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# *PATOLA / VIRALI PATTU – FROM GUJARAT TO KERALA*

New Information on Double Ikat Textiles in South India

BALAN NAMBIAR and EBERHARD FISCHER

*Patola* (plural; singular: *patolu* in Gujarati) are silk cloths that are considered technically perfect, «pure» in terms of material, and auspicious because of colour scheme and pattern – culturally, in other words. These saris, shawls, *dupatta*-scarves have long been used in Gujarat as the most precious wedding gifts to be worn at important functions by respectable persons (by women as well as by men) and were always considered part of the wealth of respected families.

The word *patola* comes from Sanskrit *patta* (= *pata*) which signifies, among other things, «coloured cloth, woven silk». Manufactured probably with the most refined traditional textile technology of the world, the *patola* of Gujarat belong to the so-called double ikat category of tie-dyed fabrics (a technique which was primarily practiced in India – fully developed in Gujarat and found in simpler versions in Andhra and Orissa – and secondarily in Bali, Indonesia): in this, pure silk yarn is first separated in warp and weft, the threads are then coloured in sections by tie-dyeing before weaving. In some cases as many as seven colours are used but generally red, yellow, dark violet and white are common. On rather simple looms the pre-patterned warp and weft are woven to form clear designs. Today, «real» *patola* are manufactured only in two workshops of the Salvi community in Patan (Northern Gujarat) and are sold at about RS 30,000 per sari at Cottage Industries Emporium, New Delhi. (For several years far cheaper imitations have been coming mostly from Pochampalli, Andhra Pradesh.) In Gujarat, traditionally, various designs were regarded as typical for communities like the *Nagar* and *Anavil* Brahmins, Jaina merchants like the *Oswal-Jain*, *vaishnava* like the *ghee*-merchants, the *Modhi* and the Muslim *Vorah*-merchants who had each preferences for special patterns. But these textiles must have been known and marketed in Northern India for several centuries because we find them mentioned in Hindi poems of the pre-Akbar and Akbar period. The poet Jayasi mentions them, and in the famous *dohavali* of Kabir there is this celebrated verse: «I will tear my *patola* off and turn it into a flag, for if this is the way to finding Hari, this is the dress I will wear...»<sup>1</sup>

1 We are most thankful to B.N. Goswamy for drawing our attention to this verse.

*Patola* fabrics were produced in various centres of Gujarat (specifically in Patan, Ahmedabad, Surat and Cambay), possibly in the Deccan (16th century Deogiri and 19th century Jalna near Aurangabad), and used for centuries as export goods mainly from the ports of Surat and Cambay to South East Asia and Indonesia until the beginning of the Second World War. They were bartered against pepper and spices until the 16th century mainly by Gujarati traders (like the *Vorah* Muslims) to the Mollucca-Islands and Java and then formed an important item in the trade lists of European companies which used them in their purchases of spices. One of the most important early statements is by the French jeweler Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1679):

«*Patola* are of very soft silk, dyed all over with different-coloured flowers,, and the manufacture is in Ahmadabad. They can be had for 8 to 40 Rupies (i.e. quite expensive). This is one of the good commercial articles of the Dutch, who do not allow anyone from the Company to sell them privately, and they transport them to the Philippines, Borneo, Java, Sumatra and other neighbouring (islands).»

These *patola* textiles were in high demand in many parts of Indonesia up until recently as ceremonial cloths for *rajas*, or as formal wedding and dance costumes etc. No other textile type – Persian, Indian or Chinese – has had a similar importance in the textile history of Asia: most patterns and patterning techniques of South East Asia and Indonesia – up to New Guinea and Japan – have been influenced by the *patola* of Gujarat.

When the monograph «The Patola of Gujarat»<sup>2</sup> was compiled in 1979, very little information on the use of Gujarati double ikat textiles in South India was available (see 1979, p. 274ff. and 304). Our source of information was mainly Harris (1908) who had published a plate with three *patola*-specimens from the Travancore Raja's palace of Trivandrum<sup>3</sup> and had given as information that these textiles which he included in his article on carpet weaving were silken cloths, locally called «*veera kali*, *veera vali* and *veerali* silks.» Harris (1908) continues: «The name *veera-kali* is locally explained by these fabrics having been greatly used in the pagodas of the goddess Kali, *veera* meaning ‹rough› or ‹ferocious›. This information appears to be rather far-fetched. The silks were certainly used in the palaces... (as) it was the custom for the Maharajas to present a silk of this variety, either to tie round the head like a turban, or to spread on an elephant's back for a procession...»

2 Bühler & Fischer, 1979, *The Patola of Gujarat - Double Ikat in India*, Basel.

3 Harris, H. T. 1908, *Monograph on the Carpet Weaving Industry in Southern India*, Madras.

These silks are now very rare in the palace, and hardly found in the possession of private individuals... common silks are substituted for them...» Harris (1908, pl. 30) illustrates three *patola* of the motive types *ful bhat* (MT 5a), *popat kunjar bhat* (MT 14) and *vorah gaji bhat* (MT 23).<sup>4</sup>

In 1955, Pupul Jayakar published an article on Indian ikat textiles<sup>5</sup> accompanied by the photograph of a mural in the Mattancheri palace in Cochin, Kerala, showing *patola*-like features which she identified correctly as such. Several more murals from Kerala with *patola*-designs were later published<sup>6</sup> but no actual *patolu* had then come to light from Kerala palaces or temples.

In 1978, Thiel published an article<sup>7</sup>, not based on actual fieldwork, stating that *patolu*-like double ikat textiles were formerly produced in Kerala too (Mattancheri and Trivandrum are mentioned): however no proof was conducted in support of the statement. To us, it appears very unlikely that this ever happened, and all our sources clearly speak of imported products.

At present, at least, there is no traditional silk weaving centre in Kerala. However, it is locally believed sometimes (we learned this from Mr. Srikumaran Nair, Director of Archeology, Trivandrum) that the *virali pattu* used for wrapping the idol of Shri Padmanabha<sup>8</sup> in Trivandrum was received formerly from the weavers of Nagercoil (a town in the South of Trivandrum, formerly part of Travancore State). Our enquiries have revealed, however, that the present-day cloth used ritually in Padmanabhaswami-Temple is predominantly red, but is shiny satin – not even necessarily of silk. The weavers of Nagarkoil only do cotton weaving nowadays.

Mr. Raja, trustee of the Shiva-temples of Kottakkal Kovilakam in Malappuram District of Kerala (where four real *virali pattu* are still preserved) informed us that these textiles were originally received from Tinneveli/Tirunelveli (nowadays Tamil Nadu, Kaniyakumari District).

4 All references to specific motif types (MT) of *patola* textiles follow the typology of Bühler & Fischer, 1979.

5 Jayakar, P. 1955, «A Neglected Group of Indian Ikat Fabrics», *Journal of Indian Textile History*, vol. I: pp. 54–65, Ahmedabad.

6 See Bühler & Fischer, 1979, vol. II: pl. 196–199, footnote 1; and Bühler-Fischer-Nabholz, 1980, *Indian Tie-Dyed Fabrics*, Ahmedabad: pl. 6; our main source of information was Sivaramamurti, C. 1968, *South Indian Painting*, New Delhi and 1974, «Nataraja in Art», *Thought and Literature*, New Delhi.

7 Thiel-Horstmann, M. 1977, «Hypothesen zur Datierung der Patolen-Weberei in Gujarat», *Asiatische Studien*, vol. 31,2, Bern: p. 139.

8 According to this source, the temple management possesses a book dealing with rituals and procedures of this temple which makes explicit mention of *virali pattu*. We have, however, not yet been able to refer to this work ourselves.

In his study of ikat, R. N. Mehta (1961) has stated that «the designs in the frescoes at Mattancheri palace, Cochin, show that *patola* were known in the 16th century in Cochin and were produced in Jalna.»<sup>9</sup> The first part of this statement is certainly correct, for the second one no proof exists. As to our information, Gujarati weavers migrated to Jalna near Aurangabad only during the 19th century. The centre of manufacture – from where they received their raw materials and where they delivered their goods to – remained however in Surat in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century. It is much more probable that the *patola* textiles were exported over the sea from this and other ports in Gujarat and Sindh to Kerala rather than being traded directly from Jalna in the Deccan.

