of the deity spreads symmetrically on the either sides of this line. Only the outline of the deity will be drawn with rice flour in the first stage of the drawing. This drawing, starting from the forehead of the deity moves on to the upper part of the figure, the crown, and then comes down marking the body parts and ends with the legs. The areas that are supposed to be white in the ultimate figure will be filled with rice flour along with this outline drawing itself. In *Vettakkaran Kalam*, the lower part of the deity's cloth is supposed to have white shade in its background. Once the outline sketching is over by the leading *Kurup*,

the others in his team join him. All of them together fill the sketch with colours and give shape to the deity. While drawing special care is given to the colour combination and patterns as they are not supposed to alter the age old traditions. The figure of the deity is not supposed to go beyond the four edges of *Pattarangu*. But the aura of the deity and other decorations in the picture may go outside this frame. Eyes are the last parts drawn in the figure as it is believed that with the drawing of the eyes the deity in the *Kalam* comes into being.

The figure of *Vettakkaran* drawn in the *Kalam* portrays the deity in standing posture on a *peedam* with bow and arrow in his left hand, *Churika* in his right hand, and a quiver with arrows on his back. Both his arms till his elbow are kept horizontal to his shoulder with the left forearm held up towards his head and right forearm down towards his body but holding the respective weapons. Both his legs are straight and held together with both the feet pointing towards his left side as if he is going to turn back. His face, basically green in colour, is drawn with sharp features. He has thick beard, moustache, and eyebrows drawn with black colour which provides an added effect to the ferocious eyes drawn between them with black, white and red colours. The eyes and the nose of the figure are given an elevated look with a three dimensional touch. They are not just drawn but made with powders and they stand projected out like a relief sculpture. The forehead of the deity is decorated with different colours. He has an elaborate crown that has peacock feather in it. In spite of all these awe inspiring effects on his face he has red smiling lips. The whole body of the figure is embellished with ornaments drawn in yellow, red, and white like rings, bangles, chains, garlands, earrings, and anklet in enormous numbers. The cloth of the deity is also perfectly structured. Only the lower half of his body, from stomach to a bit down the knees, is covered with clothes. But the ornaments for his neck almost cover the whole of his torso. The clothes has two sections from stomach to a bit down the knees he has a white cloth

called *Vellanjeri* upon which he has a silk clothe draped. The silk cloth has red and *Vellanjeri* has white as the background colour upon which different patterns are made with other four colours. Apart from these body decorations the whole frame in the *Pattarangu* is beautified with patterns of halo all around him.

Strict rules are followed in drawing the *Kalam*. The basic patterns and proportions of the *Kalam* and colours used to make the body and weapons are to be followed mandatorily according to the tradition. The body of the figure should come inside the four edges of the *Pattarangu*, though the crown and halo may go a bit beyond it. The arbitrary areas where the artist can execute his discretionary sentiment are in the drawing of crown, ornaments, patterns on silk cloth, the halo around him, and the *peedam* on which he is standing.

After drawing the *Kalam*, *Kurups* decorate the *Pattarangu* with flower garlands, bettal leaves, areca nut, leaves and fruits of mango and jackfruit trees. Coconut palm leaves will be hung on the ropes tied to the roof of the *Pattarangu* leaving the space below the *Koora* undecorated. *Vellari* will be kept at both the sides of the *Kalam*. And they are supposed to be the offerings to the *Satpa Mathrukkal* and *Upadevatas* of the temple. Four bell metal lamps will be placed at the four corners of the *Pattarangu*. Two lamps may be kept in the *Kalam* in the space between the body and hands of the deity. While coconut oil is used in all these lamps there will be a lamp with ghee kept ready at the leg of the deity for the pooja. *Kurup* then places a *peedam* with *Thiru Aada*, flower garland and *Vaalkannaadi* on it outside the eastern side of the *Kalam*. All these will be kept ready by the evening for the *Kalam Pooja* at night. The preparations for *Mullakkan Pattu* follow. *Kurup* takes with him two *Vellari*, two coconuts, *Kaduthila* (a kind of sword), flower garland and musical instruments to the sacred peepal tree in front of the temple. *Kurup* goes to the tree first. *Marar*, *Nambissan* and *Namboothiri* with the *Churika* that was used

at the time of *Uchappattu* follow him. At this time *Karakkura Nair* goes to take bath and to get ready for the ritual performance.

Mullakkan Pattu

Once the holy procession reaches the peepal tree it's the time for pooja and *Mullakkan Pattu*. Everything for *pooja* will be kept on the platform around the peepal tree. The *Churika* that was used as the symbol of the deity during *Uchappattu* is again used here with the same signification. *Namboothiri* begins the procedures by starting the *pooja*. *Marar* and his team beat *Chenda* along with other musical instruments like *Ilathaalam*, *Komb* and *Kuzhal* standing right next to the tree. Along with this, *Kurup* sings *Mullakkan Pattu* sitting on the platform around the tree. *Mullakkan Pattu* is nothing but the repetition of *Niram* and *Sthuthi* of *Uchappattu* in a different tune. By the time the *pooja* and song is nearing an end *Marar* plays a single *Chenda* to give a signal to *Karakkura Nair* to enter the scene. Another *Nair* with a lamp will pave the way for *Karakkura Nair* to come to the place. *Karakkura Nair* then takes his position in front of the deity. He comes dressed appropriately to get transformed to the deity. He wears a dhoti that comes down only till his knees and drapes a red silk cloth called *veeralipatu* over it. *Namboothiri* pours water to *Nair's* hands to wash his hands. He then gives *Theertham* (holy water) to drink and again gives water to wash his hands. Then he gives sandal wood paste, that the *Nair* puts on his forehead and flowers, which he puts on his head. The washing of hands follows. *Nair* then receives a flower garland from *Namboothiri* and wears it around his neck. Again he washes his hands and finally accepts *Kaduthila* from *Namboothiri* in a way without touching each other. *Marar* and team again start playing the musical instruments. *Nair* takes *Kaduthila* in his hands and jumps once. Following this the *Ezhunnellipp* happens.

Ezhunnellipp, the sacred procession

The sacred procession of the deity from the peepal tree to *Kalam* rounding the temple shrine is called *Ezhunnellipp*. Devotees stand on either sides of the way with *Thaalam* (a plate with burning wicks, flowers and rice in it) in their hands. *Marar* and his team will play the musical instruments. *Namboothiri* sits on an elephant with decorated *Churika*, the representation of *Vettakkaran*, in his hand. *Nambissan* will be there in front of the elephant holding a lamp. Though the distance between the tree and *Kalam* will be only a couple of metres the procession moves in a low pace taking nearly one hour. Once the procession takes a full circle around the shrine *Namboothiri* gets down from the elephant and stands with the *Churika* in his hand.

Eedum Koorum (Eedu and Kooru)

Eedu and *Kooru* are the two stages of the performance by *Nair* and *Marar*. It is a very structured performance where *Nair* and *Marar* can exhibit their artistic skills. Both of them are trained to do it. *Marar* plays a *tala* (a rhythmic pattern) on his *Chenda* and *Nair* dances according to the *tala*. There are a range of *talas* and there are different dance steps corresponding to each *tala*. The dance is mainly leg movements as *Nair* has *Kaduthila* in his right hand holding near to his chest. He keeps his left hand horizontal to his shoulder with his palms pointing down all through the performance. *Marar* has the control over this stage of performance as it is he who decides the *tala*. He plays it once as a demonstration for the *Nair* which he has to apprehend and start dancing from the second round of the *tala*. There should at least four *Eedu* and five *Kooru*. Till the end of this performance the devotees will stand holding the *Thaalam*. The flowers and grains in the *Thaalam* will then be put in front of the shrine.

Kalapradakshinam, circumambulation of the Kalam

Nair circles the *Pattarangu* three times in dancing kind of movements with the accompaniment of the musical instruments played by *Marar* and his team. But here, unlike *Eedum Koorum*, *Nair* has the control of the dance. *Marar* is supposed to beat *Chenda* in tune with *Nair's* steps. There is no restriction about the number of times that *Nair* should circle the *Pattarangu* except that the number should be an odd number. Before the last round camphor will be burned around the *Pattarangu*. After *Kalapradakshinam*, *Nair* keeps the *Kaduthila* in *Kalam* just above the deity's left shoulder. Then he leaves the place for the time being and sits praying somewhere away from the *Pattarangu*. *Namboothiri* places the *Churika* on the western side of the *peedam* already kept at the eastern side of the *Kalam*.

Kalam Pooja

Worshipping the deity in the *Kalam* is *Kalam Pooja*. Sitting outside the western side of the *Pattarangu*, facing the figure in it *Namboothiri* does the *pooja*. The ghee lamp kept at the leg of the deity represents the deity and *Namboothiri* worships this lamp. *Namboothiri* also offers things like rice flakes, *malar*, *Kadali Pazham*, *payassam*, and *appam*. The *pooja* takes almost thirty minutes. While the *pooja* is going on *Marar* sings in praise of the deity and plays *Idakka*. At the end of the *pooja*, *Namboothiri* burns camphor around the *Kalam*. The *Kalam* is then open for the devotees to pray. *Kurup* and his team start singing a string of songs sitting on the south side of the *Kalam*. The songs include sections called *Ammanachaya*, *Niram*, and *Paadiveykkal*. *Ammanachaya* begins with a tribute to Ganapati, Shiva and Parvati and goes on to glorify *Vettakkaran* who is supposed to have already taken his seat in the *Pattarangu*. It says that the deity's oracle *Karakkura Nair* danced, communicated the god's words to his devotees, took the

sword and sat on the *peedam*. The section ends by praising the deity once again. Following this *Niram* is sang with a different tone. The next portion of the oral rendition is called *Paadiveykkal* that describes with awe the hunting abilities of the deity.

Thiri Uzhichil

Kalam Pooja will be followed by *Thiri Uzhichil*. *Kurup* takes one wick in a *Dhoopakkutti* and goes circling the *Kalam* stopping and praying to *Saptha Mathrukkal* at different defined spots around the *Kalam*. This process is called *Nadathurakkal*. The places around the *Kalam* in the order of *Nadathurakkal* are east, west, south, east and north. Then standing at the northern side he puts out the wicks and with the smoke coming from the wicks circles the *Kalam* offering *dhoopam* to *Saptha Mathrukkal*. He goes round the *Kalam* praying at east, north, south-east, south-west, south, west, north-west and north-east respectively. Then he places the *Dhoopakkutti* at the eastern side of the *Kalam*. He moves to the northern side and takes the areca nut inflorescence hanging from the roof of the *Pattarangu* and offers pieces of it and prayers at all those spots where he offered *dhoopam* in the same order. He then takes *Dhoopakkutti* in his hands and leave the remnants of the wicks on the floor and goes with it to south-west corner of the *Pattarangu* and takes rice, flower garland, and nine long wicks in the *Dhoopakkutti*. He keeps the wicks hanging down and lights it up from the lamp at *Agni Kone*. He goes to the western side of the *Kalam*. Standing at the leg of the deity he takes the palm leaves hanging from the roof of *Pattarangu* on either of his sides. He puts the palm leaves in the *Kalam* covering the legs of the deity and places *Dhoopakkutti* on the top of it. He then takes flower garlands hanging from the *Pattarangu* and offers it to the deity by throwing it into the *Kalam*. He reserves some flowers in his hand and takes *Dhoopakkutti*. Then again he gathers palm leaves from the roof of the *Pattarangu* and circles the burning wicks with them and puts them at the deity's leg. He

circles the *Kalam* thrice with the *Dhoopakkutti* in his hands. And comes again to the western side of the *Kalam* and leaves a wick at the leg of the deity. He takes the *Dhoopakkutti* to *Vettakkaran* shrine and keeps it at the door step for a while and then shows it to the *Thandri*, priests, *Marar*, *Kurup* and devotees. They all bow in respect and pray placing their hands over the fire. From the crowd *Kurup* comes back to the eastern side of the *Kalam* and circles the *Kalam* in the same order he followed while offering *dhoopam* and areca nut inflorescence. He leaves one wick each at all the eight spots. He then offers rice and flowers at all these eight spots in the same order again. After that he circles the *Pattarangu* once. During this circling he throws rice all over the *Kalam* and reaches the eastern side of the *Kalam*. He offers rice and flowers thrice at the holy hair of the deity. He then bends down and touches the eyes of the deity in reverence and prays and symbolically erases the *Kalam* with a line drawn by a finger cutting across the holy hair of the deity. He goes to the western side of the *Kalam* and repeats the same offering at the legs and erases legs in the same fashion. *Dhoopakkutti* will always be there in his left hand while doing all these. *Thiri Uzhichil* comes to a close with *Kurup* throwing rice at *Koora*.

