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► **To cite this version:**

Arlo Griffiths. The Go'ter Ritual of the Gadabas According to Duaru from Tikrapada (1965): A Gutob Text Translated. Peter Berger; Ellen Kattner. The Anthropology of Values: Essays in Honour of Georg Pfeffer, 2010, 9788131728208. halshs-01957755

HAL Id: halshs-01957755

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01957755v1>

Submitted on 11 Jun 2024

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The *Go'ter* Ritual of the Gadbas According to Duaru from Tikrapada (1965) A Gutob Text Translated

Arlo Griffiths

Over the past several years, I have come to know Professor Georg Pfeffer as an extraordinarily generous and inspiring man, opinionated and open to various kinds of scholarly exchange. In this spirit of exchange, it is a great pleasure to make a small contribution to a volume in his honor, and to offer data from the side of linguistics on the *Go'ter* ritual that has played such an important role in the research of Professor Pfeffer himself, and of his student, my friend, Peter Berger.

On behalf of the *Munda Languages Project*, several American scholars from the University of Chicago made field trips to Orissa in the course of the 1960s to collect descriptive data on various languages belonging to the Munda subgroup of the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. Among these is the language Gutob, which was chosen for study by Professor Norman Zide, initiator of the entire project, and a student, now professor, Richard DeArmond. I myself started to work on this language in the year 2000, and both scholars generously agreed to my making use of the data they had collected decades ago, but never published. These data include texts—recorded dialogues and monologues of Gutob speakers—transcribed for linguistic analysis. One of these texts, from the collection of Richard DeArmond, was recorded from the mouth of the informant Duaru from Tikrapada, and given the title ‘Funeral Ceremony’. The text in fact is an interesting indigenous account of the *Go'ter* ritual, to which Peter Berger’s contribution in this volume is dedicated. The original Gutob text was recently published elsewhere,¹ along with detailed linguistic analysis, but without any ethnographic contextualization. By way of appendix to Peter Berger’s article contained in this volume, I present here my translation of the text recorded by DeArmond, along with some ethnographic annotation.

The original recording does not seem to be among the digitalized reel-to-reel cassettes that were kindly supplied to me by the Languages Laboratory of the University of Chicago, so I have had to rely on the typed transcriptions left by DeArmond in the custody of Norman Zide, and later entrusted to me. Translating and trying to understand the cultural significance of a text that was transcribed

forty years ago by a linguist *without* a detailed understanding of the language and the culture of its speakers, and doing so without being able to check the original recordings, inevitably involves some uncertainty about whether the speaker actually said what the transcription notes down. However, the text as we have it generally fits remarkably well with the present state of ethnographic knowledge about the *Go'ter*, so much so that in those cases where it seems to contradict our knowledge, the possibility that the speaker said what the text says must be taken seriously—and it is perhaps these problematic passages which provide this historical document with its true significance.

The speaker seems to move freely from one topic or part of the ritual to another. Merely for the sake of presentation, I have tried to divide the text into 'episodes'. It is quite uncertain whether I have done so everywhere in accordance with Duaru's intentions, and this is why I refrain from providing the episodes with titles. The division into sentences corresponds to that in my publication of the Gutob text (see n. 1). My annotation refers to the ethnographic paragraphs in Berger's contribution to this volume, specifically the paragraphs 'The *Go'ter*' (here numbered §5.0), those following ('*Go'ter* in Ponosguda' = §5.1, 'Raising the Dead ...' = §5.2, etc.), and 'Interpretation' (§6.0) and following. I thank Peter Berger, who read through this text with me several times, for his help and comments.

Episode One

1. A story about the ritual of the Gadbas.
2. When their grandfather, ancestor, brother, mother has died, they perform the *Go'ter*.
3. For one ghost, they tie up two water buffaloes; they kill one [head of] cattle for one ghost.

The word 'ghost' is chosen here as translation of the indigenous category *Duma* (Berger §5.2). The buffaloes are objects of exchange primarily between agnatic (*bai* 'brother') categories, with the exception of buffaloes called *purani*, which are taken to the host village by affines of the hosts to be ritually killed. The other buffaloes stay alive for some weeks and are then slaughtered one after the other (Berger 2007: 291, 304f; Pfeffer 2001:99). The cattle are slaughtered during the *Go'ter* (Berger §5.6).

4. If there are twenty ghosts, they tie forty buffaloes.

The report (sentence 2) that two buffaloes are given for one spirit is repeated here and can thus not be regarded as an accident. However, it disagrees with ethnographic reports about the *Go'ter* (Berger 2007: 293; Izikowitz 1969: 134; Pfeffer 2001: 110; cf. Pfeffer 1991: 79), which all state that in principle one buffalo

is given for one spirit. However, in Berger's case from 'Ponosguda' (§5.5), there is an ethnographic example of two for one.

5. They provide four *banda* of uncooked rice.

The *banda* must be a measure of contents, but it is not identifiable with any of the known units of measurement, unless there is a mistake in the transcription for a known measure such as *bastar*, *dala* or *man*. On such units of measure, see Berger 2007: 148f., with nn. 156–58.

6. They make an expense of a thousand, one and a half thousand rupees.

Episode Two

7. When they have bought the buffaloes, they tie them at the platform.

Of the two platforms that play a role in the *Go'ter* (Berger §5.3), the one meant here must be the one inside the village.

