

## PUTHALIKA PATRIKA

Aug 2021

Ever wonder  
what these  
wonderful puppets do  
at night?



## PUTHALIKA PATRIKA

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## Editorial Column

August is known for two observatory days from an artist's view. August 9, is International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples and August 22, the World Folklore Day. Many indigenous folk arts have started waning, even before Pandemic paralyzing the world. Unfortunately, 2020-21 continues to be a World COVID-19 Pandemic year with many countries cocooned from opening up to the world. The whole performing stage has now undergone a makeover to suit online/ virtual mode of presentation.

Change in the set up, presentation and participation. This change has been in the boon as well as a bane for performers. New performers technically sound are able to connect well and others with limited gadgets and online accessibility had

left with no performances. The ray of hope has emerged to bring back the lost sunshine by none other than noble souls, philanthropists, charitable trusts and other institutions who have feel for art and artists are acting as liaison agents between the art , artist and the audience reassuring the performer of assured bread and butter and in bringing back the lost expression. We are fortunate to be associated with the Social Substance group in connecting arts and artists around the world.



A traditional Shadow Puppetry of Odisha State, India

## Ravan Chhaya

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A traditional Shadow Puppetry of Odisha State, India

## Ravan Chhaya

and in bringing back the lost expression. We are fortunate to be associated with the Social Substance group in connecting arts and artists around the world. Shadow puppet theatre is different from all other folk art forms. Ravana Chhaya, literally 'the shadow of Ravana', is more than a



6000-year-old shadow puppet show of Odisha State. The show starts at night with a good tradition of breaking the coconut and offering to Lord Ganesha- commences with Sri Ganesha Vandana- song/hymns singing on Lord Ganesha, Ganesha is the Lord who clears off all the obstacles. Also hymns are sung on Lord Rama. The soul of a Ravana-Chhaya performance is its music. The style of Singing blends the folk and classical Odissi traditions. The show follows the Odia poetry collection, Vichitra Ramayana written by Vishwanath Khuntia, a seventeenth-century poet.

This shadow puppet play is called 'Ravan Chhaya' in Odisha. It goes by other names in different parts of India, such as 'Tholu Bommalattam' in Tamil Nadu, 'Togalu Gombeyatta' in Karnataka, 'Tholu Bommalata' in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana,



A traditional Shadow Puppetry of Odisha State, India

## Ravan Chhaya

'Chamdy Chaya Bahulya' in Maharashtra, 'Tol Pavakoothu' in Kerala and 'Chaya Putul Nacha' in West Bengal. The specialty of the Ravan Chhaya as per the name, the episodes of 'abduction of Sita and Quest of Sita' from Ramayana performed with colored shadows , background voice



over and music accompanied by music is a popular performance. Other narrative performances are the stories from 'Mahalaxmi Katha', 'Krishna Leela' and even contemporary socio-educative stories are also performed. The puppets of Ravana Chhaya are hand made using a single piece of untanned deer and buffalo/ cow hide. According to traditional Ravan Chhaya puppet performers, the practice followed was to choose the hide according to the characters. The positive Characters like Rama are made from deer hide, whereas negative characters like Ravana and others are made out of buffalo/ cow hide. Either they are left in neutral color of the hide or they are colored using natural substances to depict clothes, jewellery, accessories, etc. The music which is played in the background is an appealing blend of



A traditional Shadow Puppetry of Odisha State, India

## Ravan Chhaya

folk, classic and modern with many traditional musical instruments such as tambourine, cymbal, daskathi, mridangam and tabla. The entire Ravana Chhaya shadow puppetry performance is managed by a group of artists who are musicians, singers, manipulators, voice over rendition and puppet makers. The stage is an empty white screen made out of cloth. When you are

looking at the performance from the front, all you see is an empty white screen on which the shadow of the puppets is visible for the audience. The puppets are the flat figures of leather which are gently pressed on the translucent white screen with a source of light coming from behind. The



audience is seated on the other side of the screen and sees the shadow movement of the flat figures. The manipulator interprets the thoughts and expectations of the spectator through song renditions in accordance to the puppet maneuvering. It is not the object in the hands of the puppeteer/s but its image on the screen that decides the action. The in his mind, there are thoughts and ideas. He translates them into Moving pictures.

