

LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH AN EXTINCT ART FORM: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

Folklore in India has met out a dreadful disaster because of the technological update. As the world is in the hands of everyone in the form of a mobile phone, it is quite difficult for all to spend time for the ancient arts. But the impact which the ancient art forms created in the minds of the ancestors could not be brought by the technology in a positive way even to know such art form. The researchers have taken this article as a mouthpiece to voice forth the extinction of one such ancient art 'Puppetry' which was playing a vital role in the previous years. Further, this art form, which helped to awaken the society and to teach values under cultural and moralistic aspects by demonstrating the mythological stories, has almost lost its significance in the modern world due to the advancement in technology. The researchers voice forth the role of this art form in awakening the people in ancient days and further represent the present state of it and to provide scope for preserving the art form in the modern world by incorporating the same in the teaching modules of schools and higher education to preserve its ethnicity.

Key words: *Puppet, mythical stories, shadow, Bommalattam, Thol Pavaikoothu*

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Folklore in India has been under extinction now. This is really because of boon in technology. This technical prospective future and, the mind-set of the people after money, have enabled the teens to evade the technical arena leaving aside the ancient culture and folklores. Lots of people who were the deep adorers of ancient culture feel the endangering vision of their cultural dignity as well as the cultural practices. There are a lot of ancient arts which are left

unnoticed. Owing to this, this article is drafted to exhibit the status of one such art form which has been in a devastated condition across the country.

The younger generation, which considers money as the sixth sense and depend only the technical future and the outcomes of the same, does not mind about these ancient art forms as they would not pay them on time. Under such postulations, the heirs of the folk artists do not consider the folk art to be highly productive for their future. Some organizations like Centre for Cultural Resources and Training, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, New Delhi, Suresh Dutta in Kolkata, Shri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra help in retaining this art form in the modern competitive world. In South, Ammapet Ganeshan and Mr.Kuppusamy are trying to retain this ancient art form. Taking into account the devastating condition of this folk arts, the researchers have written this article for alarming the society regarding the about to die ancient folk art of India – Puppetry. This article further envisages the possibility of retaining this art form even in the technology-advance world by incorporating the same in the curriculum of schools and higher education thereby providing a platform for this ingenious art form to prolong further. Thenceforth it could be used to inculcate strong socio, cultural awareness through mythological stories among the common public.

Literature survey

“[...] the puppet dramas of the past were an instructive and entertaining form of art, with religious and philosophical ideas conveyed through the symbolic stylizations of hand, rod, shadow, and string puppets.” (Michanczyk 2017, 1) says Michael Michanczyk in “The Puppet Immortals of Children's Literature”. Caganaga and et.al., states in “The Role of Puppets in Kindergarten Education in Cyprus” that “the puppets can be used as a teaching tool in kindergarten education[...] The data show that puppets are engaging and motivating for young learners”.(Caganaga 2015, 1)

Yilmazer and et.al., states in “The Effects of Teaching Geometry on The Academic Achievement by Using Puppet Method” that “The purpose of this research is to observe the effects of the geometry teaching by using this puppet [...] on the 8th grade students. [...] At the end of the research it is observed that the test group that the puppet model is used, is more successful.” (Yilmazwer 2015, 1). Further, Anindita Chattopadhyay, states in his article, “Puppetry as a form of Mass Communication: Indian perspective” that “Puppetry could act as a medium of mass communication in order to create social awareness among the common public and in addition, this article focuses on how an emotionally disturbed child can come out of the disturbances using this art as a therapy” (Chattopadhyay 2017, 79). Ghosh (2006) represents in Indian Puppets that Lord Shiva and her better-half Parvathi as the chief “Sutradhars”, the persons who operates puppets. But according to Bhats, the traditional puppeteers of Rajasthan, this art form originated from Rajasthan only. Various perspectives regarding the exact origin of the puppetry is analysed in the book. In addition, the puppeteers who live in India protecting the ancient art form are highlighted in the book. In consequence, the book gives the variety of puppets, their functions, animations and their inter-link with other arts. It gives mind-blowing pictures of various puppets and shows in various states. As no research has been done on the extinction of puppetry in Indian culture and the methodologies to preserve this work of art, this study throws a light on the same.

