



Shadow puppetry of Telugu States

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Abstract :

Puppetry is an ancient art form of India. It is derived from the basic entertainment needs of the public as well as to promote morality explaining through different stories mainly in the state of Andhra Pradesh. There are several types of ancient art form of Puppetry, which are explained and discussed about in this research paper extensively. The art of puppetry is a combination of different art forms like drawing, painting, sculpture, music, dance and drama etc. Right from the beginning when the puppets are made, the art of extracting the skin from the animal and tanning or cutting the wood, drawing and cutting of the puppet's shape and painting and decoration of the figure like this every step of this process demand a lot of patience and imaginative skills.

Introduction :

Puppetry is the most vibrating and popular theatrical form of India. The origin was traced in India and other places across the world. Some scholars cited the dating of puppetry was found 30,000 years ago. The Egyptian script "Hieroglyphics" on the Egyptian tablets described "walking statues" were being used in ancient Egyptian religious dramas. In the primitive period of the human society the Puppetry was used to drive away the evil spirits or to cure the patient's mental depression². According Contractor (1983), the use of puppets seen in church in most of the European countries. Malkin (1977) mentioned that the puppetry was quite popular but the opposition of religious leaders banished the Puppets from the Church because of its acquisition of Witchcraft resemblance and quality. According to Indian legend that the origin of the puppetry is attributed to Brahma the creator of the Universe, created the first puppeteers Nat, then he created puppet and again he created Bhutt to manipulate for the entertainment of his consort Saraswathi. It is conjectured that legend (Asian puppet 1976) might have originated in Rajasthan, because the Nat, Bhutt communities are the caste of puppeteers belonging to this area³.

Historical Background:

The Ashokan rock edicts in 3rd century B.C had cited the entity of puppets in 1st and 4th edicts. According to Koomara Swamy, Panini, the Sanskrit poet and grammarian of 4th century B.C and Patanjali the author of yoga sutra dated 2nd century B.C, Bharatha, the author of Natya Sastra also discussed about the Puppetry. Later the commentaries of Sarvanada explained that the Bharatha's dancing doll was made of wood, leather, metal. The Kamasutra of Vatsayana the most celebrated classic of intimate relationship has discussed various types of Puppets. It is also elaborated the making of puppets from not only from wood but also from threads, animal horns, honey combs and even with clay too. Vatsayan also mentioned for the first time about the manipulation of the puppets not only by strings but also by "yanthras" so that puppet could be animated with inbuilt mechanism which might prone the idea of "Robot" to science and technology. The puppetry was cited in great epic Mahabharatha. The great Sanskrit poet and Play writer Kalidasa had discussed of Puppets in his Abhignana Shakuntalam⁴. The Bala Ramayana by Rajasekhara around 10th century A.D mentioned two wooden puppets of Rama, Sita. The famous King Bhoja whose throne carried by 32 statues of wooden dolls resembles the Puppets⁵. The Puppeteer does not have any restriction on impersonating a member of any caste,culled from the general characteristics with adoption of the immediate surroundings. Depends upon the context and availability of material and necessity, the puppets can be divided in to Four types. They are

- 1. Glove Puppets**
- 2.Rod Puppets**
- 3.String Puppets**
- 4. Shadow Puppets.**

Glove Puppet:

It is the simplest type of the puppets to make which will be manipulated by the Puppeteer. Its works like hand glove. The puppeteer's hand slips into the glove. Entire manipulation of the puppet depends up on movement of fingers as the parts of the puppets. The thumb and ring finger. The thumb and middle finger move as the hands of puppet. The middle finger to be inserted into head of the puppet to move contextually. The puppeteer's forearm moves like the body which covered by dress. So, that puppet does not have legs. One puppeteer can manage two puppets at a time. Puppeteer moves only the puppet which is talking and other is keeps quiet and still. Contextually the puppeteer changes his voice so that each puppet sounds different from another. This kind of puppetry is most popular in Orissa, Kerala, This tradition in Kerala is known as "Pava Kathakali".In this puppets are carved in wood, painted and embellished in transparent coral and peacock feathers in the manner of Kathakali. Most of these themes are culled from the Mahabharatha named as "Kalyana Sugandhikam, Uttara Swayamvaram and Dhuryodhanavadham.