This Indian heritage can certainly awaken art lovers and appreciate the rich art form. It would be a suggestion to experience Ravana Chhaya play at least once in a lifetime.

## Puppetry of Spain

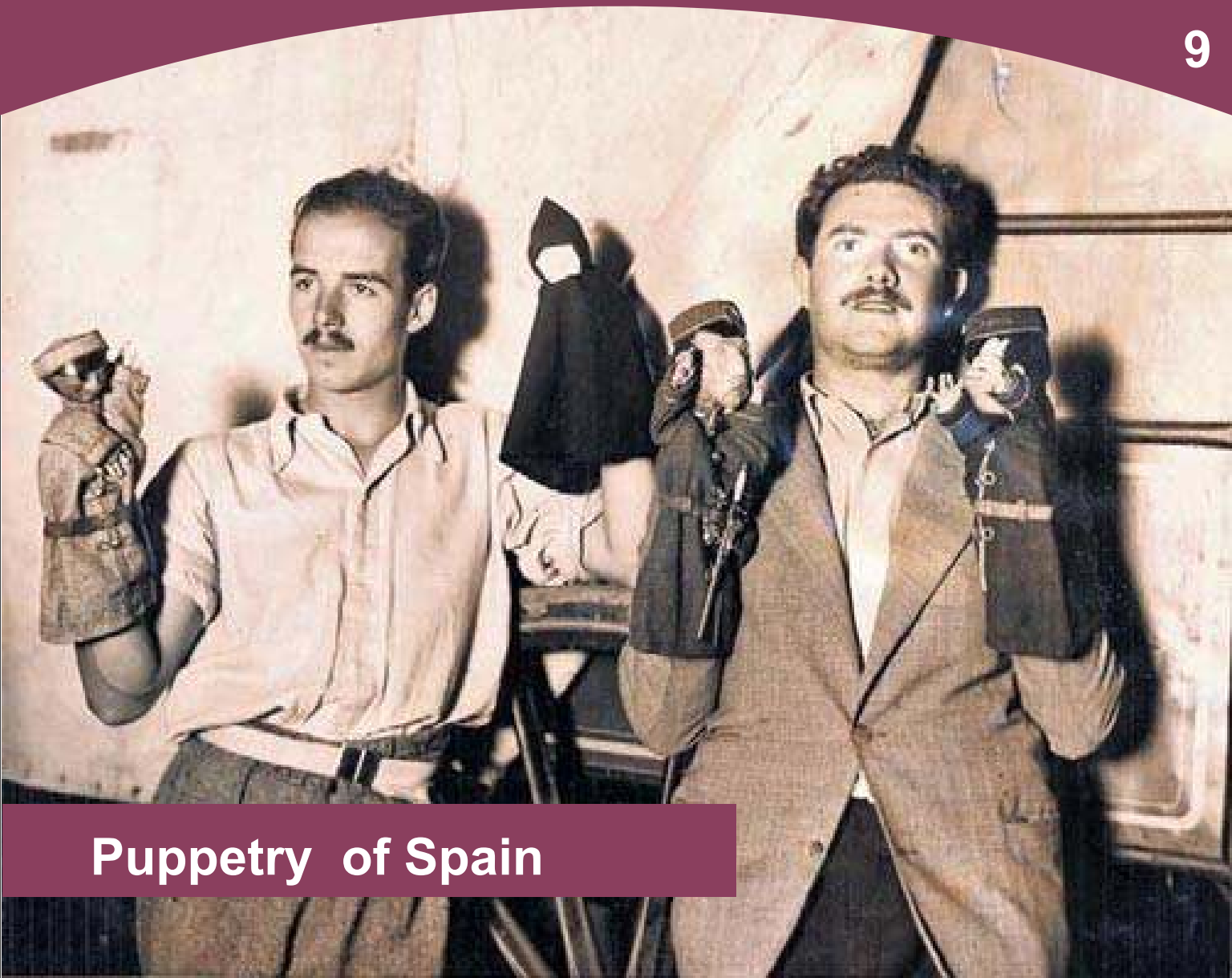
The general Spanish term for the theatre of figures is títere. Over time, two other words, from the French were introduced and commonly used as synonyms, even though they represent two specific genres. One is marioneta from "marionette", in general it is a string puppet. The other is guiñol, derived from the Lyonnais Guignol, represent hand / glove puppet which, in Spanish, is sometimes also called títere de cachiporra. According to Varey, the very first puppets were introduced from France into Spain during the 12th century by jugglers. The first written accounts of puppets in Spain date from the 12th and 14th centuries with a text distinguishing different types of street performers. The use of objects in Spanish animated performance theatrical contexts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries became one of the most effective pedagogical means to engage with civil society. Most of these historical puppeteers were foreigners, particularly with French and Italian origins.



