



# Sutradhar

A UNIMA India Publication

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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

*Sutradhar* in its fourth issue brings us closer to world class artists of the performing arts/puppet theatre. This issue focuses on reflections and learning from Barbara Kolleig's Master Class held in Delhi in January 2015. This year has also seen three festivals of Puppetry in India (a first! I think), and we have featured photographs and commentary on two of the most important ones - Ishara International Puppet Festival and Dhaatu International Puppet Festival. In memory of Indonesian puppeteer Tizar Purbaya - who passed away unexpectedly in April 2015 - our final article in this issue is on his career as a path-breaking *dalang* and innovator of the form.

A background to the issue - UNIMA India, the National Centre of the Union International De La Marionette, in India has committed itself to build a discourse around puppet theatre in India and by 2016 it intends to propose the first draft of a curriculum for puppet theatre. It is in this context that the Master Classes are organized by UNIMA-India. Each master class engaged with two key questions. Firstly, what could be the possible curriculum of a future puppet school in India? Secondly, what are the crucial discourses that emerge in this interaction between 'Masters' of the form, participants who are practitioners in the field and researchers/observers who watch the workshops? Some of these questions are of universal significance to the arts.

The very first Master Class was led by Gunduraju (a puppeteer from Karnataka) on the traditional shadow puppet form known as Togalu Gombeyatta. This intensive residential workshop of 15 days was held in Mussoorie in June 2014. The focus of the workshop was to create an atmosphere for an immersive experience for participants to understand Togalu Gombeyatta. This process involved the making of leather shadow puppets, engaging with the particular narrative technique of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and then the creation of projects inspired by the form i.e. its material, narrative or manipulation technique.

In the case of Barbara Kolleig's workshop, held in Delhi in January 2015, the focus was learning the very specific technique of 'Material Theatre' that she practices as the director of Helios Theatre in Hamm, Germany.

Unlike Gunduraju, Barbara is used to conducting workshops and has a pedagogic system in place. This was a crucial starting point for us as UNIMA India is trying to understand pedagogic practices in order to record best practices.

In the series, Barbara was the first European artist to hold a Master Class. It was clear to see that our main challenge will be to evolve a curriculum where both traditional Indian puppetry and non-traditional techniques must be included. These will have to be collated powerfully so that the education of future puppeteers is truly holistic. However, there are already clear parallels in practices as diverse as that of Gunduraju of Karnataka and Barbara Kolleig of Germany. For example, deep immersion in the art itself, keeping the material (in Barbara's case the materials like sand, stone, water and in Gunduraju's case the narrative) as a priority.

Barbara Kolleig's Master Class was supported by the Goethe Institute, Delhi. The Crafts Museum generously gave their space for the workshop. The space definitely added a very special dimension to the workshop. Gunduraju's Master Class was supported by India Foundation for the Arts, Bangalore. These valuable collaborations add strength to our efforts and we are grateful for them.

Ranjana Pandey  
President,  
UNIMA India

# With New Eyes: Exploring the Theatre of Sand, Stone and Paper

By Ranjana Pandey & Anurupa Roy

## Context

In France, theatre-for-the-very-young (i.e. age 2 years upwards) came about as early as 1994. Netherlands and Italy have also been exploring the same for many years. In this view, Germany's city of Hamm is a newcomer. In 2000, a European network called "Small Size" was launched - it brought stories of practice and practitioners of this field together for the very first time. This network consolidated and acknowledged the importance of this burgeoning field of theatre.

Barbara Kolleig's Helios Theatre has been practicing their special form of 'Material Theatre' with growing success in Hamm - this particular form of theatre is for children between the ages of two and five. An early performance of theirs titled "H2O" set the bar; the focus of this performance was water. Since then, both their work and fame has grown steadily.

UNIMA INDIA and Goethe Institute partnered to hold a Master Class led by Barbara for ten days from January 12th -22nd 2015 at the Crafts Museum in New Delhi. There were ten participants - a mix of theatre practitioners and puppeteers and two observers.

## Material Theatre For The Very Young

In preparation of the workshop, we asked Barbara for a list of workshop material. In return, she sent back a mysteriously scanty list - "sand, stones and

paper." So, it is not surprising that on the very first day the participants were plunged into a deep exploration of natural material which is, in fact, central to this kind of theatre.

The following excerpt from a participant's journal gives an idea of the levels at which they were encouraged to engage with the material -

*"We were told to play with the sand.*

*Holding a hand full of sand and then to throw it to floor (It made a sound)*

*Tried to make different designs out of it.*

*Creating Landscapes, imagining different situations.*

*Exploring its texture, weight, flexibility"*

Barbara began by making the participants play with material for a whole day - just like children play with material. This was focused not on creating "theatre" but learning to understand the material itself.

This meant understanding that each material is itself i.e. to truly understand that it has its own smell, texture, shape and size.