Kalathilaattam* , dance in the *Kalam

Nair who left the scene after *Kalapradakshinam* comes back with a *Churika* in his right hand to dance in the *Kalam*. *Kalathilaattam* has two parts to it: *Vilnrutham* and dance on *Vellanjeri*. *Vilnrutham* is the dance on the bow and arrow of *Vettakkaran* in His left hand. *Nair* cuts the bow and arrow in the *Kalam* with the *Churika* and enters the *Kalam* from the southeast corner. *Marar* beats single *Chenda* and *Kurup* and his team sings. The song describes the ornaments worn by the deity like his silk cloth, rings, the jewels, and bangles. *Nair* dances on the bow and arrow facing east for a couple of minutes and ends the dance by a jumping step. During this dance the bow and arrow in the deity's left hand get erased. Then *Marar* beats *Chenda* three

times and at the very same time *Nair* exchanges *Churika* from his right hand to the left and takes the *Kaduthila* from the *Kalam* and holds it in his right hand. He then walks through the erased area and stands on the *Vellanjeri* facing the east and starts dancing there. *Kurup* sings in the background that the devotees are bowing in front of the different attributes the deity like his garlands, songs, sandal paste on his forehead, *Kaduthila*, the divine dance, his hands and shrine. The dance of *Nair* ends again with a jumping step. After the dance, *Nair* who is now standing on the *Vellanjeri* walks through the already erased area in the *Kalam* and places *Kaduthila* at the southeast side of the *Kalam* and hands over the *Churika* to *Thamburunadhan*. He walks out of the *Kalam* through the western side of the *Kalam*. *Nair* then goes to change the clothes and take bath to get ready for *Pantheeraayiram*. This act of leaving the place after the two dances on *kalam* is called *Kalamkandu Pokal*.

Once *Nair* goes from the scene *Kurup* and his team starts singing again. It communicates how difficult it is to put the legacy of the god into words. The verses mention the birth of the deity as the son of Shiva and Parvati. By the time this song is over *Nair* again shows up. *Nair* gathers the palm leaves from the sides of the *Pattarangu* starting from western side and through northern side reaches the *Agni Kone* and enters the *Kalam* from there. He holds the leaves collected in his left hand and with the right pushes the palm leaves on each rope under *Vithanam* to the sides. Then standing on the *Vellanjeri* he prays and throws the palm leaves in his hand in to the *Kalam* covering the deity's figure from chest to hair. *Kurup* hands over the *Churika* back to *Nair*. Keeping it in his left hand *Nair* takes the *Kaduthila* in right hand. He then dances in the *Kalam* and cuts the palm leaves three times with the *Kaduthila*. Meanwhile *Marar* and his team begin playing *Chenda* and other musical instruments. During this dance most parts of the *Kalam*

gets erased. *Nair* keeps the *Kaduthila* back in the *Kalam* and cuts all the remaining palm leaves in the roof with *Churika*. He ends the procedure by doing a jumping dance step.

Peedam Nirakkal, dragging the peedam

Kurup takes a *peedam* and keeps it in the northern side of the *Kalam*. *Nair* drags it by his hands to the leg of the deity and sits on it. *Kurup* and team start singing that the deity was very merciful to the needy. The verse pleads him to dance in the *Kalam*. *Nair* again drags it to the centre of the *Kalam* and then to the southern side, this time not by hand but by sitting on it. *Marar* plays music according to which *Nair* dances in the *Kalam* erasing it with his legs. He ends the dance by the jumping step and drags the *peedam* to the northern part of the *Kalam* by his hands and again sits on it. *Kurup* again sings. *Nair* drags the *peedam* to south side facing the *Kurup*. Then jumps from it and again drags it back to the centre of the *Kalam*, keeps the *Churika* on it, and prays. He then walks backward in the *Kalam* and comes out of it through the leg portion of the deity's figure. He goes and takes the *Kindi* under the *peedam* kept at the head of the deity and enters the *Kalam* again through *Agni kone*. From there he goes to the place kept ready for *Pantheeraryiram*.

Pantheeraayiram

At the *Pantheeraayiram* performance area next to the cage with coconuts, there will be stone placed to break the coconuts by throwing them at it. *Nair* will be accompanied by someone holding a lamp in front of him and *Kurup* and *Marar* following him to the cage. They all circle the cage of coconuts three times. Then *Nair* takes water from the *Kindi* through its tail and puts it back to it through its mouth three times. In the same way again he takes water and sprinkles it on the banana leaf kept upside down on the top of coconuts and removes it. Then he sprinkles water

on coconuts. He moves to the stone and pours the remaining water on the stone and keeps the *Kindi* upside down on the stone.

The next stage is offering coconuts to the deities and all the people associated with the performance. First he offers to the main deities, then to *Upadevatas* and finally to all the official human participants in the performance. *Nair* gives the *Veeralipatu* draped around his waist over the white dhoti to the *Thamburunadhan* along with the coconut. The last coconut will be given to the person holding the lamp and in return accepts *Maatu* from him and drapes it around his waist. He takes three coconuts and places them on the floor behind the stone. They are kept in such a way that the eyes of the coconuts will come towards the east. It is the base of the seat for him. There will be *Kurup* and his team to take the coconuts from the cage and place it in front of *Nair* so that he can take them easily and crack them throwing at the stone. *Kurup* makes a seating with coconuts for *Nair* to sit and *Nair* sits on it. *Marar* and his team play *Chenda*, *Komb*, *Kuzhal* and *Ilathaalam*. It is corresponding to the beats of *Chenda* that the *Nair* breaks the coconuts. He begins *Pantheeraayiram* by taking a coconut in his right hand, tosses it into the air and catches it with his left hand. He then tosses it from the left hand and catches by the right and once again repeats it and breaks the coconut by throwing it at the stone with left hand. He repeats this juggling two more times with both the hands. From the fourth coconut onwards he breaks the coconut without juggling. He uses both of his hands alternately. It will take nearly three hours to break all the coconuts. But *Nair* does it so dexterously without taking any break in between. The last coconut will also be broken after juggling it. Then he removes the *Maatu* and leaves it covering the coconuts upon which he sat. Those coconuts belong to him. After this he runs from there and enters the *Kalam* through the leg side of the deity. Betel leaf and areca nut will be kept on the *peedam* inside the *Kalam* to be distributed as *dakshina* to *Namboothiri*, *Thamburunadhan*

and *Nair*. *Nair* takes them and gives away the share of *Namboothiri* and *Thamburunadhan* and keeps his share tucking to his dhoti. He then takes the *Churika* on the *peedam* and pulls the *peedam* to the leg side of the deity and sits on it after a jumping dancing step. *Kurup* and team start singing. The song celebrates the strength of the deity in breaking all the coconuts from the huge heap. It also prays the deity to remove all the sadness that may come to the devotees. *Nair* sitting on the *peedam* drags it first to the centre and then to the southern side. At the end of the song by *Kurup*, *Nair* stands up from the *peedam* and dances. He keeps the *Churika* down and takes the *Kaduthila* in his hand and dances. He again does the jumping dance step and sits on the *peedam*. *Kurup* again starts singing hailing the deity and *Nair* drags the *peedam*. The song winds up by bowing in front of the Devas, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Once the song is over *Nair* blesses *Kurup* with *Kaduthila* in his hand. He keeps the *Kaduthila*, for a while, on the *peedam* with the pointed end of the *Kaduthila* down. And then goes out of the *Kalam* to say the oracle. He says it to the patron and to the devotees and they give *dakshina* to him. After that he circles the *Kalam* and keeps the *Kaduthila* on the *Peedam*. Now it is the time to distribute the sacred remnants of the *Kalampattu* to the devotees. *Nair* takes the mixed powder from the face of the deity and gives it away to the devotees chanting prayers. At this time *Kurup* takes the lamp at the leg of the deity and places it near the *peedam* in the centre of the *Kalam*. *Nair* takes the *Churika* kept by *Namboothiri* at the *peedam* near the head of the deity and keeps it on the *peedam* at the centre. He places the *Vaalkannaadi* too on the *peedam*. *Ekathalam* (a kind of *tala*) will then be played by *Marar* and *Kurup* on *Chengila* and *Nanduni* respectively. *Nair* then circles the *peedam* by sprinkling rice on it and then throws the remaining rice on the devotees.

Nair takes the *Churika* and *Kaduthila* from the *peedam*. If the *Churika* belongs to the temple he keeps it at the door of the shrine along with *Kaduthila*. And *Kurup* takes the

Vaalkannaadi. All the other things in the *Kalam* like lamps and *peedam* will be kept there. They are to be removed only after *Koora Valikkal*.

Koora Valikkal, taking the Koora off from the roof

Kurup throws rice at the *Koora* and holds the rope tied on the roof of the *Pattarangu*. He repeats it three times and sprinkles the remaining rice on the devotees. He asks the permission of the patron to remove the *Koora*, which is the official concluding stage of the entire performance. Patron gives the permission. *Kurup* takes the *Koora* from the roof of the *Pattarangu* and hands it over to the patron. With that the performance comes to an end.

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Chapter IV

Thus They Speak and Thus They Do: An Analysis of Mythologies and Ritual Process of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*

A ritual is a combination of narrated and narrative events. This chapter ventures to look at the functional overtones of these events in their context. The chapter has two parts; the first enlists the narratives in the form of mythologies collected from the field during field work along with a structural-functional analysis of the narrated events in it, the second explains how these narrated events are narrated through narrative events during ritual performance.

An aphoristic definition will put myth as “narrative of cultural or religious beginnings” (Farrer 575). They give a reason, logical or illogical, why a particular cultural or religious observation came into existence. William Bascom is one of the theoreticians who summarized the distinction between myth, legend and folktale. According to him,

Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. (4)

The criticism against this definition is that Bascom considered all the myths as prose narratives and myths communicated through other forms of narratives escaped the purview of this definition. Since the myths under study in this chapter are in prose form, this definition will serve the purpose. The larger than life figure of the central character, the sacredness and genuineness attributed to the protagonists and the narratives, and myth's association with a ritual are all evident in the narratives listed as a part of this chapter.

It is also to be noted that “what gives the myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future” (Levi-Strauss 430). In the myths narrative develops through events that follow a linear chronological order. The events and characters in them are limited in number and simple in composition. They are all orbiting a central character or concept. Each event and each character has a definite purpose to serve not only with regard to this centre but also to the group of people who propagate these narratives which means that these elements have some specific functional roles. The functional approach to ritual postulates that every constituent part of it has a function. Scholars have enlisted different reasons for this, three of which are cited by Mark Glazer in an encyclopaedic entry on Functionalism.

The first posits that it is the needs of the psychobiological human entity that are at center stage, the second emphasizes the roles and functions of social structures within the group, and the third approach to functionalism argues for social cohesion through the shared mental structures of the “conscience collective.” The first of these is represented by the work of Bronislaw Malinowski, the second by the writings of Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, and the third by writings of Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss. (386)

Identifying these functions of the collected narratives in this chapter will disclose cues to the genesis and acceptance of the narratives as a discourse in their cultural context and in society.

The following are the narratives related to *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*

Narrative- I

The myth of *Vettakkaran*: *Vettakkaran* is believed to be Lord Shiva in the form of a Kirata (hunter) when appeared with Parvati to deliver a weapon known as Pashupathasthra to Arjuna. The *Sections XXXVIII, XXXIX, and XL in Book III of Mahabharata* called “Vana Parva” (“Forest Book”) are on Arjuna’s encounter with Shiva disguised as a hunter (Ganguli 84-92). But the name *Vettakkaran* is not mentioned anywhere in the epic.

