

Dramaturgy and Performance Aesthetics in Hela Khayal: A Study of Folk Theatre Practices in Eastern Rajasthan

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Abstract: Hela Khayal is one of the significant folk theatres of Rajasthan, which is widely performed particularly in Dausa district of Rajasthan. An exclusive combination of music, dance, sarcasm, narration, and mass involvement, Hela presents a lively form of theatre, with deeply rooted traditions. This paper gives distinct importance on Indian tradition, performance theory and aesthetics of Hela khayal. This study focuses on actor-viewer dialogue, narration, performance sites, musicality, language, get-ups, and socio-cultural roles of Hela folk theatre. Hela shows a thoughtful dramatic art, where performance surpasses the restrictions of written text and performs the form of a collective cultural involvement. This study more defines 'Rasa', folk-theatre acting, vocal dialogue, spontaneous acting and shape the aesthetics of this tradition. this study makes significant contribution of Hela khayal to the preservation and intellectual understanding of the insubstantial cultural tradition of Rajasthan.

Index Terms: Hela Khayal, Significant, Music, Aesthetics, Theatrical, Oral performance, Indian Tradition, Socio- Cultural, Communal, Folk Theatre

I.INTRODUCTION

A rich custom of folk theatre practices exists in India, that serve as a medium of social explanation, entertainment and ritual expression. In these numerous forms, 'Hela Khayal' holds a special place in eastern Rajasthan, particularly in Dausa district. Where it is still being continuously fostered as a community- oriented performance practice. The style of dramatic storytelling in Hela Khayal is knotted with folk music, improvised dialogue, sarcasm and performance -based narration. This theatrical form is deeply rooted in rural life and depend on the direct participation of the spectators. Hela dramaturgy develops through oral dialogue rather than a fixed written script, which provides artists complete freedom to adapt stories to changing social and political realities. The performance study thoroughly explores the theatrical-framework and performance-aesthetics of Hela Khayal.

This research paper seeks to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the key dramatic elements of Hela Khayal?
- How does performance aesthetics work within this ritual?
- How does 'Hela ' express collective identity, verbal memory and cultural continuity?

Objectives of the study to examine the theatrical structure of the performances of Hela khayal. Analyzing the aesthetic aspects of music, acting, language and performance-venues. Studying the relationship between artists and audiences. Understanding the socio-cultural significance of Hela khayal in contemporary Rajasthan. this study uses qualitative and ethnographic approaches, which are based on field-observations, interviews with artists and documented analysis of available literature on folk theatre. The research also draws considerable material from studies on performance theory, Indian aesthetic theory, and the traditions of Rajasthani folk theatre. Secondary sources include books, journal articles, archival footage, and oral descriptions collected from artists.

II.HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF HELA KHAYAL

The 'khayal' tradition of Rajasthan developed into a popular folk theatre-form, a combination of musical and theatrical presentation. Its various regional forms were established in Rajasthan, reflecting the local dialects, Customs and performance styles. Hela Khayal developed within this comprehensive Khayal tradition and became particularly associated with rural communities in eastern Rajasthan. The term " Hela " is often related to the rhythmic calling-styles used during mass exclamations and performances. Historically, 'Hela Khayal' has been a medium for narrating heroic sagas, devotional stories, social satire and moral teachings. It was staged at fairs, festivals, occasional celebrations and religious events, further strengthening community unity. Scholars of Rajasthani folk theatre believe that 'Khayal' troupes preserve oral narratives and local history through their acting-dominated staging style.

III.THEATRICAL STRUCTURE OF HELA KHAYAL

a. Narrative structure: Hela Khayal's theatrical style is not primarily linear, but relevant and flexible. The stories unfold through songs, dialogue, narrative observations and entertaining interludes. Performances often include: folklore, heroic sagas, historical narratives, social satire and contemporary political commentary. This flexible narrative structure allows artists to create improvised works in line with current social concerns. This openness distinguishes folk theater from text-centered classical theater.

b. Verbal script and spontaneous composition: one of the main features of 'Hela Khayal ' is that it does not have a strictly written script. Artists learn narrative structures orally through the guru-shishya tradition. Dialogues are often composed on the spot, enabling spontaneous

interaction with the audience. This spontaneous work serves a theatrical style that maintains the interest and engagement of the audience. The artist plays both the narrator and the interpreter at the same time, he reworks the stories according to the mood of the audience and the local context. The artist's distinctive performance styles provide a new and vibrant look to every performance.

c. Music as a dramatic narrative: the performance of the 'Hela song' not only makes the presentation beautiful, but also enhances the richness of folk melodies. Rhythm cycles and repeating poems evoke different emotions in the minds of the audience. The spoken dialogue and lyrics combine to reflect the fluctuations and evolution of the dramatic rhythm.

d. Commonly used instruments: harmonium, dholak, Nagara and Manjira. Through these instruments one gets a broad musical glimpse of Rajasthani folk-beauty, which places special emphasis on collective singing and rhythmic continuity.

e. Comic interludes: these comedies transform the presentation into a democratic public forum where collective concerns and criticisms are expressed through laughter.

