



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Arts

SUPPLEMENTARY ELEMENTS OF ENTERTAINMENT IN LEATHER SHADOW PUPPETEERING OF ANDHRA PRADESH

KEY WORDS: Tholu Bommalatha, Kambaramayanaam, Thiruvachakam, Natiya Sastra, Yakshaganam, Adalpattu, Are, Ranganatha Ramayanam, Ayappudava, Sadya Vazhthal, Gona Budha reddy, Puppeteering, Yakshaganam, Wuti. Mada Pulavar.

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ABSTRACT

With stupendous international kindred, leather shadow puppetry is a marvelous folk art form widespread in India. This art form has a role in conception of amusement in all south Indian states, (Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh). Apart from its special role on Hindu devotional practices it a well established engagement of entertainment. There are certain families absolutely devoted in puppet making, playing and surviving only with income produced through performances. It is very intricate for provide a normal survival to them because of the strong hostility with other various modern forms of entertainments existing in each corner. However it is the duty of the beholders and beneficiaries to keep the system alive for their continued existence. The certain changes and differences found in puppets and its manipulation in Andhra Pradesh are documented and evaluated its relevance here.

INTRODUCTION:

From child hood I have been well acquainted with several types of performances conducted in temples offered as worship to deities. This kind of folk associated performances have analogous nature and character which are conducted in temple premises as offering to satisfy the deity for the accomplishment of their wishes and dreams and are related with unforeseen happenings in materialistic life. Habituated reading it was some years ago, I happened to read one of the first books in this area, which was written by K L Krishnankutty Pulavar who was a well-known puppeteer with authentic knowledge in the subject. He was a meticulous performer of Tholpavakoothu, and most likely the first writer of the same in Malayalam the native language. His book "Tolpavakoothu, The Traditional Shadow Puppet Play of Kerala, Vol.-I, Balakandam" was published in 1987.

In 2005, I was invited by Chennai Regional Centre of Lalithakala Akademi, New Delhi to participate in a practicum arranged at Chennai. The Puppet manipulating artists from various parts of South India



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and some contemporary artists including me were invited to participate in the workshop. The idea was to evolve a new technique by exchanging our ideologies with inborn and adapted skills owned by the genuine local village artists. We spent fifteen days and nights, learning, mind storming, discussing, drawing, painting the puppets, cutting the leather, experimenting and recreating the images, scripting, practicing voices, music and mobility chances of each of the images we made. It was amazing for me to



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watch the way master craft persons from Palghat, Tanjore,

Kanyakumari, Bengaluru and Visakhapatnam straightly cut leather with a sharp knife and stitch them to make a huge Ravana horrifying Puppet or smooth colorful pieces joined for a beautiful image of Sita. I have been straightforwardly exposed to performances of Shadow puppeteering from all south Indian states. Among which it found the performance of Andhra based puppetters are keeping some makeable differences from others and its entertainment level is higher than the others when comparing its visual impacts. The differences I have located are the major theme in this essay.

General nature of performance:

The images according to the story and puranic descriptions are cut from leather made from animals like deer, goat etc without losing its transparency. The images prepared are punched for passage of light as per requirements and colored using limited number of colors prepared naturally (*Note-1*). These puppets are strengthened by fixing a bamboo stick at the centre and according to the requirements of movements supposed to be made while performances. Some puppets are made with convenience to move some body portions so the artists can make feeling of a dance performance by a puppet, walking, speaking and even fighting between puppets on the screen.

A screen is made using a big cotton dhoti, and lights made up of broken coconut, oil-cotton thread made lamps are kept behind. The puppets are exposed between the lamps and screen movingly as to fall the colorful shadows on the screen. The artists manipulates the puppets, orate the dialogues narrating story and sing as per requirements. Also they use accompanying instruments while the story is narrated dramatically in tonal gradations, laughs, cries, shouting, singing, and even running sometimes to place and change puppets according to the requirement of narration. Most of the times more than one person is involved in entire performance, often all the family members of the artists take part in various actions like controlling lamps, handling puppets, singing, making additional sounds for special effects and in using musical instruments. All happen behind the screen which is invisible for viewers.