Narrative- II

The myth of *Vettaikkorumakan*: The word literally means ‘a son for hunting’. The myth behind *Vettaikkorumakan*’s birth and life is as follows. The couple, Lord Shiva and Parvati, lives for some time in the forests as hunters after gifting Arjuna with Pasupathastra. During that period Parvati wants to have a son in their disguised selves. Shiva fulfills her wish and a son is born to them, and this son is called *Vettaikkorumakan*. He can be considered as the third son of the couple and the only son whom Parvati is supposed to have borne in her womb. Soon after the birth of the child they had to leave for Kailash deserting the child in the forest. But before leaving the child Shiva gives him a boon that he will grow up as a warrior with great skills in using weapons and will be unbeatable by anyone from all the three worlds. Hunters in the forest find the child and bring him up as one among them. The child under the training of the hunters in using bow and arrows grows up to the blessings of his father. Bow and arrows becomes a part of

his body and hunting his hobby. All the evil creatures in the forest fall prey to his arrows and he becomes famous among the forest fraternity. Once he was done with the forest he moves to the nearby kingdoms where he fights and defeats the kings. But he never does it for the power and kingdom but for the pleasure that he derives from using his weapons. As the kings couldn't stand the material loss caused by the fights they approach Lord Shiva for help. Shiva says them that he is helpless since he himself gave him the boon and advises his devotees to consult Lord Vishnu. Lord Vishnu listens to their prayer and promises to help them.

To materialize his promise to the kings one day Vishnu appears in front of *Vettaikorumakan* in the disguise of a Brahmin boy with a golden *Churika* ("dagger") in his hand. *Vettaikorumakan* was in the mid of a hunting then with his bow and arrow. *Vettaikorumakan* immediately gets attracted to the new weapon in the boy's hand and asks him for it. Initially the boy refuses his appeal but on his insistence says okay to his demand under one condition that he will neither put the *Churika* down on any floor nor keep it in his waist belt. *Vettaikorumakan* agrees to the demand without a second thought. To accept the new weapon he transfers the arrow from his right hand to the left in which he already had the bow and takes the *Churika* in his right hand. He becomes happy beyond words and turns way from the boy to continue his hunting. But suddenly the realization strikes him that he no longer will be able to use the weapon he was trained with since to use bow and arrow he needs both the hands. Also he doesn't know how to use the newly gained weapon. He understands that he was fooled and turns back to the boy only to see that he is already gone. The figure depicted in the *Kalam* captures exactly the split second of the realization. The deity has bow and arrow in his left hand and the *Churika* in the right. His legs are in a posture to turn back. His lips still has the happiness of adding a new weapon to his collection but his eyes reflect the anger born of his realization.

Immediately after the incident *Vettaikorumakan* approaches Shiva and narrates his tragic tale. The father pacifies the son and asks him to go to the ghats to protect the good and destroy the evil. He also adds that the golden *Churika* will serve as his weapon for the cause. Accepting Shiva's proposal *Vettaikorumakan* goes to Nambumala Kotta (now known as Numbalakottai) near Gudalur, geographically positioned now in Tamil Nadu and a gateway to Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

Narrative- III

The supreme shrine of *Vettaikorumakan* in Kerala is in Balussery, Calicut. Balussery, before the formation of Kerala, was a part of the princely state Kurumbranad. The myth behind the deity's travel from Nambumala Kotta to Balussery Fort is as follows.

Once when the princely state of Kurumbranad was constantly been attacked by enemies the king decided to seek the divine intervention into the matter to solve it. He sat worshipping at the Rajarajeswara Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, in Thaliparamba. During this course of time Shiva appeared in his dreams and asked him to go to Nambumala Kotta and worship his son *Vettaikorumakan*. Following the instruction the king went to Nambumala and through his intense ways of worshipping pleased the deity. The king requested the deity to come over to Balussery to protect the land and its people. *Vettaikorumakan* accepted his prayer and told him that he will come to the fort soon but will be in disguise. He also urges the king to distribute rice to the beggars as alms. The king returned back to his kingdom and gave orders to give alms to the beggars. The next day *Vettaikorumakan* started to the fort in the disguise of an ascetic. When he reached Punalur he saw a man, a *Nair*, making a fence around his plot with a thorny plant called *Kara* and asked him for the directions to the fort. The *Nair* treated him with due

respect and gave directions to his destination. *Vettaikorumakan* got pleased by the well behaved *Nair* and gave him the right to be his oracle. This *Nair* and his predecessors are called *Karakkura Nair*.

It was almost noon by the time he reached the fort. The distributing of alms was in progress there. The steward of the fort offered alms to the ascetic too but he demanded more to which the steward responded negatively. The ascetic got angry and he walked back throwing the rice he got on the road. The steward reported this incident to the king. The king instantly got the realization that it was *Vettaikorumakan* in disguise. The king sent a *Pattar* (Kerala Iyer) to have reconciliation with him and to call him back. On his way back *Vettaikorumakan* went to Panniyam Valli Illam, a Brahmin house. The eldest woman of the family gave him a good reception by offering milk and fruits. The deity in disguise got pleased with the treatment and he gave the men of the family the right to be his *Thandri*. He continued his journey and wandered around in many places. The *Pattar* met him under a peepal tree in Thrikkuttissery. The *Pattar* threw himself at his feet and pleaded him to come back to the fort which made the deity delighted and he accepted his request.

The fort already was the residence of two deities- *Kariyaathan* and *Bhagavathi*. When *Vettaikorumakan* reached the fort *Bhagavathi* paid homage to him by moving from her place giving it to *Vettaikorumakan*. But *Kariyaathan* didn't pay respect to him or acknowledge him. *Vettaikorumakan* lost his temper seeing this and lifted *Kariyaathan* and threw him away. The rock on which *Kariyaathan* landed is called *Kariyaathan* Rock. Later on *Vettaikorumakan* explained to the king and his men the ways through which he should be worshiped. He also allotted different functional roles to people as rights in rituals to worship him. He also asked

them to facilitate the participation of all castes in these worships. It is believed that after giving all these instructions he dissolved into the back wall of the temple.

A variant of this narrative says that *Karakkura Nair* accompanied *Vettaikorumakan* to the fort. Since the *Churika* in *Vettaikorumakan*'s hand will make his identity obvious even in disguise he asked *Nair* to hold it when he entered the fort. *Nair* waited patiently outside till *Vettaikorumakan* came back. This loyalty from *Nair* pleased *Vettaikorumakan* and he gave the right to hold his weapon in his worship.

Narrative- IV

The myth behind the origin of *Kallat Kurup* Community: Thirumandhamkunnu is a place in Malappuram district where there is a temple dedicated to Goddess Kali. The place is named after the hermit Mandhathaav who used to meditate and worship Lord Shiva at that place. Before he left this world he met two Brahmins and handed over the Shiva Linga he had been worshipping for years. These two Brahmins decided to create a suitable location to place the Shiva Linga for worship. They made a clearing in a forest region in Angadippuram, a place near Thirumandhamkunnu, put the idol there, and began to worship it once in a month. They used to take a *Nair* with them for assistance in the poojas. Once, this *Nair* happened to see the whole of the pooja that was secretly done by the Brahmins. The *Nair* saw Goddess Kali during the worship and tried to draw her figure on a stone. It is believed that the stone got cut along the lines he drew and the figure emerged into a relief sculpture. The Malayalam words '*kurikkuka*', '*kallu*' and '*attu*' mean 'draw', 'stone' and 'get cut' respectively. The word '*Kurup*' is supposed to have come from the word '*kurichavan*', the one who drew. The two Malayalam word "*kallu*' and '*attu*' combined together to form '*Kallat*'. After the drawing was done the *Nair* went to the

nearby pond to wash his hands and at this time the Brahmins happened to see the drawing. They paid due respect to it by doing *pooja* while *Nair* was away from there. The ritual also echoes this incident. *Kalam Pooja* is done in ritual in the absence of *Kurup* (Mundekkad 35). *Kurup* community interpret this act as a Brahminical scheme to patronize their ritual, whereas Brahmins look at it as a favour done to *Kurups* since Brahmins are supposed to be more close to gods and their involvement in a worship will make it more appealing to gods.

The alternative version to this narrative holds that the *Nair* didn't draw it on stone instead he carved the stone to get it powdered and drew the figure with that powder. Here also the process of cutting the stone and drawing the figure happened and can be connected to the rest of the etymology. It is said that this drawing with powder got perfected over the years and ended up in the tradition of *Kalampattu*.

Analysis of Narrative- I and Narrative- II

Vettakkaran and *Vettaikkorumakan* are two names that represent the deity in *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*. One thing that was evident from the field work is that even the practitioners of the ritual are not sure about whether there are two deities or just one. To make the situation simple they go with the argument that whether it's one or two the worship is done to an incarnation of Shiva. Another argument is that the name *Vettaikkorumakan* underwent linguistic ellipsis and transformations and became *Vettakkaran*. The ritual is named '*Vettakkaran Kalampattu*', yet the songs in the ritual addresses him as *Vettaikkorumakan*. There are temples dedicated to deities with both the names, though they are only a few in numbers. Both the deities belong to Shiva cult and the worship, in temples and during *Kalampattu*, follow the same procedure except for the part where their names come in one basic mantra. *Vettakkaran* is addressed in that particular

chant invariably as '*kiratamoorthy*' and '*kiratavapussu*' both of which mean 'the body of a hunter'. *Vettaikkorumakan* on the other hand is called '*kiratasoonu*' which can be translated as 'son of a hunter'.

It is to be noted that, though both the narratives on the deity's origin present him as a hunter are silent about his food habits. Being a member of the hunting community he must have fed on the animals he hunted down. The castes who participate in the ritual are supposed to stick on to vegetarianism since their lives and profession are associated with temples. So obviously they cannot have a flesh eating god and have to hide the fact that the deity was a carnivore or an omnivore. Thus the omitted reference to the deity's food is a distortion imposed on the narrative to authenticate the communities' practices.

A comparative study of Narrative- II and the *Mahabharata* episode of Kirata and Arjuna

Since one cannot say for sure whether the myth of *Vettaikkorumakan* or *Mahabharata* originated first, the discussion of that question should be kept in abeyance. The oral narrative and the written work are to be juxtaposed first to have a comparative study. The myth may have paved the way for an episode in *Mahabharata* or the epic gave a platform for the myth to develop. Whatever that be, both the stories take on the same plot and continue to develop as individual plots. "Vana Parva" of the epic accounts an incident where there is an encounter happening between Lord Shiva and Arjuna. But from there the epic returns back to the central narrative on the Pandavas with little digression. The myth starts where the epic leans back towards its main thread. It acquires a distinctive individual identity and existence of its own. But, in today's context where the text is popular and valid than the myth as a written narrative, for the legitimization of its lineage the myth has to go back to the plot in the epic.

Structurally analyzing there are striking parallels between the characters and events of narratives on Arjuna (in “Kairata Parva” of “Vana Parva”) and *Vettaikkorumakan* that are to be discussed. Parallels can be drawn from the very birth of the two. Arjuna is considered as the son of Indra and Kunti, a celestial being and a woman. *Vettaikkorumakan* also is born of the divine union of two deities in disguise of human beings. Irrespective of their divine birth both the characters live the life of a normal human being cohabiting with other humans. Both are excellent bowmen and with their talent they attain the stardom and acceptance of a hero among the layman. According to various events in Mahabharata Arjuna is the most proficient warrior on earth in using bow and arrows. The myth of *Vettaikkorumakan* mentions about a boon given to him by his father that he will grow up to be an unbeatable bowman, which he later proves true through his deeds. Both the men get a weapon from a deity. Arjuna wins *Pasupathastra* from Shiva while *Vettaikkorumakan* gets it from Vishnu. Both the deities were in disguise of human beings, Shiva as a hunter and Vishnu as a Brahmin boy, while they appeared in front of the characters and the characters fail to recognize the deities at the first sight. Both Shiva and Vishnu do not appear in front of the two characters upon their will, but on the request of others who suffered because of them. Arjuna’s fierce asceticism disturbed the Rishis in the Himalayas who complained about it to Shiva. *Vettaikkorumakan*’s love for fighting leads the kings to meet Vishnu.