The origins and development of puppetry arts in Spain is primarily based upon the work of the Spanish and Hispanic Theatre historian, the British John Earl Varey, about his works *Historia de los títeres en España* (History of Puppets in Spain, 1957) and *Los títeres y otras diversiones populares de Madrid, 1758-1840* and *Puppets and Other Popular Entertainments in*







## Puppetry of Spain

Madrid, 1972. Since then, other interesting local case studies and thematic works on certain traditions of this art have been published. During the entire 18th century, the retablos and altarpieces continued to present performances of “moving figure Nativities”, of which the Crèche of the Santa Maria de los Reyes de la Guardia Laguardia (in the Álava Province) remains (see Nativity Scenes). Chinese shadow plays were also introduced during this century. With the growth of urban populations during the 19th century, “theatre-houses” – inns and small performance spaces where puppet shows were performed – started to appear. The first portion of the 20th century witnessed many developments in Spanish puppetry. During the 1950s, several “masters” (maese) set up their companies throughout the country. These include Pepe Segura with Abedul in Cádiz, Julio Martínez Velasco and his Pipirijaina del Titirimundi in Seville, Within existing companies, puppetry

# Puppetry of Spain

was being taken up by new generations of family artists. However, in Spain, adult spectators still considered puppets as a minor entertainment form exclusively for children. To change this situation, the leaders of the Institut del Teatre de Barcelona (Barcelona Theatre Institute) created in 1972 a programme dedicated to puppetry. From 1974, this was lead by Jordi Coca. With the creation of schools, international festivals, exhibitions and conferences, Spanish and international professionals were able to congregate, and public interest grew. The 2001 directory/yearbook published by Concha De la Casa identified some two hundred professional troupes spread out all over Spain, with several of these having been in operation for more than thirty years.



Several recent initiatives are encouraging further dissemination of puppet theatre. These include national and international festivals like those in Bilbao, Tolosa, Segovia, Barcelona, Seville, Alicante and Lleida. Research and studies are being supported by Centro de Documentación de Títeres de Bilbao. Special mention must also be made of the role of UNIMA Federación Española (UNIMA Spanish Federation) Created in 1985, it has brought together puppet professionals and it supports the training of puppeteers with classes and workshops. (Source: UNIMA Spanish Federation)

photographers by Pablo Seaz, Argentina





## Aaya Aaya Bioscopewala Aaya

In the streets of India, not only kids love the good old-fashioned desi bioscope, but elders too enjoyed it. “dekho,, dekho... Bumbai dekho..Dilli dekho...Agra dekho..Tajmahal dekho...Amitabh Bachchan..dekho..Sholay dekho..Hemamalini dekho, nach dekho..Gabbar dekho”. Bioscope or “bi-scope” as it is also called, is an old styled “slideshow in a box”, managed by an operator. He is known as bioscopewala who manually winds a series of scrolled images. People who have had the experience of watching film rolls scrolling in a bioscope show in their childhood. The moment one could hear a strange bell sound of a bioscope, children would peep through windows, run and gather around to watch it. People who have experienced a bioscope show in their childhood may still remember with excitement “chalta phirta cinema”. On the tiny bioscope stage the images slide between two spools by the operator turning a small lever. A bioscope is an early movie projector, but in the Indian sub-continent a desi bioscope is a wooden box that plays a scroll of pictures, which can be viewed through three to four circular holes. At one time, bioscopes were commonly seen in the rural and semi urban streets, especially on Sundays or so. Time and electronic technology advancements