Generally the sizes of the puppets are limited under three feets which can be easily handled behind the width and length of the screen made by dhoti. There are differences found in size of puppets, type of leather used, size of screen, number of puppets and puppeteers, accompanying instruments and the ways and manners of presentations from place to place according to the taste of local people. Generally the stories are taken from Ramayana, but in several occasions they performed different stories as per requirements of the audience. This folk art form is known as Tholpavakoothu in Kerala, Tholu Bommalatha in Andhra Pradesh, Thokala Bommalatha in Karnataka, Ravanashchaya in

Orissa and as Chandi Bahulya in Maharashtra (Note-2). Also this folk art form with variant is popular in Thailand, Malaysia and China. There are places where contemporary festivals arranged for puppet play.

Manikya Vasakar in his book "Thiruvachakam" wrote during growth of Bhakthi cult (Note-3), referred Tholpavakoothu with a sentence "Tholin Pavai koothatai chuzhalvintene" (Note-4). The text of Thirukural which was written in the first Century refers to a kind of street play (Theruvu Natakam) (Note-5). Also Bharatha describes about a shadow drama in his Natya Sastra (Note-6). Evidences show the existence of a kind of shadow puppetry during "Wuti" Period in China (Note-7). It is presumed that the declaration of the existence of shadow puppetry as an enjoyable art form first appeared in Tamil Literature. The use of skin for shadow puppetry can be justified with habits of various races by keeping made animal skin on belief of its supernatural power to protect people from evil forces.

Existing there is an authentic screen play for Tholpavakoothu in south India. The suggestions for the screen play are based on epic Ramayana as retold by Tamil poet Kambar. There are 12116 stanzas in the Kambaramayanam (Note-8). The screen play is known as Adalpattu in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. There are 2500 important Stanzas included in the adalpattu of Tholpavakoothu. Even though except some most of these stanzas resemble Kambaramayanam, only few stanzas differ from it in style and content. These variations might have occurred due to the local interference of artists. Ramayanam is the most accepted story with logic of showing it in Devi Temples. When Sri Ram went to win war with Ravana and kill him for rescue of Sita, Devi Bhadrakali was busy in carnage of Darikasura, another demon figure in Hindu mythology. As extermination of demons are favorable to heavenly forces like Bhadrakali, the incident of killing Demon Ravana is visually symbolized in another occasion to delight her.

In Kerala, Tamilnadu and Karnataka the traditional puppet manipulators are accustomed with steps followed through centuries in performance. The tholpavakoothu is performed in Devi Temples and Siva Temples having separate places of worship for Devi. There are more than 120 venues in Kerala where Tholpavakoothu is performed during festivals. Some of the venues have a separate stage permanently built (Koothumadom) and retained for the performances year after year. The performers with help of devotees make temporary stages where permanent facility is absent. The performance based on Kambaramayanam has 21 parts and it takes 21 days of play to complete all. The Adal Pattu is a mixed form of Prose and Poetry and poetry is sung by participants called 'Koothukavikal'.

The performer begin his speech with following introduction: "by watching the beautiful dance of peacock, hen in the forest tries to imitate the peacock. Just like that our efforts may not be fruitful. We request our wise spectators to forgive the shortcomings and mistakes we may commit during the performance (Note-9)." After introduction the narrator explains specialties of the portion which is proposed to play that day and each character is displayed on the screen. It is followed by Sadyavazhthal meant by 'appraising the feast', during which they elaborately thank everyone supports to materialize the play there. The performers are offered with money, fruits and special food items by devotees



Image-3

during the play. Also special praying with any one of the devotional image is performed during the play in with alternate words than original adalpattu and it is not considered as mistake or strange as it is expected. According to Kambaramayanam the screen play of the 20th day includes beheading of Ravana. The screen called Azhapudava is removed, washed and dried for the usage of performance on 21st day to eliminate impurities of blood shedding and killing of Ravana, for performing the enthronement of Sree Rama who is the winner. 21st day the stage manager called Madapulavar take out the screen on completion of the play, cut it into pieces and distribute among the devotees to keep in home to deflect all evil forces and curses.