The geographical milieu of both the stories is to be noticed. They are set in forests with the backdrop of mountains. Arjuna goes to the Himalayas for ascetic austerities. The entire story of *Vettaikkorumakan* won’t be able to survive without the presence of the forest and Ghats. The pride of both the heroes is another parallel between the two. The pride of Arjuna ends up in a one-to-one fight with Shiva and the God of Gods makes it sure that his devotee comes out of this

short coming before he gifts him *Pasupathastra*. The mythical hero also had this fatal flaw as a result of which he falls prey to the plot by Lord Vishnu. In fact the process happens with the heroes during the encounter with the heavenly ones is an alteration in their characters for the sake of a weapon. This redressive process turns the characters more adorable as well as powerful, though in different ways. Arjuna is described as “armed with his celestial bow and a sword with golden hilt” when he goes to the Himalayas (Ganguli 84). *Vettaikkorumakan*'s picture drawn in the ritual depicts him with bow and arrow in one hand and a golden *Churika* in the other.

The dissimilarities of the two stories are also to be discussed before moving to a conclusion on the above observations. Chronologically *Vettaikkorumakan*'s myth is a continuation of Arjuna's episode. The structural patterns of the two seldom differ except for some events at the beginning and ending. Arjuna as a warrior goes to the forest with a purpose whereas *Vettaikkorumakan* is born and brought up in the forest. The locale of the epic is the Himalayas. *Vettaikkorumakan*'s story in Narrative- II has two parts- before and after deification. The geographical locale of the later is specified as the Western Ghats, though that of the first part is unknown. At the end of the narratives Arjuna is gifted with the deadliest weapon in all the three worlds which can destroy the three at once. He longs for it, strives hard to win it, and becomes the only mortal in possession of it. Shiva gives it to him with proper instruction regarding its power and usage and warns him against hurling it without adequate cause. *Vettaikkorumakan* gets a weapon accidentally; in fact he was tricked to be in possession of it. Neither he dreamt of it nor did he know how to use it. Though the weapon helped him in the long run, to be a protector of the masses, its possession made him instantaneously powerless. Among the triumvirates of Hindu mythology, Shiva is the destroyer and Vishnu is the protector. Their

respective functional roles are represented through the weapons given by them. The newly achieved weapon leads to the deification of *Vettaikorumakan* but in no way influences Arjuna's status.

The lives of the characters as well as the plots of the two narratives develop through a lack-fulfillment agreement. The character lacks something, he overcomes it, and then another lack pops in, he again overcomes it and the narrative builds on this sequence. Arjuna lacks enough power to win the battle so he decides to please Shiva to become powerful. Shiva gets pleased but Arjuna now has the shortcoming of his pride, Shiva destroys his pride and gifts him a weapon and now the warrior is ready for the battle. In the case of *Vettaikorumakan* also the linear narrative is constructed on the same motif. He lacks his parents and parenting which are met by the hunters. He then doesn't have enough enemies in the forest to fight with in the forest as a result of which he moves out to the kingdoms and fights with the kings. The pride of the warrior turns out to be another flaw which is rectified by Vishnu. Above all these the lack he possessed was his human self. Though born to two Gods he lacked the stature of a deity. It is the golden *Churika* that paves the way for his deification. The weapon here stands for an element of a God which when given to *Vettaikorumakan* entitles him with the eligibility to be a God and finally helps him overcome the lack he had.

Closely observing this can be interpreted as an interaction between the two creeds of Hindu religion- Shaivism and Vaishnavism. The supremacy of Vaishnavism is exerted over Shaivism very evidently through making *Vettaikorumakan*(son of Shiva) helpless with the intervention of Vishnu. The masculinity and physical strength of Shaiva Gods are undefeatable and Vaishnavism is famous for its intellectual activities. The confrontation of the two creeds happens here but the intellectual superiority of one gets established over the masculinity of the

other. But the narrative did not end there. It goes on to create a godly figure for Shaivism at the cost of Vaishnavism.

The shift in the communal identity of *Vettaikkorumakan* can be appropriated with the transition of Kerala community with regard to religious outlook. Kerala was occupied in the prehistoric time by its own indigenous tribal population. They were a pagan lot. The first religion that ran its roots, but not deep, in Kerala was Buddhism. Later on Hinduism took over Buddhism. Hinduism of that time was synonymous with Brahmanism. During that period the people worshiped Shiva as their family deity. Brahmanism marked its advent and power by converting the Buddhist monasteries called Viharas and Buddhist temples into centres of Hindu religion and Hindu temples by placing the idols of Shiva in them. The caste system invaded Kerala simultaneously. A gradual shift from Shaivism to Vaishnavism happened in due course of time. Historic events that stamped the shift were the establishment of three Vaishnava temples in Kerala- Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple in Trivandrum, Sree Poornathrayeesa Temple in Thripunithura and Sree Krishna Temple in Guruvayur. Though Shaivism was followed by Vaishnavism in the state, unlike in many other states, there were no clash between the followers of the two creeds and both of them coexist in Kerala even now (Sadasivan 295-368). In the myth of *Vettaikkorumakan* only the Buddhist, which now in Kerala is not as prominent as the other religion, portion is missing.

From this analysis it can be argued that

1. *Vettaikkorumakan* myth could be a variant of Arjuna story
2. The appropriation and localization of Arjuna- Kirata episode is an ideological move to establish the superiority of Vaishnavism over Shaivism

3. Even if one leaves out the appropriation element, it is obvious from the myth itself that it carries the statement of supremacy of Vaishnavism.

4. It also marks the victory of brain over brawn.

Comparative Observations on Narrative- II and Narrative- III

The point of comparison between the two is the localization of the narrative and emerging of a cultural hero. Travelling of the Narrative from the Himalayas to the Western Ghats and then to the down west is noteworthy. The *Mahabharata* is a pan-Indian phenomenon. The travelling and appropriation of the *Mahabharata* events can be collected from places across the subcontinent. In these two narratives the geographical milieu of forest and hills makes it easy for the appropriation. This change can be explained through the concept of ‘oikotypification’, a term used by C. W. van Sydow who explains “oikotypification occurs when regular changes occur in a text-type’s content, style, or structure as it adapts to the preferred patterns of a particular locality or culture group” (qtd in Clements 604). The cultural groups of different localities morph a story thread to suit their purpose of narration. And these purposes are the functions served by the narratives in that cultural context.

A function served by these two narratives is the creation of a cultural hero. No cultural group can survive without a cultural hero. A cultural hero in its true sense is the pivotal figure in a collection of myths or myth cycle whose life was of adventures and challenges that he undertook for human beings.

Narrative-III and Narrative-IV

As far as this thesis is concerned the factor that connects these two narratives is the way in which two participant castes, *Karakkura Nair* and *Kallat Kurup*, exploit the scope of narratives. These two narratives functionally legitimize their involvement in the ritual performances. They become what Roland Barthes termed ‘perpetual alibi’ for the communities to assert their claim to what they practice (122). The presence of the sacred beings in the narratives makes it beyond interrogation and instantaneously acceptable. These unwritten yet shared narratives in the unconscious of the community are a form of identity as well as functional role assertion of them in the context of the ritual.

The narratives talk about the origin of two castes or rather it is the story of a conversion of a group of people into a different caste starting with an individual. A person happened to perform an action which no one has done before and the said action had an explicit connection with a supernatural being. This act, with the blessing of the divine, turns to be the vocational exigency of the person’s predecessors and a new caste is born. This forms the basic structure of both the myths and these two narrations meet and complement each other in the ritual of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu*. The mutual dependency takes on from there. As stated before *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* is a ritual that accommodates a good number of castes in its performance. Along with these two myths other communities’ narrations also get incorporated. The negation of one myth will lead to the negation of the other that finally will result in the termination of the ritual. So it becomes a shared responsibility from the part of every caste to reinstall their narrative to the cultural context. And each time the ritual is performed an interactive negotiation is necessitated that leads to polyphony (Bhaktin 21).

Binaries in Narrative- II

Accommodating binaries and concealing those binaries in the narrative through making them devices for the progression of it is a characteristic of myths. The binaries navigate the evolution of the myths. The binaries in the Narrative- II include the following pairs- mountains: plains, forest: kingdom, destruction: protection, hunters: civilized, war: peace, freedom: dependence, physical power: intellectual power, man: god. These binaries are enlisted in the order of the appearance of the first elements in the pair. It is the horizontal relationship between the elements in each pair that mark them as binaries and they show an upward rise from the first to the second. But there is vertical relation as well. The vertical relations start from mountain end with man on one side and on the other side it start with plains and end with god. Each element in this vertical relation designates an upward rise in terms of man's social life. The primitive man emerged into the modern man through different stages. Each element in the vertical association shows the different stages in that development and thus the narrative indirectly relates to the development of human civilization, the growth from the nature to the culture.

Analysis of the ritual as narrative text

The above discussed narratives set the milieu for the ritual. The ritual can be, in very simple terms, said to be the presentation of Narrative II and parts of Narrative III through three different mediums entangled together to form an organic whole. The ritualistic elements become the 'narrative events' of the 'narrated events' in the myth (Jacobson 44-45). Narrated events are the events recounted in the narratives and narrative events are the events of recounting itself. There is an essential relationship between the two events. The narrated events in a myth could be best communicated through the narrative events of a ritual owing to the sacred nature of the

events presented through them. Any lesser way of recounting will fall in short to capture the intensity of the events and there by fail to achieve its function.

One interesting thing came to be known from the fieldwork is the lack of knowledge of the devotees participating in the ritual regarding these narratives. Asked about the deity and content of the ritual, most of them revealed their ignorance. Those who seemed to know something about it too had nothing but broken information to offer. As far as the performers are concerned they know the basic narratives since the very existence of their community and vocation are interwoven into it but are clueless regarding certain elements in the ritual performance. They say that they do it because they have seen their ancestors doing it and have been instructed by them to do it in the same way. The saddest part is that these gaps in the knowledge are growing with the passing time and are never going to be like before.

The lack of the knowledge of the devotees about the background narratives never really affects the ritual mainly because of two reasons. The first is that being devotees their prime motive is the spiritual actualization and psychological wish-fulfillment offered by the belief in god. The second is the capacity of the ritual to absorb and present the essence of the actions in the narratives through the various elements of the practice. The three constituent genres of the ritual -the oral rendition, the pictorial representation and the performance- carry across the message and satisfy the functional role of it well through a combination of them. This remark is made not to belittle the importance of the narratives but to reiterate their significance. The content of the narratives or its text gets transformed into three different mediums that work together to achieve the social and cultural function of the narratives.

Now to find out how these functional goals are achieved through the ritual, the ritual should be closely analysed. The method put forward by Alan Dundes will be apt for the purpose. He proposed three levels of analysis to define any given item of folklore. They are the texture, the text and the context. In his view a folklore item should be defined not on the basis of just one of these but all the three. “In most of the genres (and all those of a verbal nature), the texture is the language, the specific phonemes and morphemes employed” (22). Most often the linguistic feature of an item are untranslatable to other languages since in the case of verbal forms textural features include rhyme, stress, pitch, juncture, tone etc. Dundes gives tongue twisters as the perfect example for this. Their dependency on textural features rarely allows them to diffuse from one linguistic community to another. “The text of an item of folklore is essentially a version or a single telling of a tale, a recitation of a proverb, a singing of a folksong” that can be translated into any language (23). The context of an item of folklore is the specific social situation in which that particular item is actually employed” (23).

As far as *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* is concerned the ritual can be analysed by dividing the ritual into three genres. The singling out of different pieces of oral renditions, instances where the picture comes into the ritual and portions of performances and joining them together will give three distinct genres in the ritual. The interwoven structure of the three genres along the axes of a spatial and temporal graph to a single unit is to generate a sense of the linear development of ritual events which is different from the narratological linearity of the myth. Though the division of it into different units will disturb this structural harmony to an extent, for the purpose of analysis this fragmentation is necessary. And the analysis of individual units will be followed by observations on how these units are knitted into the greater functional unit. Going back to the analysis proposed by Dundes, a version of the *Vettaikkorumakan* myth operates as

the basic text of the ritual. This text is divided and appropriated accordingly into the semiotics of three genres form an oral text, a pictorial text and a performance text.

