

As a Social and Folklore Research Scholar, I firmly believe that every art form undergoes changes over a period of time as society undergoes a change. I am shocked to learn from a learned person ***'Puppetry is outdated and out of Fashion'***. Is it really so? Time to explore further.

Recently got to read a good number of initiative taken by IT companies and colleges started an initiative to help the amazing art form of puppetry across the country. From connecting the puppeteers with the market to providing training and organizing workshops, transforming the fate of traditional puppeteers and so on. Why is this initiation taken up? Perhaps, our lifestyles have changed so rapidly that many of our traditional arts and crafts have been packed off to the archives as ***'Cold storage'***. Folklore, folk art and folktales are one of the most important integral parts in the world of communication. Folk media like puppetry are close to the hearts and minds of the people. Puppetry is such a folk medium, which not only is a very old traditional art form found in many countries but also a very powerful medium of mass communication and journalism. Being a bendable folk form, it not only entertains but also provides audiences with valuable information about the plays, social and educative awareness. Today, this art of Puppetry is used in psychological therapies.

***-In this Issue:***

Page-1-2 : Traditional Puppetry of Maharashtra State, India

Page-2-3 : Puppeteer of the month Dr. R. Bhanumathi

Page-3-4: Dhristhi Dolls

Page-4-5: Unima-Union Internationale de la Marionnette

Page-4-5-Wonderful Days in March

Best Regards

Padmini Rangarajan

**Traditional Puppetry of Maharashtra State, India**



The ancient village of Pinguli in the Konkan region of Maharashtra has been home for nearly five hundred years to a wide variety of ritual performance arts. The Thakar community is currently able to perform the following traditional Thakar arts.

The Thakar community of Pinguli in Sindhudurg District performs eight forms of tribal art and dance forms. One such is ***'Kalasutri Bahulya'***. ***'Kal'*** meaning forefingers of the human hand, ***'Sutri'*** meaning black thread and ***'Bahulya'*** meaning puppets. A kind

of String Puppetry. There is one more form called '**Chamadacha Bahulya**'- 'Chamada' meaning leather, so it is a Leather / Shadow Puppetry. There is a possibility of existence of glove puppetry in this region, which needs to be explored. According to **Shri Parasuram Atmaram Gangavane** from Thakar community- a storyteller and a puppeteer. He opines that earlier it was known as '**Kithli Bhavali Khel**' meaning a bark or a leaf or a paper kind and **Bhavali** meaning puppet and **Khel** signifying a play.

Scholars date the origin of Kalasutri Bahuliya to 1600 A.D. Also known as **Zaiti**, it is a Marathi folk form, immensely popular till the twentieth century. This is a small wooden puppet with moveable arms and shoulder joints. The Kalasutri puppets are mentioned in the 15th chapter of the famous and sacred **Gyaneshwari** written by **Sant Gyaneshwar**.

Vishnudas Bhawe, the pioneer of modern Marathi theatre, is also known as Father of Traditional Marathi Puppet Theatre. He begun his career with puppet shows that he called **Yamapuri**. This means 'City of Yama' and this is named after the God of Death. Further, it is believed that string puppetry tradition travelled from the Rajasthan-Gujarat area to Maharashtra and were given patronage by the rulers of Sawantwadi. Sawantwadi was the kingdom of the Bhonsle dynasty that is well known for the patronage of traditional arts and crafts.

The puppets are carved from the light wood of pangara that is the coral tree. The stories presented in a Kalasutri Bahuliya theatre are usually from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The popular ones are Dashavataram and Bhagawad Gita Upadesham. It is always performed with live folk music. Traditional puppeteers are experts who learn techniques from their forefathers and are well aware of the technique of manipulating these puppets.

## **Puppeteer of the month -Dr. R. Bhanumathi** **Puppeteer from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India**

Dr. R Bhanumathi is the Managing Trustee of Pava Centre for Puppetry. She is an Environmental Educationist by profession. She learnt puppetry and applied the art of Puppetry in addressing various environmental issues over two decades. She has been in the field of conservation from 1984 onwards. She did her Ph.D on the 'Status of Traditional Shadow Puppetry and Puppeteers of South India'.

She conducts regular workshops for teachers, students and others. She focuses more on application of Puppetry art in addressing various environmental issues, conservation and social issues. Dr. Bhanumathi has authored Textbooks on 'Environmental and Value Education in English, A Handbook of Butterflies in Tamil, Co-authored 'A Guide Book on Dragonflies & Damselflies' in Tamil and authored a bilingual book on 'Paper Puppets'.



