

Stories on strings

IN FOCUS Vicky Hart's 'Magic In Our Hands' documents the journey of Hyderabad puppeteer Padmini Rangarajan

When's the last time you enjoyed the simple pleasure of watching a puppet show or had your five-year-old jumping with excitement on spotting her favourite puppet - probably a long, long time ago. Historically, the Art of Puppetry was known to have developed to its fullest in India and was used in entertainment, to convey mythological stories and for social messages. A fact that was picked up by Vicky Hart, a London-based film producer/director with an eye for the old yet relevant.

On a visit to India last year, Hart discovered that most urban youngsters here had never witnessed a puppet play; that made her investigate why the art form so widely used in yesteryears was fading away. This led her to interact with Indian puppeteers and from there to the feature documentary she is presently in town to shoot called *Magic in Our Hands*. The focus of this film is on the journey of Hyderabad puppeteer Padmini Rangarajan and how she employs the medium of puppetry to address local and global issues.

Why puppets in the first place we



PULLING STRINGS Producer /director Vicky Hart (centre) with Camera Operator/Editor Simon Temple (left)

ask, to which Hart replies, "Puppetry is alive and vibrant and a medium that is effective at all levels. It involves the audience and encourages them to take responsibility to face social issue, besides preserving the country's ancient tradition. *Magic in Our Hands* offers a unique look at cultures and demonstrates the power of puppetry which reflects the human spirit and crosses

boundaries uniting the world. The film will show puppet making and manipulation, story telling, music and design while portraying India's diverse culture."

Padmini Rangarajan is the recipient of the Tata Fellowship for Folklore 2012 and is doing research on the traditional wooden string puppets of Ammapuram in AP. Her company Sphoorthi Theatre for

Educational Puppetry and Art & Craft (STEPARC) has been successful in linking academics with puppets, making learning fun for school children and in conveying a wide range of social messages such as sexual harassment, e-waste management, living in harmony etc for corporates and institutions.

Her puppet workshops will also be featured in the film reiterating the fact that puppetry encourages both children and adults to be creative and makes people more empathetic towards a variety of situations. Hart strongly believes that the power of creative imagination is understated and can really serve to improve the development of a new generation.

To think it all began with a 11th century legend that Lord Shiva induced life into the exquisite dolls of a carpenter to please Goddess Parvathi. No doubt the art form that has been pulling strings for generations, managed to tug at the heart strings of young Hart too. To track the filmmaking journey visit www.facebook.com/magicinourhands.

PADMINI B PATELL