



Arts

PUPPETRY-THE TRADITIONAL FOLK THEATRE OF INDIA

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Abstract

Puppetry is the indigenous theatre of India. From times immemorial it has been the most popular and well appreciated form of entertainment available to the village people.

Keywords: Puppetry; Traditional Folk; Theatre.

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1. Introduction

Puppetry throughout the ages has held an important place in traditional entertainment. It is an ancient art, originated about 3000 years ago. It is a least expensive source of entertainment which imbibes the all creative expression like painting, sculpture, music, literature, dance and drama etc.¹ It has been most popular form of entertainment for the village people. Almost all types of puppets are found in India. From different parts of the country they have their own identity. Regional variations of style and theme are reflected in them. The stylized vocabulary of puppetry carries local myths and legends usually with the message of social awareness, moral values, historical and traditional subjects.²

Like traditional theatre, themes for puppet theatre are mostly based on epics and legends. In India the history of puppetry is possibly dates back to 4000 years ago. Archaeological and literary sources of Indian history of subsequent periods amply prove the evidences of puppets. In Shrimad Bagwat Geeta, Iswar is represented as a string holder, the strings are the three Guna – Sattva, Rajas, Tamas, which moves the man in between and manipulate all beings of the universe.³

In many Sanskrit drama the word Sutradhar ‘string holder’ denotes evidences and the identity of puppetry later this word has taken for the director or principal actor who holds the control and connection between the audience, artist and theme in the theatre.⁴ In Bengal the puppet, doll, mask, are also known as Sutradhar. In India many types of puppets are found. Four of them are

commonly used the different way of manipulation becomes their identity. String, rod, shadow and glove are prominent among them.

- 1) The String puppets of Rajasthan,
- 2) The Rod puppets of Bengal
- 3) String and Rod Puppets of the South India,
- 4) Shadow puppets of Orissa, Kerala, Andhra and Karnataka and Glove puppets of Tamilnadu and Kerala are remarkable.⁵

These puppets are like large dolls that are colorfully dressed.

2. Kathputli, The Puppets of Rajasthan

Puppets from different part of India have their own identity. The traditional puppets of Rajasthan are known as Kathputli having two words 'kath' (wood) and 'puttali' (doll) which is the feminine gender of Puttala. The word Puttala is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Puttara' meaning 'a son.'⁶

These motivated mobile wooden dolls are carved from a single piece of wood; they are bright in colour and beautifully dressed. Large eyes with arched eyebrows and thin lips on an oval face are being specialized as an identity.⁷ The costumes and headgears are designed in the medieval Rajasthani style of dress, which is prevalent even today. The puppets of Rajasthan are of two feet in height. Most of the figures have no legs. The long trailing skirts cover the part of the legs. The Kathputli is accompanied by a highly dramatized version of the regional music. The music that accompanies is dramatic and beautifully blends folk and classical elements. One group has 80-90 puppets of different characters viz Sutradhar, Joker, Dholki, Kartal player, dancer, demon etc. The themes of presentation are based on the stories Prathvi Raj Chauhan, Vikramaditya, Amar Singh Rathore. Puppetry in Rajasthan is a hereditary profession as the puppets are handed down to next generation. The nomadic tribes of Gadulia Lohar are the rural patron of puppet theatre⁸

The puppets have the joints at head, shoulders arm, elbows waist and knees so that they can be easily moved. Puppeteers manipulate them with five to seven strings which are normally tied to their fingers and not to a prop or a support. Music accompanies the show drawn from the popular regional tunes. The performance usually starts with comic prelude full of fun and humor which attracts the large number of spectators. Story narration also has a peculiar style. The movement of the puppets on the beats of Dholak with the dialogue delivery creates the well synchronized dramatic atmosphere⁹

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In Rajasthan puppeteers are the rural patron and derivatives of puppet theatre are of the nomadic nature.¹⁰

3. Putul of Bengal

The popular show West Bengal is known as Putul Natch. The specific types of rod puppets are made from clay and rice husk. These rod puppets are fixed to heavy bamboo sticks which are

tied to the puppeteer's waist. These are three dimensional moving figures that are manipulated with the help of rods. 1.5 meter height of puppets is built over 2.5 meter long bamboo. Hands are manipulated by strings.¹¹ Rod puppets are extension of glove puppets

According to the subject, the puppets are decorated, for the **Puppet Shows**. The puppeteers' ties the marionettes properly into their waist –band in front to make their hand free for manipulating the puppets.¹² In Bengal the word Sutradar is used for carpenter who is specialize in making puppets, wooden idols, mask and wooden dolls.¹³ He presents the philosophical aspect and ideology of the play and also maintains the continuity in the play.