Differences in Puppets of Andhra Pradesh.

There are serious differences between the images of Shadow puppeteering in Andhra Pradesh and other places in South India. The family of an artist named Mr. Kale has been engaged in making designs for Leather puppets for past many centuries. It is



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purchase seasoned leather from local market, draw suitable pictures for puppet shows following puranic traditional job accepted for their family. They stories, finish them with generally accepted iconographic details and appealing colors. They consider it as a devotional duty and sell them to the puppeteers as per their requirements. Mr. Kale lives in Andhra Pradesh and there are some centuries old sample puppets in his care. None of them measure more than three feet height and adequate breadth.

Some of the performers from Andhra Pradesh to whom I was directly exposed were using approximate life size images up to six feet height during performances. Also they manipulated the images to fall shadows in an adequately sized curtain instead of a dhoti. These performers are from genuine puppeteering families and brought up in peculiar cultural backgrounds. Of course the visual range of puppets and aesthetics is high in their productions. The feeling created by the shadows fell on big screen than a dhoti gather more involvement of spectators. They seem more attractive and influential to anybody see them. The generated involvement is more passionate, influential and seductive to any viewer.

In personal enquiry I understood that they began to use bigger images since childhood along with smaller one. Slowly understanding the impact on viewers, they renewed the size though and received more appreciation. Smaller puppets are made to show when object is shown as from far distance. During some occasions like the situations when the growth of Hanuman is to be shown, differently sized images one by one are shown, from small to larger. Except such they usually use puppets made in larger sizes, while the puppeteers in other places in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka are using the images in older format, less than 3 feet height. Requirement of larger screen and more efforts are some disadvantage for them. Player will not be able to manipulate a six feet high puppet by sitting. It requires for them to stand behind the screen and in some rare occasions it requires more than one person to control and manipulate single puppet. When such situation comes with more than one or two puppets on screen, it requires two or more people to manipulate and the difficulty of the same is transparent.

Another difference I found in images of Andhra is



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exceptional mobile nature. The puppets they made for women like Sita, the heroine of Ramayana is made with moving hands, moving legs, moving hips, sometimes even with moving fingers and lips. The Heads of certain images and the lips, they made with probability to move. These are advantages for the meticulous puppet manipulators. Performing with mobility increased puppet is difficult but they are able to manipulate them more freely even to show minutest details of a movement. So that the performer will be able to make replica of the movements of a dancer, performer, deliberate war phases more accurately. All these possibilities are advantageous for attracting more people and acquire demand for their program. The elements added are confirmed to make more entertainment for its viewers.

The third and most major diversity is the difference of the story they uses in Andhra for puppeteering. The essence of story is tailored from Ramayana, like Kambaramayanam is the base of story in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. But the major source of Andhra Pradesh is Ranganatha Ramayanam wrote by Gona Budha Reddy (Note-10). The artist uses the same lyrics uses in Yakshaganam, another well known folk performance of Andhra Pradesh for Shadow Puppeteering. The theatricality of Yakshaganam is higher than any other folk art, performance of Andhra Pradesh. The performance and body movements in Yakshaganam are higher influential than other such forms. The puppeteers always tries to replicate human movement in their puppets and the viewers get a more live theatrical situation by use of similar movements of Yakshaganam in Puppet manipulation. That makes attraction to art form much higher than during the usual use of small images for Kambaramayanam. The viewers in all venues, in Andhra Pradesh and other places of South India are getting entirely different results of Rasa (Note-11), which reach superior in the viewers of Andhra. When considering the theatrical impact on audience through puppeteering with larger images, the stories Indrajith Vadham, Keechaka vadham, Veera Abhimanue, and Padmavyuham are with high impact on viewers of Andhra Pradesh.