Excerpts from participants' journals give a sense of

"In preparation of the workshop, we asked Barbara for a list of workshop material. In return, she sent back a mysteriously scanty list - sand, stones and paper."

the scope of this engagement:

*"Exploring of Material Stone -*

*Feelings, Playing with the Stones, Its Character, Possibilities*

*After playing with the stone alone we worked with a partner.*

*Exploring the Possibilities as a material for kind of story or presentation.*

*We played, we tried different games, threw those stones up and down.*

*We tried with different force, pressure, with its weight, hardness, shape and sizes.*

*Tried to make forms, landscapes ."*

*"A stone is just a stone until you do something with it."*

*"Imagined those stones as different characters, we all had our own stories."*

Through this process, the participants discovered the nature of the material. The *theatre* of material then uses this intrinsic nature to create situations and circumstances that ultimately become the performance.

"Why focus so much on material? Because the danger is that the material goes away and what we have to tell becomes more important (than the



Barbara in session with participants at the Master Class



material) because we are so used to using words. If material is used like an object then it loses power. If we focus on something, the spectator will also focus on it. We have to learn to focus on material that keeps the attention of the audience on the material itself," says Barbara

Undoubtedly, it is a very sensory process. It is the sound that the water makes, the way the sand feels, the way clay clings, the way stones roll, the way paper tears... To observe all this and to have all of one's senses stimulated is one way to describe theatre-for-the-very-young.

### **The Non Actor**

In an interview Barbara explains

"In my style of theatre, what can the approach of the artist be to his performance on the stage? Does he behave like a grown up? Or does he become very small and child-like? Or sweet? The question is how can I - as a forty year old adult - approach children with my subject matter? There are so many questions aimed at the ego of the artist on the stage. If he is not ready to put his ego on one side, then it will probably not work."

The players do not pretend to be children just

because they are playing for children. In fact, they are "non-actors" in this style of theatre.

In the workshop, Barbara brought participants to the point where they had to think everything through - the pace, the position, the "why" of each action. Participants had to learn to *not* put too much "actor" energy into each action as it distracts and leads the focus away from material. For example, in one of the exercises, a stone was dropped and the movement of the actors was exaggerated

and accompanied by a strong vocalization. The actor's movement and the vocalization eclipsed the stone and its movement, the sound of the dropping on earth. The actor had distracted the

audience by putting too much "actor" energy.

For most learners, the pitfall is that acting and actors become central to the performance. The human fellowship, emotions and partnership between actors is so familiar to us that we unconsciously begin to play to each other. The actors have to make an effort to drop this interplay i.e. drop all extra action, objects, material, movement, words. Less, in material theatre, is always better than more.

"The human fellowship, emotions and the partnership between actors is so familiar to us that we unconsciously begin to play to each other. The actors have to make an effort to drop this interplay - drop all extra action, objects, material, movement, words. Less, in material theatre, is always better than more."

More often than not, adult expectations and assessment of children tend to guide what is deemed “participation” in a theatre performance. Instead, we have to examine participation through the lens of child psychology and pedagogy of *this* kind of theatre. Theatre-for-the-very-young has developed its own principles based on pure experience.

If performers want to reach small children we have to be quieter, slower and more measured.

### Teaching Process

Every day of the workshop began with a warm-up exercise, which was followed by the screening of a filmed performance and discussion, and finally hands-on exploration of material.

With regard to the material itself - Barbara

carefully introduced one element at a time. First, a single material (stone), then two materials (sand and stone), followed by three materials (sand, stone and paper) then adding sound and, finally, the word.

In terms of developing a performance participants began by creating an image out of the material, adding some action to the image and then, finally, developed a fully-fledged story from this combination.

By the fifth day, Barbara had brought the participants to a point where they could start doing small improvisations in pairs or threes. For her, the interaction in these small groups was crucial. It was important for participants to reflect off each other to develop a performance. To keep the process dynamic and challenging, she changed



*Left and Top Right Adjacent Page: Participants exploring the texture of sand*



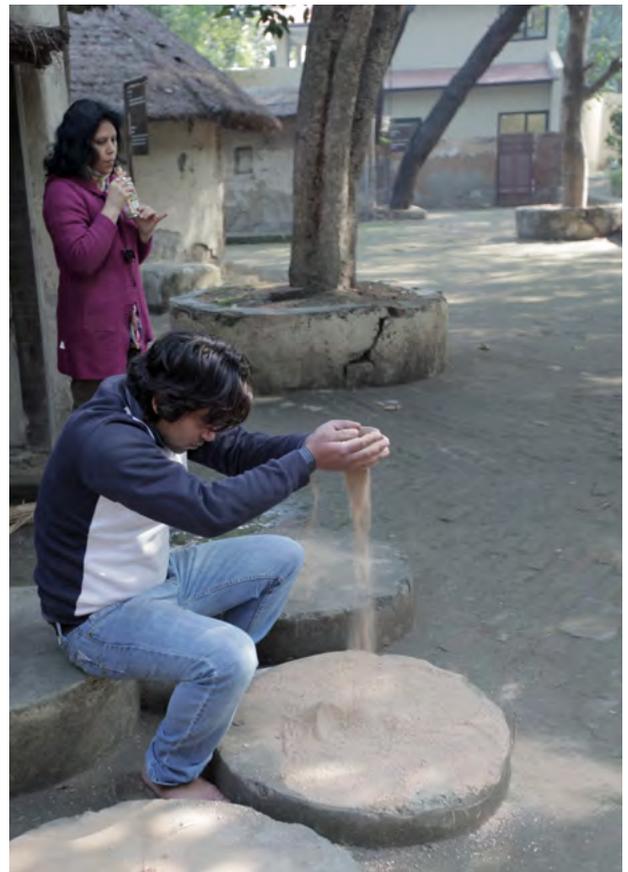
the groups every day – all the while observing how they worked together.