The oral text communicated through the songs sung is formatted as direct addresses primarily to *Vettaikorumakan* though a couple of lines address other deities too. They cater more to the aural features than to communicating a meaningful content. The text of the oral narration is divided and scattered in different portions of the ritual, some of them are repeated too. They together narrate the myth of *Vettaikorumakan* from his birth to his travel from mount Kailash to Balusseri fort. Apart from the myth it also contains eulogies and prayers to him. These different sections are of different length and each of them has a basic rhythm since they are sung with the accompaniment of musical instruments. There are alliterations and rhyme schemes which are very common to folksongs. Most often the textural feature of rhyme is achieved at the cost of meaning of the lines. Words are distorted to the level of meaninglessness that makes it difficult not just for translation but also understanding certain items. In recording the oral rendition to written text these textural particulars are made use of to divide each section into different lines, because the sections of songs are not differentiated further into stanzas or lines. Each section is sung in a stretch only breaking at the points of rhyme. The repeated sections called *Niram* and *Sthuthi* are sung in different tunes when repeated. The words used in the narration include usages from standard Malayalam to spoken language, and sometimes words are distorted to match the flow of the singing too.

The pictorial text gives a two dimensional physical structure to the sung hero in the oral text. It captures and seizes the narration at a very crucial juncture when the deity has just received the weapon that leads to his deification. The text that the picture communicates is the glory of a deity, a protector, who is virtuous and fierce at the same time. The colour scheme and

distribution form the texture of the picture. The picture in five deep colours kept against the backdrop of the setting sun and spreading darkness of the night becomes more intense. The frame provided by *Pattarangu* and the decorations provide the canopy to locate the narrative in its geographical setting of forest. In the midst of these settings the light from the burning wicks of bell metal lamps gives a moving illusion to the figure in the *Kalam*.

The two dimensional pictorial text gets an added physical dimension through the three dimensional body of the performer. The so far sung and seen portrait comes into being through a human body. The text that the performance communicates is that of the physical attributes and power of the deity. Dressed as in the portrait and carrying the deity's weapon the oracle develops into a larger than life figure through his performance. When the ritual gradually develops from *Eedum Koorum* to *Pantheerayiram* the transformation from a hunter to a supernatural being is achieved. The shift is from a lesser physical activity of enacting a hunting scene to an aggressive performance of breaking more than thousand coconuts at a stretch. And again being the only individual who gets to enter the *Kalam*, stand and dance on the figure of the deity, sit on the seat of the deity and finally erase the *Kalam* the oracle attains the confidence of the devotees to deliver the word of god to them, who by then can't differentiate the deity and the oracle.

The three genres with individual texts and unique textures communicate parts of the myth. The social and cultural contexts of each of these texts are described in detail in the ethnography chapter. An important thing to be added here about the performance context is the way in which the frame of multiple medium of the ritual entralls all the sensory organs of the participants. The songs sung in piety with the accompaniment of musical instruments and the oracle gives more life to the picture and performance seen by the participants. The mixed smell of burning incense, camphor, oil and ghee lamps relates them to smell often imagined to be

associated with temples and there by gods. The remnants of *pooja* like *payassam* and *appam* are touched and tasted. This combined experience offered by the process ease the construe of the ritual by the devotees even if they are ignorant about the basic narrative.

Though communicated through different structural forms there is an upward mobility in the narrative of each of the three texts. An analysis on the ritual as a single unit will illustrate that this movement in each genre is well complemented by the others. The ritual starts with oral rendition that leaves images to the imagination of the devotees, then the ritual moves to a more concrete schema of a two dimensional picturesque figure with elaborate detailing. Towards the half way the ritual enters a stage of ultimate signification with the appropriation of a human body to the deity with three texts communicating simultaneously. And the two mythical narratives that form the basis of the ritual are conveyed through the ritual events and that facilitates even an uninformed audience to understand the crux, and only the crux, of the ritual. They follow a chronological order in the narrative sequence and can be categorized as what Formalists called *fabula*. And the text of the three genres and they put together, the ritual, disturb the chronological narrative to make it a *syuzhet*. The entire ritual provides the participant observers with masses of materials in *syuzhet* that they can arrange on causality reasoning to find out the *fabula*.

Myth and ritual as semiotic systems

The myths and the ritual discussed above are systems of significations. Constructed with an already existing semiological chain of linguistic system they are as Roland Barthes put it second-order semiological systems.

That which is a sign (namely the associative total of a concept and an image) in the first system, becomes a mere signifier in the second. We must recall that the

materials of mythical speech (the language itself, photography, painting, posters, rituals, objects, etc.), however different at the start, are reduced to a pure signifying function as soon as they are caught by myth. (113)

A signifier and signified together constitute a sign in the linguistic system and that sign in the language becomes the signifier in the mythical speech associated with another signified to form a different sign. In the ritual and myths under study the devotees or any participant observer, uniformed yet belonging to the same socio-cultural background, can build a *fabula* with the aid of the signs common to the myths and ritual. In the myths, oral narratives, picture in the *Kalam*, and performance the same signifiers are employed to suggest their respective signified that makes it easy to perceive the sign by any observer. Actually in the ritual process the sign is perceived through different sensory organs which are an added merit over the lone auditory sensation of mythical narration. The songs are heard, picture seen and the performance seen and experienced.

Take for example the linguistic sign *Churika*. It is the weapon of *Vettaikkorumakan*. In the linguistic system it stands for a type of double-edged dagger with a pointed edge but in the myths and in the ritual this sign is a signifier that stands for the concept of the deity himself. In this way each signs in the myths becomes 'language-objects' and the myth itself a 'metalanguage' as there are two semiological systems in mythical speech (Barthes 114).

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Chapter V

The Dynamics of Power: Hierarchies and Subversions

This chapter discusses the power hierarchies and subversions of some power relations furthered through the ritual process of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style. This is a continuation of the previous chapter on the functional role of codified oral narratives in the creation and subversion of power structures in ritual context. The chapter ventures to identify the explicit and implicit models of power dynamics operating in the different layers of the narrative events. The later part of the chapter surveys power relations with reference to the concepts propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin and Victor Turner.

Ritual is a cultural discourse in which interactions and events are negotiated to achieve certain socio-cultural goals. More than mere communication of the content each ritual exploits the possibility of its form and context to facilitate the transmission of some power relations. In fact generally speaking also, communication operates always on the ground of the power structures. The encoding, choice of medium and form are all in direction relation to the people involved in it and their relation to each other. Studying discourses in their temporal and spatial milieu will disclose the relation between the people involved in interaction. Rituals involving a group of people work on the same principle. The discourses define the association between the participants in it. At the same time ritual takes these discourses to a bit further to recreate, exactly as well as in some subversive ways, the normal hierarchal equations of relationships in

the immediate social structure. “Ritualization is a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship. This is not a relationship in which one social group has absolute control over another, but one that simultaneously involves both consent and resistance, misunderstanding and appropriation” (Bell 8). Discussed in this chapter are the various forms and formulae of distributed power constructions in *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* and how they are different from the relations outside the ritual atmosphere.

The exertion of power happens in multiple levels and to understand them a classification of the people associated with the ritual is necessary. Basically there are two groups of people the patrons and the performers and their lives are woven into the texture of the ritual through many ways, both internal and external. Patrons own the land of worship, the temple or the house, and belong to the upper class among the upper caste. The ownership of the land and membership to a particular community gives a group of people the power to be a potential patron. Now in the patron’s community or family itself only one person can enjoy the right that is hereditary in nature. Usually the eldest male member of the family is the privileged one. And if the temple is run by a committee the president of the committee is titled to perform the rights of the patron. So the selection of the patron is ruled by both external and internal factors. The responsibility of the patron is not just confined to his parent community alone. Being the patron he has a religious obligation to the temple, the deity, his community and the performers and a social obligation to the community of devotees who come for worship in the temple of his ownership. Unlike the ownership of other properties or land the ownership of a temple is not a private possession even if it’s a family temple. It’s a social institution for the welfare of the people who believe in it. The patron enjoys his right and fulfills his obligations simultaneously through certain expected behaviours like making religious observations and rituals happen in their due course of time.

And what he gets as a reward to this activity is the power and fame associated with the position he holds.

The people from the performing communities also get their basic right for the performance through their community and family. A specialty of these performing interim caste communities was their joint family system and matrilineal system of descent in terms of ancestral property as well as hereditary rights. One family from each caste was identified and the eldest male members of these families were given the performance right by the patron in the temple of his patronage. For example, a *Kallat Kurup* family will be chosen by the patron and the eldest of the family will be bestowed with the authority to do the ritual on patron's behalf. In *Kallat Kurup* community such a selected member is called *Adiyanthira Kurup*. Only he and his predecessors have the right to do *Kalampattu* in that temple. If by any chance it becomes inconvenient for the eldest of the family or any other member of the same family to do the ritual he can entrust another *Kurup* from a different family as a substitution. Even then the hereditary rights will stay with the *Adiyanthira Kurup*. The suitable example for this is the stage of the ritual called *Koorayidal* where only *Adiyanthira Kurup* can perform the act irrespective of who performs the ritual. And it is observed that the *Adiyanthira Kurup* is usually eager to do it as it assures his participation and more importantly reiterates his power of heritage.

The chosen families of performers used to live on the income that they get from doing services and rituals in the temple. To facilitate the smooth functioning of temples the performers lived in places around the temple creating a community of performers. This is one of the reasons why temples became an important centre for arts and a community of artists flourished in association with temples. The lands around the temple were usually owned by the patrons and the patrons allowed the performing members to live on his land without levying taxes from them.

This relaxation helped the interim castes to secure a place to settle down along with an income. But this in a way curbed their geographical mobility and they with their families got tied up directly to the temples and indirectly to the patrons.

Since the ritual is an art form teaching or learning the art was significant. In older days, as mentioned, the hereditary right to be the part of the ritual was inherited by boys from their uncles. But after the decline of matrilineal system any male member of the participant communities is considered as a rightful performer. Under this circumstance now the ritual is learned from elder performing members of the family through informal apprenticeship training. But in today's social context not many people from the performing communities wish to go with the tradition. The socio-economic patterns changed many of these interim castes who got educated and achieved financial security to do away with many customary practices and broke the ties of the class segregation. These factors accelerated the scope of mobility and people migrated for a better standard of living. But some members of these castes stuck on to the traditional ethics irrespective of their class change and still follow a couple of age old traditions in its most-close-to-original forms.

Those who are still into the performance do it as a way of reasserting their communal identity and fulfilling their religious obligation to god and to the people. The ritual performance forms only a part of many of other activities for expression as well as livelihood. Their identity assertion lies on the type of value system they follow, which is different for different individuals. Sometimes only an individual from a family takes up the hereditary right, sometimes a whole family takes it up. In the first case the value is an individual's concern but in the second it becomes a shared value of the family. They basically believe that being born to the community is not enough for their identity, but performing the hereditary rights shapes the real identity. Being

the part of what they are supposed to be born for is what they assume as identity marker. This act makes them form a “society of discourse”, a concept by Michael Foucault (62). He says societies of discourse “function to preserve or produce discourses, but in order to make them circulate in a closed space, distributing them only according to strict rules and without the holders being dispossessed by this distribution” (62-63). As far as the ritual is concerned either the selection or the rejection of the ritual participation is a power vested upon an individual; he can exercise it the way he wishes. If one selects the hereditary right he is exercising a power to create a self and the other. The discourse produced and its context of closed space makes him immediately identify that he belongs to those people who produce it, and that those who consume it are the others. Thus in both the cases of patrons and performers the basic level of group consciousness operates on similarities and differences simultaneously.

In this way the ritual context itself is an after effect of the interaction between different communications at different layers of socio-cultural relations. Family, community and land surround the ritual in its genesis. A combination of the three transforms an individual to a patron or a performer. As discussed, there are religious ideological ties between patron and temple as well as performers and temple. A triangle of correlation among the patron, temple, and performer is formed in the socio-cultural domain that gets manifested through the ritual events. The temple again has different spheres of its own. Even when established by a group of individuals its reach is not confined to them but to the society at large. The devotees from the larger society establish a primary dependant relation to the patrons and performers through the places of worship or temples.

