

Drawing parallelism of *Alienation* in Brecht's 'Epic Theatre' and *Therukoothu*

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Abstract

Since the aesthetic traditions of west had not edify the real source of human suffering in relation to the contemporary socio-political conditions, the visualization of the enactment in theatre space distorting the spectators' critical nuances. Therefore, Brecht accentuates an intellectualistic theatrical method called Epic theatre which portrays present society on the stage and teaches the audience about the reality of the world where they live. In Epic theatre, Alienation effect is an important concept which signifies the utilization of theatrical effects and practice that curtail the emotions between actors and the spectators. Similarly, the functions of Asian theatre are working accordingly Brecht's concept of Epic theatre throughout the ages by the way of presentation and non-representational staging, disconnected montage of scenes, and most importantly the elements of 'alienation effect'. Since the time of epic, the concept of alienation effect was implied in folk and traditional art forms in the Indian subcontinent. In relation with Brecht's theory of dramaturgy, this paper aims to explore and examines the implicit and explicit nature of alienation effect in Therukoothu, a traditional theatre of Tamil Nadu. Further, the paper also analyses whether Therukoothu theatre has similarity only with the elements of epic theatre or with the idea which lies in the concept of alienation effect.

Keywords: Alienation, Epic Theatre, Therookuthu

Introduction

As we know in theatre the theory of alienation introduce by *Bertolt Brecht*. He was leftist playwright and director. Brecht has keenly watched and find around his time whatever theatre was happening it was the commercial, conventional and bourgeois. Conventional theatre of his time that runs on the emotional manipulation, with an emotional identification with the main character. The conventional theatre uses to break audience relation from society and effectively it connects with the emotion. And that audience is ready to enjoined with character emotion. Ones if audience enjoined with emotion, they use to lose their self and if they lose their self then they

never think about others. Here audience uses to take an uncritical emotional roll. Here audience uses to cry when the main character cried, they will laugh when hero or heroine laughed. They use to identify their self with him or her even when the character had nothing in similar with them. Brecht has seen that these audiences were manipulated by emotion and empathy as well as theatre technology in the concept of the fourth wall, Realistic sets, beautiful naturalistic lighting, and emotionally effusive acting techniques.

1. The concept of alienation in Brecht's 'Epic Theatre'

Brecht has got the influence of Marxian ideology; he was very much in the concern of social changes according to Marxian theory. And he has understood the Marxian theory and idea of Alienation. In order to incorporate Marxist theory into his works, Brecht devised various dramatic techniques to convey his message. Out of this Brecht has used the idea of 'Epic Theatre'. The characteristics of Epic theatre are non-representational stage performance, destroy the theatrical illusion, a disconnected montage of scenes, acting in the third person, use of music to break off and comment on action. Among other methods and practices, Brecht developed the Alienation effect the most important method of practice in epic theatre which is derived from Marxian alienation. Apart from this in epic theatre have several elements which are related to the audience participation and performance. Notably, turns the spectators into observer and force them to take decision by the way of arguments, arouses his capacity for action. These all elements contribute to develop the Epic theatre, and to make possible comments on the present socio-political, and economic condition. Moreover to teach the audience and realize them about their political, social and economic condition and to stimulate the audience mind to words the rational mind to think about the development of society. As Benjamin (1999) explains:

Instead, the art of the epic theater consists in producing astonishment rather than empathy. To put it succinctly: instead of identifying with the characters, the audience should be educated to be astonished at the circumstances under which they function. (p. 147).

In epic theatre the concept of (Verfremdung) alienation is the most important one. The word alienation in English has the meaning of turning someone away from something or inhabiting

them. Or the state or experience of being isolated from a group or an activity to which one should belong or in which one should be involved. But the most similar and usually used by Brecht the word is V-effect. Brecht made a number of attempts to define the V-effect. In his work, the *Messingkauf Dialogues*, Brecht states: *"It consists in the reproduction of real-life incidents on the stage in such a way as to underline their causality and bring it to the spectator's attention"* (102). The purpose of V-effect is to realize the audience to think about the relationship of cause and effect of their life and to stimulate the audience's critical capacity so that they can become involved in the changing and development of society. The Alienation is to make the spectator to develop or adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident and think towards the social changes. Since Brecht is inspired by Marxian ideology, and he has seen by the Marxian spectacles and find around his time whatever theatre was happening it was the conventional and in the state of the bourgeois. The structure of Conventional theatre and the style of performance in the state of owner-bondage and bureaucrat. So Brecht has used these alienation elements in order to break this conventional state. Because conventional theatre runs on the emotional manipulation, with an emotional identification with the main character. The conventional theatre uses to break audience relation from society and effectively it connects with the emotion. The alienation effect attempts to combat emotional manipulation in the bourgeois or conventional theatre. So this is the purpose behind the concept of alienation or V-effect.