By the ninth day, participants had created short pieces which were ready to be presented to an external audience. However, the rains on the last day became a serious challenge for the group as they had to re-think their outdoor presentations. To the credit of the participants, this actually brought about some wonderful last-minute improvisations

### **Learning From The Experience of Helios Theatre**

Group discussions were an important daily event – especially as none of the participants had worked with such young children before. So, discussion about the psychology of children of 2-5 years became key. Barbara shared with us how Helios Theatre had learnt experientially and intuitively, albeit with some guidance by pedagogues. During these discussions, participants developed an understanding of the important role that the introduction to the performance plays, as well as the interaction that happens after it. Both these “moments” have become an integral part of the Helios Theatre methodology and practice.

This was evident in the filmed performances, as well. Children were introduced to sounds and/or materials in the foyer of the theatre itself, a preparatory moment that put them in the correct



frame of mind for a material-centric performance. After the show, children were invited to participate in an exploration of the material used in the performance (like licking ice or feeling a drop of cold water) and/or to step into the theatrical space (the stage). Here, participants saw how “participation” itself is questioned in this context until the right “child-centric” balance is found.

An excerpt from the participant’s journal illustrates this:

*“After watching H2O, a very successful performance of the Helios theatre we learnt: To be not too fast. Not*

*to be too loud, too direct or make large movements. To make the children settle down the pace should be slow and steady.”*

As a workshop conductor, Barbara is flexible – she keeps her process open to intervention by participants, all the while nudging them forward with questions about their work.

When asked about her methodology she explains quite simply, “I try to stay at the back and not be too much on them... It would not be very fair of me to make them depend too much on me. When I go, they will be lost.”

One of the most successful examples of this approach at the Master Class is the performance developed by Prerna Bagaria and Partha Prathim Paul. Using the concept of “joining the dots”, they made an exciting series of images that used stones as the dots and sand as the lines connecting one image to the next. It evolved in the course of the workshop with minimum interference by Barbara. Barbara’s approach looks at the actor for children as the “non-actor” who does not pretend to be a child but is “him/herself”. This truly challenged our participants but by the end gave them a clear device and way of working with and for children. They could see for themselves what Barbara meant when she said “being authentic” and “staying with the facts”. These were the two major breakthroughs they experienced at the Master Class.

## **Observations**

For UNIMA INDIA this Master Class has been a wonderful opportunity to explore the similarities and differences in “traditional” and “contemporary” pedagogy. In the case of the Togalu Gombeyatta Master Class (held by UNIMA INDIA in June 2014), for example, the main focal point was narrative i.e. the epics. In puppet theatre, the focal point is the puppet itself. In Barbara’s theatre, natural materials (for example: sand, water and stone) remain the central focus. There is no strong narrative, puppet or actor in the conventional sense.

## **§**

***Ranjana Pandey** is a puppeteer, playwright, television director and educator. She has worked extensively using puppets for therapy and in educational puppet theatre especially for children with special needs and grass roots community. Currently she is teaching puppetry at the University of Jamia Milia and is also the President of Unima India.*

***Anurupa Roy** is a puppeteer, puppet designer and director of the puppet theater. She started *Katkatha* in 1998. She has directed over 15 shows for children and adults ranging from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* to Shakespearean comedy to the *Humayun-nama*. She is a recipient of the *Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar in Puppetry (2006)*.*



*Clockwise: Participants filling up journals at the Master Class; participant Faezeh Jalali performing with paper; Pallavi Chander and Partha Prathim Paul performing with paper.*



# 'Material-ness': Exploring Intersections between Object Theatre and Material Theatre

By Choiti Ghosh

In India, thousands of years of puppet-history stand us in good stead when we are introduced to concepts like material theatre & object theatre. They also shape our initial approach to these emerging art forms, as we find ourselves trying to fit the new into familiar slots and techniques. We find ourselves creating puppets from formless materials, or attempting to move immobile objects so that they awkwardly walk, talk and have a consciousness of their own.

