

## Educative and interactive puppet plays addressing 'environmental issues and creating awareness in rural community-A case study of Mahaboobnagar district, Andhra Pradesh

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### Abstract

For centuries puppets have been an integral part of our lives. The Puppet plays used to deliver information and help community understand and remember different concepts, especially religious teachings. Present explicit utility of puppets in education in the form of as valuable teaching tools helps in its existence. With the creation of big rod puppets and marionettes are widely used as awareness campaigners. One is familiar with bunny and bunny family type cast for 'Lizzat Papad' a popular commercial ad that had become a household name in late 80's and early 90's. Following the trend various organizations started using puppets in a better way to disseminate message and bring in transformation with positive spirit. One of its properties being 'safe tool' has enabled its usage to teach children and help the children to express their needs and ideas. Puppet use in classrooms in schools has increased in combination with the languages they learn. India is the only country perhaps to be blessed with all forms of puppets: glove, string, rod, and shadow.

**Keywords:** Puppets, lizzat papad, glove, string, rod, shadow.

### Introduction

*Traditional puppeteers:* India is blessed with multi structured puppets from different regions to suits the regionalist and proving its uniqueness in unity in diversity. Right from glove puppets to big moving marionettes, string puppets to rod puppets and shadow puppets. Traditionally in India, puppetry was used as a popular and an inexpensive medium to transmit knowledge about Indian myths and legends. In India, this art form is practiced by a group of families involved in folk art prevalent in villages. In traditional puppetry, different types of puppets are used in different regions of India. The differences exist in names, in form, structure, manipulation and presentation methods. The different traditional forms are glove, rod, string, and shadow puppets.

Further, the regional name given to puppetry varies from state to state within India. These puppeteers are trained artist in different art forms that puppetry adapts, like: skilled in carving, designing, stitching, colouring, scripting, narrating, dance, music and are good story tellers. Each member of the family incorporates and equips the essential skill of puppetry and is then passed on to the next generation. Most traditional puppet-shows are deep-rooted in its religious fairs and festivals, narrating stories of the gods and goddesses in order to seek blessings from the Almighty for safeguarding the village community.

The puppeteers the nomadic groups were either semiliterate who could quote from the original Ramayana and Mahabharata and illiterate. These groups belonged to various castes mostly belonging to backward or low backward caste. No festivity and ceremonial seasons in the villages are complete without their performance.

From Bommal<sup>1</sup> attam or Tholu<sup>2</sup> bommalatta in Andhra Pradesh, Gombe attam and Togalu<sup>3</sup> gombe-atta

in Karnataka, Putal<sup>4</sup>-nach<sup>5</sup> in Assam, Pava<sup>6</sup>-kuthu<sup>7</sup> - glove puppetry and Thol<sup>8</sup> pavakuthu-leather puppetry in Kerala, Kalasutri Bahulya-string puppetry and chamadyache Bahulya shadow puppetry in Maharashtra. Kundhei-nach the glove-, Ravanachaya-Shadow Puppet, Kathi Kundhei- Rod Puppet and Gopalila kandhei- string all four forms in Orissa, Kathputli of Rajasthan, Bommalattam -string puppetry and Thol Bommalattam -shadow puppetry in Tamil Nadu, putul nach- rod puppetry of West Bengal. <sup>1</sup>Bommal or Bommai- means dolls in Telugu and Tamil Language; <sup>2</sup>Tholu-means Leather in Telugu; <sup>3</sup>Togalu-means Leather in Kannada; <sup>4</sup>Putal or Putul-means doll in Assam and Bengali languages; <sup>5</sup>Nach- means dance in Hindi, Assam, Bengali Languages; <sup>6</sup>Pava- means doll in Malayalam; <sup>7</sup>Kuthu- means dance in Malayalam Language. Pava-Kuthu means doll dance; <sup>8</sup>Thol- means leather in Tamil and Malayalam Language.

*Present-day puppeteers:* The last half century has given rise to the emergence of present-day puppet theatre, groups and puppeteers who were the people been attracted to the art form completely from outside and do not belong to the traditional families of puppeteers. This include persons from various art forms, from diverse disciplines like graphics, commercial arts, dance, music and even science and technology, to educationist and environmentalist adopting the tool of puppetry in multiple way to uphold the magnitude of this performing art. What has happened as a result, a completely new creative process has been set in motion, with experiments and innovations found aplenty. This is where *contemporary puppetry* as it is been popularly known has extended its dominion, over and above traditional puppetry. Present-day puppeteers can be any one who is interested in promoting and preserving this art form.



## Objectives

The impact of globalisation has not left any traces both on urban and rural sectors. Many are migrating to urban from rural and this increase of migration has further added to the existing problems of urbanisation. When we look into various causal factors are responsible to this situation. Many villagers have sold and are selling their fields for the property developers. These developers are converting the serene beauty of village atmosphere into amusement parks, resorts and restaurants. In turn, the original beauty of the village and its healthy practices and life -style is lost. It's not surprising that some villages look pale and has lost the lustrous green beauty which Villages are known to be. The following were the objectives of the study:

- To address the social- environmental issues and needs through puppetry;
- To use puppetry in midst of prevailing modern technologies of entertainment and awareness building at higher level.
- To determine puppetry as 'any child's play' that is easy to adopt and play.
- To assess improvements and benefits on personal as well as community as an outcome of puppet presentation.
- Further to identify application of puppetry as a tool for education and social communication for the masses addressing social, environment health, and as a reform therapy.
- Include villagers and children in the play and to come out with innovative solution to tackle Social- environmental related issues.

