

Goril Theatre from the View Point of Brechtian Idiom

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Abstract

Goril theatre is essentially a ritualistic theatrical exercise. It's enacted in ritual context with the help of tableau pageants, demonstrations and theatrical performances based on the life events of Golu Devata (God). The present paper is an attempt to discuss, scrutinize and analyze the theatrical enactments pertaining to Goril theatre in the light of Brechtian theories and practices.

Key Words: Goril Theatre, Brechtian Idiom, *Kath Ghori*, *Sil-batta*, *Masan*, *Manautis*, *Kaub*, *Epic Theatre*, *Verfremdungseffkt*, *Distantiation*.

'Goril Theatre' is a ritual theatre, depicting the story of 'Goril'. 'Goril' is popularly known as 'Golu Devata' who is regarded as the 'God of Justice' and the 'desire-fulfilling presiding deity' by the people of Uttarakhand. C.M. Agrawal¹ writes that apart from Goril, Golu Devata on account of dialectical and linguistic variations is variously called: Gwel, Gwall, Gol, Goria, Chaudhani Goria, Dhve Golla, Haidiaya Golla, Dhudhailiya Golla, Dudhadhari, Narsingh, Nirankar and the list goes on. Dev Singh Pokharia² regards him to be the most renowned, highly-worshipped, omnipotent and justice-loving god of Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. He is the only savior and rescuer of miserable, harassed and dejected people. 'Kath ki Ghori' or 'Kath Ghori' (The wooden horse) is the emblem of his justice. C.M. Agrawal³ refers to E.T. Atkinson's *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, Vol. II, and Part II for the story of Golu or Goril. The story of 'Golu Devata' is supposed to have gained high popularity sometime in the tenth century A.D. Since then it handed down through verbal tradition which has undergone many changes in course of time according to the conditions of the time and place, yet the soul and the main theme of the story remains unchanged.

The history mixed with legend has it that Jhalrai, a Katyuri King of Champavat, married seven times in the expectancy of a son but to no avail. Eventually, he married an extremely beautiful and virtuous Kalinka, the reason being the same. With the passage of time, Kalinka became pregnant with 'Golu' or Goril in her womb. But her pregnancy made the other seven queens extremely jealous of her. Fearing Kalinka's special status after her delivery, they unsuccessfully began their utmost efforts to kill Golu even at the foetus stage. In such circumstances, Golu came into the world but Kalinka and the king were misinformed that she had given birth to 'Sil-Batta' (Grinding stone and Muller). These conspiring queens kept trying to kill the infant but divinely-endowed Golu survived. The climax came when these queens put the infant into the salt-studded iron box and flung it into the river 'Kali'. But even this heavy and clumsy box reached to 'Gorighat' without sinking into water. A fisherman named Bhana caught this box in his net. When he opened it, became utterly surprised but more pleased to see a newly-born babe with royal features. He and his wife, childless even after the lapse of twelve long years as they were, regarded the infant as a boon from 'Baaba Kailash' (the God Shiva) and brought up the child, proving to be utmost caring parents. In course of time, Golu grew young and, on one auspicious night was informed in a dream about the tactics through which the queens had plotted the conspiracy against his mother. In spite of his newly gained information, Golu, throughout his life, remained very reverential to ageing Bhana couples and regarded them as his parents as it were they who had brought him up. In the meantime, he proved his identity in front of Kalinka, Jhalrai, and his seven step-mothers. In what way he succeeded in proving his real identity will later be discussed in this chapter in 'Kath ki Ghorii' episode.

During the ritual performance of Goril, two plays have evolved over last one thousand years. The plays are based on the episodes of 'Kaht ki Ghodi' (the wooden horse) and fight with the king of Doti. Because these two events are not only very poignant and thrilling respectively but also mark epiphanies in the life of Golu. Knowing the reality, the King Jhalrai accepted Golu as his son and ordered to kill the seven conspiring queens but on the request of kind-hearted Golu, inflicted on them mere banishment with provision of their maintenance.

Goril or Golu as a prince became famous for his generosity, honesty and even-handed justice. In course of time, he acquired the kingship of Dhauri Dhumakot and ascended the throne. In course of time, his kingdom is known to have extended up to some parts of Himachal Pradesh and Nepal as well. As a King, he issued many orders for the welfare of the people. People started to regard him as the incarnation of God. He was assisted in his administration by Harua and Kalua, two miraculous brothers, who were born of the 'sil-batta'.