In 1981, C. Reis Jones published an important article on *dhulicitra* of Kerala<sup>10</sup> in which he not only showed designs of dresses for deities painted during the rituals clearly representing the stepped *patola* motifs, but he had photographed priests wearing actual *patola* textiles when performing these rituals. He clearly identified these ceremonial silk cloths as *virali pattu* as being «double ikat of untwisted hand-woven silk thread, a fabric type traceable to the famous pre-patternded *patola* of Surat in Gujarat... Without any doubt, the fabric is definitely not native to Kerala (but was imported from outside the country).» C. Reis Jones offers the view that these highly valued textiles «belong possibly to the seventeenth century or early eighteenth century.» But since, as he says, the «precise history of the fabric» is not entirely clear, he does not equate *virali pattu* with *patolu*.

This paper aims at citing evidence to the effect that the double-ikat textiles documented in Kerala itself and from existing photographs from Kerala are genuine *patola* textiles from Gujarat. It also aims at giving information on the manifold ceremonial functions of these *virali pattu* textiles in Kerala culture.

Before entering upon the ritual field of (silk) textiles in Kerala, however, it might be appropriate to make the major textile terms used in Malayalam relevant to this study available to the reader.

The word *virali pattu* is already mentioned in the early dictionaries. We find it for instance in Dr. Hermann Gundert's Malayalam-English diction-

9 Mehta, R. N. 1961, «Bandhas of Orissa», *Journal of the Indian Textile History*, vol. VI: p. 68.

10 Reis Jones, C. 1981, «*Dhulicitra*: Historical Perspectives on Art and Ritual», in Joanna G. Williams (ed.) *Kalâdarsana, American Studies in the Art of India*, New Delhi: p. 69–75. We are most thankful to Prof. Reis Jones for giving us more photographs of *virali pattu*/*patola* used by Tiyyâti Nambyâr invoking Ayyappan.

ary of 1872 (p. 874): «*virali* = best silk stuff,» mentioning furthermore that the word *virali* might be derived from *vira-zhi*<sup>11</sup>, a form existing only in Tamil and Malayalam. In Rev. Miron Minslow («A Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary of High and Low Tamil», Madras 1862) it says: «*viravalichelai* = a kind of silk cloth printed with curious devices,» *chelai* meaning sari or cloth. The author unfortunately does not explain why the patterning is «curious» (possibly it was tie-dyed!). The *Sabdataravali* Malayalam Dictionary by Sreekanteswaram G. Padmanabha Pillai (1983) mentions and explains the following textile terms of interest:

1. *kachha*, additional waistcloth

a) a kind of thick cloth, see the word *pattu*, b) uncut new cloth, the rough kind with panama-weave, c) long, narrow cloth which is used by dancers and practitioners of martial arts to enable them to keep their waist tight, d) a rope used for elephants, e) a cloth of 40 muzham(ells)-lengths, f) a cloth given by the bridegroom to the bride, g) ladies' upper garment cloth to cover the breasts.

*kachhayituka*, to place a *kachha*-cloth over a corpse

2. *pattu*

a) textile prepared from the thread of *pattupuzhu*, silk worm, special textile such as *viravali*, thin, soft thing, b) sack-cloth, c) soft earth... .

*pattukachha*, a kind of textile, narrow, used for tying around the waist.

3. *virali*, differently coloured, variegated silk, *viravali*.

4. *talapavu*, turban, decoration of the head.

5. *vithanam*, a) horizontally spread out decoration, b) top layer, c) surface,

d) *yagam* (*yagna*-sacrifice), e) appropriate occasion, f) *bali*-sacrifice, g) gathering, h) rest.

6. *marappu*, a) a bundle made of cloth, bag-like crossbelt along the shoulder to carry something, b) short rafter of a house.

7. *terika*, a thing kept underneath to prevent a vessel or something else from falling.

8. *uthariyam*, loose upper-garment (unstitched), a second wrapping cloth.

11 In Sanskrit the root *vîr* means to be powerful or valiant, to display heroism, to overpower or subdue.

### 1. *Virali Pattu in North Malabar – today*

When travelling in the Cannanore area searching for actual samples of *virali pattu* fabrics,<sup>12</sup> we found that everybody we talked to immediately knew the term *virali pattu* for a precious textile. But hardly anybody was aware of how such a *virali pattu* would look, what its technical peculiarities would be. It was not even generally known that it must be of pure silk, even though the term *pattu* refers to this. In shrines and temples we were often shown fragments of patterned textiles with red ground as *virali pattu*, which were late replacements. But evidently, *virali pattu* even nowadays is a well-known Malayalam term. A young Poduval man, for instance, in the village Annur near Payyanur immediately quoted the following line from the 17th century poet Kunjan Nambiar: «*Viralipattu kittiyennakilum pora tarivala kittuvanagraham.*» («Even if I get a *virali pattu*, I still desire a golden bangle...»)

In the local library we met an old gentleman, Karipathu Kunhiram Poduval, who remembered that his father's elder brother had brought a *virali pattu* from Rangoon in circa 1920. He mentioned that the main field of the textile was plain, only the borders variegated. This *virali pattu* was then used near Payyanur. It was both worn as a shoulder cloth and as a crossbelt. When this textile had become old and torn, pieces were used on fresh wounds to stop the flow of the blood.

We had a chance to see our first actual fragment of a *virali pattu* in North Malabar in the family house of Mr. Balagangadharan at Payyanur (see sample 3). This *virali pattu*, we were informed, was given to the family's forefathers, the Vangayil Nayananar by the temple authorities of Madayi kavu: «Our family has special rights and privileges, because our forefathers were brave enough to respond to the call of the oracle of the shrine of Madayi kavu when a cow was slaughtered by a Muslim in the courtyard of this shrine.»

In this house, one still remembers that *virali pattu* textiles from the family treasure were used as gifts to brides at the wedding, then again at the time of the birth of the first son. The old lady of the house stated that «*virali pattu* were always given in recognition of heroic deeds.»

Here, the *virali pattu* was kept in a wooden box along with other *puja* articles. The old lady of the house mentioned that the *virali pattu* of which

12 The Trivandrum Art Museum has on display a textile bearing the label «*virali pattu*» which, however, is not a «real» *virali pattu*; it is a traditional brown cotton towel, locally called *veshti*. The only other *virali pattu* from Kerala are published by Harris (1908); their present whereabouts are unknown.

only a small fragment remains was once used to wrap a *shri chakra* that is worshipped regularly. But when the cloth was too ripped, it had to be replaced by some other silken cloth. But the lady still remembers that in her youth the *virali pattu* could only be handled after taking a bath. Most parts of the tattered cloth were given away for the treatment of burns.

Nowadays, *virali pattu* textiles are very rarely found in private possession. The only other fragment (sample 4) belongs to the house of a Brahmin, the Tantric ritual practitioner of Kalakattu illam – about 30 km away from Payyanur. Here we were informed that 1) for Tantric rituals a *virali pattu* has to be tied around the waist, 2) for *bhagavati puja*, *virali padma* (lotus) designs are drawn on the floor in the centre of which an oil lamp is kept, 3) villagers used to come and collect small particles of *virali pattu* for medical purposes.

All the other Tantric families are supposed to possess *virali pattu*, but neither at Puntthottath illam (near Taliparamba) nor at Kattumadam illam (near Cannanore) did we find «real» *virali pattu*; we found only replacements.

Unfortunately, as far as we know, no *teyyam* performing nowadays possesses or wears a real *virali pattu*. However, in their ritualistic songs, quite often *virali pattu* textiles are mentioned. Red cloth, often silk, are common substitutes.

In a mother-goddess shrine like the one of the Tiyan or Toddi-tapper community of Annur Pumala kavu, formerly a *virali pattu* was used. The Antithiriyam or main priest still remembers that the textile was kept, when not in use, in a bamboo tube. He was able to identify the design of the now disintegrated and lost *virali pattu* of his shrine from samples and photographs shown to him as MT 1 (*pan bhat* in the Gujarati terminology). However, according to his memory, the textile «was softer.» When he joined the shrine, many years ago, this *virali pattu* was already a fragment. Pieces were given to whosoever asked for it for medical purposes. The *virali pattu* pieces were used to treat boils in the ear. The priest said: «A small fragment of a *virali pattu* is tied around *devadaru* wood and dipped in *gingli* oil. Then it is lit. While burning, the drops of the seething oil are collected. Cooled down, they are applied to the ear. That cures immediately.»