My direct contact with the artists made opportunities to communicate with them elaborately. They agreed that they have to adjust their life and lifestyles for the continuation of their practice. Always they try to modulate their performance in a manner they could satisfy their appreciators. They practiced their life in which they never argued for benefits. They satisfied with what offered them each day after practice of their performance which is very low according to the labor they produce. Further studies on the origin of puppeteers in Andhra lead me to the fact that the early puppeteers were shifted from Maharashtra some centuries ago to Andhra and followed the basic wandering life depends up on availability of work. A number of families in this clan are available near the border villages of Bellari and Hindpur. They increased the sizes of the images slowly to bring better impact on viewers and replaced the story narration in a more appealing manner successfully.

CONCLUSION:

The puppeteers of Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala were Nomads. The first settled among them were the families in Kerala was at least one and a half century ago. The people in this clan are known as Pulavar and enjoying normal lives with a social status. The puppeteers of Kerala say a story of Chinna

Thampi (Note-12) about the first Pupeteer in Kerala but which has no solid evidences. Considering other symptoms of practice it is safe to consider their chance of settling earlier in Kerala and finding social support for their long stay here. The puppeteers of other states directly agree and accustomed with their state of survival. They all had a past of travel from one place to other along with everything they acquired during life along with other members of the family until find a new venue suitable for survival.

The puppet manipulators in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are still living their vegetarian lives on road sides in which they are not bothered much. They are worried about their food, survival and puppeteering and further possibilities of it. The Puppeteers speaks "Ara" a dialect of Marathi within their family and hold a vegetarian life. "Mutharamma" (Note-13) a form of Devi is their major Goddess for this Hindus.

As time passes the light source is changed to Petro-maxes. In the forties the new source of electric light became popular. Now all people except in Hindu devotional venues uses electric lights for the performance. They are more powerful and the efficiency to penetrate through the leather is several times bigger than beam of oil lamps. All the puppeteers perform in traditional format, but the puppeteers of Tamil Nadu are more innovative in their approach and found various themes to perform stories about Rain water collection (Mazhaineersamipoo), the importance of growing trees (MaramValirpoo), Cleanliness (Sukhacharam), Elimination of AIDS, Elimination of Polio etc. They adjust play for advanced viewers, arranges programs for performance suitable for modern life, the satirical stories self made, and newly shaped puppets with them. It is necessary for them to search for viewers near large factories, where the ordinary and humble people gather, in schools etc. There are several stories kept by them to entertain the adolescent viewers.

Garalattom, Kavadiyattom, Vaymoodarathu, Kadasaranam, Peyattom, Swamiyattom are some of them, to which people crowded. The performer and artist Muthu Lakshmana Rao made new stories following Independence struggle and various political issues, Dandhi March, Jalianwala-bagh etc. To attract large audiences they made a large number of puppets- various political leaders, Gandhi, Kastruba Gandhi, Nehru etc. – according to requirements.

As an effort to reduce cost of entire production to save money, avoiding leather they began to use plastic sheets, polythene, cloth, even thick paper for the creation of puppets and chemical oxide colors on it. Also color slides, color masks and florescent lights are used to make the performance more attractive. But the puppeteers in Kerala and Andhra are still following the traditional set up and perform ceremonially at least occasionally in devotional atmospheres. Generally the puppet makers of Kerala and Andhra draw the pictures on leather themselves. But at least some of them approached local traditional artists for beautiful designs and drawings. The designs of puppets are different from each other and



Image-6

in Kerala; the puppets resemble the images drawn in Mural Paintings due to involvement of traditional painters in them. Considering dependence on light source to create shadows falling in screen, coordinated sounds and music, narrative qualities, the play of leather puppets may be considered as

the older format of today's massive entertainment, the feature film.

But with the modern invention of lens cause to create the shadow images fall on them can be made into several times bigger. It took prime attention of viewers with its mobile nature and ability to create exact sounds according to the requirements of the projected shadows. But the society did not put into practice to wipe out any such substantial existence of local folk art forms. By adapting affinities towards devotional and ideological human needs, the puppeteers continue their efforts to interact to the mass within their limitations.