As a child, Dr. Bhanumathi was captivated by knitting, sewing and doll making. It was her

good friend, who asked her to make a set of puppets for her school that she got introduced to formal puppetry. "Contemporary puppetry has great scope in education and in raising awareness", she says. For instance, Dr Bhanumat has used puppets to introduce the subject of sex education to school kids.

Be it '**Khan chacha**', '**Rukku mami**' or aunty, '**Mela Ram**' the farmer, '**Shoe Sha**' the cobbler, '**Tinku**' the monkey or '**Poochi**' the frog, Bhanumathi's puppets provoke a warm feeling, which breaks down barriers between the communicator and the listener. "Puppets generate a non-threatening and responsive

atmosphere, and so the kids and others are able to establish a rapport. By adding dialogues for the puppets, kids learn to speak better; they develop peer interaction relationship and communication skills”, says Dr. Bhanumathi who works with paper, paper pulp, cardboard, cloth, jute, clay, foam and even junk materials.

Her nature loving attitude asserts itself and she uses cardboard and x-ray sheets in place of animal leather, typical of some forms of traditional puppetry.

The puppets built during one of her workshops for women from Tsunami affected areas in 2004 have gone to Kyrgyzstan, Abu Dhabi, and Germany; they have helped tsunami affected villagers on the ravaged coasts of Tamil Nadu come to terms with the emotional devastation and face the sea again; These puppets usher in the transformations. “Puppets can make for a great therapeutic tool. When you talk through puppets, the listener gets liberated from embarrassment and other inhibitions which may crop up if you were to do it directly”, says Dr R Bhanumathi.

## Announcement:

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

## ‘Dhrishti Dolls’

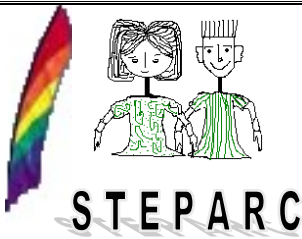
‘Face is the index of the mind and Eyes are indices of the Soul’ “Eye is the window to the Soul”. Perhaps the real truth is that it is the window of intent. The eye is our most powerful organ in social interaction. We are fixated on it, and we use it against others to show our emotions. The evil eye is a human look believed

to cause harm to someone or something else. The supernatural harm may come in the form of anything from a minor misfortune to disease, injury or even death.



The best way to understand the concept of the evil eye is to accept the idea of auras. Every human being has an aura around him or her. This is known as the subtle body. It is a kind of energy shield emerging from our physical and mental health status. There are various layers of aura that flows around our body. When the flow is blocked, disturbed or restricted by the negative energy, it causes ill effects.

Attempt to ward off the curse of the evil eye has resulted in a number of talismans in many cultures. Disks or balls consisting of concentric blue and white circles representing an evil eye are common apotropaic talismans in West Asia, Mediterranean regions. In Turkey it’s known as Nazar found in or on houses and vehicles. The blood-red demonic face with horns, smiling at you with a menacing glee which is visible on house terraces and construction sites, and on almost every truck, lorry and auto rickshaw in varying styles is nothing but a Drishti doll/ Drishti Gombe. This doesn’t have a discovery date, the custom of hanging a Drishti Gombe is centuries old and has been passed on from generation to



generation with almost no variations, which is unique to India. This belief rests not only in India, but also among the people of the Latin America, West Africa, Central Asia, Europe and Mediterranean countries. Legend has that this belief had its genesis amongst the ancient Egyptians and Sumerians.

The custom is that by hanging the Drishti Gombe or doll in India or blue eye symbol in Mediterranean countries, it protects the owner from misfortune and jealous onlookers and wards off the evil eyes. In turkey people believe that a symbol in the same shape as an evil force can deflect the evil away, much like the best antidotes to snake poison are often made from the poison itself.

The Evil Eye has such a long and broad history that it is hard to tie it to one religion. There are references to the Evil Eye in Sumerian cuneiform texts from 3,000 BC, from where it became the Hebrew 'ayin harah, the Greek baskania and the Roman fascination. At the beginning of the modern era, thinkers such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Martin Luther, and Thomas Aquinas wrote about the Evil Eye in religious and scientific terms.