This practice is generally well known in North Malabar where it is called *panthatailam* (literally «collected from the oil flame»).

This priest was the only informant who remembered that the leaf design of his *virali pattu* was locally known as *virali dalangal*, i.e. *virali* (with) petals. He used the term *viravali* synonymous for *virali*.

Even though *virali pattu* textiles must have once been common to all temples of North Malabar, they seem to have been specifically important items to Shaktiya shrines where the *puja* is conducted by the *pitarar*-community. These are the following temples: Madayi kavu, Mannampuratthu kavu, Kalari vatukkal, Mamani kunnu, Kaliyam valli kavu, Pishari kavu, and the similar shrine at Kotungallur in Trichur District. Except for the first, none of these Shaktiya shrines possesses a real *virali pattu* nowadays – or even a fragment – but Madayi kavu or Tiruvarkattu kavu near Payangadi, is a large, well-endowed temple of the mother-goddess Bhagavati. The goddess is worshipped by members of all local communities. Meat, fish and liquor are offered to her. The daily *puja* is conducted by the *pitarar*-priests who are considered lower in status than *nambudri*-Brahmins. According to local esteem, they are practitioners of *madyama puja* which involves animal sacrifice and are therefore degraded in rank. These priests wear the sacred thread, but they eat meat and fish and drink liquor themselves.

The *mutha pidarar* or officiating priest of this shrine, Narayana, informed us: «Formerly, we possessed many *virali pattu* textiles. The silk comes from China, Turkey, Paris (i.e. France), Japan and China are the places where real silk is produced. On the occasion of his birthday, the Maharaja of Travancore used to send two men called *arikkar* to this shrine. They brought one *virali pattu* and Rs 300 to conduct a *puja* for three days at the shrine. Like this we received one *virali pattu* and a good amount of money every year. This happened till about sixty years ago; the custom has since stopped. «Tiruvarkattu Bhagavati is the goddess, worshipped also by the family of the Maharaja of Travancore. There is a *shaka*, branch, of this temple in Travancore itself. On the day of *andu pirannal*, the birthday, a man from here must carry *prasad* to the Maharaja. Nowadays, this practice no longer exists, but occasionally we receive money from the royal family as an offering, sent to us by postal money order.»

It is well possible that this shrine once possessed several *virali pattu* and could therefore «hire» them out occasionally. The chief priest says: «For the wedding ceremony of the royal family of Chirakkal, a *virali pattu* was taken from the shrine (Madayi kavu), but it was returned after the function. It was used to wrap the shoulder of the king or the bridegroom – prince.»

When we discussed this with the eldest member of the royal family of Chirakkal, he only mentioned (1984) that they used to honour distinguished performers of *teyyam* divinities by giving them *pattum valayum*, i.e. a *virali pattu* and golden bangles. And whenever any landlord went to have an audience with his king, he was supposed to present him with *pattum ponnum*, i.e. a *virali pattu* and a gold coin.

There was no discrimination of motif types within *virali pattu*. All of them served the same needs: till they were in tatters they were used for decorating the deity, and the fragments «where used as medicine.» The two pieces left to the shrine are only used for the *titambu*, procession idol, but formerly, the main priest remembers, «a full length *virali pattu* of circa seven metres was needed to wrap the *sapta matrika* images which are life-size figures in this shrine, made of *khatisarkara* (i.e. clay mixed with lime and jaggery.)»

But nowadays the two *virali pattu* pieces (samples 1 and 2) are mainly used to decorate the procession idol, locally known as *titambu* which is taken out on the occasion of the annual festival. It takes place on the day of *puram* during the month of *minam* (i.e. March/April). In this procession, all three venerated objects considered auspicious and necessary belongings of a Shaktiya shrine are carried in the procession: *virali pattu*, the sacred silk cloth, *valampiri shankhu*, a conch with a clockwise spiral, and *nandaka val*, a specific sword, which, in the case of Madayi kavu, is made of gold. The *virali pattu* is used as the backdrop forming a halo of the tiny procession idol. The textile is covered partly with golden ornaments like crescent moons, lotus flowers, chains etc. and is surmounted by a moon and several metallic umbrellas. From the backside, the design of the *virali pattu* is well visible.

In another Shaktiya shrine, Kalarivatukkal near Valapattanam, no real *virali pattu* was anymore available. We were shown several textile fragments by the temple priests which are used nowadays as *virali pattu*, but none of these was «genuine» in material. This temple, too, has a wooden group of *sapta matrika* which, when we visited the shrine, was not wrapped with any cloth nor did it have a canopy. In the annual festival, their *titambu* procession idol is decorated with modern red, printed textile (1984), even though at this occasion the golden ornaments fixed on it are the same as in Madayi kavu. There they remain during the year in a treasure chamber. The golden sword and the real *virali pattu*, however, are not given away from Madayi kavu.

In the Kotungallur shrine of the mother-goddess again, formerly a *virali pattu* was used – according to the local head priest, Narayana in 1984 – to wrap the main idol made of wood of the jackfruit tree. Nowadays, ordinary red silk is used.

No *virali pattu* is available anymore with the Christian communities in Trichur, but we were informed by Mr. Porunjukutty, Principal of the College of Fine Arts in Trivandrum, that at several ceremonial occasions like the *kurbana* the *kuppayan* main priest officiating used a *virali pattu* as part

of his ceremonial dress (at Palayur Church near Trichur). – This seems to be an old custom, because on a large board displayed in a private museum attached to a church in Trichur, we found among the 72 privileges granted to Christians by the Maharaja of Cochin the permission to wear *virali pattu*.

Similar to the *dhulicitra* ritualistic floor drawings documented by C. Reis Jones (1981) in South Malabar, in North Malabar the *viralipadmmam*, i.e. the *virali* lotus (design), is drawn by Tantric Brahmins on the floor in powder colours for the invocation of the mother-goddess Bhagavati. This information came from the priest of Kalakat illam, where such a *puja* is regularly performed. Today, a printed book is in use, a copy of which we have seen in Kalakat illam, from which the various designs are copied. However, no form of these ornamental *yantra*-drawings specifically reminds one of traditional *patola* motifs.

On walls, beams, pillars or pilasters of most of the temples<sup>13</sup> and *teyyam* shrines of North Malabar one finds step-designed paintings of simple ornaments in red, white, yellow, black and blue. Green is generally missing. These patterned forms are usually recognized by the local priests as *virali pattu*. By tradition the Kidaran community claims to have the sole right to paint these motifs called *virali dalan*, *virali* pattern (literally «petals»).

Our informant, Mr. Raman Gurukkal, states that he learned this art of wall-painting from his father. There is no text or written reference material available. In his painting he uses mineral and vegetable colours: black, yellow, red, white and green. He says that he knows only a few designs and remembers to have seen a real *virali pattu* in his childhood.

That not only shrines but palaces and ships too were decorated with *virali pattu* designs is reflected in an invocatory song for the goddess Marakkalathilamma. While elaborately describing the construction of the ship, the song mentions that many paintings were drawn on the walls of the boat, one of them depicting the goddess Bhadrakali:

*Vetalam muthukilu viravalipattu*  
*ezhuthi tirkunnu*  
*Vetalam muthukilu Shri Bhadrakali*  
*ezhuthi sivanatikal...*

On top of the *vetalam*-animal *virali pattu* is  
 completely drawn  
 On top of the *vetalam*-animal Bhadrakali is  
 drawn by Sivanatikal...

13 Splendid wall-paintings with *virali pattu* designs appear on 17th century murals in Southern Kerala in Pundarikapuram temple (see Sivaramamurti, 1974: fig. 154), and 18th century murals in Peramangalam Shiva-temple (see Sivaramamurti, 1968: fig. 154); *virali pattu* worn as a dress by a sage (Narada) is depicted on the *Umamahesvara*-panel in Mattancheri palace (see Sivaramamurti, 1968: fig. 89); as a dress as well as back drop for Rama, it figures in Munsterberg, H. 1970, *Art of India and Southeast Asia*, p. 145.

