

Details of Research Production (An Experimental Theatre Production carried out by the Researcher Applying Theatre Elements of Kuthu Ratheeb.

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The word “Kuthu Ratheeb” is a mixed form of Arabic verbal noun “Ratheeb” (which means something done repeatedly) and Malayalam verb “Kuthuka” which means to stab or to use any weapon upon someone’s body. KuthuRatheeb is a performance among the Muslims of Kerala. This ritual performance originated in the Middle East, but later came to Kerala and became an accepted form encompassing several local customs and traditions. These are inseparable, unified and embodied in the Islam of the locals. Sufis focuses more on the religious spirituality. Sufis is constantly being tested by the almighty. They create their own rules by taking their paths. Sufis are in direct communion with God. Rifayi Ratheeb or KuthuRatheeb was related with Iran (Bhathahiya) born Shaik Sulthanul Arifeen Al Syed Ahmed Al Kabeer Hussanur Rifayi. This performance was popular amongst Sunni Muslims of Iran as Rifayi Ratheeb and in Kerala as ‘KuthuRatheeb’.

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The performance aspects of theatre research production ‘Repetition’

Performance set up of research production ‘Repetition’. The research production of ‘Repetition’ came on stage in 2016 at Natyashastra, a famous theatre research centre in Kerala. Natyashastra is a theatre group which has become famous by presenting political plays both in Kerala and outside. It was on June 26, 2016 that ‘Repetition’ came to stage. Before the entry of performer on stage, frankincense is burnt and the smoke and smell of it was allowed to be spread from the performance space into the audience who were sitting in four sections. In the centre of the stage, using rods, a transparent level is used. It is from beneath the level that smoke and smell enter. In that level a big cross is placed. From one part of the cross, a rope is hung. Also there was a stool in the stage and in the floor a chess board is drawn in a mirror with threads. Around the rectangular level which is in the centre, a rectangular frame is made. In the four directions, there were paths in saffron colour. Including all these was the stage in a rectangular shape. In the audience who were sitting on the four sides of the stage, in each one’s neck, there was hang rope to hang. The hang ropes were set sufficient for the ones who wanted to wear that. Electric lights were not there in the beginning of the play but only light from candle was there. Such an effect was given to the audience. Into the stage, actor enters through one path among four which were set in the four sides of the stage. As a character that is very peaceful is how performer comes through that path. Holding a candle in a hand and very peacefully entering, the performer lights the things which were hung in the rectangular frame which is arranged in the stage. The ember and ash of the things which are burnt falls on the body of the performer. Later, the performer very slowly lies down with his anterior part placed on a stool which is placed so close to the frame. That time, so close to the body of the performer, candles too are lit on the two sides on the top of the stool. It’s the performer who lights up the candle which is on the two sides of the performer and he lie in between the candles. It’s by bearing the heat of the wax which drips down and fire that the performer plays chess in the first stage of presentation. When the unit of chess playing starts, the presentation of music also starts. A special type of music which is related to the Arabic type is used from the beginning to end in the ‘Repetition’ presentation. In the unit where chess is played, the performer lies with anterior part down on the stool and play chess by looking into his face in the mirror which is placed in the ground. In the ground, in the two sides of the mirror, candles are lighted up. From this candles which are lit in the ground, into the face of the performer heat is stricken.

The implementation of elements of Muslim ritual Kuthu Ratheeb in the theatre production ‘Repetition’, investigation whether presentation has created irritation among audience, the experience of body, flesh, pain, violence and trance of the performer and its communication to the audience is discussed here. Later the performer travels through the story line by becoming many different characters and by receiving their bodies. But the presentation as a whole is not taken forward by the characters or the bodies of the characters specified in the story line. After the completion of story line, in the presentation comes a body which represent all the bodies mentioned in the story line. All the characters mentioned in the story line are hanged in this presentation. For