I often do object theatre workshops with adults and young adults who have *some* exposure to puppetry but absolutely no experience of theatre with objects or material. It is always a bit of a struggle to switch from looking at all dead matter as a potential puppet to seeing the object's own communicative potential. Recently, at one such workshop, I was asked - what is the need for object theatre if animation, actors, puppets and other forms of art can do what object theatre does, and on a larger scale?

It seems like an innocent enough question with a simple enough answer but I was flummoxed for some time. Flummoxed because the realization of what these "scompletely-dead" things can do while they remain what they are - and not transform into a living creature at any time to walk, talk and express how humans express - is actually a fundamental and profound shift from

the theatre of the 'living-dead', i.e. puppetry.

I hope I was able to get the point across as clearly as possible to the confused participant of my object theatre workshop. The very simple answer being - if we try to make the object do what a human or a puppet does then, of course, it will fail. The idea is to truly discover the *object-ness* of the object in as many ways as possible and use that as a trigger.

Despite having practiced object theatre for 4 years, I only truly internalized this at Barbara Kolleig's workshop with materials. Object theatre and material theatre - as they both follow the dictates of the material/object itself rather than that of the human - are actually quite similar in this regard.

The dictionary meaning of "material" is - it is a substance or substances out of which "things" can be made i.e. a raw material (which is physical), a tool, a quality (which is ideational) which gives rise to something else.

In Barbara's theatre, the "material" morphs the physical and the ideational in unique and evocative ways. The physical material carries within itself and gives rise to ideas through their very material-ness.



Every day of the ten day workshop was begun by watching a video of Helios Theatre's (Barbara's theatre company based in Hamm, Germany) productions.

In all of these videos we saw that their theatre followed a similar pattern of adults playing with the chosen material (clay, water, sand, wood, wool etc.) and creating visuals with them. The performer's interaction with the material and with other humans (co-performers and audience members) was simultaneously playful and mature. We saw two-year-old audiences - as well as accompanying adults - watch the

material create, break and recreate imagery, as if enchanted.

This would be followed by a discussion, and the rest of the day would be spent by us - the ten participants - playing with materials. That is it. Simply playing.

This is where the deceptive simplicity of her process lay. Without completely realizing it, while we played with the material - sometimes stones, sometimes paper, sometimes sand, sometimes water - many things subconsciously started unfolding within us.



What you create - or in this case how you play - is so connected to “who” you are and “who” the material is. This form of theatre is a subtle and subliminal coming together of these two critical elements, i.e. the material and the human who interacts with the material.

Many of us were puppeteers, some theatre actors, some educators, a sculptor, an object theatre practitioner and a designer - so, most of the participants already had some existing relationship with material. Each relationship was quite peculiar to them and their practice. And the material, for its part, seemed to absorb our

history, our background, our experiences and our individual thoughts quite mellifluously.

Barbara never got in the way of this relationship. She never came between the material and me to say this technique is right and that technique is wrong - or *this* approach is not material theatre or *this* is “correct” material theatre.

The first day was spent largely playing with stones. First one. Then two. Then many. When - for the first time - a single stone was carefully handed to each of us by Barbara, we all stood staring at it for some time waiting for some instruction to follow.





None did. It was a while before we realized that she was not going to tell us what to do. We just simply had to do. Something!

But what?? What do you do with a single stone??

After a while, I found myself getting down on my knees and placing the stone on the ground before me. The rest of the participants were experiencing similar moments - some on their knees, some with the stone placed on their palms or feet, some holding it up in front of their eyes with two fingers. And we stared at our respective stones with a reverence that we would never have shown a stone before!

(Of course, at that time it was not reverence we were feeling - we were actually racking our brains.)

After the initial moments of not knowing what to do, our brains and our bodies managed to find a focus with the stone. And from this focus moment - gradually and organically - some sort of “play” began.

This was beautifully summed up by Barbara later: “The material by itself will do nothing. And for the first time, the human being will wonder - what should I do with it? This moment is important, because it leads to filling the gap between

the human and the material and for things to happen.”

All of the participants had to “come together” with the material - in this case with the stone - before things started happening. For the first time, in a small way, the physical (stone) and the ideational (play) came together.

As we continued playing with our stone, Barbara went around to each of us and quietly placed one more, sometimes two - or, even, a whole bunch before us. These new stones immediately became “the other”, with whom we had to forge new relationships.

With the coming of the new stones, I realized that our brains will “endow” the material with situations and relationships, contexts and mini-stories.

As days progressed and we began demonstrating our “play” before each other, we also realized that this tendency to “endow” is shared by the audience. Even if the player/performer does not infuse situations or relationships within the performance, the audience’s mind will endow it with their own interpretations. In fact, the more the performer remains simply factual, the more the audience has scope to interpret on their own. This interpretation can arise out of even the

largest of abstractions.

Over the next nine days we played in a variety of circumstances - alone, in pairs, in groups, with and without musical instruments. We often showed each other our improvisations, which were then followed by long discussions.