The alienation is a technique which estranges the audience and forces them to question on the social realities of the situation being presented in the play as well as in the society. Alienation happens by using some of the techniques called- didacticism, breaking the fourth wall, acting technique, gestures, narration, and song. To show the bourgeois hegemony society, Brecht has chosen the method of Didacticism for his performance. It is the pedagogy to teach the actors as well as audience in order to uncover the class based societal life among the politerate. Brecht's plays are having didacticism in order to educate the audience or give a message about bourgeois society, economy, and politics. Brecht has written and designed his plays accordingly in the didactic way. This idea comes from Brecht's Marxist beliefs and he gave importance to Marxist morality in his plays. To show the bourgeois society negatively and the rightness of Marxist morality. The Fourth Wall" is an imaginary wall in the conventional theatre, which is making a

separation between the audience and performer as well the action on the stage. In the realistic theatre or production, this wall remains intact and the actors will not accept that they are being watched by the audience. In this theatre, audience does not have any active role. They have to attach by their emotion and they have to believe that the world of the play is real. In this bourgeois theatre don't have any kind of dialogue between audience and performer; it is in the state of monologue. Brecht wanted to break the notion of the fourth wall. Breaking the fourth wall performer will address the audience directly and an audience will also react. It is made clear that the characters, their emotions, their actions are not real. And the audiences are known that they are watching a fiction. By removing the fourth wall the audience must face the action, take decisions against the negativity of society.

In order to stop the emotional manipulation of the audience, Brecht has used the different devices for epic theatre acting. In epic theatre an actor should present a character in such a way that was not an impersonation, it should be a narration of the actions of the character. An actor should not go in emotional state he/she should break and represent the character' emotion because audience should know they are watching a play. If the audience developed an emotional attachment to the characters, then they could not evaluate the social realities of the play and they will not think to elaboration for society. By the narration of actor and his action should make the audience to ask the question, make comment and interpret what was on the stage. "For its actor, the producer no longer gives him instructions about effects, but theses for comment" (Benjamin 2). The epic theatre does not show the human nature of an individual but reveals collective human relations. In epic theatre, the story is the point of interest, not the characters. The story is the sequence of events that is the social experiment, allowing the interplay of social forces, from which the play's lesson emerges. Acting in epic Theatre an actor is required to play characters believably without convincing either the audience or themselves that they are the characters. In his book "Understanding Brecht", Walter Benjamin (1998) states the fundamental aspects of epic theatre as follows:

For its public, the stage is no longer 'the planks which signify the world' (in other words, a magic circle), but a convenient public exhibition area. For its stage, the public is no longer a collection of hypnotized test subjects, but an assembly of interested persons whose demands it must satisfy.

For its text, the performance is no longer a virtuoso interpretation, but its rigorous control. For its performance, the text is no longer a basis of that performance, but a grid on which, in the form of new formulations, the gains of that performance are marked (p. 2).

Brecht was “not interested in actor training, and might employ any actor who was intellectually and artistically interested in the problem posed by his epic theatre”. There will be the distance between the actor and their character and the actors will often break the fourth wall by using several distractive devices and address the audience. An actor can play multiple characters and use exaggeration in any way or repetitive actions to make their distance with the character and audience also will in the state of the wakeup for the critic. The epic theatres can present the gesture and a social meaning by doing one movement or action, it is the unusual and non-realistic way of situation. It referred to the 'social gest', as it is an action which makes the audience to understand something specific about the social circumstances which showed on stage. In epic theatre, the social gest is the exaggerated gesture or action that is not to be taken literally but it will critically explain the social relationship, or power imbalance within a social structure.

Narration and Songs are the important elements to set up or create alienation in epic theatre. The purpose of the song is not to heighten the emotion of the scenes or character but it is revealed or narrates what is going on at the stage. It is a very effective form of alienating audience from the performance or an emotion. Sometimes the music also helps to establish the alienation along with the songs but not by the content of the song. The song content can be serious, while the music may be happy and light. It projects the lighter side of the serious situation and the dichotomy and ambiguity of it ultimately alienates the audience and makes them raise the question of social realities which are being presented. Alienation also can happen by showing the theatre technology, in that the source of light, musician, can be shown directly to the audience, costume and make-up also alienate the audience by using in exaggeration way.