Not all the narrated events are narrated through narrative events. The selection of the excerpts from the myths should be perceived as a strategic activity. They are chosen on the

criterion of the functional aspect of the ritual. Closely analyzing these selected episodes of narrated events will reveal some equations of power conveyed through the ritual. In the case of oral text in narrative events, the narration concentrates mainly on three aspects of the deity- his birth and life, hunting abilities and his merciful character. What is communicated through the songs is basically the glorification of Shaivism. All the instances from the mythical narratives that put Shaivism secondary to Vaishnavism are completely omitted from the ritualistic oral recounting. By not mentioning about the deification process that he underwent the songs invite one to believe that *Vettakkaran* is a born deity. This in fact is a distortion compelled on the narratives to promote the cause of Shaivism.

It is to be remembered that *Kallat* style of *Kalampattu* is only done for Shaiva deities, *Upadevatas* and serpent gods and not for Vaishnava deities. Of course at some points of oral rendition references are made to Vaishnava deities but then they are only passing references. The starting hymns of *Uchapattu* that praises a string of deities is common to all the *Kalampattu* and stand apart from the ritual as a whole as an auspicious activity to mark the beginning of the ritual. Since these beginning hymns in no way influence the ritual process they could be a later addition to the already existed songs to impose a nonexistent Vaishnava lineage to the ritual. The same strategy can be observed at the place where Parasurama's name is mentioned in the songs. The reference cannot be quoted as an authoritatively cited Vaishnava activity. His name is used only for a geographical citation. It can also be viewed as a technique for the localization of the myth. The nonspecific character of the geographical location in the event of mythologies till the deification of the deity is an inbuilt advantage for localization of it to any location by any group of people. The third instance where Vaishnavism seemingly intervenes to the ritual is the

offerings given to *Saptha Mathrukkal*. This stage of the ritual is common to all the *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style and is more associated with mother goddess worship than to Vaishnavism.

The construction of *Pattarangu* and drawing the figure of the deity in it is an instance of role reversal. The *Pattarangu* with its strict measurements and structure resemble the shrine of a temple and the figure drawn can be equated to the idol in it. Though the temple and idols will be constructed by people of lower castes only Brahmins are supposed to do the physical activity of installing idols in temple shrines with appropriate methods of worship. The physical labour belongs to the lower castes but the supposedly ultimate spiritual power of installation belongs to the upper caste. In *Kalampattu* there can be observed a slight change in this. Both the construction of the place for worship as well as installation of the figure is done by *Kallat Kurup*. But then comes the act of invoking the presence of the deity by the priest into the figure drawn. Here is an intermingling of hierarchy happening. One is installing the idol and the other is bringing life into it. In worshipping the drawn figure also the labour and responsibility is shared between the two castes. If the *Kalam pooja* is done by the Brahmin priest, *Thiri Uzhichil* is done by *Kurup*. The ephemeral nature of the ritual also contributes a lot to bestowing some superior functional roles to the interim caste members. While constructing a temple, worshiping gods in it or demolishing it due to some reasons are all very complicated religious activities that consume a lot of time and labour. But when it comes to *Kalampattu* the whole process is minimized to a nutshell that could be carried out in less than a day.

There is an important supporting argument to equate *Pattarangu* to a temple shrine. Usually *Pattarangu* is constructed on the day of the ritual and the whole construction is supposed to be complete with *Koorayidal* and is useless once *Koora* is removed from its roof after the performance. But if at a place *Kalampattu* is done for a deity consecutively for 120 days

Pattarangu will be kept intact from then on and *Koora* won't be removed from the roof of the *Pattarangu*. This continuous ritual performance for 120 days is called *Purushantharappatu*. It is believed that with this process the presence of the deity will be there permanently under the *Koora* which means that it acquires the status of a temple. Also the priest is supposed to perform daily offerings, however small it may be, to the deity in *Pattarangu*.

The subversion of the power of the deity himself is also noteworthy. The deity's image is created, worshiped and finally erased by a group of interim caste people. Here the usual paradigm of god creating, sustaining and finally destroying life is found parallels in the activity of human beings. An authority for creation is conferred on normal humans, the authority becomes all the more powerful since what is created is a deity. This power is juxtaposed with the comparative powerlessness of the deity. The figure drawn indirectly is an indicative of the deity's powerlessness as the picture figures him in a moment of being fooled by a boy. Another instance of subversion is the angle of view of the figure. Usually in temples the idols of the gods will be placed on an elevated pedestal which facilitates the devotees to have the idols in their eye level or above it. But in *Kalampattu* the drawn figure on the floor calls for an angle down the eye level from the devotees. The deity is in literal sense looked down upon. This angle of perception can be considered as a tool of power reversal. In this way all the glorification of the deity done explicitly through the oral text and performance text are balanced with the hidden subversions in the pictorial text. The temporal superiority of the ritual over spatial one is worth mentioning in this account. As far as a temple or a shrine is concerned the space is very important. But in *Kalampattu* time is superior as it attributes temporary sacredness to the space. The very place where the *Pattarangu* stands becomes sacrilegious immediately after the ritual. But a shrine has a sacred aura about it even during the times when worships are not being done. The time frame

of *Kalampattu* is decided by the patron and practitioners, most often, according to their convenience unlike other temple festivities that are controlled by the special days related to the deity.

The base of most of the segregations to exert power starts with the human body, be it religion, caste or gender. The abstract notions of power, purity, and pollution are first held in connection with human body. And that is why the concepts of untouchability and initiation rites exist among different communities. During the ritual touching each other, materials that touched the ground, and things not to be used in the ritual will all lead to what is considered as pollution. Performers from different castes make sure that they don't touch each other, or don't touch a ritual material at the same time when they handover materials during the ritual. They usually drop things to other's hands. Handing over of ritual materials by *Namboothiri* to *Karakkura Nair* during *Mullakkan Pattu* will serve as a citation for the observation. The things once offered to the deity are considered as sacred by the devotees and are received after the offering as a blessing. But if the things to be offered get in direct contact with already offered ones, it will lead to pollution of the former. Through these modes of behaviour untouchability becomes the norm of the ritual. Water and fire are used as the ultimate purifiers all through the ritual process. Instances of washing hands and taking bath to purify the body and carrying lighted lamps in front of the procession to purify the way are illustrations of the same.

The gender also plays a role both in the power structure and the concept of purity. The consideration that women were given in the matrilineal descent, in effect positive or negative, got confined only to that tradition. Everywhere else patriarchy was the order of the day. The complete exclusion of the female participation in any crucial event in the ritual process is one of the best reflections of the situation. In the performance of *Kalampattu* for female deities also

women are not given performance rights. But in *Nagakalams*, the *Kalampattu* for snake gods, girls or women from the patron's family erase the *Kalam* by crawling like a snake on it in a trance mood. And as in all the Hindu religious observations menstruating women are not allowed to participate in the ritual as devotees. Even accidental touching by a menstruating woman leads to pollution and taking a bath will restore the purity.

Though some of the traditional notions of purity connected with human body is maintained, during the ritual performance the body of the performer is used as device to destabilize some other set models of power. *Karakkura Nair* takes fasting continuously for 41 days before he performs a *Pantheerayiram*. The fasting includes restricted food habits, prayers, and abstaining from all physical pleasures. The performances by him called *Eedum Koorum* and *Pantheerayiram* are celebrations of body and physical power. What happens during the ritual performance is the conversion of a human body into a deity. The body being converted is the body of an interim caste man before whom even the upper caste people bow in reverence. Before his transformation into the deity the norm of untouchability keeps his body down the hierarchy. But in a couple of moments the whole hierarchy gets upside down and places him on the top with the norm of untouchability favouring his supremacy.

In Richard Bauman's opinion there is power inherent in performance as a mode of communication to transform social structures

to a range of additional considerations concerning the role of the performer in society. Perhaps there is a key here to the persistently documented tendency for performers to be both admired and feared- admired for their artistic skill and

power and for the enhancement of experience they provide, feared because of the potential they represent for subverting and transforming the status quo. (305)

The power that *Nair* gets as the oracle is the same; he is admired and feared for the performance that he showcases.

The confrontation between *Karakkura Nair* and *Marars* on the basis of artistic proficiency is a test to prove dominance with regard to their skills, knowledge, and practice. The ritual provides them one chance each to prove themselves and their superiority over the other. The two events *Eedum Koorum* and *Kalapradakshinam* go beyond mere ritual events to them. *Marar* has the control of the former and *Nair* the latter. Both the events are all about structured rhythms and dance movements according to the rhythms, each rhythm will have a corresponding body movement. During *Eedum Koorum* if *Nair* cannot understand the rhythm being played by *Marar* he won't be able to dance accordingly and vice versa during *Kalapradakshinam*. Humiliation will be the end result. During the fieldwork the performers quoted such events from past performances where they have seen their older generation competing with each other on their proficiency. They also added that there is always a possibility of negotiation between *Nair* and *Marar* before the events on the rhythms and movements but are solely dependent on their personal preference.

The view of Catherine Bell on ritualization itself as a process that promotes the power relations needs attention here. In Bell's opinion the process of ritualization hierarchize and intergrate in complex ways the practical knowledge acquired in and exercised though ritualization.

The ultimate purpose of ritualization is neither the immediate goals avowed by the community or the officiant nor the more abstract functions of social solidarity and conflict resolution: it is nothing other than the production of ritualized agents, persons who have an instinctive knowledge of these schemes embedded in their bodies, in their sense of reality, and in their understanding of how to act in ways that both maintain and qualify the complex microrelations of power. (221)

Another important way through which the ritual works out the subversion of the power relations is by creating a platform for what Bakhtin termed as ‘carnivalistic contacts and combinations’. He remarked “all things that were once self-enclosed, disunified, distanced from one another by a noncarnivalistic hierarchical worldview are drawn into carnivalistic contacts and combinations. Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid” (123). Many communities believe in keeping the sanctity of their group by not mixing up with other communities through any activity. This division between the self and the other is possible only when the communities are self sufficient in all respects. In a society where different communities cohabit and depend on one another for their existence the concept of sanctity is worked out through hierarchical relationships among them. Those on the top will be the privileged with power and substance; power to regulate the social interactions and substance to fix the situations without alterations. So every society with any kind of division into groups finds it convenient to keep to their own groups to remain in the group. The caste system also is commissioned on the same principle. Cross communication in any level is minimized as a scheme to define their self-closed entity. The thus created identities get manifested through differentiated behaviours like their life style, food habits, linguistic fixations, religious observations, matrimonial alliances, and

vocational preoccupation. In older days when caste system in Kerala was very prominent hierarchal relations were very evident in common social interactions. In those days rituals that demanded the participation of more than one caste exhibited the characteristics of a carnival. They promoted the coming together of different castes, mingling of different ideologies and reversal of roles. Rituals created a mutual dependency between different groups of people, their worldview, and their narratives.

Vettakkaran Kalampattu incorporates, directly or indirectly, the involvement of people from carpenters to priests in its functioning. But the main interactions are between the upper caste and the interim castes. They mix together for a motive and freely depend on each other for a common socio-religious cause. The interim castes get to experience a position equal to that of the upper caste and perform activities entitled to them. Whatever the functional aspect be, the role of the ritual in fusing the two creeds of Hinduism is also to be noted. The ritual also sets the platform for a linguistic coming together and mixing up two languages; the language of the Vedas or of the upper caste and that of the common man. The Sanskrit hymns chanted by the priest are simultaneously accompanied and complemented by the Malayalam oral renditions of *Kurup*. The Malayalam used is not the standard version of it but the spoken form. During the rendition many words are picked from local dialects and some are even distorted to match the rhyme scheme of the songs. Also the Sanskrit hymns are written documents where as the ritual songs exist as oral literature in the memory of people. They both are linked to build a spiritual ambience. The erasing of the picture by dancing on it is another instance of making the sacred and profane meet each other. In these ways the ritual exploits the scope of “paired images”, here chosen for their contrast, which is a characteristic of carnival (Bakhtin 126).

But unlike in the concept discussed by Bakhtin a complete suspension of hierarchy, law, and prohibition that determine the structure of the noncarnival seldom happens, as in a *carnival*, in *Kalampattu*. As a result of carnivalistic atmosphere, and as discussed earlier in this chapter, certain functional roles of the participant in the institutionalized system of society get reversed. But the people from different castes confine themselves in their own groups carrying out their functional roles. This peculiar kind of behaviour where different communities unite on one cause yet manage to create their own differentiated existence can be analyzed with the concepts of *communitas* and *liminality* put forward by Victor Turner in his book *The Ritual Process*.

