

Traditional Puppetry of Telangana State, India

Puppetry is the oldest form of Folk Theatre in India. India is blessed with different



forms of Puppetry performed in different states. The two Telugu speaking states are blessed in abundance with this art form. Andhra Pradesh is well known for traditional 'Shadow or Leather Puppetry' known as 'Tolu Bommalata' and Telangana State is known for 'Wooden String Puppetry known as Koyya or Chekka Bommalata'. "Koyya or Chakka" meaning a piece of wood. However, there are traces of traditional shadow or leather puppeteers troupes settlers in Nalgonda and neighbouring districts of Telangana State. "Bommalata" meaning play of dolls-puppets.

Sri. Mothe Jaganathan and troupe from Ammapur Village, Nermeta Mandal, Janagoan District and *Sri. Mothe Shankar* and troupe from Burugupeta village, Venkapuram Mandal, Bhupalpalli (Prof. Jayashankar) District, Telangana State, are the only two families still practicing wooden string puppets.

The troupe consists of 10-12 members who are again related to each other. All artists are singers, narrators,

musicians and also puppet manipulators. Most of them are men with 1-2 women accompanying during performance.

The string puppetry of Telangana State is quite unique in appearance and manipulation. Each puppet weighs 8-10 kgs. They weight more when garments are added on top. These traditional puppeteers also perform "Vedhi Bhagavatham" which they refer to as "Yakshagana". "Yakshagana" is yet another traditional folk art of Karnataka state.

These puppets are around 150-200 years old. The group is still persevering the oldest traditional puppetry, oral narration, songs, dialogues in traditional form. However, these puppets were made by *Nakashi*-the traditional idol makers as ordered by *Mallyala Dora*-the village headman. The present group is not aware of the puppet making technique. The Puppeteers perform episodes from *Ramayana- Lava-Kusha and Mahabharath- Virata Pravam, Ali-Arjuna, Nagalok Nagkanya*. Other tales form Puranas like- *Bhakta Ramadasa, Bhakta Prahalada, Chanchu Lakshmi-Adi Lakshmi*. They also perform from regional folktale *Balanagamma, Jayantha-Jayapala, Sathyavathi Devi Katha, Kanthamathidevi Dharmanganda Story* and so on.

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Meher Contractor 'Mother of Modern puppetry' in India



The intervention of puppet lovers has pushed to reinvent, retell, remake and experiment with the puppets and the use of modern techniques. *Meher Contractor* (1918-1992) popularly, known as Meherbehn was instrumental in creating a platform for contemporary or modern puppetry along with Indian puppetry arts. She is well-known for her creative work an abstract style. *Sergey Vladimirovich Obraztsov* (1902-1992) was a Soviet and Russian puppeteer. Many individuals and puppet theatre groups across the globe owe their establishment to Obraztsov's influence. Meher Contractor is one among them. The credit for bringing Modern Puppetry to India, and linking Indian puppeteers to the world, traditional puppetry, and so on goes to Meher Contractor.

Ms. Contractor has performed widely and has conducted lecture-demonstrations, training programmes and seminars in many parts of the world. She has also represented India in various international puppet festivals. Since 1957 she has been actively connected with *Darpana Academy of Performing Arts*, Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India. She produced her most important

work in the shadow play for which she received international acclaim. Some of her works were from *Ramayana*, *Savitri and Satyavan* and *Rostam and Sohrab*. Her puppet theater '*The Key To Happiness*' on family planning was filmed by the BBC in 1971.

Her artistic work in the field of modern puppetry opened up to artistic exchange, and new forms and techniques affected puppetry, introducing new styles and giving origin to a refined urban puppet theatre. The birth of modern troupes and the opening to the international arena created new perspectives for traditional puppetry to prosper. Meher Contractor has also adapted Puppetry in education-opening a new horizon toward application of Puppetry.

She has many awards, honours and titles to her credit. She was elected Vice- President of UNIMA (Union Internationale de la Marionnette) in 1964 and again in 1976 and 1980. For her distinction work in the field of Puppet Theatre and her contribution to its enrichment, Smt. Meher Rustom Contractor received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Puppetry for 1983. She has trained many aspirants in this art form, Sri. Dadi Padumjee the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award winner in 1992 is one her student.

Announcement:

Artists, Artlovers, Parents, Teachers, anyone passionate towards traditional and folk arts are welcome to contribute articles for **Puthalika Patrika Puppetry News Magazine**

Humour & Comedy in Puppetry



Humour is a great boon to mankind. Humour as an essential genre is adapted in theatres across the sphere varying in cultural identity.

In the traditional Indian dramas and plays-*'Vidhushaka'* plays the role of humour or comedy. Sometimes, the Sutradhara plays it to add up satirical comedy in the play.

Puppets as a comic buffoonery and clown looks behave a bit exaggerated, degradation of human and animal behaviour, creating humour situations or circumstances within the play. The role of humour in puppet plays is quite significant. The adoption or space for humour tract is to edutainment. Comedy character puppets differentiate between ethical and unethical, good or bad, just or unjust social norms and behaviour.