The western playwrights and directors including Brecht have adopted the stylistic mechanism from the traditional Asian theatre. Oriental theatre has deployed Brecht's concept of epic theatre and his theory of alienation. Noticeably Brecht came to know the Noh dramaturgy of Japan and has utilized many devices of the Noh theatre. Like Noh theatre, Kabuki, the classical dance

drama also has an immune influence on Brechtian theatre. This drama is the amalgamation of stylized dance, music, make-up and acting. John Willet explains the performance of Noh theatre as follows:

Actors often address their remarks to the audience direct; they have a chorus which interrupts and comments, and at times even speaks for them; and in this highly stylized manner the dramatist will tackle the greatest moral problems with a wonderful simplicity and detachment (Willet, 1977, p. 116).

By the explanation of Willet, one can deduce that the same devices of Noh theatre performance and Brecht's epic theatre techniques have been worked in the theatricality of Therukoothu. The use of a narrator who interrupted and criticizing the character and the course of action at the time of performance, the music orchestra team placed in full view of the audience, the actor himself introduce his character as well as narrate the performance with comments are the performance process of Therukoothu.

2. Parallelism between Brechtian alienation and *Therukoothu*

Therukoothu is the most popular traditional theatre of Tamil Nadu, execute with unique dialogue delivery, verse, dance, music costume and make-up. Commonly staging the stories from the epic Mahabaratha and Ramayana and dramatizing the stories of folk deities of Tamil Nadu. Now contemporary texts have been taken in to account and perform in various occasions. The Tamil equivalent for the term 'Theru' is street and 'Koothu' means performance. It is mostly performed in the northern part of Tamil Nadu at the time of Draupadi Amman and Mariamman (Tamil Rain goddess) temple festivals in order to get rain and rich harvest. Therukoothu usually conducted during the months of March-April and July-August. Therukoothu performance usually happens in the open air, and where three or four streets meet. Previously it happens in the gas lights. On the name of the stage, this performance used only a wooden bench, which is set up to sit the singers and the musical troupe. Performance mostly takes place on the ground which is open from four sides. The make-up and costumes are considered as the unique identity of this art form. In therukoothu only men take part; the female roles also played by men. Therukoothu

performer is having very good performing ability and the performance usually starts by late evening and gets over next day early morning.

The Parallelism between Brecht's concept of Alienation and Therukoothu: since eastern theatre is representational oriented, so here alienation lies in the theatrical form itself. Therukoothu theatre form also has the elements of alienation which lie in the each and every action of the performance. Sometimes we use to compare between realistic theatre and epic theatre in order to explain alienation but here the complete performance in the state of alienation. Because here nothing is realistic every elements of performance are representational or non-realistic. A representation that alienate which allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time it seems unfamiliar. Therukoothu actor is not allowed to go in emotion. Actually, they cannot go because the actor has to perform dance, he has to sing a song and he has to speak dialog as well as an actor have to react to the music. Here actor has to show the pathetic condition of character by the singing song and after the two line of song he has to wait for the complete the music and then he can go further action or dialog, in between the gap is nothing but alienation which never allows actor to go in emotion and if actor is not in emotion then the audience cannot connect their self with the character's emotion but they aware with the situation of the character's life, so audience never lose their self. For example, the most famous episode from Mahabharata therukoothu artist use to perform by the name of '*Draupadi Vastar Haranam,*' in this performance *Darupadi* character usually performed by men this itself is the big alienation not only between the actor and character but also for the audience watching men as playing the female character. Further the Dushahsna will drag the Draupadi on the ground by the pooling her hair and suddenly he will stop dragging Draupadi and one of them will start to sing song which is narration of story, till finishing the song co-actor will be neutral he/her will not carry any emotion of character and sometime between the passage of music being played enemy character on the stage they use to talk regarding anything which is not part of the story. Here alienation is appearing in several actions but the content of story or situation never missed. The Coues and effect of the action are presented effectively. And audience also never loses their intellect.

While the actor enters on stage along with him two sportive actor or helpers also takes entry with holding a curtain. The actor used to come behind the curtain and he shows his honor to the

musical instrument and Guru. But the action which is happened behind the curtain that not shown to the audience doing this action is also part of alienation, because of this action audience use to come back in their attention and they are ready to see a new character's entry. And the actor takes his entry as a character by performing song and dance both at the same time, which is nonrealistic. Sometime in between the performance if any crucial action is there which actor has to perform being character, then actor use to stop his performance and apologizes to the character and then he goes for crucial action. For example – from the performance of Therukoothu which writer have witness one of. (performance happened in temple festival at Kalapet Puducherry in 2016) in the performance of 'Draupadi vastra harama' usually actor who is playing the character of Dushasnah, he will stop doing his action and as a person apologizes towards the Draupadi 'Oh goddess Draupadi I am going to disrobe you as character of Dushasnah so, forgive me for that' and the actor goes for further action. This action is the biggest example of alienation, it breaks the continuity of story if actor or audience by chance they are attached with character's emotion that also gets alienated. After saying apologizes audience will not see that actor as Dushasnah, they will consider an actor who is representing a character. And the other hand audience will see the performance without going any emotional state.

