all-arounders

Lessons from puppets

Students learn the art of puppet making at a workshop.

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Move over movie stars and sports personalities, it's puppets who are spreading social messages and helping youngsters cope with relationships and improve their communication skills. City colleges like St Francis, CBIT, Spoorthy Engineering, Bhavan's and Ambedkar Open University have hired professional puppeteers to conduct shows and swear by it.

It is the unique and different concept of a puppet show that catches the attention of youngsters, making it more effective, feel teachers. Dr Rajamouli, dean and professor, Ambedkar Open University, where a show on the theme 'Be Assertive' was held, says, "For the overall development of a student it is necessary to work on aspects like confidence building, positive thinking, decision making and effective communication. In a puppet show, lessons are imparted via communication between the puppets. As it is a different medium of expression it succeeds in generating interest among the students."

Padmini Rangarajan, director of Spoorthy Theatre Foundation, which conducts puppet shows at various educational institutes, explains, "I take up a situation and build a story around it. For instance, while talking about relationships and how to handle them, I show a girl in a relationship, who takes her date home and introduces him to her parents. The idea is to maintain openness in a relationship. I also portray how issues like sex are not a taboo and can be discussed with parents and teachers. Youngsters relate to these themes."

The most interesting part about the show is that they do not have an ending. "The end is decided by the audience. The show often ends with an interactive session, where the audience suggest the ending and justify it," says Padmini.

It is this interactive method that strikes a chord with youngsters. Vartika Shrivastava, a student of CBIT College, where a puppet show titled "An ode to relationship" was held on Valentine's Day, says, "We connect more with a puppet show when compared to a film with a social message. We saw them put up the props and felt like we were a part of the show. We even got to clarify our doubts at the end of the show. Even our teachers were present and they tried to answer our queries."

As puppetry is a traditional art form it also helps in acquainting urban youngsters with our culture. Dr Nirmala, lecturer, St Francis College, where a puppet show on the theme 'Save Nature' was held recently, says, "The show talked about how natural resources are depleting in rural areas and how villagers need to save it. This show helped students get to know more about villages."