It is obvious that on buildings the paintings represent or even replace the precious and auspicious *virali pattu* textiles. Here are a few examples:

In the Bhagavati shrine next to Kalakat illam where *teyyam* performances are carried out regularly, the insignia of the *teyyam* deity are kept on a platform, the backside of which is painted with *virali pattu* designs. This was painted by Raman Gurullal (about 70 years old) who states that formerly a real *virali pattu* was used in this shrine to wrap the pedestal and to serve as a backdrop for the *teyyam* insignia. The same painter has recently renovated the ceiling of the Krishna temple in Trichambaram, applying the traditional *virali pattu* motifs.

Specifically beautiful, even though of recent date, is the painted gable roof of the *teyyam* shrine inside the Annur pumala kavu shrine. Here, a *virali pattu* seems to be actually stretched behind various, three dimensionally carved *teyyam* sculptures such as Vishnumurti (i.e. Narashimhan), Bhagavati, twice Viran and several snakes.

At the Shiva temple at Chokli near Tellichery, the ceiling of the *namaskara mandapa* is beautifully decorated with wooden sculptures of the *ashta dikpalas*, the gods of the eight directions. The square borders around these sculpture panels are all decorated with small *virali pattu* designs; the broad beams however are painted to create the impression that real *virali pattu* textiles are wrapped around them.

To add a few more prominent examples of such *virali pattu* designs painted on temples – what one will find at more or less all traditional and old shrines of North Malabar – the following may be mentioned:

In the shrines at Kottappuram near Nileswar, where the *teyyam* Vishnumurti originated, a *virali pattu* is painted as backdrop behind the insignia of this *teyyam*. – At the Vadakkunnathan temple at Trichur, the outside wall just below the roof is still superbly covered with *virali pattu* designs, clearly indicating a difference between a main field and the borders. – In the Subramanyam temple of Payyanur town, the beams and the ceilings of the outer wall are well painted with various *virali pattu* designs as is the entrance hall of the Srivalayanar temple in Calicut.

But in Muslim mosques of Kerala one can find the *virali pattu* designs as well, specifically on the *mimper*, i.e. the *minbar* or pulpit in the mosque from which the *khutbah* or sermon is recited. One of the finest *minbars* made of jackfruit tree wood exists in the Older Jumma athpalli (Mosque) of Punnol near Tellicherry and is said to be more than 400 years old. The exquisite paintings of *virali pattu* designs are lacquered. It gives an impression as if this seat for a religious lecturer is covered with a cloth. Although all informants in this mosque were familiar with the term «*virali pattu*», none of them knew an actual cloth or could comment on it.

All these decorations on the walls and wooden structures with *virali pattu* designs are more than mere beautifications: they reflect the auspiciousness associated with the actual *virali pattu* and are believed to have a pleasing as well as benevolent effect on the temple-goer.

## 2. *Virali Pattu/Patola textiles in Kerala – today*

In North Malabar, we found (1983) the following samples of original *virali pattu*, i.e. *patola* textiles:

### *Sample 1*

Owner:	Bhagavati shrine of Madayi kavu, near Payangadi (Cannanore District, Kerala).
Condition:	very damaged, but full-length and full width, including borders and end-pieces.
Size:	455 cm × 102 cm.
Colours:	white, crimson, reddish orange (in the flowers), peacock-blue and yellow (only in the frame-portion).
Motif type:	a new sub-type of MT 5 ( <i>tran ful bhat</i> ).

The main field pattern corresponds to MT 5 (see in Bühler & Fischer, 1979, pl. 20), the colour scheme is however nearer to a *patola* in the Calico Museum Ahmedabad (inv. no. 444), see Bühler-Fischer-Nabholz (1980, pl. 23). The end-panels (*pallav*) correspond to those of MT 8f (in Bühler & Fischer, 1979, fig. 57) with minor details changed. Similar patterns are also found in export *patola* for Indonesia MT 22. Extraordinarily patterned is the broad frame around the main field: here large flowers with four roundish petals are placed in a broad rick-rack with small counter-positioned leaves at the angles. The diagonals consist of four dark cells, alternating with white ones. This type of frame is uncommon in other *patola* textiles.

A very similar *virali pattu/patola* is published by Harris (1909), which represents another subtype of MT 5. It differs from the Madayi kavu piece in minor details (all technical details tally with the *patola* of the Calico Museum, inv. no. 444).

Vertical borders:	the non-ikat silk is dyed from outside to inside red, yellow, red, yellow, red, green, red, green (broad), red, white, red, yellow, red, white, violet (blue on red), white, red, ikat starts.
Ikat-sets in the warp:	usually 10 (rarely only 7).
Ikat-sets in the weft:	6 (but irregularly 7 and 5).

## Individual warp-ikat

motifs in end panels: 17 arrowheads, of which two on each border stipe (i.e. four) are smaller. The silver gilt metal is coiled around twisted yellow silk thread, forming simple arrowhead designs in the monochrome section of the major end panel.

*Sample 2*

Owner: Bhagavati shrine of Madayi kavu, near Payangadi (Cannanore District, Kerala).  
 Condition: Fragment (end panels completely missing), *jari* border added. The fragment is stitched on red cotton cloth.  
 Size: Unrecorded.  
 Colours: White, red, orange, greenish blue, black. All colours appear in warp and weft in the main field and in the border stripe.  
 Motifs type: MT 4 (*tran ful bhat*).

This sample consists of a main field pattern as well as a three-part frame (of which, however, only vertical portions have remained). Since the end panels are missing, the sub-type of MT 4 cannot be defined.

This *virali pattu* corresponded in all minor details with an original *patolu* we had brought from Ahmedabad. MT 4 is found as pl. 19 in Bühler & Fischer (1979) or as pl. 27 in Bühler-Fischer-Nabholz (1980) in the Calico Museum, inv. no. 2486.

All technical details correspond with this piece:

Ikat-sets in the warp: usually 10 (rarely 9).  
 Ikat-sets in the weft: 5.  
 Vertical border: the non-ikat silk is dyed from outside to inside red, orange, red, white, red, blue-red, blue, red, white, red, red, blue, orange, blue, red, white, black (red on blue), white, red, blue, ikat starts.

*Sample 3*

Owner: Mr. Balagangadharan at Payyanur (Cannanore District, Kerala).  
 Condition: Only a tiny fragment of the outside vertical border and bits of double ikat warp and weft threads remain.  
 Motif type: Not discernable.  
 Colours of warp and weft portion: red and white.  
 Ikat-sets in the warp: 7.  
 Ikat-sets in the weft: Not discernable.  
 Vertical borders: Only a portion is available in the colours red, yellow, red, green. All warp-threads are double.

*Sample 4*

Owner: Mr. Sridharan Thirumumbu at Kalakattu illam (Cannanore District).  
 Condition: Fragment, one corner with parts of the main field, border and *pallav* very faded and weathered.  
 Motif type: MT 25.  
 No technical data available.

*Sample 5*

Owner: Viswambhara temple of the Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala, (Malapuram District, Kerala).  
 Condition: Fragment, however main field with three repeats and one border complete, one border of plain red silk added.  
 Colours: Black-violet, red, orange, white.  
 Motif type: MT 25.  
 No technical data available.

In the main field, the dark lozenges have a red square centre with four white corner dots, exactly as in colour plate 18 in Bühler & Fischer, 1979 (not corresponding with fig. 113, vol. I, p. 107).

This type of *patolu* was mainly exported to Indonesia. A similar piece was recently purchased in the village Klungkung, East Bali (now private collection in Zürich). All these export pieces – including the one documented here – are narrow, to be used as shawls or *melmundu* or on top of a *mundu/dhoti*.

The *virali pattu* was observed as being used during a *vettakkaran pattu* song performance. It was slung over the waist of the oracle-man. The *virali pattu* is said to be in the possession of this family for many generations.

*Sample 6*

Owner: Mr. Raja, Trustee of the Shiva temple belonging to the royal family of Kottakkal (Malapuram District, Kerala).  
 Condition: Fragment, but with full width of the mainfield with both borders (a patch from another piece used for mending).  
 Colours: Red, white, black.  
 Motif type: MT 11d (star-like configurations of floral motifs in circles). Plain borders, the main adjusting stripe shows triangles in white.  
 No technical data available.