IV. PERFORMANCE AESTHETICS IN HELA KHAYAL

a. Folk performance style: Hela Khayal mainly uses a folk style of acting, the roots of which lie in everyday behavior and folk expressions. In contrast to the stylized traditions of theatrical theater, artists use informal gestures, direct conversations, and spontaneous emotional expressions. This style of acting relies on exaggeration, rhythmic dialogue, and physical energy rather than psychological realism. This aesthetic persistence makes it more accessible to viewers.

b. Rasa and emotional experience: Indian aesthetic theory, especially the concept of 'Rasa', provides valuable insights into the performance aesthetics of Hela Khayal. Various Rasa are enthusiastically produced during the performance: comic (funny) - through satire and imitation; Heroic (Brave) - in narrative stories; Karun (compassion/grief) - in tragic events; Bhakti (devotional feeling) - in religious episodes. This performance creates a collective emotional atmosphere, in which the audience actively participates in the aesthetic experience. Studies on Indian aesthetic traditions emphasize the importance of emotional engagement in the Performing Arts.

c. Three-dimensional aesthetics: the performances of Hela khayal usually take place in open spaces, such as village squares, Temple courtyards or grounds. The absence of a fixed stage eliminates the distance between the performer and the viewer. This spherical or three-dimensional arrangement promotes the active participation of the audience. Audiences often respond by repeating songs, or engaging in dialogue with performers. This flexibility of spatial process resembles other folk theatre traditions of northern India, characterized by mass performances taking place under the open sky.

d. Costumes and visual symbolism: In Hela Khayal, costumes are symbolic rather than realistic. Artists often use minimal props (props) and stylized costumes to reflect the uniqueness of the characters. Turbans, ornaments, lathis, dupattas and traditional garments act as dramatic

signs. Visual aesthetics rely on the energy of performance rather than extensive stage-decor. This simplicity reflects the commercial and community nature of folk performance traditions.

e. Language and dialect: Language is a major aesthetic component of Hela Khayal. These performances use regional dialects, enriched with idioms, proverbs and folk-analogies. Linguistic familiarity reinforces audience engagement and preserves regional cultural memory. The poetic quality of dialogues and songs generates rhythmic and mnemonic elements, which are helpful in transferring knowledge orally from one generation to another.

V. SPECTATORS' PARTICIPATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Audience participation is the core of the artistic vision of Hela Khayal. Spectators are not only silent audiences, but also active collaborator in the performance procedure. They respond in oral comments, clapping, demanding a repeat performance, and spontaneous mutual support. This kind of participation transforms theatre into a mass social ritual. The performance becomes an occasion of shared cultural experience, rather than an indescribable artistic performance. Such Folk theatre participatory structures are the backbone of the original performance systems of northern India. As a cultural tradition, 'Hela Khayal' preserves local history and social memories, moral ethics through performance. Stories involving, saints, local heroes and community maintain regional identity. This practice also plays an educational role, by which it transfers the following: social ethics, history, moral values and community identity in society. where the influence of oral performance culture continues today. 'Hela Khayal' serves as a living community recognition.

VI. HELA KHAYAL CURRENT CHALLENGES

In spite of its cultural worth, folk theatre falling interest in new age group, development, relocation and competition from digital Media, absence of institutional association, and insufficient documentation and archiving. Contemporary media has changed spectator behavior, dropping chances for traditional communal get-togethers. Though, artists are repetitively presenting this art-form in innovative contexts, through modern themes and performing at many festivals. Research recommends that productive revitalization of traditional folk theatre depend on amalgamation of in-depth documentation, digital preservation, and active communal engagement. Together, these strategies preserve cultural heritage, and confirm its significance in contemporary culture.

VII. CONCLUSION

Hela Khayal is a cultured form of folk theatre, rooted in the cultural environment of eastern Rajasthan. Its performance structure replicates the flexibility of verbal theatrical traditions, where music, creativity, sarcasm, narration and spectators' involvement combine to form a collective artistic experience. Hela Khayal's dramatic style gives more importance to performance and communal engagement, rather than being bound in the limitations of a written manuscript. Its artistic presence is exposed through rhythm, bodily acting, emotional conversation, and closeness. While preserving verbal and regional identity, Hela Khayal remains as an important medium of

cultural solidity. This research focuses on how systematic documentation; academic and cultural engagement keep such insubstantial cultural heritage alive. Further interdisciplinary study, performance studies, participating ethnography, digital documentation, can contribute to the revival and preservation of Hela Khayal.

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