

PERFORMANCE THEORY IN KUTHURATHEEB

By

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Abstract

KuthuRatheeb is a ritual performance which stems from Sufi culture and it is the huge and blend of Shiite Muslim and Sufi culture. Basically, Kerala's KuthuRatheeb and its origin came from Kondotty, Malapuram district, Kerala, India. KuthuRatheeb is practicing by Shiite people in Kerala. Though, there are some section of people in Kerala located in Ponani, they are also practicing KuthuRatheeb but they are the followers of Sunni religious section. KuthuRatheeb is performed at ritual festivals, mosques and homes. At homes they are done to escape from incurable diseases and to fulfill the aspirations of the people. This ritual performance is taking place in Iraq by maintaining commemoration of Husain's death in Karbala war, In Kerala this ritual performance is used to propagate religious ideologies.

Keywords: performance theory, kuthuratheeb, muslim, kerala

Introduction

The word "KuthuRatheeb" 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 Sulthanal 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'.

KuthuRatheeb: A Glance

A Specialist person, who has got ample instructions and practice from the Usthad, does KuthuRatheeb. Usthad acts as the mediating power between the saints and the performers, controlling all the rituals and acts of KuthuRatheeb. Usthad is a title given with respect to a Muslim man and is used via informal social agreement, so KuthuRatheeb is a folk Theatre. Usthads of KuthuRatheeb have mysterious powers and the power to lead the presentation. These beliefs exist as part of a cult. This belief makes the performer more close to the performance. The sound, light, ambiance and the belief of the performer together enables him to enter into superhuman performances. When inflicted with injuries

on the performer's body, he will reach the state of Trance through his performance. Only Usthads who have hired the right or the elected ones have the right to give permission for the performance. Ustad needs to be given money by the followers depending on their status for conducting the ritual of KuthuRatheeb. By this ritual, the followers seek and search for blessings. It is also a ritual performed at homes with the aim of chasing out evil forces. This is performed by men from the Sunni Islam section in Kerala. Groups of 10 to 15 members participate in the ritual. The date and time of the ritual are decided by discussing with the Ustad. Usually the ritual is held during night times. It starts after the 'ishara' namaz at night. Participants of KuthuRatheeb are bound to be physically and mentally clean, follow the fasting and Namaz regularly, according to tradition. There are no specific stage arrangements for KuthuRatheeb. Participants sit in two sides on a rug or carpet opened out on the floor. The site should be clean. Frankincense or joss sticks are burned for fragrance. The costumes of the protagonists of KuthuRatheeb are plain and simple. White shirt and 'mundu' is worn with a small cap or clothing over the head. Participants sit in two sides after receiving blessings from Ustad. Ritual starts with a prayer. After that Ustad recite Byths and the participants repeat them. Along with it Arabana is tapped in the same rhythm. After a number of Byths, performances with tools begin. Kadar (a sharp tool with a wooden handle) is pierced through tongue, cheeks and ears. Blood from the wounds is wiped away. Finally, the Arabana Muttu is stopped after chanting 'la ilahailalla'. The first chantings (Byths) of KuthuRatheeb are Byths in remembrance of Muhammad Nabi (the prophet). Then after,

it is the expressions of the glorious and magical deeds of Sufi saints who are considered to have super human powers. This time, the beat of the Daffu or Arabana becomes swift and performers and audience reach a state of extreme elation. At this time, audience and performers become the part of the ritual performance, KuthuRatheeb.

In KuthuRatheeb, the pain happens when the performer torture their own body using weapons is experienced by the audience in a different level. Audience unknowingly, along with the performers, by swinging and chanting Byths, by moving hands and legs according to the rhythm of the beat of the Arabana, becomes part of the KuthuRatheeb performance. The ritual, KuthuRatheeb is popular in Iraq and is presented in the Darga of Mohayudheen Shaikh. During any time of a day, KuthuRatheeb can be performed. The belief is that Shaikh Faridhudheen, the disciple of 'Hazrat ShaikhKhwaja Syed Muhammad Muhayudheen Chisthi', has come to Kerala and has started the practice of KuthuRatheeb among Kerala Muslims. Later, the presentation of KuthuRatheeb has spread to all parts of Kerala and has also become popular in Lakshadweep and Sri Lanka as well. The book written by Muslim scholars for the presentation of KuthuRatheeb includes the glories of holy beings, especially of 'Rifayi Shaikh'. The books used by all the groups in Kerala are 'Kai Pusthakam' (hand written book). The respective Ustads got these hand written books traditionally. The performers after taking bath wear traditional dress. They don't use any intoxicants for performance which are against the religion. It is with complete devotion do these people observe KuthuRatheeb. If the knowledge about performance of KuthuRatheeb is gained