each body there is a state of transformation by conquering its mental states. It is in such a transformation that the performer follows a Muslim ritual Kuthu Ratheeb and certain elements of Kuthu Ratheeb ritual is followed and in the chest region of his body in the two sides using his two hands is strongly beating by taking a long time. The self torture which continues for a long time makes the performer reaches a state of trance. It is by hurting one's own body is how the elements of performance are communicated to the audience. All the freedom to interfere in between the presentation for the audience is given by the performer through upset and irritation. It is through the naked presentation of body parts and self torturing that the performer makes the audience more irritated. Movement and properties which are not feasible for native culture are shown (showing condom in between the performance and actions relating to that is manipulated by performer's body and in the end aiming any one audience, the condom is thrown onto his front is also done). Will these types of presentation irritate the culture of one land was also experimented in the presentation of Kuthu Ratheeb? But when the Muslim ritual Kuthu Ratheeb which is centuries old which has only self torturing elements is re-presented through the 'Repetition' presentation, the performance gets a paradoxical status. On one side, we feel that audience don't know all of its historical elements. This separates out spectators from performers and their experience is covered on just a documentary paper. On the other side (those who know), the same emotional reactions of myths and Kuthu Ratheeb are presented by 'Repetition'. Self beating and incising one's own flesh generates emotional reactions in the audience. If actions of these types are repeated, while recalling, what happens to the perspective of pain of performer is also communicated by 'Repetition'. By staying away from body art representations, by fixing attention on performer's body organs, in the awakening of body art, theorists start to write about concrete body's meaning and importance. That concrete body is not a carrier of symbol and that body itself does the presentation of the flesh. The view point of audience about body is a repeating one. That means the audience who point themselves by opposing the interpretive proclivity is how these kind of presentation happens. The term flesh cannot rescue a special immediacy. That suddenly instigates a reaction which is sensory and corporeal. The term flesh does not convey an artistic experience, but the ineffability of an almost artistic experience is conveyed. All artistic activities start from living flesh. Flesh is a material. In Kuthu Ratheeb and 'Repetition', flesh is used as a material. But on it, societal values and structures are imprinted. A litigation covered with flesh is body. They create levels of their own importance. The formation of art theory starts and ends with and in living flesh. This differs from semiotic and phenomenological traditions. In body art, mostly the artist itself is the performer. In the production 'Repetition', Usman V. K. (research scholar) is the one who created the concept of performance. The same artist has enacted that in the stage. Till the end of the performance, Usman V. K. were primarily the performer and artist, because in performance, customs and physical acting has introduced and the customs are re-enacted. The 'Repetition' performance is made as an ideal space for immediate sensual experience of staged action. Performer is the one who experiences body, its flesh and pain. To experience all the emotions of the performer, spectators also can reach this position. Otherwise the spectator can not be thought to be in the position of ideal recipient. In the beginning, spectators are separated from the stage. He hermeneutically receives the actions of the performer and reflects on it. In 'Repetition', the performer makes the audience realise his sensual experiences as symbols. Through sensual experiences, the complex and constricted language is communicated to the audience. In his book, 'Art and Agency' Alfred Gell had given the position of performer and recipient as agent and patient respectively. It prejudices the western concept of art. The theory of Alfred Gell is a communication theory. In that, art is a medium for energy transference. In between the presentation of 'Repetition', in a unit, sex is done. The performer by lying down is doing sexual actions in maximum extent using his body. In between this, the groaning and palpitations are raised as sounds and is transferred into the audience from the body of the performer. After that unit, a baby is born. It is pampered and his growth follows. The growth of this baby is shown in the next unit by the performer. The growth of the baby is done using stained socks on the right hand of the performer. At last, the socks which is the baby transforms into a gun and the performer's body falls into the ground and using less space is doing spectacular performance by lying on the floor. In all these times, the performer keeps direct eye contact with the audience in a sharp manner. The audience are prevented from getting directed into other thoughts or feelings is how the performer kept his eye contact. Fischer- Lichte's elaboration of 'presence' is not against the energy transmission between stage and auditorium. For the direct interaction between performer and spectator in the pre-conscious level, the intent and desire is inherent part and pre-requisite of all stage arts. It is multiplied or blurred depending on the style and background. The perception of the performer who acts and the performer's own sensory experience is not the same. Theory and therefore empathy are mediating processes, however natural they maybe. What mediation intents here is a conscious interference between perceiver (subject) and another external entity. The ones who experience empathy generally know that the object of their experience is not themselves. Even though it is primarily their own feelings and not others. This fact has not changed by the discovery of mirror neurons. In the 'theory of mind', the mirror neuron is an important scientific corner stone: "an understanding of others in terms of goals, intentions and perhaps desires".