This type of *patolu* was mainly exported to Indonesia, especially all forms without decorated borders.

*Sample 7*

Owner: Mr. Raja, Trustee of the Shiva temple, belonging to the royal family of Kottokkal (Malapuram District, Kerala).  
 Condition: Red, white, black.  
 Motif type: MT 8 (Floral designs in the mainfield, cells with three flowers alternating with single ones). Plain borders and plain *pallav* with small individual warp-ikat motifs and a thin stripe of gold-jari work.  
 No technical information available.

This type of *patolu* (MT 8) shows in a main field twelve single flowers placed on top of each other. (The Ahmedabad piece of the Calico Museum, no. 1114, has the same, whereas a *patolu* of this kind in Basle has ten or the one in Zurich has up to fourteen. Some of these *patola* purchased in Ahmedabad have no double-ikat border either, one even a plain cotton one.)

*Sample 8*

Owner: Tiyyati Nambyar (Photo C. Reis Jones).  
 Condition: Most probably complete.  
 Motif type: MT 25.  
 Colours: Red, white, black, orange-yellow.  
 No technical data available.

The overall pattern is similar to the published ones (Bühler et al. 1980: pl. 43, Calico Museum no. 2712); however, the vertical border seems to be single ikat (warp) in one colour (red and white). The pattern corresponds to the usual.

### 3. *Virali Pattu in Malayalam Poetry*

There are many references to *virali pattu* in the dictionaries, invocatory songs, ballads and poetry in the Malayalam language. We have selected some typical samples, specifically to demonstrate the prestige value, the auspiciousness and ritualistic importance of this important textile.

A possible reference to the *virali pattu* as an imported textile may be seen in the following lines in which, however, only the term *pattu* is used, an abbreviation quite common in Malayalam usage. In the folksongs on the heroine Mathilerkanni<sup>14</sup> we read:

14 T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar, 1979, «*Mathilerikanni*», (in Malayalam, A Collection of Folk-Songs), Calicut: p. 174.

*Karakothi chithirapatu pattu*

The silken textile (*pattu*) with the pictorial (*chithira*) impression (*patu*) and with a border.

*Katalotiya pattonnetuthututhu*

travelled through the sea, she wore such a *pattu* cloth.

In a footnote the editor of this text comments that the *pattu* textile has «pictures and borders,» i.e. the main field and the border have designs (cf. the *jama-i-surat* in the Persian tradition which also means a «garment (textile) with pictures and borders»). This again is a clear indication that the *pattu* is a multi-coloured, imported textile, which has come by ship.

A similar phrase to denote the import of the textile is used in the ballad of the hero Kappulli<sup>15</sup> where the hero preparing himself to go to his beloved is described like this: He opened the *maivarnapetti*, treasure chest to take out the *pattu* textile, «ezhukatalotivanna *pattu*, the *pattu* which has come crossing the seven seas.» This *pattu* is later called an *angapattu*, the textile used in combat and it is mentioned that it has been used as *pukachha marappu*, a flower designed cloth bundle. Its function will also be that of a *kachha*, an additional waistcloth.

The main colour of the *virali pattu* is described as red, but there were black and other colours as well. This we learn from the following ballad sung in praise of the hero Tacholi Othenan<sup>16</sup>. He is dressing for a combat: «*Virali vithu thalayil ketti*, after shaking the (folded) *virali* textile, (he) tied (it) around his head.» Then the hero is described: after dressing in the *virali pattu*, Tacholi Othenan looked like «a *venmurukku* tree in full bloom» (with blood-red flowers) and like the *kunni* seeds of bright red colour with a black dot, «piled in the bright sun.»

To wear a *virali pattu* as a turban seems to have been a general practice for warriors. In the ballad of Mathilerikanni<sup>17</sup> the heroine sees a group of soldiers:

*Virali vithu thalayil ketti*

a *virali* cloth after shaking tied around their heads.

15 Anonymous, 1980<sup>4</sup>, *Kappulli palatte komannarute pattukatha*, (in Malayalam: Songstory of the Hero Kappulli Palatte Komannar), Kunnamkulam: p. 24.

16 Anonymous, no date, *Tacholi Othenan ponniyan patakkupoya pattukatha*, (in Malayalam: Songstory of the Hero Tacholi Othenan going to fight at Ponniyan), Guruvayur: p. 4.

17 T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar, p. 179.

But *virali pattu* were not only tied as head gear but as second waistcloths. Here is a lengthy description of how a hero gets ready for combat:<sup>18</sup>

«Komannar, taking a bunch of keys, goes to the basement storeroom and opens the door. He opens (there) the treasure box, quickly taking out the *chamayangal* (decorative items), opens the *pukacha marappu*, [flower (designed) cloth bundle], removes the flower designed cloth from the *kuzhal* pipe, takes the sword and the shield with reverence, locks again the treasure room, comes out to the *patakali muttam* (the court yard). He begins to wear the *angapattu*, the textile for combat, in the *norinhututhu*, folded way around the waist. He begins to tremble like the leaves of a banyan tree (i.e. falls in trance). Then he takes a (second) *kachha* (waist cloth), rolling it like a ball, throws it up, aiming at the sky, and before it comes down to the height of five men, he adjusts this cloth around his waist. This *kachha* cloth is used to make several specific folds (which are now described with individual names) . . .»

This text indicates that the warrior may wear two *virali pattu* textiles, one around the head and another around the waist. The textile is so light that one can throw it high up, and it will balloon downwards. We can assume from this that the textile has no front and back, but is equally useable on both sides. Furthermore, it may be noted that one *virali pattu* was stored in a (bamboo) pipe, a practice known to general informants until today. This type of storage is referred to in another ballad.<sup>19</sup> Here the hero prepares himself for the battle, taking out the *virali pattu*:

*Otakkuzhlil thirichuvecha pattu  
valichangetuthitunnu*

Kept as a roll in a bamboo pipe the *pattu* is drawn out.

When the heroine Mathilerikanni<sup>20</sup> goes to fight a battle disguised as a man, she too wears a *virali pattu*. This time, the exact measurement is given: 42 *mulam*, or «yards», the length between elbow and fingertips.

*Nalpathirumulam pullikacha kachha  
nherinhum ututhe Kanni  
Chempattu virali pattetuthu  
Virali vithu thalayil ketti*

42 ells spotted *kachha* waistcloth  
Kanni folded and wore the *kachha* the red *pattu*, the *virali pattu* having taken shaking the *virali*, (she) tied it around the head.

18 *Kappulli palatte kômannarute pattukkatha*, p. 24–25.

19 Kunnikannan Nair, K. P. 1954, *Korothu kotakkal Kunhikannan*, (in Malayalam: Ballad of the Hero Kunhikannan), Eriapuram: p. 29. (The following lines are confused; they may describe the designs of a *virali pattu* and the way the textile is used as a waist cloth.)

20 T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar, p. 80.

And from the Tacholi ballad<sup>21</sup> we know the reason why warriors liked the *virali pattu* to be tied around their heads. Here it says that the hero Odennan «tearing off his silken head cloth, Odennan dressed his wound on the forehead,» a reference to the healing qualities of the *virali pattu*.

However, the *virali pattu* was also the right textile to wrap the corpse of a warrior. In the ballad of the hero Chariya Aromalunni<sup>22</sup>, the mother tells her teenaged son to revenge the death of her uncle, while dressing him for the battle with a *virali pattu*:

<i>Nerittu vettimarichethengil vitteku nalloru manam thanne virali pattu vithanathote arthuvilichu etuppikkendu</i>	If (you) die in straight combat it is honourable for the house (in that case) decorated with a <i>virali pattu</i> it (i.e. the corpse) will be brought with jubilant sounds.
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In the ballad of the hero Olathulunatan Kannan<sup>23</sup>, this great warrior from South Kanara (Thulunadu) dies in a battle. His corpse is hung in a tree. His head is later cut off and taken along in a *virali pattu* cloth bundle by his sister. The text reads:

<i>Angala thalayangaruthukondu virali pattil pothinhuketti</i>	Brother's head is cut and wrapped in a <i>virali pattu</i> cloth.
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Yet not only warriors wore *virali pattu*, but any distinguished person, male or female. The *tottam*, invocatory song<sup>24</sup> of the *pottan teyyam*<sup>25</sup> in the form of a dialogue between the Shankaracharya and a *chandala* or untouchable, lets the latter say: «Whilst you use a flower garland, we use one from grass; whilst on your body, sandal paste is applied, on our body is mud;

21 Chummar Choondal, 1980, «Ballads of Kerala», *Sangeet Natak – Journal of the Sangeet Natak Akademi*, 55: p. 41–58.

22 Anonymous, no date, *Vatakkan pattukal*, (in Malayalam: Ballads of the North, i.e. of Northern Malabar), no place.

23 *ibid.*

24 Chenthara, C. M. S. 1968, *Kaliyattam*, (in Malayalam: A Study of Folk-Songs), no place, p. 162. The text quoted is from an oral tradition, but may be several centuries old. The Sanskrit source is supposed to be *Manishi panchaka* by the Shankaracharya himself, according to C. M. S. Chenthara.

