

Puppetry as a form of Mass Communication: Indian perspective

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ABSTRACT

Folk media is one of the most important part in the world of communication. Folk media like puppetry are close to the hearts and minds of the people, so their appeal is at a personal and intimate level. From the beginning of the civilization, till today, folk media has played a very crucial role in any society. Puppetry is such a folk medium, which not only is a very old traditional art and craft form found in many countries but also a very powerful medium of mass communication, often involved in folk journalism also. Being a flexible folk form, it not only plays its part of entertainment but also provides audiences with valuable informations and plays social role in public awareness building for different issues. Puppetry also helps in psychological therapies. This paper will focus on puppetry as a powerful medium of mass communication and how it can be used in a better way for mass communication purpose of spreading of social awareness messages and as psychological therapy. This paper will also try to find ways for development in the field of puppetry and puppeteers.

Key words: Puppet, Puppetry in India, Folk Media.

Introduction

Puppetry is a very old traditional art and craft form found in many countries. Puppetry is an indigenous theater form of India. Since time immemorial, it has been a popular and appreciated form of entertainment in rural areas. The tradition of puppetry is not just ancient in almost all civilized countries of the world; puppetry has been present in different forms and has been used for various purposes since ancient ages. In India the stylistic vocabulary of puppet theatre carries a relevant message of social awareness, historical and traditional identity and moral value system. Its relative isolation and distinct style of improvising has made it a powerful medium of mass communication. Not only in rural areas but also in urban places puppet shows are very popular and powerful tool of communication with the mass. Even in the modern medium of communication like television and films - puppet shows are quite popular.

Aims and Objectives

The main aim and objective of this paper is to analysis on puppetry of India, its four different types, puppetry as a powerful medium of mass communication and finally how development can be brought in the fields of puppetry in India and how it can be used in a better way for mass communication purpose of spreading of social awareness messages, especially in rural areas and as psychological therapy. Empirical Research is

conducted to describe, explain and reach a conclusion. This paper will focus on Indian puppetry as a part of Indian folk medium - its past, present and future. What changes have come and may come in puppetry shows with time to survive will also be dissected.

Puppetry as a Form of Mass Communication

There are different types of puppetry, in India there are four types of puppetry mainly: - String puppets, Rod puppets, Glove puppets and Shadow puppets, which are found in different parts of India. Being a flexible traditional folk form puppetry also plays social role and helps in psychological therapies also. Role of puppetry as a medium of mass communication is immense.

If we observe the historical perspective of puppetry in India since MahenjoDaro, as it used in plays and fables, use of puppets in religious ceremonies all over the world like Egypt, Rome like Osiris festivals where women priests carried string manipulated images of the dog faced God Anubis with moving arms. French word - "Poupee" or Latin word "Pupa" both of which means dolls. (Wikipedia.com)

Different Types of Puppets in India

In India, different names are given to puppets in different places like - in West Bengal glove puppet is known as Benerputul. The traditional glove puppet in Kerala is known as Pavakathakali (Pavakoothu), presented usually in a play form. String puppet is called "SutoPutul" and puppetry "putulnach" in Bengal, while in Rajasthan it is known as "Kathputli".

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According to Bill Baird in his book *The Art of the Puppet*, "Bengal had created a rod puppet style which I believe moved eastward with Hinduism and became the *Wayang Golek* (Java), performed with three-dimensional wooden figures that are manipulated with rods". Rod puppets are, however, seen in India only in the States of West Bengal, Orissa and Jharkhand. In Orissa Rod puppets are called Kathi Kundhei and in west Bengal it is known as "Chor Putul".

It probably started in prehistoric times. Caveman and cavewoman, stretched out by a blazing fire, turned their heads and noticed a curious phenomenon: shadows dancing on the cave walls. Intrigued, they lifted their arms, arched their wrists and began flapping their fingers against their thumbs in mock imitation of some objects in front of other cave dwellers, and thus began the first puppet show. The shadow puppets are very widely prevalent in the south India in all the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the coastal areas. Besides, these are found in the states of Maharashtra and Orissa also. The shadow puppet is conducted in open air as a free show. The shadow plays are known as Tholu Bommalatta (Tholu meaning leather) in Andhra Pradesh, Leather puppet of Karnataka is called Togalu Gombeatta (Togalu meaning leather, Gombe meaning doll and Atta meaning dance), Shadow puppet of Kerala is called Thol Pava Koothu (Thol meaning leather), Shadow puppet of Tamil Nadu is called Tholu Bommalattam (Tholu meaning leather), the shadow puppet of Maharashtra is called Chamdyacha Bahuliya (Chamdyacha meaning leather) and is mostly seen in the famous village of Pinguli on the border of Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka and finally the Shadow puppet of Orissa is called Ravana Chhaya (Chhaya meaning shadow). They derive the name from the evil king Ravana as they believe that Rama, with his spiritual aura, casts no shadow. Shadow puppeteers of India still follow traditions and observe many customs connected with ritualistic religion. Even today most traditional puppeteers commence their shows with prayers and at the end of the shows, put the puppets respectfully aside (puppetindia.com).