With regard to Indian traditional puppetry retains a visual social relationship between the audience and the puppeteers as performers. In Tolu Bommalata *'Bangarakka'* plays quite bawdy character who is identified very well as one among the audience.

'Bangarakka' along with her counterparts *'Ketigadu'*, *'Juttupoligadu'* and *'Poigadu'* together perform instant verbal slapstick comedy sequences. They crack wise to naughty jokes, break social norms, enact naughty gestures

and of course satire too. They together perform the in the language of the commons and pass on running commentary on the society, culture and the weaknesses of the people. When only one male comic jester character appears it is named as *"Killekyatha"* in *'Togalu Gombeatta'* of Karnataka.

The shadow puppeteer caste name in Telugu speaking states and Karnataka is Killekyatha. The practice of puppeteers putting a bunch of their hair to the comic puppet character is visible even today in Karnataka. This is the belief of the puppeteers building long lasting relationship with the comic puppet character which bears the name of their caste. Again, when the humour puppet characters make an appearance, humour or witty scene expectation of the audience is quite natural. The element of the comic scene sequence is use of everyday language, specific voice of the comic character to be maintained all through, specific movement of the character and bizarre gestures that provoke laughter.

In the traditional glove puppetry of Tamil Nadu *'Komali'*- the clown is the character similar to the looks of *'Punch and Judy'* of English puppet theatre. Well, they also established a relationship between a clown and a fool. During the *Dravidar Kazhagam* movement founded by *E. V. Ramasamy*, fondly called *Thanthai Periyar* in Tamil Nadu to attain an independent nation for Dravidians called Dravida Nadu, *'Komali'* puppet character was widely welcomed to share and comment on behalf of the audience.

The beauty of the comic puppet character is that they freely establish relationship with epic characters too during the play.

Puppetry In Education:



The significance of traditional Indian puppetry was much beyond mere entertainment. Traditional puppetry acted as counseling cell, grievance cell, and a cell for social interaction. However, it did play the role of 'Edutainment' in the society, it was not used in total in the field of education. Puppetry in education is still at its infancy in India. Thanks to the efforts by the Meher Rustom contractor, use of puppets in education is of course mushrooming. It is widely used in western countries.

A 'Puppet' is a movable doll or a toy or a thing that a puppeteer manipulates and brings to life. Puppetry encompasses the essential elements of all art forms such as -drama / theatre, sketching, drawing, sculpting, carving, molding, painting, storytelling, story board, scripting, literature, dress designing, music, dance, that facilitates students to build up creative aptitude.

Studies reveal that between the age of 3-6 years a child develops physically, rationally, emotionally and

also socially. The physical and mental abilities progress at a high rate during this stage. A child gains independence and self control. As the child grows quite sure to encounter 'Stigma, bullying and discrimination' issues in the fields of education-schools, colleges and higher education levels. Knowing or unknowingly, it is visibly practiced by children in the schools and colleges. The scope for puppets' entry to address sensitive issues is very encouraging.

It is more safe to convey or address any kind of sensitive matter related to the children through puppets. Puppets with the body movements provide a visual notion of expressing emotions and thoughts through the movement of hands and head backed by expressive voice of the puppeteer.

According to the research studies, Puppets help teachers improve 'student-teacher' relationship in the classroom. This further builds up healthy interaction. A puppet as a helpful tool creates a comfortable atmosphere as part of classroom management. The potential of puppets lies in strengthening creativity. According to Jean Piaget's theory, puppet plays help with cognitive and creative skills in young minds by forcing them to use one's imagination.

Puppets are effective language teachers. As puppet language is unique, and it helps both teachers and students to learn from each other clearing the blocks between them. Hence, young learners are less inhibited and do not hesitate to express or comment freely with the help of puppets. This further update to work cooperatively with peer groups. Thus, puppets build confidence in young learners, strengthen communication skills, aids in developing

artistic skills, and promotes healthy social relationship.



Time for Puppet making:

Things You'll Need:

1. Colour charts paper-A4 size. Can also use newspaper initially to teach young learners.
2. Crayons, sketch pens, Glue stick or glue.
3. Pair of scissors (young learners to use scissors under the supervision of adult/s).

Step:

1. Fold a piece of coloured chart paper into 3 equal sections fold lengthwise.
2. Glue the top flap of the section to secure the folds in place.
3. Turn around the horizontal rectangular fold into vertical.
4. Now, fold the rectangle into half by bringing two short edges together.
5. Turn over the top flap down to align with the centre fold. Repeat the same on the other

- side. The folds are opened it looks like alphabet 'M' or 'W'.
6. Glue the the two outer folds the centre on the either sides. This will look like two open pouches.
7. The open pouches are for inserting fingers and to make the puppet 'TALK'.
8. Lastly, with the help of crayons, sketch pen or coloured pens draw the character you like-dog, cat, elephant, flower,and so on.
9. Your puppet is ready!!!



For enquiries about Storytelling, storytelling with puppets, Puppet shows, puppet making workshop and customized puppet making contact:

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