Rod Puppet:

Rod puppet is a cut –out figure tacked to a stick with one or more movable parts, controlled by puppeteer from beneath the stage floor. These puppets are very simple to move. Another type consists with movable head, body, and arms. To some there will be more rods and strings to move doll's eye ball, tongue, upper limbs. It is difficult to operate rather than earlier type. These are taller

than 1.25 centimeters in height and 5 to 10 in weight, faces are often painted in the style of Pata Chitra of Orissa. In Orissa it is known as “Kathi Kundhei Nach” which means rod doll dance. Themes are adopted from Mahabharat and Durga slaying demon. This is famous at temples, rural areas, surrounding areas of Tanjore of South India. The Puppeteer does not have any restriction on impersonating a member of any caste, culls from the general characteristics with adoption of the immediate surroundings. Depends upon the context and availability of material and necessity, the puppets can be divided into four types. They are

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String Puppet:

In this kind, the puppet is usually manipulated by 5- 7 strings, 4-5 feet in height, 10 Kgs in weight which are attached to triangular wooden control. The string puppet is most popular in Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, Orissa. In south, at Tamilnadu there is composite puppet tradition was found known as “Bommalattam” in which both strings and rods were used. This is also famous at temples, rural areas, surrounding areas of Tanjore, themes were supplied from Ramayana, Mahabharatha. In Karnataka this tradition is called as “Suthrada Gombetta” resembles to yaksha gana dance form. Especially in the context of theme, costumes, music, jewellery and make –up and structure of performance it seems like yaksha gana.

Shadow Puppet :

The traditional shadow puppet theatre is chiefly concentrated in the States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, the Orissa, Maharashtra and Kerala shadow puppets are black in color, the Andhra and Karnataka puppets are multi colored and are bigger in size. The shadow puppets were made of deer skin, in the earlier days. They are flat, cut out figures seen only in silhouette. The figures are drawn on the skin, cut out and embellished with dots, lines and holes. Puppets are painted in different colors. To prevent the puppet from bending, a thin strip of smoothed bamboo is fastened vertically along the middle either side. The arms of the puppet are provided with movable joints. A semitransparent white cloth will be stretched as a screen made of smooth cotton to any frame. A strong electric light is placed behind the screen. Shadow puppet is attached to thin rods either wood or wire is placed between the screen and light. So that the shadow falls on the screen when light puts on anything that will throw a shadow is a shadow puppet. The main drawback of this puppet is very limited movements akin to rod puppets.

Shadow Puppetry of Telugu states:

Shadow puppetry of Andhra Pradesh is most popular from the ancient times. In Andhra Pradesh, appearance of this art form can be traced from 12 century A.D. the famous Telugu poet Palkuriki Somanatha cited about this in his classical text “Panditharadhya Charitha⁶” later flourished in Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Rayalaseema. Roots of the Puppetry can be traced from Maharashtra. In Maharashtra, puppetry lost the popularity, patronization. Due to this the puppeteer

community was migrated to the borders of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Some scholars stated that this art of puppetry migrated from Karnataka. Because this is flourished in both Karnataka and Maharashtra the same time. But we say that migrants are Maharashtrians which can be supported by the language which they used to speak in Marathi and their names are also similar to Maharashtrians. Even their facial features also had resemblance to the Maharashtrians. Migrants settled in the south Andhra Pradesh and continued their practice of Puppetry. In result, the place where they settled down was named as “Bommalatapalli” village in Ballari district soon they became popular with their Performances. These people are known as “Bondili Kshathriyas”. They revered the puppetry and even shared the puppetry as the inherited property from their ancestors. Simply puppets are their properties. They culled the stories from the great epics Mahabharatha and Ramayana. Unlike other puppetry traditions their choice of themes is very interesting which can arouse the interest among the audience. The themes for Performance are “Draupadi Vasthrahamanam”, Keechaka Vadha” battle scenes were elaborately performed. As for their performances they relayed on ‘Ranganath Ramayana of the 16th century which was exclusively written for their puppet shows.