## Unima-Union Internationale De la Marionnette

Union International De La Marionnette- is a non governmental organization affiliated to UNESCO. UNIMA was founded in Prague in 1929 (the then Czechoslovak magazine Loutkář was UNIMA's first official journal in years 1929-1930). In 1981, the French puppeteer Jacques Félix moved UNIMA's headquarters to Charleville-Mézières, France, the location of the *Festival Mondial des Théâtres de Marionnettes* since 1972. UNIMA is affiliated to UNESCO and it is a member of the International Theatre Institute.

There are national centers throughout the world like: UNIMA-USA, founded by **Jim Henson** in 1966, UNIMA Australia, UNIMA India,

British UNIMA, UNIMA France - THEMMA and so on. Similarly, world Congress has been held in different countries since 1929. Thus, this new initiation to unite and provide space for puppeteers, puppet lovers and passion for art UNIMA is a hub of puppets puppeteers across the globe.

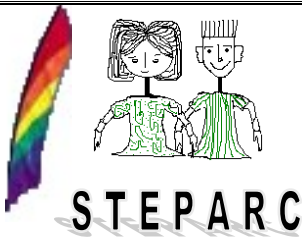
One of the best projects that UNIMA has decided to carry out was to edit and publish the World Encyclopaedia of Puppetry Art (WEPA) published in French in 2009, and then translated into English and Spanish. With the partnership of UNESCO, the publication of the "Encyclopédie Mondiale des Arts de la Marionnette" is not just the realization of a founders' old dream (the project was proposed since 1970's) but also represents for all puppeteers and thousands of enthusiasts in theatre, an essential source and a proof of the recognition for this branch of the theatre arts.

Today, one can find the puppets in in every genre of the performing arts. In theatre, film, dance ballet, celebration, ritual, education, and healing, like each art, it is a means of bringing people and art closer together. UNIMA proposes **World Puppetry Day on March 21, 2020** to be as a first step in the celebration of the XXth UNESCO World Day of Peace.

## Wonderful Days in March

Month of March has many eventful days to celebrate. To start with **March 3<sup>rd</sup> World Wildlife Day**- *Life below and above water, land and planet*. **March 5<sup>th</sup> is the World Book Day**. Let's at least now get off to grab a book, donate a book or even spend some quality time with a book. As the saying goes "*Books give a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything*". **March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day**-It's women's pride. Globally every year on 8 March to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and





political achievements of women. March 14<sup>th</sup> - **International Day of Action for Rivers.** Many institutions, philanthropists and well known Spiritual gurus like Sadguru Sri Jaggi Vasudev of Isha Foundation, Sri Sri Sri Ravishankar Gururji from Art of Living and others have adopted rivers and initiated conservation of ecosystem and perennial flow of rivers. March 20<sup>th</sup> - **World Sparrow Day, World Reading Day and World Storytelling Day.** World Sparrow Day is celebrated to raise awareness about the conservation of sparrows. This day also celebrates the relationship between people and sparrows; spread a love for sparrows, awareness about their importance in our lives, etc... So are reading and Storytelling day. Read about a Sparrows and tell a wonderful story about them makes the day meaningful. March 21<sup>st</sup> - **World Puppet Day, world Forest Day, World Down syndrome Day and World Poetry Day.** The idea of creating a World Puppetry Day was first discussed by the UNIMA members during the 18th Congress, in Magdeburg, in the year 2000. The official date "March 21st", on a proposal from **Padmashri Sri Dadi Pudumjee**, was approved in 2002 at the UNIMA Council Meeting in Atlanta. The first International Message delivered in New Delhi in 2003 and gained popularity. It's now celebrated all over the world. March 22<sup>nd</sup> **World Water Day-** is observed to raise awareness about the importance of freshwater and promoting for the sustainable management of ground water resources. March 27<sup>th</sup> - **World Theatre Day.** World Theatre Day was initiated in 1961 by the **International Theatre Institute –ITI.** Various national and international theatre events are organized to mark this occasion.

## Obituary:

**Kalaimamani Shri Theni T.N. Shankaranathan** the founder of Sri Murugan Bommallattam, Kumbakonam passed away on 28 December 2019. He is the first seniormost artist from South India to hold a Guinness record for the performance of Bommallata-traditional Puppet play in regional folk style and folk music.

**Shri Yervard Manaryan** passed away on February 20, 2020. Yervard Manaryan known as People's Artist and Merited Arts Worker of Armenia, famous puppeteer, actor, director, filmmaker, scriptwriter passed away on February 20, 2020, at the age of 96.

**Ms.Alki Zei** renowned Greek novelist and children books author died at the age of 97 at Athens on February 28,2020. Many of her works translated into several languages.

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