## Aaya Aaya Bioscopewala Aaya

have replaced all that had folk parts that connected to humans. Yet, even today bioscope still presents a unique experience and charm for its audience. The content of the slideshow is usually the images and artwork stripped from magazines or old books. Later, there was used film rolls also used. The bioscope box with a linear slideshows had no built-in audio. It was the bioscopewallahs- the storytellers would wood struck to anklet and would play rhythm. The start beats could make commencement and In some places, even figurative dolls with would be placed on



true folk artists and jingle using piece of beads (gungharoo) tapping on it for the and the closure of the one aware of closure of the show. two clapping waist movement the bioscope box to

attract kids. One can even find bioscopes in melas, Delhi Hut or in Fun and Fair exhibitions. There is an interesting story of one such bioscopewala in a village of Gadag district, Karnataka State, India. His name is Shri Durgappa Koppal. He and his twin brother used to go around villages carrying bioscope with them. It is known as "Gardi Gammathu" in Kannada and popularly known as "Dabba Talkies" amongst folks. Shri Durgappa Koppal started earning his bread and butter by showing the bioscope in villages when he was a young man. For the past four decades, he goes around wooing



## Aaya Aaya Bioscopewala Aaya

children to this form of storytelling. Durgappa shares with smile, "I show and tell stories by scrolling pictures of stars of yesteryear and veteran actors, such as Amitabh Bachchan, Sridevi, Madhuri, Rajkumar, Ambareesh, Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, and ends with celebrities of today, including Prabhas, Rana Daggubati,



Darshan and Yash. Stills from recent hits films like KGF and Baahubali, Prabhas lifting the Shivalinga, or Kattappa, evoke cheers from the young and old alike". Durgappa is the only person seen recently in and around Gadag area who is actively involved in this occupation. Durgappa opines that "I am carrying on with this Dabba talkie not to earn a livelihood, but I want to show this old means of entertainment to the new generation". It is sad to know that, even Durgappa has disappeared since last year, not sure about his whereabouts. Not a surprise there are many such Durgappas' in different places who are either still holding this amusing bioscope box or have no trace about their disappearance. There is a wonderful film also made by the name "Bioscopewala" stars legendary actor Danny Denzongpa, Geetanjali Thapa, Tisca Chopra and Adil Hussain. Presented by Fox Star Studios in association with Star India, Bioscopewala is Produced by Sunil Doshi and Directed by Deb Medhekar in 2018. The film is an extrapolation of Rabindranath Tagore's Kabuliwala.

Photos' credit: Ragottam Koppa The New Indian Express



Meera Vishwanath

## Artist of the Month



The art of storytelling is booming up again in India in particular with women and young minds. One such interesting person is Ms Meera Vishwanath- a storyteller and puppeteer, & the founder of 'The Story Basket'. She is from Hyderabad city, Telangana State and a postgraduate in Literature. She has been always passionate about stories even as a teenager, narrating stories

to younger cousins of hers. Meera calls her father to be instrumental behind her journey as storyteller and a puppeteer. "We grew up among lots of books and stories by my father. So it was the same with my son too"-recalls Meera. She greatly admires Papa Joe Gaudet who is a Master storyteller, flutist and a poet. She has always been into stories and activities for kids.

Initially, like any career oriented woman, she too worked with the corporate sector for a while. At same time, she volunteered with Heartfulness for 'Conscious Living' programs at schools and colleges through interactive Life-skills workshops. Also, conducting summer camps with values based activities. She was quite inquisitive about interacting with the young generation about values of life. "It is often a two-way learning with the younger generation. With their broad perspectives deepens my understanding of things of life too"—realizes Meera.