Study on Anthropology of Extinct Art Form: Puppetry in India

Puppetry is a form of theatre art which involves the usage of puppets or inanimate objects which are the representations of humans or animals. They all are dangled to the voice and tunes of the puppeteers. It is also called as Puppet play. The puppet shows in different times expressed different socio-cultural aspects through inanimate humans. On account of this, the present study explores the socio-cultural anthropological views on Puppetry.

Anthropology represents “[...] the study of humans and human behaviour and societies in the past and present. Social anthropology and cultural anthropology study the norms and values of societies. Linguistic anthropology studies how language affects social life” (Wiki 2018, 1). Puppetry – an ancient form of folk art is near dead in Tamil Nadu. On account of this, this paper focuses on the puppetry art form, its place in the society then and now, with a primary focus on the sociological changes accumulated in the art form at the cost of development of technology. Further, it provides the hint - how the art form helped the society to have rich culture by demonstrating the mythological stories among the common folks. In addition to exploring the benefits of this art form, this paper highlights the steps to be adopted for retaining such a precious art form.

As stated in Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) webpage, it is notified that the puppeteers were given high tribute by the ancient Hindu philosophers as they brought the entire universe into the puppet stage. The etymology of the term puppet is identified in Latin word ‘Pupa’ meaning a doll. Further, in Sanskrit terminology Puttalika and Puttika represent ‘little sons’. (CCRT). The presence of this art form is revealed through the Tamil classic ‘Silappadikaram’ which was written around first or second century B.C. This puppet folk art is believed to have originated even in 500 BC. This puppetry was practised in ancient Greece even in fifth century BC and it had been recorded in Herodotus and Xenophon. This puppetry had a very good start in the good old days but right now, whoever gets a choice of watching it feels that it is shown once in a blue moon.

Extinction of Ancient Art form

Such an ancient art form is significantly losing its importance in India. Very rarely these art forms are exhibited. In the ancient era, even before two decades, they were given due importance. During the regional festival, the puppeteers stay in the village or town for around 10 days and demonstrate various mythical stories to the mass with the help of the puppets. As the audience were not quite familiar with the television, the puppeteers were playing a prominent role. Every evening and night they performed the show which was soul-stirring and they were given a lot of appreciations and laurels. They had a good earning that time. “Time has swept away the golden days” says Mr.Kuppusamy, a puppeteer.

The Puppet show has become a show to be watched once in a blue moon. Not only that, it has encountered a devastating effect as it does not provide earnings for the puppeteers. Under such postulations, the researcher has provided a case study of this puppet folk art in Tamilnadu in this article. These puppet shows were used to teach tales and morals to kids and adults in the early ages. It satisfied their aesthetic sense there by developing their personality. The status of it is highly pathetic as so many youngsters and kids are unaware of what Puppetry is. Jairazbhoy states regarding this extinction as, “A major point that is often overlooked in every puppet based literature is that until and unless puppet artists earns 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 2008, 5). Further, Ilangovan states in his article "Shadow Play" that "While researchers and academicians are burning midnight oil over the traditional art forms for their scholarly research pursuits, the art and its performers tread a treacherous path."(Ilangovan 2013, 1).

Puppetry in Tamilnadu

In India, before and during independence this art form played a vital role among people in order to make them to participate in pre-independence movement. Later, this art form was transformed into the most entertainment form during early independence period. The government supported this art form then for promoting education, culture, social life. As there is a transformation in the art form, the Tamilnadu state government in 2015-16 had taken this art to spread hygienic aspects such as the proper usage of public lavatory facilities among the country men. This powerful puppetry form has many forms.

In Tamilnadu, this art form is called as Bommalattam. In Tamil, dolls are called as 'Bomma' and dance represents 'Attam'. In another way it is called 'Thol Bommalattam' or 'Thol Pavaikoothu'. They make use of tanned goat skin which was made even before 500 years. They use natural colours to colour the materials which are pressed to form shapes of the characters. They are pasted to a rod which is cut along the length into two halves. The hands and legs of the puppets are assembled with the help of buttons and strings thereby making a free movement during the performance.

Forms of Puppets

There are different forms of puppets called String puppets, shadow puppets, rod puppets and glove puppets. In various states puppetry forms have different names.

String puppets

In CCRT, a detailed note on String puppets are given. These are the puppets having the limbs being controlled by the strings of the puppeteer. This has been practised in Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. In Rajasthan another form of puppet show which exists, is called as Kathputli where the puppets are made of single piece of wood and they are colourful dressed in Medieval Rajasthani style. The unique feature of this puppet is that it has oval face and large eyes with raised eyebrows and big lips.