In Therukuthu, the Kattiakaran introduces the main characters and makes the audience laugh by his jests. If one analyses the role of the Kattiakaran, there is no direct link between the Kattiakaran and the narrated story. In Therukoothu '*Kattiyakaran*' (*Sutradhara*), this character is the very important element of Therukoothu. The presence of Kattiyakaran is not a requirement of the story; it is the requirement of the form of Therukoothu. Presence of Kattiyakaran is also nothing but alienation because he is the person who moves and stops the story; he is only making the story contemporary or includes the contemporary context in the performance. Political, social and economic question raised by him. By breaking the scene, dialog, action, song, and dance as well as the story also, Kattiyakaran makes the alienation and gives the space to the audience to think about the problem which is raised by him. For example- which writer have witness one of the performance of Therukoothu; the play was started little later due to some reason but at the starting of play while Kattiyakaran was introducing the play, first of all, he apologies for the late but he tells the road is not good so we reached late even though we are paying the tax but government is not caring. But in reality, they are reached at the performance place one day

before. Further in the performance while the character Duryodhana enters on the stage and speak about the self '*I am the great king of this country, I have so much wealth*' and so on, then kattiyakaran stops the actor and he asks are you, king? You are a fake king! First, you return my five rupees which you have taken in the morning in order to by *Bidi* (Cigar). And he addresses to the audience also by the *saying* 'he doesn't have money for food, his house running by borrowed money and now he is saying he is great king'. Here Kattiyakaran made alienation between the actor and character and the other hand he shows the reality of the life not only actors life but also audience life. He stops to enter into the fantasy by speaking the condition of reality of their lives and social issue. He made a question which brings the attention of the audience towards the problem which they have in their day to day life and in their system. Thus it gives the way to audiences to think about their self as well as others' pathetic condition.

The performance of Therukoothu usually happens at the center of where three or four roads are crossing. It is collectively arranged performance which anyone can see. The audience is at liberty to see the performance on their comfortable they can stand, sit, recline or choose whatever stance or manner in which they wish to see the performance. Alienation by costume and make-up, the concept of representation is also followed in costume and make-up, as the actor represents the character and keeps himself alienated with the character, along with this the costume and make-up also very much sportive to not inter in the realistic performance. The upper part of costume called '*Marapadakkam*' and '*Davuroy*' is round and bloated towards up. And ornament called - *Mughatam* (headgear), *Bhoojakattu*(Armllet). This costume is exaggerated, too bright, ornament also too heavy and Dazzling which never goes in a realistic way always remains nonrealistic. Whether story belongs to epic or contemporary costume remains same exaggerated, bright and heavy. During the performance costume or ornament mostly use to get loose due to heaviness or fast movement of dance. Actor use to suffer from the loose ornament and costume then also he use to continue with his dramatic action but gives his full attention to the loose ornament or costume. Sometime actor himself stops his action and goes to back and keep his ornament or anyone from music pit or co-actor usually comes and helps him to correct his costume/ornament in the running show. This incident also makes alienation and second hand unknowingly it gives a message to help someone from his suffering. Make-up also is nonrealistic; the tradition of Therukoothu performance has decided that some color like – black, red, blue, yellow and

white for the base color of face for the different kinds of character. And apart from this after applying this color performer makes some lines, dots in order to highlight the expression which is never related to the realistic characters.

Music and musicians of the Therukoothu are the important element of the performance, it's axis of the performance. Music always cared for the whole performance. It holds the actor's action and controls his performance. Music also masks alienation in the whole performance and it never allows to build up emotion or goes into deep in the realistic. It breaks or stops actor as well as the audience to go in an emotional state. An actor has to follow the music and react on the musical tune by doing dance movement whether the character in pathetic condition. Musician use to sit on the up-stage and they give their sound or reacts by the saying *yes, no* or *hum (humming)* on every dialog of the actor. Sometimes if co-actor is present at the stage then musician only gives the answer of the main actor who is performing at the stage. So music and musician of Therukoothu has a big role in this theatrical form which is always in a state of alienation.

Conclusion

Therukoothu is a democratic theatre form which has the dialog between the actor and audience, performer use to ask a question or share the problem and issue regarding the economic, political and social aspect. Therukoothu is having all elements of alienation in the performance style as well as it remains the conceptual aspects also. It makes the audiences aware by the commenting on their social, economic and political condition. This performance never allows the actor to go deep in the character or in an emotional state, if actor trays to go in emotion then it got distraction from the Kattiyakaran, music or by musicians.

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