25 Teyyam is a local divinity of Northern Malabar, worshipped in form of a performance; see Balan Nambiar, 1982, «Gods and Ghosts – teyyam and bhuta rituals», *Marg*, vol. 34,3: pp. 62–73.

*Virali chutti natakuollo ninkal  
manchatti chutti natakuollo nankal*

You walk about clad in *virali* cloth,  
we walk about clad in bark.

In the ballad of Navaru Kaimal becoming a *sanyasi* or recluse<sup>26</sup> the corpse of the hero is wrapped in a *virali pattu* for cremation and his bones are again collected in another *virali pattu* to be immersed in sacred water;

*Viralipattil pothinhu ketti  
ariyume nellumetuthovarum ammaman  
mūnnu valathu vechu  
ariyum nellumittu thozhuthavarum*

(The corpse) wrapped in *virali pattu*  
rice and paddy taken in hand went three  
times around the uncle  
rice and paddy were thrown, respect was paid  
by them...

That ladies wore *virali pattu* also becomes evident from the following lines of a folk song, where the lady Venatu Pomkoyilom Kanni prepares herself to take a bath:<sup>27</sup>

*Vithittututhittara marinha  
virali pattonnazhichu Kanni  
kachha kazhichum kanam kazhinhu*

The *virali pattu* which (she) was wearing  
after shaking it out  
is (now) untied by (lady) Kanni  
The *kachha* waistcloth is untied and the  
weight is lessened.

Similarly, the girl Mathu<sup>28</sup>, when sent by her mother to her cousin to marry him, wears a *virali pattu*:

*Mathunte ponnokke etuthuketti  
Virali pattu kotanhu chutti  
kalkuriya kotayetuthu*

The girl Mathu took (out) and wore her  
jewellery  
*virali pattu* was taken and tied around  
and the palm leaf umbrella with the short  
handle (a sign that she is still modest)...

It may be that here the *virali pattu* is referred to as being worn in token of the readiness of the girl to be married, but it may only denote an auspicious textile to be worn at such an event. That *virali pattu* textiles were used not only by the bride but by the bridegroom's sister comes out in Thurston's description (1909): during the marriage ceremony of the *Tiyan* (or *Toddi*-

26 *Vatakkan pattukal*, no page.

27 T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar, p. 169.

28 Chirakal T. Balakrishna Nair, 1979, *Keralabhasha ganangal*, (in Malayalam: Kerala-Language Songs: A Collection of Folk-Songs), vol. I, Trichur: p. 60.

tapper community) «the sister of the bridegroom must wear bracelets on both wrists, a necklace, and a silk cloth (*virāli*) on the shoulders.»<sup>29</sup>

In folk songs we find several references to the use of *virāli pattu* at rituals. In two instances a newly born male baby is referred to as being washed and then dried with a *virāli pattu* textile. When Kunkiyamma gives birth to the hero Kommannar<sup>30</sup>, they shoot a gun in the air to make the baby fearless. Then the baby is bathed:

*Kuttiyute talayangu thorthuvannayi* To wipe the head of the baby  
*virāli pattu kotuthithallo* a *virāli pattu* is given.

In the invocatory song for the goddess Marakkalathilamma<sup>31</sup>, the baby is dried after a bath with a *virāli pattu* by a Tamil Brahmin woman on the 28th day (i.e. the repetition of the birth day's stars):

*Virāli pattukondu torthikollunnu* (*The baby*) is dried up with a *virāli pattu*  
*Pattathiyamma* by Pattathiyamma.

Again, during puberty rites for a young girl, the *virāli pattu* is used, this time to cover the food sent to her by her parents. Most probably the cloth is kept by the girl. It is mentioned that the *tharika*, a coiled cloth on the head on which the man carries the plate of food, is made up of another *virāli pattu* – perhaps to create some distance between him and the sacred gift.<sup>32</sup> This is stated in an invocatory song for the goddess Chonnamma:<sup>33</sup>

*Palpungan vechu vasamakkunnu* The prepared *palpungan* food was kept ready  
*virakali pattale mutalittu* covered with a *virakali pattu*  
*virakali pattale oru tharika thirichu* a head-ring is made out of (another) *virāli pattu*  
*virakali pattukondu oru uthariyam ketti* and a third *virāli pattu* is tied as *uthariyam*,  
 shoulder cloth (by the man who carried the gift to the girl).

29 Thurston, E. 1909, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, vol. VII, p. 57.

30 *Kappulli palatte komannarute pattukatha*, p. 1.

31 M. V. Vishnu Nambudri, 1981, *Utharakeralathile Thottampattukal*, (in Malayalam: Invocatory songs from Northern Kerala), Trichur: p. 236.

32 Likewise the *patolu* is used on the saddle of a bridegroom in Gujarat, see Bühler & Fischer, 1979, vol. I: p. 268; vol. II: pl. 188.

33 M. V. Vishnu Nambudri, 1981, p. 98.

In connection with the first pregnancy, food gifts are carried in a ritualistic way, using again a *virali pattu* for a *tharika*, a supporting head-ring. In a folk song<sup>34</sup>, Nagadevi carries a mango on her head, using a *virali pattu* as a supporting ring:

A head-ring is made of a *virali pattu*...

The *virali pattu* being prestigious and auspicious textiles, they were considered suitable to wrap gifts or messages in.

In the ballad of Kunhi kanni<sup>35</sup>, the heroine is insulted by a man and sends the news to her brother in the form of a written note on a palm leaf wrapped in a *virali pattu*: To appease the heroine Unniyarcha<sup>36</sup>, her Muslim lover sends her betel-leaf on a golden plate, both wrapped in a *virali pattu*:

*Virali pattu pothiyetuthe vettila murukkan etukkunnunte* taking the wrapping *virali pattu* away she began to chew the betel leaf...

Precious gifts of golden bangles offered in homage by defeated enemies are wrapped in *virali pattu*.<sup>37</sup> In addition, any reward for a favour or some service can be packed in a *virali pattu*. This is the case in the ballad of Kanni<sup>38</sup> where the lady-messenger is highly honoured by the heroine:

*Virali pattonetuthu Kanni nanazhi  
ponpanam variketti* In one *virali pattu* were tied four measures  
of gold coins.

Likewise, the hero Navaru Kaimal<sup>39</sup> wraps his gold coins in a *virali pattu* when he becomes a *sanyasi* or recluse and starts on his pilgrimage.

*Rasippuranavumalannu nokki viralipattil pothinhu ketti* The required coins were measured and wrapped in a *virali pattu*.

Finally, sacred or important objects, regalia or weapons, are packed in a *virali pattu*. In an invocatory song for the goddess Kali<sup>40</sup> it is mentioned

34 Folk-Song *Kurunthini pattu*, connected with pregnancy, p. 334, footnote 13.

35 *Vatakkan pattukal*, no page.

36 Anonymous, no date, *Unniyarcha*, (in Malayalam: Ballad of the Heroine Unniyarcha), Guruvayur: p. 10.

37 *ibid.*

38 T. H. Kunhiraman Nambiar, p. 121.

39 *Vatakkān pattukal*, no page.