Implementation of concepts of performance art in ‘Repetition’ and immediacy of presentation of flesh which is involved in Repetition resembling Artaudian theatre elements and elements of Kuthu Ratheeb in its performance. In theory and concept formation also the performer can participate. It can be done only by adopting a reflexive observer position, either after, before or even during the performative act. This “meanwhile” tends to be an issue because the understanding of consciousness of us which is culturally determined allows only one type of consciousness at a time (i. e. The experience of pain is not there while reflecting on the same pain). On and in front of a performance stage, this paradoxical state unfolds. The origin of performance art is from the surroundings of visual arts. It’s in the same time, swept away conventions which are theatrical and representational. Performance art is seen mostly as an attempt, an attempt to present an event in an authentic manner because actions have innate meaning in given situations. The term Allan Kaprow uses is “happening”. By drawing spectators into a concrete tangible world, the presence is created. It is a world not made up of metaphors and metonyms. Comprising action involving skin, flesh and blood, human beings are exhibited as operating organisms. This is a strategy which is found in body art.

The scope of ‘Repetition’ in challenging the audience to respond physically and the opening up of pain and trance to the audience when it adopts elements of Kuthu Ratheeb: The greatest peculiarity of Repetition presentation is that the audience are challenged to respond physically. During the performance, the performer hurts himself by beating in his chest, that time the spectator can’t experience pain or trance but through the action of beating which is repeatedly done in same manner, a pain, trance and violence is opened up towards the spectators. To the deep nimbus of performer’s body, the spectators are drawn in. Such modes can be seen in ‘Repetition’ performance and Kuthu Ratheeb. Towards the purity of science of the body, the spectators are drawn in completely are the performances of Kuthu Ratheeb and ‘Repetition’. How does each spectator respond to the clear sounds is related to each individual? That is according to their gender and nature. Richard Schechner, who is a performance director, sees the ideas of performativity and performance as connecting concepts and as a basic character of various cultural manifestation and events. Performance art is only one example. He finds the common characters of indigenous rituals. To make everydayness into extraordinary is a character of rituals. A room and time are limited and separated from the daily pace of life. Van Gennep and Victor Turner describe this as Liminality.

The peculiarities of rituals in the west where state of trance is implemented: The rituals in the west are often associated with orgasmic trance states, in that, rationality is transcended. The dramaturgy of ritual is defined clearly. The given script is followed by all the participants, both audience and performer. That describes the essential elements of performed act. In the scripts, one finds the ritual’s social purposes and aims. There is a documentary nature for the ritual script. Like that, the ritual script has a non-vulnerable direction that acknowledges a societal power structure which is existing. That opens up spaces for cultural innovations and improvisations. (3)

Foot note 3. – Victor Turner, *the Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1987).

The state of pain, violence and trance experienced in ‘Repetition’ and its similarity with these experiences in Kuthu Ratheeb ritual: The ritual’s (Kuthu Ratheeb) boundary is its space and time. In Kuthu Ratheeb, the first observation level is the performer’s being-in-action. It is same in case of ‘Repetition’ presentation. There, the performer experiences his body and actions. Through that, state of trance and state of pain which forms in flesh is experienced. Through this, the third thing which audience get is state of violence. The experiences of trance and pain are experienced by spectators emotionally and not. Through Kuthu Ratheeb presentation, the performer gives the state of violence into the audience. Later the performer observes the sensation by staying in the spectators’ internal position. The script performs the action. Then also, the presence of the body in stage doesn’t go out because in the presentation of Kuthu Ratheeb and ‘Repetition’, the importance is given to bodies. The pain experienced by the body is treated as the performer’s pain. Through body, the script is acted and body as a machine performs on the stage is what can be seen in ‘Repetition’. What we can see here is that the performer becomes an interpretive observer of his own actions. Flesh is opened and shown by the performer gives rise to an inverted theoretical movement. The performer can loosen oneself from her own flesh and be directed back to it through the performative script.