The box like stage of bamboo and painted cloth is called Putul-Ghar is constructed for puppet show. Episodes enacted in Putul Natch are usually based on Ramayan, Mahabharat, and Mythological theme of Radha-Krishna and Satee Behula.¹⁴

4. Sakhi Kundhi of Orissa

Various social and cotemporary themes are being performed in Indian towns and cities. The puppeteers, decorates their marionettes according to the themes. Earlier the custody and protection of these puppets was taken by the royal families. Ramayan and Mahishasur mardini is popular narrative theme of puppet shows of Bengal & Orissa. Kundehi are made of light wood with more joints to make them easy to manipulation. The absence of legs is covered with long trailing skirts flowing from the waist. Music is based on regional tunes. Today the troops are performing all kinds of themes as classic, romance and fantasies. They are styled and designed like the traditional, Jatra theatre actors. Rod puppets of Orissa are similar to puppets of West Bengal.¹⁵

5. Goyambatta of Karnataka

Episodes enacted in Goyambatta of Karnataka are usually based on Prasangas of the Yakshagana plays. These puppets are manipulated by five to seven strings tied to a prop; manipulation is similar to Rajasthani puppets. They are styled and designed like the characters of Yakshagana, the traditional theatre form of the region. Some of the more complicated movements of the puppet are manipulated by two to three puppeteers at a time. The Gombeyatta puppet figures are highly stylized and have joints at the legs, shoulders, elbows, hips and knees.¹⁶

6. Bomalattam of Tamilnadu

The Bomalattam of Tamil Nadu is associated with religious festivals. Vinayak Puja, Komali, Amanattam and Pusenkanattam are four parts of Bomalattam theatre. The marionettes are artistically designed on wood. They are the heaviest and largest marionettes of India with Ten kilograms of weight and 4.5 feet in height. The rods and strings are used to manipulate the hands and head. Two rods are fixed in the hands and strings are attached to an iron ring.¹⁷

7. Kalasurti Bahulya of Maharashtra

Kalasurti Bahulya is originated in 1600 A.D. in Maharashtra. These are the small wooden string puppets with movable arms and shoulders. Kal is known as a forefinger of man, sutri means thread and Bahulya denotes for Puppets. Rulers of Sawantwadi were the patron of Kalasurti Puppetry. The puppets are made of light wood of pangara that. The Theme of Ramayana and Mahabharat are usually performed Dashavtar and Bagwad Gita are also performed.¹⁸

8. Shadow Puppets

Shadow Puppets in India has specialized forms. Tholapavakuttu of Kerala are performed during the temple festival. The puppets of Togalu Gombeyatta are generally small sized shadow puppets of Karnataka. The Tholu Bommalata represents the rich tradition of shadow theatre puppetry of Andhra. They are the largest shadow puppets of India. Ravanacharya is the traditional local shadow of Orissa presents the legends of Ramayana. The puppets are small in size.¹⁹

9. Glove Puppets

The Uttar Pradesh has the rich tradition of Glove Puppets. Social themes are usually presents in plays. West Bengal, Orissa and Kerala are also popular for glove puppetry. Kathakali texts accompanied with music are performing in Kerala. Radha-Krishna themes are the popular themes of Orissa and West Bengal.²⁰

10. Method and Material

Material and new method opened the wide range for contemporary crafts-man. The traditional shift embraced the full range of fluency and flexibility to create the aesthetically organized new forms. Fluctuation in availability of wood is also one of them.

The body is first drawn on a thick Sponge. Then the shape of the body is cut & with waste cloths cuttings, the attire of the Puppet according to the subject is stuck on the body with the help of glue, needle & thread etc. After the basic clothes are made on the body, the time for decoration is arrives. Once again according to the subject, the décor is done, with the help of glitters, beads, laces etc. Now these days' thermos coal hard board, soft board, paper cloth are being in use.

11. Problems and Suggestions

In last two centuries the industrial revolution has been a major single factor in changes of cultural stabilities all over the world. It upset the fundamental of social and cultural fabric. In rural India puppetry is a source of livelihood, the economic statuses of puppeteers have been rather low, it should be protected from the damaging impact of modern entertainment. Yet the deep rooted tradition of Indian art and craft has its existence and identity since long and the extract of Indian culture from generation to generation.

As the demands of new trends of technologies in the field of entertainment, there is a possibility that this art might get disappear soon. So we should support and appreciate this art so that, it can

also further be appreciated by our coming generations, and they will feel themselves somewhere close to society. This will be a gift for our coming generations from us. For that we should make them realize the importance of growth in life and benefits they would achieve. In India, since time immemorial, there has been an interaction between the folk and elite tradition and this process is going on.²¹

“Puppet theatre is fully integrated in the ritual observances and the milieu of the rural people in India. Various strata of society participate in puppet theatre. The regional variation in theme and style can be explained by the socio-political system, the religious doctrines and the nature of the patron class. The puppet theatre has shown remarkable staying power against vicissitudes of time.”²²





Puppetry in Different Parts of India

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