40 M. V. Vishnu Nambudri, 1981, p. 268f.

that her eighteen weapons are wrapped in a *pattu* cloth and one of these arms is held in hand by the goddess Bhadrakali. Furthermore, *virali pattu* was used as a canopy for gods and goddesses – itself a kind of «wrapper». In the *virabhadra stotra*<sup>41</sup> are indicated the items he has made available for the worship of the deity, among them a *virali*-canopy:

*Thukkumnita virakali vithanavum* Hanging and a row of *virakali* canopy.

This might even refer to the use of *virali pattu* for making a temporary tent-like shrine. In this respect, we might draw attention again to the invocatory song for the goddess Marakkalathilamma in which on the walls of a ship the image of the goddess Bhadrakali is drawn; on top of the accompanying *vetala* animal a *virali pattu* is completely drawn.<sup>42</sup>

A hero or great landlord may receive honours like a deity. When Tacholi Chandu<sup>43</sup> goes to collect his taxes, he is received in a splendid fashion, and requested to sit on a *virali pattu*:

*Malikamukalilum chatikkeri  
ponnum kaselakal randetuthu  
viralil patti metuthavanum  
vegathil kondangu ponnavanum  
malika thazhathu konduvannu  
viralil patti vithanikkunnu*

(The tenant) rushed upstairs in his house  
collected two golden pedestals  
a *virali pattu* was (also) collected  
quickly he brought (them) along to the  
ground-floor of the house  
he decorates (the place) with *virali pattu*.<sup>44</sup>

The hero Kappulli<sup>45</sup> too is once seated on a *tatukka*, straw mat, which is described as *virali mannan*, of a kingly *virali* design. This mat is later rolled up, perhaps an indication that the mat was no silk textile. However in this house there is also a real *virali pattu*, because the hero carries the gifts from his aunt Chiru wrapped in such a cloth:

*Chiru kotuthulla samanangal  
virali pattil pothiyunnundu*

*The things given by Chiru  
wrapped in virali pattu . . .*

41 M. V. Vishnu Nambudri, 1979, *Mantrikavidayum - Mantravadappattukalum*, (in Malayalam: A Study on Mantras), Kottayam: p. 109.

42 M. V. Vishnu Nambudri, p. 201.

43 Thacholi Othenan is a historic figure believed to have lived in the 16th century.

44 *Vatakkan pattukal*, no page.

45 *Kappulli palatte kômannarute pattukatha*, p. 25.

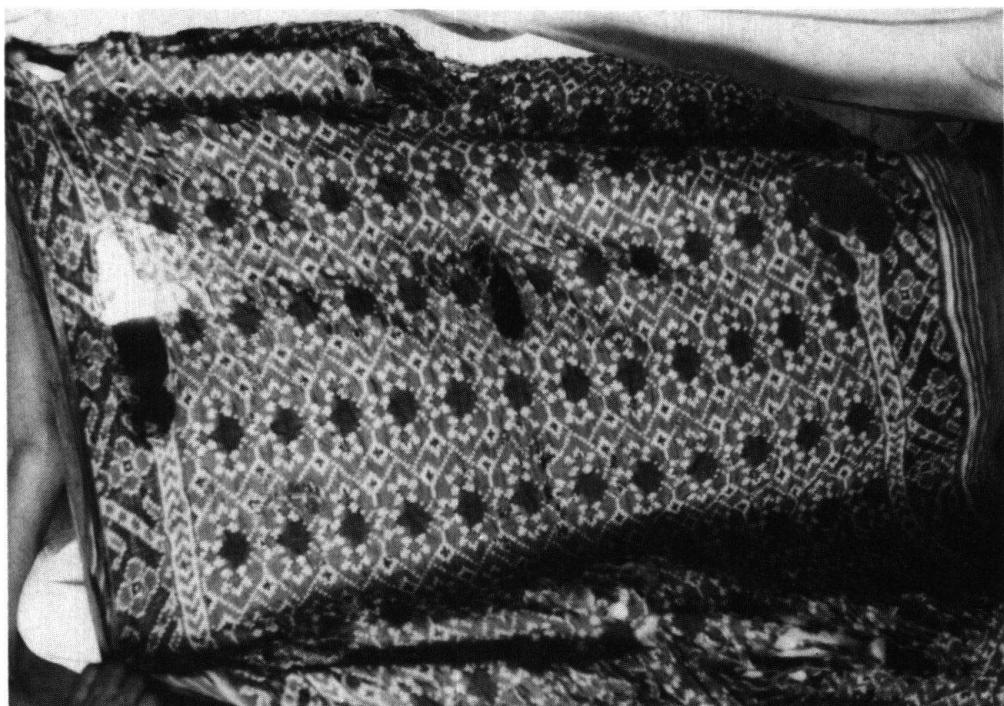
One might end this section with a few lines according the highest praise to *virali pattu* as the best of all silk textiles, from «an old song for singing while rowing boats,» collected<sup>46</sup> in Southern Kerala:

*Pattil viravali nallu  
pangajathar puvil nallu  
Bharathathil-ethirthuril  
Arjunan nallu.*

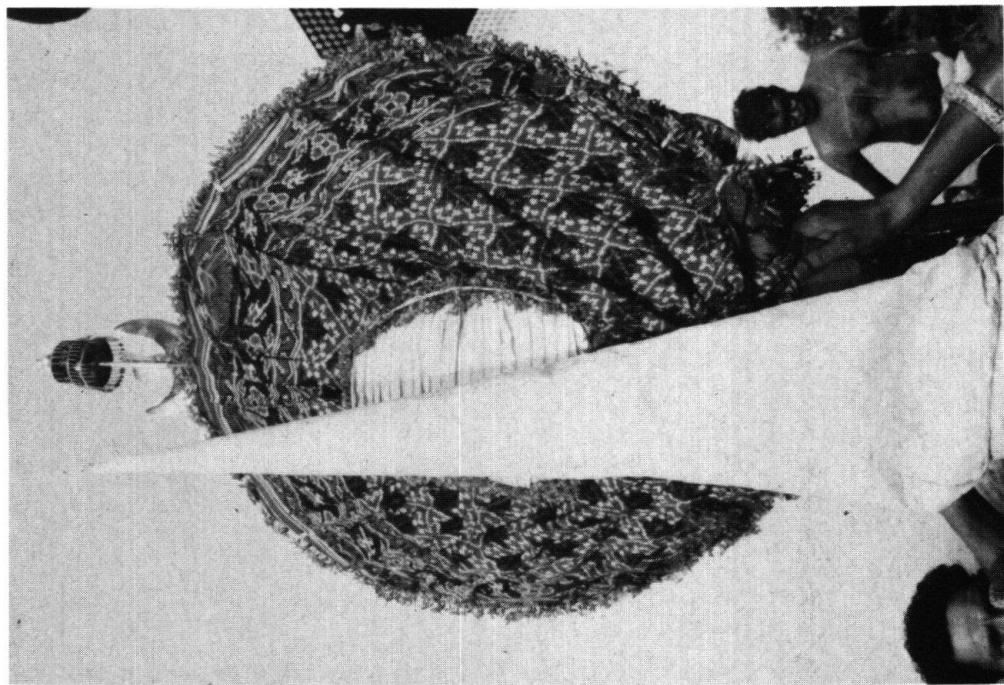
The finest among silk (textiles) is *viravali*;  
Among flowers, the lotus;  
Among those who fought in the  
Mahabharata war, Arjuna.

Fieldwork for this paper was carried out in the Cannanore and Payyanore region in October 1983. B. N. had visited all the *shaktiya* shrines of Malabar during his research on Teyyam. He had photographed the first *virali pattu* at Madayikavu which was then identified as a real *patolu* from Gujarat by E. F. Our collaboration was possible due to the financial support of B. N. received from the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund. Back from the field, this paper was drafted in Bangalore and revised later in Oviga and Zürich, Switzerland. – Our thanks for many useful improvements are due to Prof. B. N. Goswamy, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Note in Malayalam: *zh*=*l*, *ch*=*c*, *th*=*tt*, *ng*=*n*, *nh*=*n*.