The Making Process involved in the research production ‘Repetition’

The process of making ‘Repetition’ production: It was in June 26, 2016 that Repetition production was staged in Natyashastra. The careful uses of sources like sound, intentional actions, lights are seen in this. The use of sound, light and action is composed in relation with Artaudian theatre concept. The use of music (sound) is used first in the production process. Action is created according to the use of the sound. In order to apply action, Repetition has given form to a space (performance space). In rectangle shape with four edges as open is how stage is formed.

Story line portrayed in the research production ‘Repetition’

The story line used in Repetition production. It’s only the body of the actor that comes as a character. That body enters on the stage and lights the objects kept in a square shaped frame. After that by looking at the chess board which is drawn above a mirror which is placed in a corner of the frame, this body does makeup using its cosmetic items. It is by using cosmetic items of ladies and cosmetic items of men such as blade, shaving set etc., the body plays chess. When the ladies costume items win the chess, the body entirely changes to the body language of a woman and changes into ‘Kunthi Devi’. The body then becomes Karna and one of the arrows shot by Karna gets struck into the eye of King Oedipus. Jacasta who has Kunthi’s story in her memories pulls out the arrow shot by Karna into her son’s eyes and throws it to Kitharon mountain ranges. The body comes out of Oedipus’s life that is full of tragedies and then goes to death. Before that the body travels through certain elements of Kuthu Ratheeb ritual. The obstacles, quests, journeys and realizations that the body experiences are presented on the stage by the body after death.

Presentation style used in research production ‘Repetition’

The presentation mode used in Repetition production. Based on story line, it is with the help of the body, sound and light that the body creates postures and movements of different types. The intentional actions of the body are what are mostly used. As part of action of the body, by receiving elements of body actions of self torture ritual which is Kuthu Ratheeb, the body presents Kuthu Ratheeb performance. By making silence as a part of the music, here music comes as a character. By using candle lights and lights of fire, the heat necessary for the performance is given to the audience and by arranging lights in Artaudian style and types, light comes as another character in performance. It is by placing restrictions on the spectators that performance is presented. The spectators restricted in number are made to sit in the stage with hang ropes in their heads. The acting body does close communication through gazes. At certain times, actors are made from the spectators through interaction. It is by irritating the audience from beginning to end is how performance comes on stage. In between the presentation, the trance state, pain state and violence state of the body that can be reflected through the body using ritual movements come in the presentation. Violence, pain and trance stay close to tragedies. These tragic myths are presented as rituals in the Repetition production.

Method of study implemented in the feedback collection of research production ‘Repetition’.

The method used in the collection of feedback in ‘Repetition’ production. Collecting feed back from the spectators who experienced it and documentation is also done as part of the ‘Repetition’. It is by conducting interviews that feed back is collected. The direct interviews and single person (individual interview) interview with selected spectators, theatre activists, artists and film makers of this type were selected and interviews as a group were conducted and documented. The part 1 of the fourth chapter of research thesis is Kuthu Ratheeb’s field studies. Second part is the study about the research production, Repetition. As a part of it, the documented interviews in the written form is reproduced in the thesis and is decoded. Naripatta Raju (theatre activist), Prof. Dileep, (Natyashastra founder and literature teacher) Sudevan k.n (Kathakali Artist) Prashanth Cherumittam (Theatre Artist in Kadampazipuram Natya Shastra) etc., research scholars of theatre main stream etc. were interviewed as groups and as individuals as well.

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