

## Tool for education

At Padmini Rangarajan's Spooorthi Theatre for Educational Puppetry, Art & Craft, puppets are for all ages. A few Bunraku puppets, string, rod and shadow puppets celebrate the art in varied dimensions and narrate different tales. They take us to the story behind Ganesha's elephant head, give a peep into mathematical genius Ramanujam's life, tackle contemporary issues like Nirbhaya, healthy relations among teenagers and adults, going beyond the good and bad touch and a few folklore tales.

It was her research background and theatre artiste-father Rangarajan that fuelled her passion to rediscover puppetry as a tool for education and storytelling and speak about different issues. Padmini's famous monkey puppet Mallu was born with her first production 'Monkey and Cap seller.' Later, Mallu was joined by his girlfriend Malli and the duo regaled audiences. "When I was asked to do the show repeatedly, the request triggered my imagination," she says.

Besides her storytelling sessions with puppets, she also plans one or two productions annually and trains volunteers for it. "Some volunteers join me during the scripting and making period itself; most of them come to learn the manipulation of puppets," she points out.

She calls puppetry a breathing art. "Most people feel it is a dying art; I do not agree. Many women are interested and have taken it forward from traditional puppeteers. They are doing well and in their own way."

WOMEN'S MARCH

# They hold the strings

**Four women puppeteers have moved ahead in their quest to narrate, imagine, question and create magic on stage**

NEERAJA MURTHY



## Step to change

Seasoned puppeteer Ratnamala Nori ushered in World Puppetry Day early on Tuesday (instead of March 21, the actual Day) with presentation of 'The Pious Cat' and 'The Magic Shankh' in an experimental Japanese Bunraku style. "As March 21 is also Holi, the audience may be thin for the event. That's why I decided to showcase my production early," she smiles.

Known for narrating tales through her rod, hand and mouth puppets, Ratnamala chose 'experimental Bunraku' to change with the times. "I love making puppets and why should I be afraid to experiment? Bunraku is the style in vogue today; that one can do more movements with it is an advantage. The last decade has seen many changes in all traditional arts; one has to adapt to move forward."

The teacher in her, wants early childhood teachers to introduce puppetry to students. "But they don't want to go beyond a certain level, which is unfortunate. Schools do invite us for guest lectures and demonstrations, but if a professional



## Magic on stage

Roy's work, she created a piece on Parvati and Ganesha. She connected with the folk

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