Thus, she took a sabbatical break from work to be with her little son. Stories





## Artist of the Month

and books were a part of our everyday life. Sooner she realized many more children could be engaged positively through stories and puppets. And that's how she ventured to start 'The Story Basket' in 2017. It is an after school programme to engage children through puppets, stories, sensory activities, art therapy etc. Meera also conducts summer camps/shows/workshops at various schools. She hasn't undergone any specific professional training in puppetry as such, but has attended a few international courses online in the last two years. International puppetry has reached greater heights. I am greatly inspired by the works of Master puppeteers like Hobey Ford, Bernard Shaw, Galia Levy-Gard and more who are very original in their works and have paved the path for puppetry as a serious profession. Meera believes that every child should have a 'Story basket'- with some toys/puppets/props for imaginative play! The power of imaginative play is impactful in developing communication, socio-emotional, problem-solving skills in a child. Puppetry is pure joy- the process of making and also performing. It's a joy to see the wonder in a child's eyes; they lit up when they see a story in action!! Puppetry is a powerful medium that opens up a child to the world of creativity.





## Artist of the Month

Engaging in the art of creating is therapy in itself. “When a child uses his hands, creativity and faculties to create something, it's a delightful process of learning and a fulfilling experience”—adds Meera. She has explored all forms of puppets and loves the shadow the most. She finds shadow puppetry more mesmerizing, and magical. During the lockdown, she engaged children virtually by conducting sessions/puppetry workshops- mostly free, to bring some joy to the children at home. When one looks at Master puppeteers of Western countries, one is sure to realise puppetry is not just art, there is science in it (movements, manipulating a puppet), there is Maths in it (proportion, balance/weight). Of course there is music and language! It's a wholesome package of learning!! One needs to get to that perspective-expose kids to such wholesome art forms. There is much to be done and explored in India too. “I intend to explore and try more forms of puppetry and bring them to children, share the learnings, inspire them to try too. It has been a beautiful journey so far with a lot of learning and joy that the work brings in everyday. Well, I believe I have found my 'Ikigai'!!”... Signs of Meera with a beautiful smile.

Here's a few lines she penned





## The Story Basket

'So you sell stories?' quipped the passer-by,  
 'Nay sir, I TELLstories', said she,  
 'What's in a story?' he mused,  
 She could tell from his look,  
 He was confused  
 She rose,  
 And gently led him to the 'Story Basket'  
 He gazed with a gleam in his eyes,  
 There were stories of all sorts, of all kinds  
 And she spoke  
 'I sell not just a lore  
 I sell so much more



## The Story Basket

I give them wings so they may soar  
 Soar so high into the sky  
 I give them fins to dive deep  
 Into the oceans where the pearls sleep  
 I make them sail across the seas  
 I give them the language of the bees  
 I sell not just a lore  
 I make them Explore  
 I tell stories of courage, of humour  
 Of strength and wit and Valour  
 I hang some tales on their cribs,  
 Put them under their pillows,  
 I stuff some in their toys,  
 So they may know  
 they can be so much more  
 I sell hopes, dreams.'  
 Picking up her basket she said,  
 'Yes, I go door-to-door  
 Dear son, but I sell not just a lore  
 I sell them much more  
 I sell them much more'



## Nature's Lap



One of the fruit bats fell from about 40 feet height directly to ground. My instant thought was he is old enough and breathing his last. I approached and learnt something heartrending. There are almost all animals who mourn the death of their relatives, as I knew but here something was wrong. None of the fraternity visited the fallen one. He consistently was looking up at the place where he used to hang upside down. This scared something out of me. They live in colonies still they breath alone and they perish alone. Are they turning human or human are turning fruit bats? or it was just me who knew and learnt wrong all my life about life and death? Philosophical thought hit me hard and I believe I should be humbler and respect the world better.

**Dr. Arun Bansal**



## Participate in **PUTHALIKA PATRIKA**

Artists, Art lovers, Parents, Teachers and Anyone Passionate towards traditional arts, visual arts and folk arts are welcome to contribute articles for Puthalika Patrika Puppetry News Magazine

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