Although he was peace-loving and amiable King but when incited by three brothers Nakua, Manakua and Lakuda, there younger brothers of King of Doti, he waged a fierce war against the King of 'Doti' (Dotiyal) and defeated him, and later forgave these brothers. Such was

his generosity! In another occurrence, he helped the old woman, the mother of seven sons, whose sons had been kidnapped and killed mercilessly in Betalighat by Nakua, the cruel king of Betali. Golu conquered him and asked him to return the abducted sons back to the crying old woman. Nakua had to sign a deed of pardon and do accordingly. He maintained good cordial relationship with other Kings. In one incidence, He helped King Nageshwar Nagnath, the ruler of Kumaon with his capital at Garh Champawat. It so happened that a 'masan' (evil spirit) named Jatia had created great havoc among the people of Kali Kumaon. On the invitation of the ageing King, Golu reached to the kingdom in no time and ensued the ferocious and prolonged fight with this demon named Jatia who ruthlessly harassed the people and ate up them. He not only defeated and tamed him but also freed the people from the captivity of this malicious demon. He indulged in the war only when incited by his adversaries but more importantly he forgave all of them generously right from his step-mothers to different Kings and demons. All he did was for the security and wellbeing of his subjects.

His life was highly generous and given to the welfare and justice of the people. This illustrious and benevolent King visited a lot of villages crossing over Rivers, streams, mountains and held the court of justice there for the benefit of the people. In this way, he was regarded as the incarnation of God even in his life-time. Presently, he is the presiding deity of all the devoted, justice-loving and religious people. His temples are located at various places like Chitai, Ghorakhal and Champawat. People go to his temples for fulfilling their just desires and overcome the problems. They pledge 'Manautis' there. Many 'Jaagars' reflect the story and deeds of 'Goril'. Girish Tiwari and Shekhar Pathak⁴ included and discussed 'Goril-Jaagars' in their collaborative book *Hamari Kavita ke Ankhar*. Madan Chandra Bhatt's⁵ book *Kumaon ki Jaagar Kathaen* also incorporates 'Goril-Jaagars'. But here we are more concerned with the theatrical elements of 'Goril Theatre'.

'Goril Theatre' is a ritual enactment based on the myth of Goril's life. Several scenes pertaining to Goril's life are portrayed and enacted in the open arena, adopting the mix styles of Parsi and traditional Folk theatre. Particularly two dramatic performances, i.e., 'Kath ki Ghodi' and 'Golu's victory over the King of Doti (Dotiyal)'⁶ are worth-mentioning. They are enacted as separate episodes, independent and complete in themselves. There is no link between the two, except that they are the parts of Golu's life. Brecht's desire for the enactment of the play in 'episodic' way without relying on any other episode for the completion finds an exemplary expression here. Brechtian elements concerning costumes, acting, music and so on can easily be traced out in these enactments.

Kath ki Ghodi (The wooden Horse): An exquisitely carved head mask of a horse is worn by the character of 'Goril' in a typical pan-Indian fashion in which the mask is tied to the point of two strips tied together around the waist. The rest of the resemblance to the horse is

created around this structure. The character of 'Goril', playing with this toy horse goes to the riverbank of Kali. Exactly at that moment, when his seven step-mothers along with his own mother Kalinka come to the river-side for 'the ritual bath', he forces the wooden horse to drink water from the river. His step mothers giggle at him and ask him, "Is it possible for a **wooden horse** to drink water?" Quickly comes the response from Goril in the shape of a counter-question, "Then, is it possible for a queen to give birth to a '**Sil-Batta**'?" The queens request him to explain the riddle. Goril tells them how his mother was cheated by misinformation about the conception of a foetus and then eventual delivery of the child. He announces in front of the queens that instead of '**Sil-Batta**' (a grinding slab), a male child was born to his mother Kalinka, and Golu himself was the child. To prove the relationship, Goril requests his mother to bare her breast and pump its milk towards Gori's mouth at a long distance. Kalinka who was supposed to be sterile begins to feel the overflow of milk through her nipples. And thin showers of milk shoots into the sky and then onto the mouth of Goril, establishing the relationship between the mother and the son.