Proceeding with Turner's ideas *Kalampattu* is a "ritual of status reversal" in which the participating members undergo *liminality* (167). *Liminal* period of a ritual is an ambiguous realm its participants pass through that has no characteristics of the past or the coming state. It is marked by a detachment of individuals and groups from their previous cultural conditions as well as the condition that they are traveling to. Turner explains "liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (95). *Liminality* is both a state and a phase. Individuals as well as groups enter this state but even then their status is in a flux. A *liminal* phenomenon offers a blend of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. The dialectical process involving the switching over of the statuses happens through this. The two statuses stand on either side of the *liminal* phenomenon making it a "limbo of statuslessness" (97).

Liminality is a phase that marks the emergence of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *communitas* and this state can be viewed as a state of anti-structure juxtaposed with the structure offered by the society (Turner 96). During *Kalampattu* the participating individuals experience this state of *liminality* while they

travel from their status in the social structure to the acquired status in the ritual. The high becomes low and low acquires the high status. At a particular juncture of the events during the transformation they enter the *liminal* state and form a *communitas*. *Communitas* is born where social structure ceases to exist. But *communitas* as well as *liminality* are transitional qualities and transition is the only permanent condition in a ritual process. So Turner asserts that “men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of *communitas*” (129). He also remarks in his later work *Drams, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* that “*communitas* is, existentially speaking and in its origins, purely spontaneous and self-generating” (243). The all participant castes get released from their original structural position in the hierarchy and experience the phase of no status to enter the new and reversed order designed by the ritual. Thus what happens in the ritual process is not an abolition of caste to create a permanent homogenous whole on the basis of status, but a phase of homogeneity necessitated by a common religious cause.

Kallat Kurup community gets elevated in their status to perform the religious tasks usually assigned to Brahmins and *Karakkura Nair's* body gains an uplift to be that of a god. And the Brahmin priests and the devotees of all castes worship the *Kalam* drawn by *Kurup* and bow in front of the *Nair*. But in all these instances none of the participants go out of their group to mix up with the others as a homogenous group. They maintain their affinity towards their own communities and these communities as a single entity experience the status reversal. Thus the ritual does not abolish but reaffirms the principle of hierarchy. Also those interim caste members who perform *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* are still under patronage during ritual unlike in their normal social interactions where they are no longer under direct caste hierarchy. So in today's

social establishment of Kerala ritualistic ambience becomes one of the few socio-cultural discourses where classification of individuals based on caste hierarchy comes into lime light.

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Conclusion

Through the analysis made through the previous chapters on the mythologies and the performance of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* the following conclusions are made.

The Importance of Myths and the Ritual as Discourses

As extensively discussed in the preceding chapters the ritual and the well structured mythologies narrate actions that support the practices of the participant castes. They talk about first beginnings and legitimizes the practices among different castes. In *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* interdependency of the narrations by different castes that culminate in the coherence of the narrative events of the ritual is a complex scheme that holds the ritual and myths as intact as possible over the years. The incidents in the mythical text and the ritual text are so minimal to convey exactly what it wants to convey. All the non-narrated incidents which could have, by the probability principle of logical reasoning, happened in reality are all left out from the plotline not arbitrarily but intentionally to avoid the instances of contradiction as well as the scope of interpretations that will challenge the motif of the narratives. All the mythical narratives by different castes put together will constitute a life history of *Vettakkaran* but even in that narrative there are big fissures in way of time and action. Unities of time and action are completely missing and unity of place is very much appropriated through localization. Still whatever exists has a well organized structure that communicates the development of a deity in relation with the origin and development of different castes. These oral narratives influence and form the base of caste and sub-caste divisions as much as scriptures form the basis of religious classification.

Longing for the Surreal and a Heroic Figure

Reality is something that human beings are always into. The day to day life in today's world with its less adventurous and tediously monotonous pattern doesn't interest anyone beyond a point. Man has an inherent longing for the experience of the surreal as well as a heroic figure to look upon, to admire and to worship. The huge increase in the production of adventurous movies, games, and TV series as well as the transfiguration of political leaders and celebrities to cultural icons will substantiate the view. Every *Kalampattu* performance creates a surreal space for an individual to experience and to live in for the time being. This closed shelter, though temporary, meets his expectations along with a cultural hero's presence. In the normal social context or in popular culture if the hero is a human the ritual context offers a much more brave and adorable cultural hero of superhuman traits. And this supernatural cultural hero figure is an immediately identifiable figure than the human heroes owing to the narratives that connect the peoples' origin and identity with their cultural heroes.

Selective Tradition

As discussed before every social group will have their own customs, traditions, and belief systems. But most of these customs get altered with time or some of them will be left back by these communities in their linear progression. All the castes who participate in *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* have left out or altered many customary practices and traditions that were once considered mandatory. Take for example the case of *Kallat Kurup* caste that once had matrilineal inheritance system that is no longer in practice. Just like this tradition there are many other customs that they have left out for reasons more than one. There was a custom called *Kettukallyanam* in which a *Kurup* girl who is yet to attain puberty is married off to a boy from

the same caste but not having any direct relationship with her. But the two won't be treated as a couple because this wedding tie is purely ritualistic and will be broken on the fourth day after marriage. They also used to have elaborate and ritualistic puberty ceremonies for girls. The matrimonial alliances were once only confined to their own caste boundaries but now the community itself has accepted alliances with other castes of the same position in caste hierarchy. This makes *Kalampattu* a result of what Raymond Williams called "selective tradition" in his observation regarding educational systems in the society. According to him it is a process,

that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as 'the tradition', 'the significant past'. But always the selectivity is the point; the way in which from a whole possible area of past and present, certain meanings and practices are chosen for emphasis, certain other meanings and practices are neglected and excluded. Even more crucially, some of these meanings and practices are reinterpreted, diluted, or put into forms which support or at least do not contradict other elements within the effective dominant culture. (495)

Apart from the power exertion two possible reasons for this can be the strong narrative basis of the ritual as well as the dependence of narratives of different castes. None of the other traditions of the community had such strong narrative backup like *Kalampattu* has. The strength of the narratives in *Kalampattu* comes from the fact that they are about the very genesis of the caste. If they do not recount them through appropriate narrative events the whole base on which their communal identity is built will be in oblivion. This issue becomes complex when the narratives of a caste are linked with that of others. Even if one caste doesn't want to proceed with the narration, that caste will be forced to do it for the sake of the others and as an end result the narratives and the ritual will go on.

Identity Markers

The way in which direct participation in the ritual process creates the identity of patrons and performers is already pointed out. The remaining participants in the ritual also experience the identity marking procedure through the ritual participation. Every time a non-performer yet belonging the community of performing castes participate in the ritual she automatically begins to identify her allegiance to the deity and to the community. Even an uninformed participant will have a psychological impact if not an intellectual one. The ambience of the ritual context is capable enough to make a text enter the psyche of the observer and it becomes more concrete each time she participates in the ritual. Each time the participant repeats her participation she rereads the already created text with more input from the current performance. This process of *remembering* helps her to *re-member* herself to her caste and to the *communitas* formed as a part of the ritual context. What happens through this is a discourse with the self and the immediate social groups- castes, *communitas*, and society.

The ritual process deals with the problematic notion of identity. A participant's identity is always in a flux or lie in multiple identity frames at the same time during the ritual. John C Turner in his essay "Social Comparison and Social Identity: Some Prospects for Intergroup Behaviour" states that "an individual defines himself as well as others in terms of his location within a system of social categories- specifically social group memberships- and social identity may be understood as his definition of his own position within such a system" (7). Each participant, be it a performer, patron or a devotee, is called for to experience a varied number of identities during the ritual. They keep on defining and redefining their identities all through the ritual with respect to their affiliation to castes and *communitas*. They also experience phases of liminality too.

Power Exertion

The real picture of power dynamics in the ritual can be analysed by juxtaposing the ritual context with its immediate social context. Two time periods need to be studied here- the past and the present. There was a time in Kerala when caste system was so much there in the air. During that period ritual performances like this gave their interim caste performers the power to subvert the social structure that put Brahmanism on an elevated pedestal. They united for a common cause in the name of a religion debarring the divides of castes which was a contrast to the caste ridden social structure. But in today's social context where stratification based on castes is less prevalent in normal social interactions rituals become one of the rarest occasions where the discourses are based on caste hierarchy.

A simple example of untouchability will prove the point. There is no untouchability in the society but it is there in the ritual. The ascribed status of caste doesn't have much value in today's Kerala society where day to day social interactions between people are detached from caste identities. The people who interact freely in the normal social context are supposed to act according to their caste hierarchy during the ritual context. The concepts of patronage, untouchability, purity, and pollution come to existence rituals and divide the people on the basis of caste.

Limitations of this Study and Scope for Further Study

There are fifty nine different *Kalampattu* in *Kallat style* and *Kallat Kurup* is only one of the many communities who follow the tradition of *Kalampattu*. So what is studied through the thesis only becomes a pebble by the sea shore. And as far as this thesis is concerned it only addresses *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* from the textual aspects of the myths and the ritual to find out

the power of narratives in a given performance and social context. The linguistic aspects and genre overlaps are overlooked to read the performance as a text.

There is further scope of study in the field. The ethnography in this dissertation can be compared as one of the many recitations. “A work of folklore exists in constant flux, and it cannot be studied in depth if it is recorded only once. It should be recorded as many times as possible” (Propp 8). Collecting and recording all the mythical narratives and oral renditions related to each of these individual rituals and communities will result in a massive volume of oral literature. A critical approach to these narratives will throw light to the influence and power of narratives on the different units of the society starting from individual to the society as a whole. There are some other aspects too that need to be studied not only by literature departments but also by other academic domains. Being a mixture of many art forms and genres an interdisciplinary approach should be followed for a better understanding of the phenomenon.

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Appendix I

Glossary

1. *Aarti*- worship of god by offering light from wicks or camphor.
2. *Adiyanthira Kurup*- *Kurup* who has the hereditary rights to perform *Kalampattu* in a temple.
3. *Ammanachaya*- A combination of two words that literally mean ‘addressing someone with affection’. The first song among the series of songs sung by *Kurup* during *Kalam pooja*. It is an address to the presence of deity in *Kalam* praising him.
4. *appam* - A small round snack made from rice, jaggery, banana, roasted coconut pieces, roasted sesame seeds, ghee and cardamom powder fried in oil.
5. Arjuna- One of the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*. The son of Kunti and Indra.
6. Arjuna-The third of the Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata*.
7. *Arukkayar*- ‘*aru*’ means ‘side’ and ‘*kayar*’ means ‘coir rope’. The term stands for the coir ropes tied connecting the left and right sides of the wooden frame of *Pattarangu*
8. *Bhadrakali*- The auspicious and fortunate form of *Kali*, the goddess, worshiped in Kerala.
9. *Chenda*- A *Chenda* is a cylindrical percussion wooden drum which has a length of two feet and a diameter of one foot with both the ends are covered with animal skin and played with two sticks.
10. *Chengila*- A thick bell metal disc, an Indian gong used as a percussion instrument that maintains a steady beat and provides musical background.
11. *Choodi/ vakka coir*- It’s a kind of coir rope.
12. *Churika*- A type of double-edged dagger with a pointed tip.

