

## Rare puppetry show



Gudipoodi Srihari

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### Spoorthi Theatre's show depicted the life of philosopher-saint Ramanujacharya

It is quite long since one experienced a Puppet show, especially of leather puppets, narrating different themes on a screen with artistes handling the puppets from behind a curtain, like a shadow play. This experience was relived last week when Sphoorthi Theatre known for its 'Educational Puppetry' over the last twelve years put up a show at Ravindra Bharati, Hyderabad.

This also marks a revival of this traditional art of Puppetry (Bommalata) in the Telugu states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The puppets presented here were made of leather (tolu) and wood. The wooden dolls are called 'Chekka Bommalu' in Telugu. Thus the show comprised 'Tolu and Chekka Bommalata'. Spoorthi has also revived 'Rod'.

This time the team revisited the medieval era to present a bit of the life of Vishishta Adwaita proponent Sri Ramanujacharya to commemorate his 'Sahasrabdi' (Thousandth Jayanti). Ramanujacharya who lived between 1017 and 1137 is considered a visionary a revolutionary and theological philosopher. He worked for the uplifting of all the sections of society with a slogan 'Equality for All includes Women', an unparalleled message that was adapted by others later. For him there was no untouchable, even when social mores were rigid. Sri Ramanuja himself worked towards upliftment of Dalits and providing entry to them into temples. Audience lauded the efforts of Padmini Rangarajan, founder of this organisation; in integrating the two forms of puppetry to present this complex subject.

Though there were some Tamil compositions like Pasurams of Alvars and Sanskrit slokas, the show was in Telugu language. The production began with 'Ranganatha Ashtakam', slokas in praise of Ranganatha. There were about two dozen scenes depicting Ramanuja driving away an evil force that had affected the Princess of Pandya kingdom, pronouncement of Maha Mantra to all the people sans discrimination, embracing ardent followers from lower caste, working towards upliftment of poor and down trodden, blessing a curd seller Yamma and so on. The production had a narrator 'Sutradhara' too.

Supported by STEPARC Sphoorthi Theatre's Puppetry was staged in collaboration with Department of Language and Culture, Government of Telangana. Prof. SV Satyanarayana, vice-chancellor of Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University spoke about the need to protect this rich form of puppetry art by conducting workshops at the University.