The scene is often enacted in almost every village where the ritual of Golu is held. The costumes used are negligible and the dialogues are spoken in sing-song manner. The actors are often seen playing their parts using appropriate gestures and mimes. The folk word for 'mime' is **Kaub** which seems to be a corruption on the Sanskrit word **Kavya**. For any kind of enactment, the folks say, such and such is only doing a **Kaub**. If so, a **Kaub** does not need any particular costume or property. Anything would work.⁷

German Dramatist Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) aimed at a theatre in which there should be no possibility of connection between spectator and stage. In the past, he believed, a view of the drama which he called Aristotelian had prevailed, according to which the spectator was purged of fear and pity and rendered a harmless member of society whose feelings were tied up in the witnessing of purely theatrical events. For the future, a non-Aristotelian or '**Epic**' theatre needed to be created, he reiterated⁸. Epic theatre believes that the actor-spectator relationship should be one of distinct separation and that the spectator should learn from the actor rather than identify with him.

So, in Goril Theatre, there is no possibility for the audiences to identify with the characters enacted by the various actors. The negligent use of costumes and other theatrical properties also help in breaking any kind of false impression or magical effect on the audiences. All these elements present naturally in 'Goril Theatre' bear a resemblance to the **Brechtian theory**.

Devotees standing there are requested to play the characters. The audience is left to imagine that historical event which is narrated through play acting. The instantaneous call for

some of the audiences in the play brings about Brechtian '*Verfremdungseffekt*' naturally. The proper English translation of '*Verfremdungseffkt*' has been a matter of controversy. The word is variously rendered as **defamiliarization effect**, **estrangement effect**, **distantiation**, **alienation effect** or **distancing effect**. In 'Brecht and Method', Frederic Jameson abbreviates '*Verfremdungseffkt*' as the '**V-effkt**'. Many scholars leave the word untranslated.⁹

Esslin enumerates the meaning of *Verfremdungseffekt* in his own way:

The audience must be discouraged from losing its critical detachment by identification with one or more of the characters: the opposite of identification is the maintenance of a separate existence by being kept apart, alien, strange—therefore the producer must strive to produce, by all the means at his disposal, effects which will keep the audience separate, estranged, alienated from the action. That is the meaning of the famous *Verfremdungseffekt*, a term which has never been successfully rendered in English, because terms like alienation or estrangement have entirely different and unfortunate, emotional overtones. In French *distantiation* is a happier term.¹⁰

'Jaagar' functions as the central structure for the narrative ritual. The 'Hurkiya' player plays out the stretches of ballad to intersperse the plays. In fact, even the dialogues are taken from metrical language of 'Jaagars' enriched with all its motifs, symbols and images.

Golu's victory over the King of Doti (Dotiyal): Another theatrical event of 'Goril ritual' is the clash between 'Golu' and the king of 'Doti'. Golu along with his two brothers of divine origin 'Harua' and 'Kalua' goes to conquer the kingdom of 'Doti'. He sends his messengers to the Doti King to succumb. The answer from the latter is "Meri Neeli Chaunri par Chhoot hwe jalli tah dhuri ka dhara hwe jala, chhuri ka chhara hwe jala" (If you dare touch my blue square in the royal court, there will rise a tempest and streams of blood will issue forth.) Golu accepts the challenge. A fierce battle ensues and the Doti king is vanquished. The play is presented partly in Parsi theatre style and partly in folk style. However, the Brechtian element is never absent. The king of Doti wears latest sun-glasses, HMT wrist watch and a colorful hanky on his person. He is even free to take puffs of biri or cigarettes in between the dialogues. In the battle-scenes, the actor playing as king of Doti, even in front of audiences watching the enactment, often asks his director, '*Ab mar jaun?*' ('Should I fall dead now?'). What can be more **Brechtian** than this!

Notes and References

¹C.M. Agrawal, *Golu Devata: The God of Justice of Kumaon Himalayas* (Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1992), p.19.

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²Dev Singh Pokharia, *Kumaoni Sanskriti* (Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 2000), p.23.

³ibid. pp.19-28.

⁴Girish Tiwari and Shekhar Pathak, *Hamari Kavita ke Ankhar* (Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1978).

⁵Madan Chandra Bhatt, *Kumaon ki Jaagar Kathaen* (Haldwani: shri Sain Printers, 2002), pp.26-40.

⁶For the text of these two plays, we are grateful to the villagers of ‘Kurjhan’ (District: Rudraprayag of Garhwal) and ‘Bajula’ (District: Bageshear of Kumaon) villages of Uttarakhand, India.

⁷Based on personal communications with D.R. Purohit.

⁸Ronald Gray, *Brecht* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961), p. 62.

⁹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/verfremdungseffekt>

¹⁰Martin Esslin, *Brecht: A Choice of Evils* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), pp. 110-11.



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