They used deer skin and mountain goat’s skin for preparation of puppets. They registered general conventions in using the materials. The rare availability, and its role in mythology of deer has been attributed as sacred quality, was used to prepare divine pictures. Whereas goat skin was used to design the demonic images. A kind of imitation group was started from the Godavari basin of Andhra Pradesh⁷ to Gain fame and money like the traditional migrant puppeteers. But due to the lack of imaginative skills, a strong voice and musical back ground, soon they disappear from the screen of puppetry tradition. It was told the failure of the pseudo group was happened because of their unconventional methods they followed in preparation of puppets. Unlike migrants they used buffalo skin to make the puppets which caused to get effect the wrath of Gods. Because buffalo skin was non - auspicious, used in making of foot ware⁶.

The art of puppetry is a combination of different art forms like drawing, painting, sculpture, music, dance and drama etc. Right from the beginning when the puppets are made, the art of extracting the skin from the animal and tanning or cutting the wood, drawing and cutting of the puppet’s shape and painting and decoration of the figure like this every step of this process demand a lot of patience and imaginative skills. Commonly puppet figure is prepared by tracing the design on the animal skin the cutting the outlines of the puppets. Sometimes they craft person does marking the shape of the doll from his memory and imaginative skills. Physical features of the puppets follow some strict conventions like female figures are shorter than the male with slim waists and broad hips. Puppets in this region Figure are double in size than the ordinary puppets to drag the semblance of superior appearance. The colours which are applied to the faces or on the costumes of the puppets gives special quality. Devils are painted in black and red whereas the divine pictures are given white and yellow or blue. This aspects of colour choice can be witnessed in Kathakali dance form. For Example, the faces of Rama and Krishna were drawn in pleasant faces with well-structured bodies. But heads are oversized which signifies the divinity. The evil characters like Ravana, Dhuryodhana were portrayed in distorted faces and clumsy limbs. Demonic characters are usually portrait with huge boulders and big swords. Their articulations also shown with jerky and intense anguish were shown symbolically showed by striking their heads against the ground⁷. Voices of the puppets will be changed according to the situations. The Brahmin depicted in thick twist of hair. Kings and queens or other royal characters are easily identified with certain motifs like elephants, horse, and

palanquin, flanked by the attendants. Ornamentation and decoration of the costumes depends up on the cultural background and status of the puppet. Even the entry of the puppets on the stage follows some general conventions like Divine characters enter from the right side of the stage where as the other images from the left side of the stage and demonic figures enters from the usually from the top of the stage⁸.

The preparation of the puppet is reflecting the specific region and its traditions. Especially the shadow puppets of Andhra Pradesh are similar to the puppets of Karnataka. They are chiefly bulging eyes, profile face and frontal torso, heavy decoration might be taken from tradition of south Indian murals. Coloring of the puppets was given with the natural dyes but later ages they just using synthetic colors. As a theatrical prop, these characters are made to carry burning torches, sprinkled with resin dust to create sudden flame. Such techniques allow the puppeteers to create the sense of fear, awesome among the audience⁹.

As I mentioned earlier, the puppeteers have a family tradition practice in this art form. The elder member of the family train their children to acquire the skill of making and manipulating puppets. They have good voice which comes through hereditary. mostly they sing in “Mukhari raga.” In these families one male puppeteer will have two wives who helps him in the performance. These women give chorus to the main singer. So, intentionally the polygamy custom was prevalent in their families. There is no need of formal education for these puppeteers. They just need to memorize the dialogues. Many of these are agriculturists. The puppet shows were organized during the different seasons and these puppets were transferred from generation to generation. During these days the art of puppetry is taken as full-time profession by many organizations. Due to the advent of cinema and other popular media the popularity of the puppetry is waned. But still, it is plying pivotal role in promoting the govt. schemes and giving the awareness about the social and contemporary issues.

References

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