The string puppets in Orissa is known as Kundhei which is made of light wood. These puppets have more joints which help them to articulate in a better way to the tunes of the local music as well as to the tunes of Odissi dance. The string puppets available in Karnataka are termed as Gombeyatta which are highly designed on the basis of the characters of Yakshagana. These puppets are highly stylistic with their joints tied at joints and hip. These puppets dance to the tunes of folk and classic elements which has the base of Prasanga's [propagation] of Yakshagana's plays. Another form of string puppet available in Tamilnadu is Bommalattam. This is a bigger one which weights around 10kg. It is made of wood and the strings are tied to an iron ring which the puppeteer wears on his head for managing the doll. Further strings are tied to strings which are tied to an iron rod separately. This has got four different parts – Vinayak Pujja, Komali, Amanattam and Pusenkanattam.

Rod puppets

Rod puppets are an extended form of glove puppets which are supported by rods from below which is highly found in West Bengal and Orissa. In West Bengal it is called as Putul Nautch in which the dolls are carved from wood and the dolls are of human size. This form is almost extinct. In the background sounds, music, voice for the dolls are given. In Bihar, this form is called Yampuri where the doll is made of single wooden piece and are dangled using the rods.

Glove puppet

This form is otherwise called as finger puppets, socks puppets and hand puppets. In this the manipulation is done by making use of hands and fingers. It demands an artistic usage of fingers where the index finger is used for head adjustment, and the thumb and middle fingers are used for hand adjustments. It is highly practised in Kerala under the name Pavakoothu in which the height of the puppet varies from one to two feet. The representation of Kathakali, an ancient art form, is in the doll. Further they are used to depict puranas [Epic] like Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Shadow Puppets

Shadow puppets are flat figures that are cut out of leather material which are shown in Figures 1-4. They are pressed against the screen with a heavy light being projected from behind. It provides silhouette and colourful shadows to the audience. This tradition is prevalent in Orissa, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu. In Karnataka it is called as Togalu Gombeyatta, in which the puppets differ in size according to the characters. King dolls are bigger in size whereas the other dolls are minimum in size.

In Andhra Pradesh, it is called as Tholy Bommalata where the puppets are coloured on both the sides. The puppets are larger in size and the joints are done at the hands, knees, waist for the smooth move. Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas [myth] were the holistic themes with predominant music. In Orissa, it is termed as Ravanachhaya where the puppets are single piece without colouring and provide opaque shadows on stage. They are made of deer skin.

In Tamilnadu, this format is termed as Thol pavai kuthu where the leather dolls are used. The dolls are colourful and they dance to the heavy music by the side. It comprises of a lot of characters, jokes, anecdotes, metaphors which enhance the show. The dolls are tied to a rod and strings are used to change its poses. Though so many puppet forms are available right now only shadow puppets have their stage.

Shadow puppet show

a) Stage

A puppeteer is using a stage of 10x10 size. A black screen covers the square in all the three parts excluding the back part and a portion of front part. In the middle of the front portion a white cloth is used. This cloth exhibits the puppets to the world. A rod is fastened below the white screen on which the rods of the puppets could be positioned. Light is beamed from behind so that the puppets appear as silhouettes or colour shadows in the white screen. Based on the movements of the hands of the puppeteers the puppets move and dance.

b) Voicing

In Puppetry voicing is done by a single person. The same person who is a ventriloquist speaks for different puppets in various voices. He sits on the floor or the chair depending on the height of the screen. Further two members accompany them with either a pair of *ching* or with a *tabla* [a musical instrument [1]] instrument to create musical notes to the show.

c) Theme

The themes used by them are highly mythical. For example, they perform Ramayana, Mahabharata, Nalan stories or any of the mythical stories. They even create awareness among the kids by demonstrating awareness regarding AIDS, Deforestation and illiteracy.

d) Script

They prepare the script by themselves and the puppeteer knows each and every line and further manages to use the dolls depending upon the act wise sequence. It is really a remarkable and a Herculean task, as the puppeteer has to remember all these things which last for a minimum of one and a half hour. He changes his voice and uses modulations for all the different roles. eg. Comedian's role, heroine's role, hero's role, anti-hero's role, etc.,

The Puppeteer – Mr. Kuppusamy

In this article the researcher has depicted a case study on the endangered folk art Puppetry with special reference to Mr.Kuppusamy, a veteran puppeteer. He is the ninth heir of the puppeteer's origin. His father, grandfather, great grandfather and their grandfathers had been the maestros of the shows. Nine generations of his family were deeply involved in performing this show. But he says in a pathetic voice that his heir is not interested to perform this art form as it does not have a prospective future. The reason is the advancement of technology. He further adds that it would be looked as an ancient art form in the forth-coming years. Though he has sold his ancient puppets to the museums in Germany and America, he tries to preserve this wonderful art by signing memorandum of understanding with Pondicherry University, Pondy. He is teaching this ancient art form to the persons through Department of Arts and Culture in Pondicherry University.