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3. A comedy puppet of Tamil Nadu on Manipulation.
4. Horse rider. A Centuries old Puppet in collection of Artist Kale, Andhra Pradesh.
5. Horse rider. A Centuries old Puppet in collection of Artist Kale. Andhra Pradesh.
6. Sree Rama on Move, a Kerala puppet with high decorations.
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8. Lakshmana on Move, a Kerala puppet.
9. Social Element, Gandhi at Dandhi march, Tamil Nadu Puppet.
10. Ravana, Tamil Nadu puppet.
11. Lord Shiva from Karnataka.
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Image-9



Image-10



Image-11



Image-12



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Image-15



Image-16



Image-17



Image-18



Image-19



Image-20

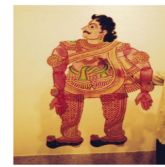


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Image-29



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2. G. Venu. "Puppetry and Lesser Known Dance Traditions of Kerala." Book published by Natana Kairali in 2004.
3. Information bulletin of Nee Enrgee, Shadow theatre festival presented by Kalari foundation, Coimbatore. 2005.
4. Babu namboodiri K "Our Traditional Leather Shadow Puppeteers, Leather Shadow Puppeteers in South India." Melinda books, Pages 158. 2018.

Notes

1. Making colors from natural objects, black from Lamp Black, Red from Kasava tree juice, Green from Amari leaves etc.
2. Information bulletin of Nee Enrgee, Shadow theatre festival presented by Kalari foundation, Coimbatore. 2005.
3. Bhakthi cult. The Bhakti movement is a Hindu religious movement in which the main spiritual practice is loving devotion among the shivite and Vaishnava saints-originated in Ancient Tamil country. References from-
4. Thiruvachakam- 51 subgroups of poems, is the first writing about his life and his Siva-experience by Manikyavachagar the great Saivite saint. References from ()
5. Thirukural-Tamil: also known as the Kural-is a classic of couplets or Kurals (1330 rhyming Tamil couplets) or aphorisms celebrated by Tamils
6. authored by Thiruvalluvar, and is the first work focuses on ethics in Dravidian literature.
7. NatyaShastra by Bharata. The NatyaShastra by Bharata is the main dramatic theory of the Sanskrit drama which is wrote by sage Bharata. It provides the rules of writing and performing music, dance and theatre and it originally dealt with stage craft.
8. Wu-di (also said Wu-Ti) -Period. The Jin Dynasty (pinyinjin, 265-420) followed the Three Kingdoms and preceded the Southern and Northern Dynasties in China. The dynasty was founded by the Sima family, pinyin S m . References from.
9. Kambar- Kambaramayanam -The original version of Ramayana was written by Sage Valmiki. This epic of Kambar describes in 24,000 verses tells of a Raghuvamsa prince, Rama of Ayodhya, whose wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, a mighty emperor
10. G Venu Puppetry and Lesser Known Dance Traditions of Kerala. Published by Natana Kairali in 2004. Also he wrote the introduction to the book wrote by K L Krishnankutty Pulavar titled Tolpavakoothu-The Traditional Shadow Puppet Play of Kerala, in 1987.
11. Ranganatha Ramayanam. Is the famous work of Gona Buddha Reddy lived during the 13th century so actually belonged to the Kakatiya period. Reference. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reddy_dynasty#Literature_During_The_Reddy_Rule
12. Rasa is the juice of various elements causes beauty, entertainment and salvation according to Indian Aesthetics.
13. Chinna Thampi : Presented Kambarama -yanam in a manner enjoyable to all people irrespective of caste differences when he was not permitted to hear chanting of Ramayana when went to higher caste residence.

REFERENCES

1. K L Krishnankutty Pulavar "Tolpavakoothu -The Traditional Shadow Puppet Play of Kerala." Published by the author. 1987.