The discussions were very interesting, because they created a resonance amongst us. Barbara - and sometimes one of the participants - would articulate something that summed up what we had been experiencing while playing.

And I would think – “Yes, that’s right! That is what was happening!” Some of these mini-epiphanies were:

- The material would always show us - often quite adamantly - what its possibilities and limitations were.
- The material decided its own characteristic personality rather than us deciding it for the material.
- It was important for us to create a large space to allow the material and the human to come together, to create something together slowly and gradually.

- It was important to follow what Barbara called our subliminal impulses. To trust “the gut” while creating any action and to allow these impulses to dictate our choices was crucial. It is from there that the right balance between ‘play’ and ‘thought’ would emerge.

Other than these, there was one epiphany that was the most significant - not only does the physical (i.e. the material) come together with the ideational (i.e. the playing) but the material also carries within itself both its hardcore physicality and the ideas it can evoke. The human need only be present to aid this process.

And this is the politics of both material and object theatre. How much are we humans able to allow the material-ness of the material to emerge and take centre-stage? How much are we able to put the material before us? It is truly a humbling thought, prone to create flummoxes!

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*Choiti Ghosh is an Object Theatre practitioner, performer, director, writer, singer and puppeteer. She is the Creative Director of Mumbai & New Delhi-based object theatre company Tram Theatre.*

*Photographs by Riverbank Studios*

# Of Things That Speak And Play In Silence

By Pallavi Chander

As someone who has always had a fascination for the unknown language of inanimate things, I often find myself collecting random objects hoping to make something out of them someday. As a theatre practitioner and arts-based therapist, I have wanted to look at developing a performance exclusively for special-needs children. Since children-with-needs are rarely taken to the theatre to experience a performance, I want to take a performance to *their* space - be it at school or home. This would perhaps lead into a session of sensory play with materials. The UNIMA INDIA master class by Barbara Kolleig was a starting point to develop this idea, as well as use those objects that have I collected over the years.



*Raghu and Faezeh performing at the Master Class*

The foremost quality of the Helios style of using material for performance is its minimalist approach. A performer explores one material and builds narratives through improvisations. Barbara - as one of the artistic directors of the theatre company and the director of the play 'H2O'\* - allows her actors to play with material before arriving at a devised piece. She allows them to respond to their impulse, and builds her productions from there. She shared that her best critics are children. As the production moves to its final stage, it is performed for a group of children whose responses are observed and changes are made to the performance accordingly.

As participants at the workshop, we went through a similar experience. We were allowed to play with a material, respond to our impulses, and slowly create "situations" through improvisations which then developed into narratives. During the sessions, Barbara asked us to think about where some of our responses to the material came from. Inevitably, we realized that most came from our own experiences and the created "situation" - most often - came from where the participant was at that point and time in his life. For example, a recurring theme in the improvisations was artistic exploration - some were consciously pedagogical, and a handful were political.

What is also interesting about the minimal

approach is that extends to all areas of a production - so as to remain true to the material. The sound, lights, colours, number of actors, the material and its various forms are just enough - nothing more, nothing less. As participants we were often reminded that it was important to “kill our darlings” to avoid clutter and an overload of visual information that could muddle the interpretation of the story. For example, in one of the productions directed by Barbara the actors from Helios explored wood as a medium. They only used musical instruments made out of wood as those alone could bring the sound of the material into the performance. The audience witnessed an interesting play with wood shavings, paper and figurines that were created during the performance with a hammer and nails.

Unlike most forms of puppetry - in which the puppeteer is behind the scenes - the performer in material theatre is almost always visible and a part of the performance. In most cases, they must try to keep attention on the material. I, personally, found this emphasis on subtle communication between the material and the audience interesting. Considering that we intend

to address an audience below the age of 4 years through this technique, subtlety not only builds assurance and familiarity with the material and the performer but also draws the audience into the play.

“As participants we were often reminded that it was important to ‘kill our darlings’ to avoid clutter and an overload of visual information that could muddle the interpretation of the story.”

The hours of the workshop whizzed past as we sat in silence speaking to a stone one day, sand on another and a sheet of paper on the third. Our bodies moved to the “element” of sound through instruments. We

were also paired up to communicate using the language that had developed through these materials, creating a special bond between the elements at play. At a later stage, exploring spaces within the Crafts Museum changed the dynamics of material. The large steps of the amphitheatre, for example, introduced definite levels. The explorations varied from paper-cut dolls realizing the breakdown of a relationship, to a magical landscape created with stones, sand and paper. In another improvisation, rolled sheets of paper played with tiny paper pieces, while strips of paper fluttered poignantly in the wind. One of the groups performed a shadow play behind a large sheet as an ode to the bright sunlight on a Delhi winter afternoon.