from any text, each presentation of KuthuRatheeb is performed differently from the before ones. None of the performance is similar to the older ones, because each performance is in its own special conditions, manner and kind. The KuthuRatheeb which happened in the Kottakal Iringal Village of Koyilandi is very relevant. The stage for the performance is setup by making a shed on top of a house. It was only a temporary shed. In this shed, the performance occurred. Including Ustad, there were seventeen performers. It has started around six in the evening. Both Muslims and non-Muslims have come to watch this performance. Even before the time of arrival of spectators, the performers occupied the space and the occupied space is split into two sections. They make a rectangular space. By spreading a mat, the space is differentiated. Encircling this rectangular space, there is another space. Spectators either sit on the ground or on chairs. Facing towards one side of the rectangle does the seat for the Ustad is determined. The performers split in to two groups and sit on knees along the lengthier sides of the rectangle. The performers, who sit along both the sides, sit like they sit during the prayer. The tradition of lighting kunthirikkam (Frankincense) and spreading its smell through smoke is a tradition that could not be separated from Kerala's own culture. It is an inevitable part of the Muslim ritual KuthuRatheeb. In KuthuRatheeb, different weapons like Dabbos, Khadir, sword, knife etc. are used by the performers to pierce their body during the performance. These weapons for performance are placed in front of the Ustad, on top of a pillow.

Rhythms of KuthuRatheeb (Byth and Arabana)

In accordance with the rhythm of Daffu, Ustad chants Dikr (praises of Allah) and Salath (praises of the Prophet) and starts the ritual of KuthuRatheeb. Devotees or spectators repeat this and one by one, comes forward and place their hands on top of the 'Kithab' in front of the Ustad. It is the local religious book created by the scholars of the land for the performance of KuthuRatheeb ritual. It is for the blessings from Allah do they place their hands on the Kithab. After that, all the performers including the Ustad chants the Quran verses of its first chapter, Surithul Yaseen (Quran's middle chapter) and Muhavadathaini (last three chapters). During this occasion, the believers pray to the prophet and chant Dikr and repeat the names of various holy beings of Islam. In between the performance, at one time, the performers keep the Arabana (Daffu) on the ground and chant the Dikrs without the rhythm of Arabana. The Baiths chant so, is known as 'Nasheeda" baith. Those which are sung during the performance without the accompaniment of musical instruments like Arabana, Daffu etc. are Nasheeda Baith. Nasheeda Baiths are praise songs of religious subjects. During when Nasheeda Baith is chanted, the performer in KuthuRatheeb gets rest. As a rest time does the performers see Nasheeda Baith. After that the performers, again start beating Daffu/ Arabana and start singing Baiths in glory of God, the Prophet and his followers. Baith again progress on. During performance, Ashraq Baith is also sung in memory of Hijra. It is believed that when Prophet Mohammad and his followers flee from Mecca to Madina, the people of Madina welcomed the prophet by chanting Ashraq Baith. It is the praises of Allah and the

Prophet. After these Baiths which starts with the praises to Prophet, does the performance start. These chants describe the holiness and super natural deeds of saints of KuthuRatheeb. During this time, the rhythm of Arabana becomes swift and the performers and spectators reach a state of ecstasy. This is the point where performers and spectators merge. Here, both of them involves to the performance in the same manner. Along with the beat of Arabana, performers repeats the chant "Shaikh, Shaikh, Huvallah".. (Oh almighty God... Allah). This time, each performer, nearly sixteen people, one after the other come and shake hands of the Ustad as a sign of receiving blessings from the Ustad. The performers receive weapons from the Ustad. Only those performers who got special mental power during the performance will get weapons from the Ustad. Only they will get special permission from the Ustad. This permission is known as 'Ijazath' (revelation). 'Power to transmit' does the word 'Ijazath' means.. The performance of performers transcends their body and the number and depth of the wounds increases. These types of them lose their consciousness and fall in to the mat on the ground. At this time, in the manner of healing, Ustad, by chanting some verses rub the bodies of those who are lying down. The performers receive it as healing and they stand up and go back to the squatting position. After that, all performers say Salam (Salutation) and pay homage to holy beings and the Prophet. After these chants, the performers start chanting Du'Ah (combined prayer) and under the leadership of Ustad, bring to end, the ritual performance of KuthuRatheeb etc. This is the time when the believers reaches trance because of their belief. The performers are helped to injure their bodies' without feeling

pain is by this belief and the trance they get out of it. Sounds, Light, dressing style, the presence of spectators (believers), the place where performance happens, all these help the performer to reach trance. At this time, performers and spectators are not experiencing pain in the same manner. The pain of the performer is in the body of the saint is the belief. The critical situations arises out of the usage of weapons by the performers are controlled by, and have the power to do so is, Ustads.