Mr.K.Kuppusamy's great grandfathers had been practicing this art form from the period of King Sarbojar. His father Mr. Lakshma Rao received "Kalaimamani" award from the then President Pratibha Patil for her excellent contribution towards the development of this rare art form. The puppeteers primarily demand support for survival in order to safeguard this art form.

Redemption from Extinction

In order to develop the interest of the rural folk in savings and insurance policies, puppetry is used in the promotional videos of the Union Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation in Uttar Pradesh. Anindita Chattopadhyay says in Puppetry as a form of Mass Communication: Indian perspective that, "Convergence of folk media like puppetry with electronic and new media like television and internet is very essential for the elevate 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" (2017: 80). Similarly Samsung Galaxy Note 3 advertisement gives a beautiful demonstration of the string puppet and represents how the audience attention gets diverted from a ball to the folk art. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CYrGTmh0Ohk>). These like promotions really help in

the redemption of this ancient art form. Further, the TV show like “Gali Gali Sim Sim” in POGO is one such example where the glove puppet is used. Through this the children get an awareness regarding these like puppet shows. Like these, some other promotions could be done for retaining this art form from extinction.

Incorporating Ancient Art form in Curriculum

The extinction of this ancient art form could be avoided by using it to create awareness among the kids and youngsters. This will be a stepping stone for the development of this art form. Further the kids and youngsters will consider it to be a freak out in addition to considering it as knowledge gathering. If this is considered as mandatory in folk lore degree curriculum, there will be a win-win situation for the art development as well as for knowledge gaining. K.A. Gunasekaran, Dean and Head of the School of Performing Arts, Pondicherry University, Pondicherry, in Frontline article “Shadow Plays”, states that “As in Kerala, the performing arts should be included in the educational syllabus. The Tamil Nadu government should revive the practice of staging a folk performance prior to any government function,” (2013: 5) [4]. It would be good to incorporate this as a learning tool in kinder garden, primary as well as in higher secondary classes while learning languages. At least once in six months, a puppet show has to be performed in the schools and colleges with a relevant theme which will enrich or create awareness in kids thereby minimizing the probability of the extinction of this art form. Further, this could be exhibited in village functions, school functions, college functions so that the puppeteers will get livelihood and will preserve it further for the forth-coming generations.

Conclusion

Preserving society and culture is mandatory and it has become a high time for Indians too. Preserving the art form which retained society with rich culture is also very important in the modern world. This article is just an exploration of how the ancient art form, a form of folk lore is getting exterminated in the due course of advancement of Technology. Technological advancement not only tunes the world to the next level but it also provides a devastating effect to the existing folk lore and folk art. Television, theatres and computers with internet connectivity have replaced many ancient arts just like Puppetry. This puppetry form could be used in education now-a-days for the sake of learning. Educating small kids up to the age of six, with the puppets will create a good impact in their minds. In hospitals especially in children’s wards, puppets are used to minimize fear in kids. Considering all, the puppetry could be used as a mode of knowledge development among the kids and through this ancient art form could be preserved. This could be introduced in the curriculum in schools as well as in arts colleges, for retaining the attention of the students as well as to create interest in them. Further, promotions can be done to develop the puppeteers for displaying the same during festive times, as in the olden days, so as to let the people aware of the cultural practises and societal norms through the demonstration of mythological stories. Technology could be a boon but the extinction of ancient art form will be a doom to the whole nation. The puppeteers and puppet shows must be encouraged by the government as well as the organizations meant for preserving the art form in order to retain the same.

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Annexure: Photographs



Figure. 1. Mr.Kuppusamy, Puppeteer, addressing the audience with his stage



Figure. 2. Shadow puppets on stage



Figure. 3. Shadow puppets on stage



Figure. 4. Shadow puppets on stage