In the last few days, we explored hidden spaces within the museumized rural houses at the Crafts Museum. Participants were paired to explore two materials (one each) with which they wished to build a narrative. While I choose sand, my partner chose stone. The solidity and finite quality of stones in contrast to the fluidity and refined quality of sand made us think of authority, rigidity and numbness which spread with the ease of sand. In this context, the story of a boy with a stone heart is the story of a young boy who gets ridiculed by bullies for befriending a bird. This experience turns him into a bigger bully where he destroys people and countries in revenge, while the bird flies past him as distant as a dream. The boy was played by a stone, destruction by sand and the bird, a fallen leaf.

Another improvisation that stood out for me was the story created on a plastic sheet which was used as a canvas with sand and stones. The participants moved around the canvas sheet – which was spread out on the floor – and created images by placing stones and connecting them with sand. They used a broom to wipe out their canvas and then began another scene, in sequence. This process created an illusion of dots and lines which could very easily be replicated as a

“A stone for its quality of being solid and having a definite shape, makes a clear-cut sound—the size and shape of it mattered as much as its shadows and texture. On the other hand, paper seemed very finite — not limiting but finite, in a sense.”

learning tool for young audiences.

Personally, I found that exploring elements like sand, stone, sticks, water and air as sound evoked a very primal sensorial experience. A stone for its quality of being solid and having a definite shape, makes a clear-cut sound—the size and shape of it mattered as much as its shadows and texture. On the other hand, paper seemed very finite—not limiting but finite, in a sense. Paper has a quality of malleability i.e. it takes the form given to it. Whether folded or cut, it does as instructed. I found the creases from a used sheet, torn pieces and crumpled quality of the material more meaningful.

We were constantly reminded that the minimal use of material not only avoids overload and clutter but also forces the performer to be precise and clear with every move for the audience to make meaning out of it. I found the minimal use of colours very important - especially for young audiences - as it reduces the overload of stimulus and holds the attention and focus for moments of

surprise. It reiterates the fact that children do not necessarily need or like loud and bright colours.

Now, back in my room

which doubles up as a workshop space, I wait for these materials to nudge a silent spark in my chaotic mind. I wait for my thoughts to surrender to impulse and my body to respond to the moment here and now. I am curious to trace back the steps and understand the trajectory of my practice. I feel it is important to understand one's own intent behind the use of these materials. I might want to use it with children in class as a learning tool to impart curriculum or, then, use

it as a therapeutic tool during an arts-based therapy session with children to explore sensory stimuli or perhaps even with adults as a form of non-intrusive storytelling. For example, a child from urban Indian schools might be encouraged to save water by using water itself as a medium for exploration. Water can also be used in a therapeutic context where special children with sensory processing disorder can explore stimulus.



*Pallavi, performing with Partha Prathim Paul at the Master Class*



With regard to a future performance - I would like to look at contextualizing materials locally. The manner in which they are used which may differ with space and age groups. As I prefer going to communities and performing - rather than using a proscenium platform - I might explore a production where I can push the imagination with found materials to tell a story. For young children living in apartment complexes and gated communities, using stones and sand from their play area might help connect to their own stories. With children from rural government schools, I might want to use paper from their note books or pencil and erasers or a ribbon from a student's plait.

The experience at the Master Class made me explore two significant areas - one is to re-look at material as itself for its own qualities. The other is to allow my instinctive inner child to play with material without any pre-conceived notions or expectations.

\*H2O is a production that explores the element of water, presented by Helios Theatre, Germany.

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**Pallavi Chander** is an arts practitioner and an arts based therapist from Bangalore. She is one of the founding members of Masrah, a Bangalore

*based theatre group. She is inclined to work with children and adults with special needs. She enjoys working with children of all ages and finds it hard to draw labels on differences between the special and normal, all being relative! With her basis in theatre and arts, she is keen on exploring 'the arts' as an approach to learning, therapy and healing. She has worked in organisations like Theatre Professionals, Snehadhara Foundation, Magic Puddles-Arts Based Therapy Centre, Maraa- arts and media collective.*

*Photographs by Riverbank Studios*

# Feature: Ishara International Puppet Festival

*Based on an interview with festival director Dadi Pudumjee*

Ishara International Puppet Festival (IIPF) was conceived by Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust\* to expose Indian audiences and puppeteers to a variety of techniques, styles and narratives. Launched in 2002 with the help of a grant from the Ford Foundation, IIPF is meant for “modern” and “traditional” puppeteers to showcase their work on a common platform. While Sangeet Natak Academy regularly held national-level puppet festivals and ICCR had brought down the occasional international show, till that point there was no annual festival that showcased international puppeteers in India. IIPF sought to fill this gap, and since then its role has evolved. In addition to the seven-day festival at the India Habitat Centre (which goes house-full on most days), shows also travel to Chandigarh and Jaipur. Visiting artists also hold special shows and workshops in schools in these cities - as a result, there are several collateral events that generate interest in the form.

