



**STORYTELLERS:** Members of Spoorthi, (From left) Boyini Prakash, Anirudh, Padmini Rangarajan, Anil Kumar and Kodapad Gajanad

# Tales through puppets

From just telling stories to her son, Padmini Rangarajan has reached out to the masses with the art of puppetry

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Children sat on their parents' laps, watching the movement of puppets with rapt attention as the members of Spoorthi Theatre for Educational Puppetry, Arts and Crafts, narrated the story of an ancient King at Our Sacred Space on Saturday. A play, *Don't Remember — What? Cucumbers!* was organised just a day after the World Puppets Day.

One of the key figures behind this theatre group is Padmini Rangarajan whose journey in this field began with a simple urge to tell better stories to her two-year-old son. She says, "I had two puppets; one monkey and a cap seller and I had made a story out of it. When my son was in kindergarten he went and



**PAYING HEED:** *Don't Remember — what Cucumbers!* in progress

told his teachers about my puppets and I was invited to perform in their school."

In 2005 she started Spoorthi along with her husband Srinivasan Raghu. Since then, Padmini has performed in schools and colleges, trained teachers and young

mothers in puppetry. But her primary focus has always been to make learning easier for children through the use of storytelling and puppetry. "Being a teacher myself, I realised that one could use puppets to explain grammar, like the parts of speech or

the usage of tenses, to children. You can use them in mathematics to teach units of measurements and decimal points, to narrate a phase in history and more," she says.

Padmini, who has perfected the art of puppet making and performing on her own, feels that this form of storytelling is flourishing, but in a new way.

"Puppetry might be dying in the traditional sense, because now, children coming from the puppet making families don't pursue the profession and choose to study further. But then there are people like us, mushrooming in cities, coming up with new concepts to explore and practice puppetry," she says explaining that, "Traditional groups would have performances up to eight hours but we deliberately try and limit our performances to only half-an-hour because children start getting restless after that. In that sense we do break a lot of conventions."