The flexibility in nature of these four types of puppets is not the same. String puppet being the most flexible one, followed by glove and rod puppet. Shadow puppetry is relatively rigid in nature and hence cannot be used in diverse manner. Puppetry and puppets are also used in negative ways like in rural areas and in ancient

times puppets were used for black magic practices and voodoo practices.

Present and Future scope of Puppetry in India

With changing time, to retain its popularity use of elaborate music, change of style and settings, special lighting effects, smoke screens, magical appearance and disappearance, etc are being introduced in puppet shows.

Surush Dutta in Kolkata, Shri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra- Puppetry in Delhi are few names among others associated with puppetry in India who are trying to retain the puppetry culture. But to survive in today's competitive market more organizations like Centre for cultural resource and training is needed.

How to popularize and survive- is a big question in world of puppetry today. The most relevant answer to it can be the convergence of the tradition media with the modern electronic media.

As stated by Kamaladari Chattopadhyay in her book "handicrafts of India", "As a medium, however, puppetry has a few equals and scores many advantages over human performances in moving and holding audiences. It suggests rather than instructs because of an innate subtlety. It can indulge in exaggerations or distortions without being coarse or vulgar".

Doordharshan has been providing short educational puppet based stories for children and adults for their educational television. Puppets are more than often used in films. Ramdas Padhye and his son Satyajit Padhye popularized the use of glove puppets in Hindi films like "Dilhai Tumhaara". Glove puppetry is very much in demand in standup comedy also. Another recent example is the use of shadow art similar to shadow hand puppetry in Madhya Pradesh Tourism Ad of Indian Government (www.mptourism.com). Also some theses are written how puppets and puppetry can be used for psychological therapies. Puppets allow the patients to express his fantasies in a creative way. (Gernier, Mathew G, 1983).

The audiences are perused to accept the icons as representatives of reality in puppet shows. The Great Russian puppet master Sergie A. Bratsov said that the puppet theatre is just as "human" as any other type of human.

A major point that is often overlooked in every puppet based literature is that until and unless puppet artists earn well and are provided with proper livelihood, puppetry will keep moving towards extinction as new generations will not be

interested in following their ancestor's foot prints (Jairazbhoy, Nazir Ali .2008).

Puppet shows, conveying information on what famine relief workers should get as minimum wages provoked unlettered rural women to go on strike in Rajasthan. Their struggle led to the Famine relief Act being declared illegal by the supreme court.(Ghosh, S. 2009).Now a days puppetry is used in different ways like for example in advertising, marketing campaigns, different music videos, among others. The Cadbury dairy milk silk ad ([youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com)) is such an example. These ways are innovative in nature and attractive for the viewers, thus they can be small steps in helping in gaining popularity for puppetry once again. Convergence of folk media like puppetry with electronic and new media like television and internet is very essential for the upliftment and survival of folk media in today's world. Development can be brought in the field of puppetry as a folk entertainment media and also in the livelihood of puppeteers. The Union Bank of India and the Life Insurance Corporation has used the medium of puppetry in Uttar Pradesh to arouse the interest of the rural folk in bank savings, and insurance policies. A pilot study by the Indian Institute of Mass Communication on the comparative effectiveness of puppetry and a documentary in two villages near Delhi showed that the cheaper traditional medium could be as effective as film (kumar, Keval J. 2010).

Conclusion

It can be concluded that better utilization of puppetry can be done for mass communication purpose for social awareness building and also for public opinion building. Puppetry has long been used as a diagnostic and therapeutic technique with emotionally disturbed children and has been well documented in the literature. Successful research has been done on

the creation of puppets in therapy or on the use of puppetry in art therapy. There is a great future scope of puppetry in India. It is a perfect folk infotainment media-entertainment along with informations.

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