The vision of Ishara is to simultaneously promote puppetry amongst potential audiences, showcase new work, and create a space for artists to dialogue on the future of the form – be it technical, formal, or related to the ethics of engaging with traditional storytelling forms. If well attended by puppeteers themselves, discussions like this - Dadi feels - offer an opportunity to bridge gaps in understanding, especially with regard

to the varied contexts in which puppeteers operate in across the country. The team has found innovative ways around some of the gaps in contextualisation - for example when Raavan Chhaya performed at IIPF, the festival asked a researcher to introduce every segment of their performance to the uninitiated Delhi audience. In the 2015 edition, UNIMA INDIA presented films and pedagogic findings from their Master Class on Togalu Gombeyatta. At the open presentations and performances (as in the Chandigarh edition, which is entirely free thanks to support from the UT government), critical discussion around the form can be encouraged amongst its varied stakeholders. When asked about what he would like to see in the coming years at the festival, Dadi says that fresh narrative-based content is a must. In a festival context, it is necessary to have strong stories – versus viewing puppetry simply as an educational tool in a classroom context.

The 2015 edition featured artists from Afghanistan, Iran, Taiwan, Portugal, United Kingdom and India using media that ranged from simple rod-puppetry/glove-puppetry/shadow puppetry to the more experimental object theatre.

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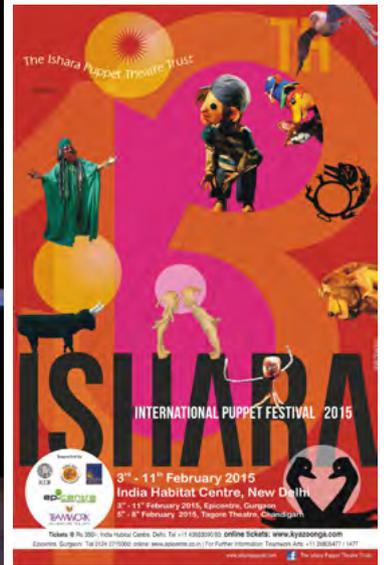


*Kuch Kuch Puppet Theatre from India performs Pinocchio*

*The Fabulous Adventures of the Big Bad Wolf and Red Riding Hood by Saftey Pin Theatre from Iran.*



*'The Lion Who Could Not Write The Letter performed by Parwaz Puppet Theatre from Afghanistan.*



Clockwise: *The Paper Play* performed by *Puppet Beings Theatre Company* from Taiwan; IIPF 2015 poster; *Heer ke Waris* performed by *Ishara Puppet Theatre Trust*; *Prem Sarang* performed by *Aakar Puppet Theatre*.

## Feature: Dhaatu International Puppet Festival

Dhaatu International Puppet Festival is held in Bengaluru, and organised by Anupama and Vidyashankar Hoskore. This year's edition (1st – 4th January 2015) featured artists primarily from Indian traditional forms as well as a troupe from Belgium and Russia each. Indian traditional forms featured were from Maharashtra, Tripura, Assam, West Bengal, and Karnataka. Formally speaking, this edition of the festival showcased string, glove and Bunraku-style shows. Documentary films on puppetry practices were also screened. The festival was held in association with the Ministry of Culture, Department of Tourism of the Government of Karnataka, Central Sangeet Natak Academy, and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike.

Intended to galvanise what it describes as the “fading” form of puppetry in India, the festival's conference was titled ‘Exploring Classical Roots and Living Traditions in Puppetry’. The focus of the conference was on the possible connections between puppetry and classical forms/drama theory – a curious proposition given that in terms of dramaturgy, pedagogy as well as narrative content, puppetry has been known to diverge from the “classical”. Keeping in mind the deep issues that affect the average puppeteer in India – livelihood, technical training, production limitations, funding – some critical thinking needs to be done on how such a large platform can be used in the future for debate and dialogue amongst puppeteers themselves.

*Dhaatu Puppet parade  
at the Dhaatu Puppet  
Festival 2010,  
Freedom Park,  
Bangalore.*





Left: Inaugural address at the conference 'Exploring Classical Roots and Living Traditions in Puppetry', Dhaatu International Puppet Festival 2015; Below: Magic hour of Puppetry- a medley of puppets of India at the 2009 edition of the festival.



# In Memory of Tizar Purbaya

Who passed away on April 23, 2015

*Edited excerpts from Karen Smith's article on Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi*

*Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi – a Betawi style of Indonesian rod puppetry that emerged in Jakarta – is a newcomer on the wayang stage. Indeed, it was created as recently as 2000 by the Jakarta-based dalang, Tizar Purbaya. There is the local shadow theatre form, Wayang Kulit Betawi, which has been performed in the Jakarta region for a long time. The repertoire of this regional style of shadow theatre, however, comes from the classical canon of stories based on the Indian Hindu epics – the Ramayana, Arjuna Sasrabahu (stories prefiguring events in the Ramayana) and the Mahabharata. In its style of performance and in its figures, Wayang Kulit Betawi more or less resembles the Javanese form of shadow theatre. It is thus not particularly Betawi in language, style or content. It was up to Tizar to develop a new style of rod puppetry, or wayang golek, that would take its stories not from the great epics of Indian origin but from local legends and history: Betawi stories. The following edited excerpts describe his journey as a dalang and creator of Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi.*