13. *Dakshina*- A gift offered to venerable persons for their service.
14. *Dhoopakkutti*- A flat metallic incense burner with a handle used in religious services.
15. *Dhulee chithram*- Drawings made on floor using powders.
16. *Durga*- The Mother Goddess figure in Hindu mythology. Another name for *Parvati*.
17. *Eedum Koorum*- ‘*Eedu*’ and ‘*Kooru*’ are the two stages of the performance by *Karakkura Nair* and *Marar*. This includes very much defined and structured dance by *Nair* and instrumental music by *Marar*.
18. *Ekathalam*- A variety of rhythm.
19. *Ezhuth*- The act of writing.
20. *Ganapati*- Son of Lord Shiva and Parvati. He is the Hindu god with elephant head who rides on mouse. Also called as Ganesha and Vinayaka he is supposed to be the remover of obstacles.
21. *Guruvayur*- A small town in Thrissur district of Kerala famous for the Sree Krishna temple there.
22. *Idakka*- An hourglass-shaped percussion drum from Kerala.
23. *Inathorth*- ‘*Ina*’ means ‘pair’ and ‘*thorth*’ means ‘cloth’. *Inthorth* is the white cloth placed on peedam as a pair to the silk cloth.
24. *Kadali pazham*- A small variety of banana.
25. *Kaduthila*- A type of sword.
26. *Kakkad Sree Mahaganapati Temple*- A temple in Kakkad in Thrissur district of Kerala with *Ganapati* and *Vettakkaran* as main deities of worship.
27. *Kalam*- Literally means ‘picture’. In the ritual it denotes the picture of the deity.
28. *Kalam pooja*- Worshipping of the *Kalam*/the presence of a deity in *Kalam* by Namboothiri

29. *Kalamezhuth, Kalamezhuthpattu, Kalamezhuthum Pattum*- Alternate names for *Kalampattu*.
30. *Kalamkand pokal*- Oracle's act of leaving the place after his *Kalathilaattam*.
31. *Kalampattu*- An indigenous Hindu ritual practice in Kerala in which large pictures of the deities are drawn on the floor with natural powders of different colours, songs are sung and ritual performances are done.
32. *Kalathilaattam*- Literally indicates dance in the *Kalam*. It stands for the dance of *Karakkura Nair* in *Kalam*. It has two parts called *Vilnrutham* and dance on *Vellanjeri*.
33. *Kallat Kurup*- Name of an interim caste in Kerala or a person from that caste whose hereditary occupation is doing *Kalampattu* in temples and noble households. They are a group among the many *Kurup* communities.
34. *Karakkura Nair*- Name of an interim caste in Kerala or a person from that caste whose is the oracle of *Vettakkaran/ Vettaikorumakan*.
35. *Kathakali*- An indigenous classical dance drama of Kerala.
36. *Kindi* - A metallic vessel with a tail to hold water.
37. *Kirata*- Hunter.
38. *Kol & Viral*- Two units of length. 1 *Kol* is equal to 72 cms and 1 *Viral* is equal to 3 cms.
39. *Kolam*- Is a form of drawing patterns composed of curved loops, drawn around a grid pattern of dots, using rice flour on floor. This drawing is considered to be auspicious among different communities in south India.
40. *Koora*- The word literally means cloth. In the ritual it's the cloth used to cover the roof of the *Pattarangu*.

41. *Koora Valikkal*- It's the act removing of *Koora* from *Pattarangu* that marks the end of a *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style.
42. *Koorayidal*-. The word '*koora*' means 'cloth'. In *Kalampattu* '*koorayidal*' is one of the first stages of the ritual when a cloth is put on the roof of the *Pattarangu*. The word *Koorayidal* also means 'the beginning of something'.
43. Krishna- The eighth incarnation of Vishnu.
44. *Kurup*- An interim caste/ a person from that caste in Kerala. They are a forward Hindu community who comes between Brahmins and *Nairs* in caste hierarchy.
45. *Kuthuvilak*- A bronze lamp with long handle used in temple processions.
46. *Kuzhithalam*- A smaller version of *Chengila*.
47. Lord Shiva- The God of destruction. One of the Holy Trinity of Hinduism.
48. *Maatu* – The white cloth to be draped around *Karakkura Nair's* waist during the ritual performance.
49. Mahabali- The benevolent Asura king of Kerala who was sent to Pathala, the underground world, by the fifth incarnation of Vishnu called Vamana, the dwarf.
50. *Malar*- Fried paddy or rice.
51. *Marar*- A forward Hindu caste who are the temple musicians.
52. *Meenam*- The Malayalam equivalent of Pisces.
53. *Mudiyettu*- A ritual from Kerala performed in sacred places called *Bhagavathi Kaavu* that enacts the mythical fight between Kali, the goddess and Darika, the demon.
54. *Mullakkan Pattu*- It is the ritual stage conducted under the peepal tree. *Namboothiri's* pooja and *Kurup's* singing happen side by side and *Karakkura Nair's* performance begin at this stage.

55. *Nadathurakkal*- The act of opening the door of temple shrine.
56. *Nambeessan*- A forward Hindu caste whose hereditary occupation is making flower garlands in temple.
57. *Namboothiri*- Kerala Brahmin
58. *Nanduni*- A stringed musical instrument used to play in background to *Kurup*'s oral rendering.
59. *Navagraha*- According to Hindu mythology it's a group of nine cosmic influencers on the living beings of mother earth, *Bhumidevi*. They include Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, the Sun, the Moon, Rahu, and Ketu.
60. *Niram*- Though its most commonly used literal meaning is 'colour' it also means 'respect'. *Niram* in the ritual is the second part of *Uchappattu* which praises the deity.
61. *Onam*- The state festival of Kerala that commemorate the annual homecoming of the erstwhile mythical king of the land named Mahabali.
62. *Ooralan*- The owner of the land in which a temple is situated.
63. *Paadiveykkal*- The last song of the series of songs sung by *Kurup* during *Kalam pooja*. The song celebrates the hunting ability of the deity.
64. *Paana*- *Paana* is a ritual which is part of a three day festival that propitiates the goddess *Bhadrakali*. A stump of *Paala* tree (*Alstonia scholaris*) is ceremonially brought to the site and planted there for the occasion and a non-figurative *kalam* is drawn in the centre using coloured powders.
65. *Padmam* and *Chakram*- Geometrical patterns drawn by Kerala Brahmins in their worships.

66. *Pantheerayiram/ Pantheerayiram Kalampattu*- The word literally means twelve thousand. In ritual context it is a type of *Kalampattu* offered to the Shaiva deity *Vettakkaran/ Vettaikkorumakan*. The ritual takes its name after the tradition of breaking twelve thousand and eight coconuts during the ritual performance.
67. Parasurama- The sixth incarnation of Vishnu. Mythical stories say that Kerala was created when he threw his axe to the sea.
68. Parvati- The Goddess, wife of Shiva.
69. *Pashupathasthra*- According to Hindu mythology it is an irresistible and most destructive personal weapon of Shiva and Kali, discharged by the mind, the eyes, words, or a bow.
70. *Pattarangu*- It is a construction made with wooden beams that resembles a four legged open roof system of stage, under which *Kurup* draws the *Kalam*.
71. *Pattu Nischayikkal*- '*Pattu*' means 'song' and '*nischayikkal*' means 'deciding'. It is the fixing of the date of the ritual performance.
72. *Pattu*- Song.
73. *Payassam* - A pudding like sweet made of jiggery, rice, milk, ghee and water.
74. *Peedam*- a wooden stool used as a pedestal for placing an idol.
75. *Peedam Nirakkal*- Literally means 'dragging of the *Peedam*'.
76. *Pooja*- worship, ceremonial offering to god.
77. *Pookkalam*- Floral carpet made by Keralites in front of their houses during the festival of *Onam* to welcome the homecoming of Mahabali.
78. *Purushantharappattu*- Performing *Kalampattu* for a deity in the same place for 120 consecutive days. After the 120th performance the *Pattarangu* will be kept intact with

Koora on it. The word takes its origin from the concept that the life span of a human being is 120 years.

79. *Putana*- An ogress in Hindu mythology who was killed by infant Krishna.

80. *Raktheswari*- A Shaiva goddess.

81. *Rangoli*- Is a folk art from India in which patterns are created on the floor or courtyards of houses using materials such as colored powders.

82. *Saptha Mathrukkal*- literally 'sapta' means 'seven' and 'mathrukkal' means 'mothers'. In Hindu mythology they group of seven mother-goddesses who are always portrayed together. They include Brahmani, Vaishnavi, Maheshvari, Indrani, Kaumari, Varahi, Chamunda and Narasimhi, each of whom is the *shakti*, or female counterpart, of a god

83. *Saraswathi*- The goddess of knowledge who resides in lotus flower.

84. *Saraswathi*- The Hindu goddess of knowledge, learning, music, and arts.

85. *Soothravara*- The first vertical line drawn with rice powder on the floor of *Pattarangu* dividing the whole area into two equal halves. The whole figure of the deity spreads symmetrically on the either sides of this line.

86. *Sthuthi*- Literally means 'eulogy'. It is the third part of *Uchappattu* that basically traces the deity's travel from Mount Kailash to the *Pattarangu* through different shrines in Kerala. It also invites the deity to occupy the *Pattarangu* where everything is kept ready for his worship.

87. *Tala*- Musical rhythm.

88. *Thaalam*- A plate with burning wicks, flowers, and rice in it.

89. *Thamburunadhan*- The leader of the singing team of *Kurup* who plays *Nanduni*.

90. *Thandri*- Head-priest.

91. *Theeyattu*- It's a ritual performed to propitiate the deities *Bhadrakali* and *Ayyappa*.
Bhadrakali Theeyattu is performed mainly in the central and south of Kerala where as *Ayyappan Theeyattu* is observed more by people from the north of the state. *Kalam* is an integral structural part of this ritual which also constitutes songs and stylized dances.
92. *Thiri Uzhichil*- It's the part of *Kalampattu* where *Kurup* does the offering of light to the deity in the *Kalam*.
93. *Thiru Aada*- The term literally means holy dress. It's a pleated white cloth with thick golden lining along the edge kept on the *peedam*. The pleated cloth will be kept like the spread feathers of a peacock.
94. *Thiruvilayarattu Bhagavathi*- A Shaiva goddess.
95. *Uchapooja*- The most important *pooja* done for a deity.
96. *Uchappattu*- The first string of songs in *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style. Though the word literally means 'song sung at noon' it is sung in morning after *uchapooja*. It has three sections. The first part is a praising hymn to different deities like Ganapati, Saraswathi, Vishnu and Shiva which is common to all *Kalampattu* of *Kallat* style. The second and third parts are called *Niram* and *Sthuthi*.
97. *Upadevatas*- A sub-section of Gods according to Hindu Mythology. In temples they are given a position after the main deity and idols of them will be installed in different places in the temple premises.
98. *Utharam*- It signifies the roof of a building. The covered roof frame of *Pattarangu* is called *Utharam*.
99. *Utharam kettal*- 'Utharam' means 'roof' and 'kettal' means 'tying'. The act of tying coir ropes along the roof frame of *Pattarangu* is called *Utharam kettal*.

100. *Vaalkannaadi*- It's a metal mirror with a handle.
101. *Vana Parva*- The Forest Book of the *Mahabharata*.
102. *Vastu*- Ancient architecture or art of building construction.
103. *Veeralipatu*- The red silk cloth that the *Nair* wears during the ritual performance.
104. *Vellanjeri*- The white lower part of *Vettakkaran/ Vettaikorumakan*'s cloth.
105. *Vellari*- A compilation of nearly 1000gms of rice, 1 bettal leaf, 1 piece of areca nut and a shelled coconut in a piece of banana leaf.
106. *Vettaikorumakan*- The word literally means 'a son for hunting'. In mythology he is the son born to Shiva and Parvati during their disguised stay on earth as hunters.
107. *Vettakkaran*- Lord Shiva in disguise of hunter when appeared in front of Arjuna to gift him with *Pashupathasthra*.
108. *Vilnrutham*- Dance by the oracle on the bow and arrow of the deity.
109. *Vithanamidal*- The word literally means 'decorating'. In the ritual it is the act of covering the roof of the *Pattarangu* with two white cloths leaving a gap along the centre.
110. *Vrischikam*- The Malayalam equivalent of Scorpio.

Appendix II

Photographs of *Vettakkaran Kalampattu* of *Kallat* Style



Pic. 1. Things kept ready for *Uchappattu*



Pic. 2. Beginning of *Kalam* drawing



Pic. 3. Colours used for drawing *Kalam*



Pic. 4. *Kalam* drawing in progress



Pic. 5. *Kalam* drawing



Pic. 6. *Vettakkaran Kalam* completed picture



Pic. 7. *Decorating Pattachangu*



Pic. 8. *Vellari*



Pic. 9. *Mullakkan Pattu*



Pic. 10. *Ezhunnellipp*



Pic. 11. *Eedum Koorum*



Pic. 12. *Kalapradakshinam*



Pic. 13. *Kalam Pooja*



Pic. 14. *Kurup singing Paadiveykkal*



Pic. 15. *Peedam Nirakkal*



Pic. 16. *Pantheeraayiram*

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