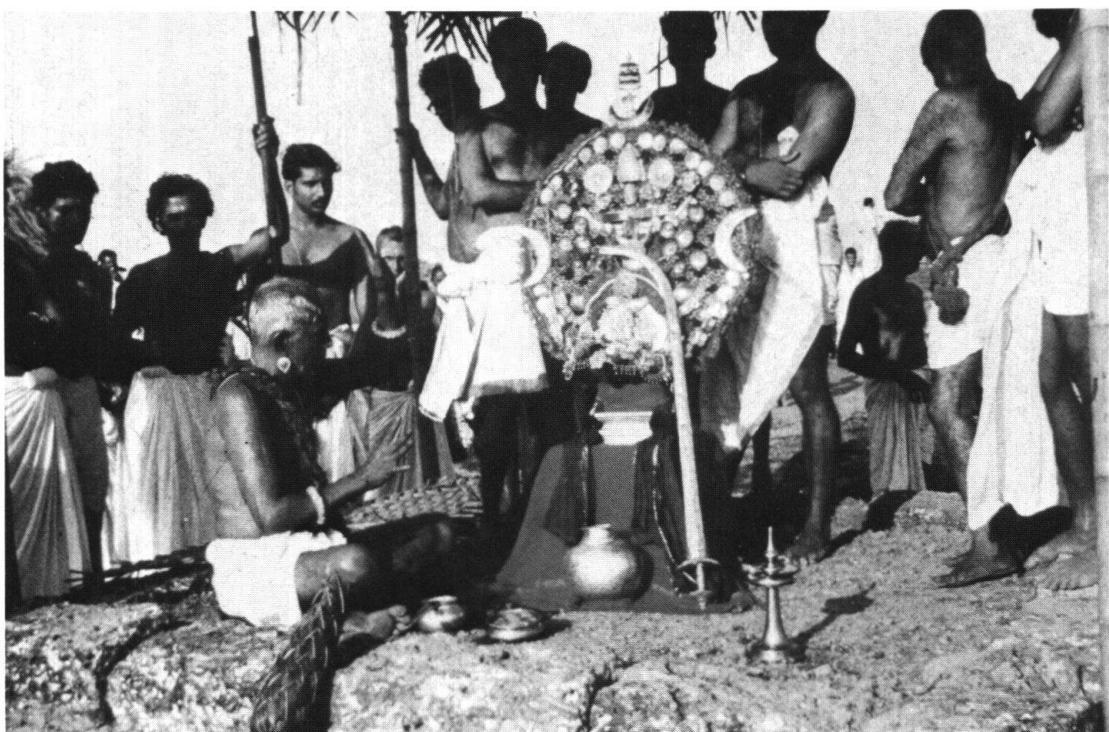
46 Madassery Madhava Warrier, 1968, *Nammute Pattukal*, (in Malayalam: Our Songs), Kottayam: p. 12.



Pl. 2 Sample 2: *Virali pattu* (Patola MT 4) of the Bhagavati shrine in Madayi kavu, used as backdrop for a *titambu*-procession ikon.



Pl. 1 Sample 1: *Virali pattu* (Patola MT 5) of the Bhagavati shrine in Madayi kavu, near payangadi in Kerala.



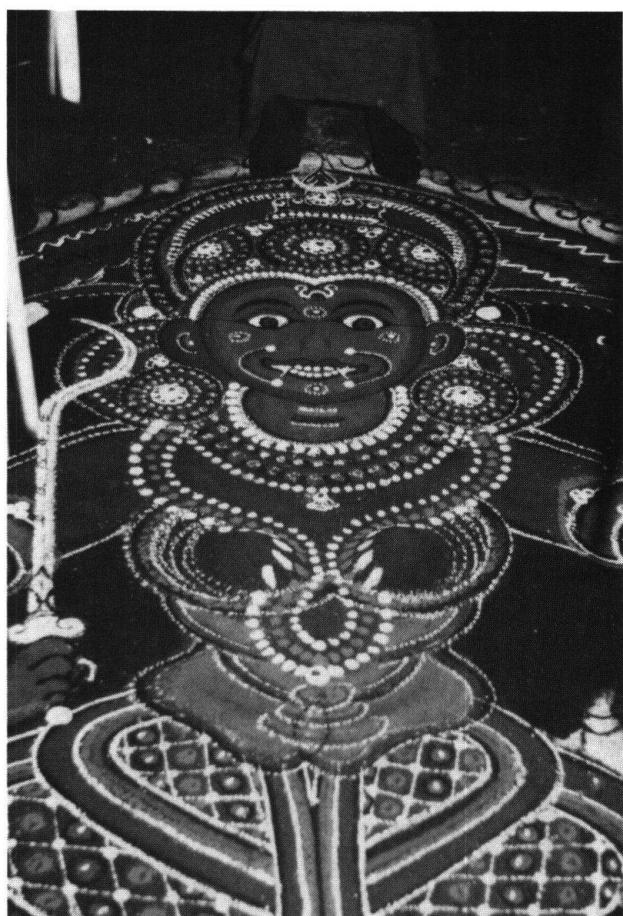
Pl. 3: Ritual use of *virali pattu* as backdrop for a procession ikon (see pl. 2).



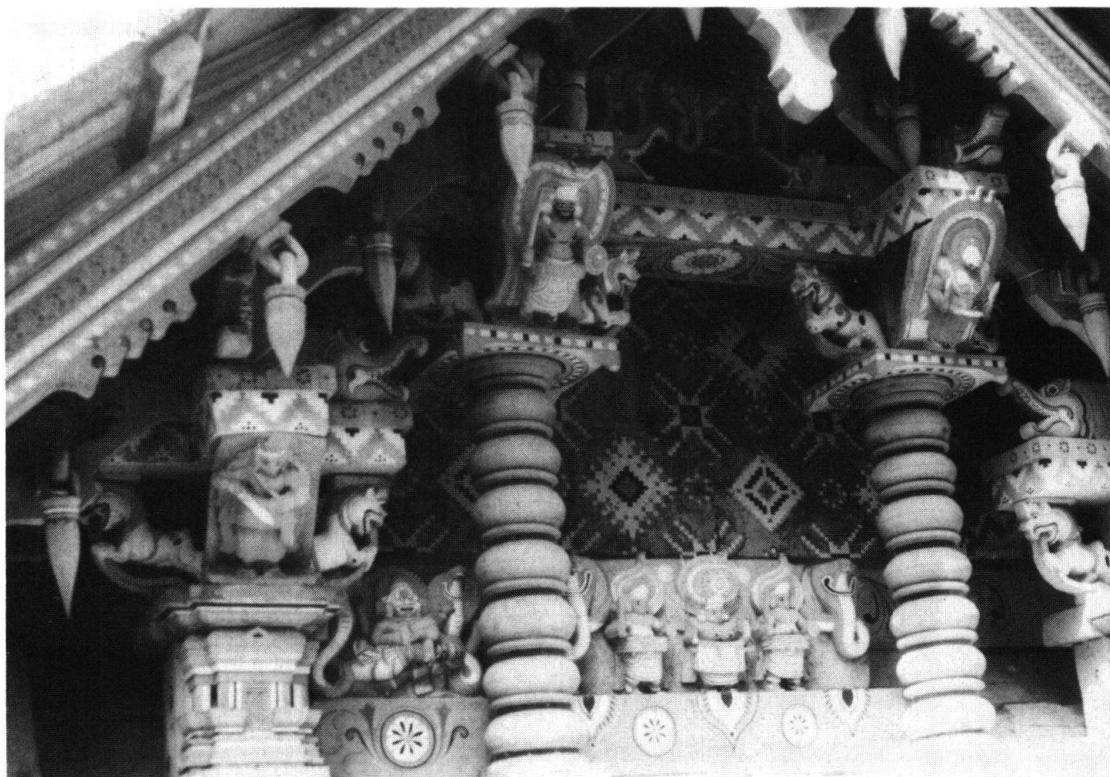
Pl. 4 Sample 4: *Virali pattu* (Patola MT 25) of Kalakattu illam in Cannanore District.



Pl. 5: Tiyati Nambyar invoking Ayyappan, wearing a *virali patti* (Patola MT 25). Photo: C. Reis Jones.



Pl. 6: *Dhulicitra* ritualistic floor drawing, the deity wearing a *virali patti*.



Pl. 7: Temple front of Annur Pamala kavu with painted *virali pattu* motifs.



Pl. 8: *Minbar* in the Older Jumma Mosque of Punnol near Tellicherry painted with *virali pattu* designs.