## Puppets as transformer

Puppetry is both - an amusement medium and a learning medium. But, today it crosses these two mediums and advances as a 'Transformer'. This study focuses on the usefulness of puppetry as a transformer. Shifting focus of theatre into therapy has facilitated puppetry to go one step further in incorporating and breaking complex concepts of social issues into simpler tablets and helping to swallow with ease. The digestive pills helps to trigger, work out ways, problem solving techniques, identifying solutions and work whole heartedness towards sustainability. Digital animation methods are most soughted today and are high demand in the movie industry today. In spite of its grey shadow, puppetry proves to exist by reaching the community through community and by community. Every means of communications has its own limitations. But puppets plays are traditional and proven scientific means of communications that not only crosses all the limitations but expands in building communications. Thanks to the Television channels in identifying and promoting traditional folk arts.

## Puppets for social and environmental causes

No doubt in government sector, organizations and NGOs are using puppets for awareness generations for various social causes like family planning to AIDS. The attempt to bridge the gap is missing. This gap could be bridged through involvement of the community right from the developing stage to manipulation stage. As this has a lasting impact both on the community and the organization working with the community. To highlight a small scale experimental study was conducted by the Sphoorthi theatre for educational puppetry, abbreviated as STEPARC in association with Vandemataram foundation, Council for Green Revolution, Hyderabad NGOs working towards strengthening education and rural community in Warangal and Mahaboobnagar districts of Andhra Pradesh. For the purpose of the study on experiment basis four villages in Mahaboobnagar village have been selected, where in environmental related issues and environmental awareness is has been addressed using puppetry. Mahaboobnagar district is one of the backward districts in Andhra Pradesh.

## Places

Government primary, upper primary and Zilla parishad high schools ZPHS. The school, staff, education department, agriculture department and student community is involved to work united to fight against environmental issues and work towards sustainability.

## About the play

A small play of 15-20 min of three characters of an illiterate old woman called 'Avva', her grandson, and a pessimist who prefers only concrete jungles and always thinks to make big money. This old woman who has vast knowledge about safe guarding environmental is considered as true and single fighter in the village and is asking the villagers not to sell the property to the developers who clear the village green pastures into barren land. She address and infact gives authentic information about ozone layers, harmful effects of air pollution, excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers and farmers suicides, and emphasis on safe traditional practices and village as a 'satisfiers of all needs'. Highlighting positive, negative impact on destruction of trees and proper approach through formation of village community and today's children taking up the issues and restoring the green environment in the village. The interactive presentation is made in local Telangana slang that added humour and was well received. The play not only highlights about mere environmental issues but stress on the impact of healthy environment on mind and body. It is the positive thoughts generated under the shade of the trees which protects from scorch sunlight and heat. Multipurpose use if a tree is around like coconut, banana and so on. Avva also talks about



conservation of water, compost pit and about birds and animals. Drinking fresh lemon juice or popular *nimbu pani* is a real refresher than soft that has literally intervened in to practices of eating and drinking healthily in rural areas. Avva talks about 'sustainability' in a larger context.

### Conclusion

Well all said and done, it is hard but a slow turtle change in the form of acceptance is seen. Now after the completion of Phase -I addressing village level environmental issues, distribution of fruit bearing, shade giving trees is done. Per child three sampling fruit and flowering plants are distributed and shade tree samplings for plantation in the village and various corners have also been done. Happy to share that even the masoon rains has extended its positive support that these samplings and are helping them to survive. No doubt that not only life style of urban areas have attracted and spoiled the rural settings but to a greater extend eating habits too. Soft drinks and crunchy snacks like potato chips, kurkure and others have become main consumer products among rural children and disposable packs and logging of packs in pond and lakes another threat to the environment. Extensive use of plastic tea cups are added problems. The main role of grandma Avva is identified by all kids and makes her reference quite often. Now, each student is whole and sole responsible and need to take care and protect the samplings. The students are maintaining records of growth of their plant as part of their science activity. The visible change seen recently is those settled in Hyderabad are returning back to their native villages as their houses are also planted with varieties of trees and the school children are taking care and guarding them. Again, these students are now practicing no plastic and are creating awareness on the same. As part of employability rural women and unemployed youth are involved and are undergoing training on making of paper bags, cloth and jute bags. Shortly, more such bags will be available in the market for use and one day all shall put an end to the use of low grade polythene bags. To conclude, Puppet plays indeed helps in bringing transformation through attitudinal. Visibility of overnight change is seldom, but overnight thought provoking is possible. This thought provoking helps to ventilate, come out for open mind discussion, acceptance, denial and ensuring participation and addressing sensitive issues of concern. As a matter of suggestion, a better transformation is possible through puppet a play that addresses

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