8. Then they beat the *Go'ter* rhythm.
9. And drumming, they dance.

The hosts seem to be intended here. Pfeffer (1991: 80f) and Berger (p.c.) have observed that different groups involved in the ritual dance in different styles, while the hosts do not dance at all (see Berger §5.5 on the controlled attitude of the hosts).

Episode Three

In this episode, the perspective seems to shift to the Panjia-brothers coming from outside to the host village.

10. They leave for the *Go'ter* field, carrying wooden-sticks etc., hatchets etc., swords.

The platform in the dry fields outside of the village seems to be intended here. On the fact that the Panjias wield weapons when they approach the host village, see Izikowitz (1969: 139); Berger (2007: 298, and §5.7); and Pfeffer (1991: 77).

11. People from very far off drink beer and wine, and come to see the *Go'ter*.
12. Ronas, Cowherds, Gardeners, Potters, Gorens (that is, the 'outcaste' Dombos), all communities meet.
13. Being drunk, they get into a lot of fighting, killing.

On the violent atmosphere that surrounds the ritual, see Izikowitz (1969: 139); Pfeffer (1991: 77); and Berger §5.5.

14. The police are also there.

On this detail, see Berger §5.7.

15. Being drunk, they do not pay heed to the words of the police.

16. Nobody's words are heeded, after the buffalo has been tied on the *Go'ter* field.

17. The Panjias smear (each other/themselves) with lime-soil, and dance while drumming the *Go'ter* rhythm.

On the role of the Panjias in the *Go'ter*, see Berger §5.0. On the smearing with lime-soil, see Berger §5.5, but in Berger's description, the smearing is done by women and not on the Panjias but the *tsorubais*.

18. Two to three thousand people gather on the *Go'ter* field.

19. When the *Go'ter* is finished, the Panjias take away the buffaloes.

20. All the people who had gathered get up and go.

Episode Four

21. The guests remain until the next day.

The guests referred to here are the hosts' affines. On the aftermath of the *Go'ter*, and the various feasts that take place at this stage, see Berger §5.8.

22. While eating feasts for two days, they go to anybody's house (?).

The grammatical interpretation of the original, and hence its translation, is uncertain here. It seems that the reciprocal visits and drinking rounds following the main day (and that are also well known as parts of other festivals) are intended here (Berger §5.8).

23. Four hundred rupees' worth of cloth is used up.

There seems to be an implied reference here to the bath on the day after the main day (unmentioned by the speaker, but described also by Berger §5.8, cf. Pfeffer [2001: 119f.]), at the conclusion of which new cloth is distributed.

24. Forty *putis* of uncooked rice are used.

On this unit of measure, see Berger (2007: 149, n. 158).

25. Fifteen *putis* of millet are used.

Episode Five

Now we return to the actions on the main day.

26. They slice open twenty or thirty buffaloes in the field, and tear them up.

These are the *purani* buffaloes (Berger §5.1). The verb *jurei* is used here, the borrowed form of the Desia *jur* that we see used in the term *jur-din* (for ‘Go’ter day’), recorded by von Fürer-Haimendorf, and whose possible significance Peter Berger has hinted at in his contribution (§6.2 ‘The second gift of fecundity’). That the action denoted by *jurei* is considered central to the proceedings, and hence may be denoted by the indigenous term *Go’ter* as well, seems to find support in these combined facts.

27. Those who are able to tear out the stomach take it away.

On the uncontrolled, unpredictable cutting open of the *puranis*’ bellies, see Berger §5.7.

28. They take the meat, cook it, and eat it together with children and wife.

It is significant that Duaru says nothing about a burial of the extracted stomach, confirming herein Berger’s informants (p.c.), and not the reports of Izikowitz (1969: 141) and Pfeffer (1991: 82) referred to in Berger §6.2 (p. 29 [of draft]), according to which it would be buried.

Episode Six

29. The Panjias take away all buffaloes, however many they may be, and to whomever they might have belonged.

In this episode, we seem to return to the topic of buffalo-exchange. There is no grammatical marker for plurality accompanying the word *panjia* here (as there was in sentence 17), so the speaker may have intended ‘The Panjia takes’, and so on.

30. They give [them/it] to a man who has (or: to people who have) performed the *Go’ter*.

This sentence may express the aspect of reciprocity (in the sense that the buffalo-takers of today are the givers of tomorrow), whose importance is also stressed in Berger’s interpretation (§6.1), although the object of the giving is not made explicit. However, the object of the gift might be the feast the Panjias

(buffalo-takers) are obliged to give to the *Go 'ter* hosts following the ritual. In this interpretation sentences 30 and 31 would belong to episode seven.

31. He kills one piece of cattle, cooks 5 *putis* of rice, and offers a feast to all the people.

On the duties of the host, see the informant quoted by Berger (§5.6).

Episode Seven

32. When the *Go 'ter* rhythms have been drummed, the Panjias go.

This episode seems to refer to the feast called *panjia kaiba* (Berger 2007: 304f.), arranged by the Panjias for the hosts of the *Go 'ter*. If so, 'the Panjias' that were in Duaru's mind here may have the hosts themselves, who are, because of the reciprocal nature of the Panjia relationship, Panjias to their own Panjias.

33. When they've partaken of the feast, all people go, the next day.
34. Having drunk beer, having drunk wine, they get drunk.

Episode Eight

35. In this way, the people of the Gadba community come to make a lot of expense of all kinds: money, paddy, *irig* millet and finger millet.

Note

1. In my contribution on the Gutob language, in G. D. H. Anderson (ed.), *The Munda Languages*, Routledge Language Family Series. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2008.

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