Beliefs and Performance of Performers and Audience

When a performer is analysed based on the ritual Kuthuratheeb, it can be observed that the customs and rituals that is followed by the performers for their performance makes the style of the performance better. For a good performance, the performer welcomes and accepts all the motivating and exciting states from the audience that strengthens their performance. Most of the rituals in Kerala are based on beliefs. For all ritual arts, beliefs and customs associated with it gives a beneficial circumstance for the performance. In the ritual performance of KuthuRatheeb, such beliefs can be observed. The performer who believes in - Thareek, cut their body with knives and other weapons sheds blood during their performance. In Kuthuratheeb ritual in the name of Rithaya Shaik, it is the performer's belief that there should be bloodshed during the performance. Conversely, in the performance of KuthuRatheeb ritual in the name of Mohyuddeen Shaikh, bloodshed is not compulsory. Their belief is that there should not be blood shed, and that if there is blood, it should be wiped off. In Malabar, the north part of Kerala, KuthuRatheeb is performed based on one of these two sets of

beliefs. The performance style of KuthuRatheeb in Kerala differs largely from the customs like 'Mathaam Chollal' a ritual among the Shia Muslims outside Kerala. Not only the performances, but the beliefs associated with these rituals are also different. The space and time selected for the performance, the style and character of the performance etc. are different because of the difference in beliefs behind these rituals. Regardless of the belief that the performer follows, the heroic and supernatural positions given to the performer by the audience contributes to their performance. The belief systems and perspectives associated with any ritual art, forms and stays the basis of all ritual arts, traditional arts and folk art performances in Kerala. The myths behind all these performances convey stories of tragedy to the audience. The retelling of these tragic tales are based on the beliefs and ritual culture specific to the region. Beliefs associated with the rituals makes it diverse.

Belief and Performance

When a ritual based on any belief is taking place, the participating audience gives the support of belief to the performer before, during and after the performance. This support of belief helps the performer reach the peak level of performance. In that state, the performer reaches a state of trance. When the audience witnesses the fantastic performance of the performer who is in a trance state, it enables them to view the performer as godly and supernatural and to believe and worship them. The beliefs of the audience are a source of excitement and inspiration for the performer in a ritual. What a ritual does is to show the strength of their own beliefs and customs and to convey it to the audience. The performance takes

place when the belief associated with a ritual is being conveyed to the audience. According to the belief, the audience turn a performance into a ritual. A performer who is also a believer will be able to perform a ritual based on beliefs with much ease. Belief is only one among the many factors that connects the performer and audience. There are many other factors. Other than belief, the time, space and actions used in a ritual are factors that excites the performer and the ritual performance. When a ritual is formed from myths and beliefs, those beliefs and customs associated with it establishes a connection between the audience, the performer who is also a believer, and the performance based on beliefs. But KuthuRatheeb and other rituals in Kerala are experienced and appreciated by audience without and beyond belief too. The performance experience is conveyed to the audience through factors like the time of performance, performance space and the different actions in the performance of the ritual. A ritual exists based on beliefs, groups and regions.

Conclusion

KuthuRatheeb is a ritual among a particular section of Muslims in North Malabar region of Kerala. This ritual is carried out according to the beliefs of this particular section alone. When a performer belonging to this specific section of believers performs the ritual KuthuRatheeb, they receive the support, respect and worship of the group of believers before and after the performance. The performer parts from the believers and attains a status of the supernatural or the god-like. Different kinds of audience unite on the basis of belief and respects the performer. It is said that a person who performs on the basis of belief is not a

performer. But whatever the performance is based on, a performer is always a performer. And what they do is a performance. All the factors that convey the performance experience affects the performer, audience and the performance. If a performer in preparation for the ritual KuthuRatheeb is a believer, the support their belief provides them during KuthuRatheeb performance based on belief, enables them to reach a trance state, to create pain through violence and then reach the state of trance through

pain. The performer who reaches the trance state creates some supernatural movements and images. In these movements and actions, there is a striking sense of the unusual and the impossible. Due to these unusual actions, the audience bestows upon the performer a position of greatness. According to the beliefs, audience sees the performer as God and prays to them. The performer receives such pays of respect and acceptance from the audience. .

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