## Early Life & Career

Born in 1950 in Banten (the westernmost province on the island of Java, bordering Jakarta) to a Betawi father and a Sundanese mother from Banten, Tizar Purbaya was a baby when his family moved to Jakarta. From a young age he was interested in the performing arts, especially

the *wayang golek* rod puppets popular in the Sunda region of West Java. He attended wayang performances and listened to the regular wayang broadcasts on the radio. “I was lucky that when I was a kid [during the 1950s and early 1960s], there was no TV or outside culture to distract me,” he explained in an interview. “When watching a performance, I used to sit inside the wooden box near the *dalang* [puppet master] where the puppets were stored, just so that I would be able to help him get the wayang in and out of the box . . . I even went to Jakarta to catch a live show [on my own],” Tizar Purbaya recalled.

Recalling the early period of his career as a *dalang*, Tizar Purbaya had this to say: “I was a young *dalang* and also a member of the theater, and the way I did my shows was considered a bit controversial. There was satire, and social and political criticism were featured in my shows. I was named one of the *dalang* that had to be closely monitored.” (The Jakarta Post, August 1, 2004) During the difficult years following the fall of Indonesia’s first leader, President Sukarno, and the establishment of the new government of President Suharto, at a time when poverty was rife and demonstrations a frequent part of life, artists who criticized the Suharto government in their works were blacklisted. In this environment, the idealistic young *dalang* had no interest in performing old legends that had little to do with

contemporary reality. Instead, he would perform his own versions of these stories so that they were relevant to the problems that Indonesians were then facing. He revealed in a 2004 interview, "I believe that my stories were quite good and, more importantly they were needed, because there was no point in narrating historical stories that were irrelevant to the time. I wanted to tell a story that was in line with the conditions and needs of the people at that time." (The Jakarta Post, August 1, 2004)

### **Birth of Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi**

While government and public interest in *wayang* alternately waxed and waned over the decades following Indonesian independence in 1945, Tizar Purbaya continued to perform, collect and thus preserve old *wayang* that elderly *dalang* no longer had use for, and he sold *wayang* to avid collectors. By the 1990s he had also developed a new technique for creating *wayang golek* rod puppets and in the process created, in 2000, a



*Tizar Purbaya at the museum in his home, demonstrating his unique puppets.*



new and local wayang tradition – *Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi*. He had begun this process by creating portrait puppets that were realistically and beautifully carved by himself and his team of master craftsmen using photographs of actual people as models for the puppets’ faces. He would also create portrait golek of world leaders, for example George Bush and his wife Barbara (which he would use in a performance during President Bush’s visit to Jakarta in 1994, along with a *golek* puppet of the president’s dog), and more recently of presidents Barack Obama and Nelson Mandela. Members of the local expatriate community would also commission portrait wayang golek of themselves, family and friends. These portrait *wayang* are usually dressed in traditional Javanese clothing, complete with a *blangkon* (Javanese batik cap). Events during the late 1990s – another turbulent period in Indonesia’s modern history when the country was in the grip of financial and political turmoil that would eventually bring about political change – would lead to a new artistic direction for the *dalang*. With the sudden departure of many foreigners from Jakarta after the May 1998 riots and subsequent troubles in the country that would prompt President Suharto to step down from office after 32 years as Indonesia’s uncontested leader, Tizar Purbaya was left with many un-claimed custom-made portrait *wayang golek*.

He resolved the problem by incorporating these puppets into his shows. “There were a lot [of puppets],” he recalled in an interview. “I didn’t know what to do with these *bule* [foreigner, fair-skinned] puppets . . . I remembered I had always dreamed about doing something for Jakarta. I wanted it to have its own version of [wayang]. The Javanese have theirs, the Sundanese theirs. The Betawi didn’t [at that time],” he said.

And thus Tizar Purbaya’s *Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi* was born.

### **Tizar’s Vision for His Form**

The first performance he gave of *Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi* was in 2001. This was a three-hour performance of *Jampang Jago Betawi*, Tizar Purbaya’s first dramatic creation for this new style of wayang. The then Jakarta governor, Sutiyoso, attended the premiere, a performance that was well received. “I went on to perform in many locations, including the Wayang Museum [in Kota] and Taman Ismail Marzuki (TIM). One establishment that is well known for its interest in the *wayang* culture is (the Muslim organization) Muhammadiyah and I performed for them to tremendous appreciation.” (The Jakarta Post, August 1, 2004)

Tizar Purbaya’s *Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi*

repertoire, to date, consists of three plays. Besides the 90-minute-long *Si Manis Jembatan Ancol* (The Sweet Maiden of Ancol Bridge), there is the two-hour long *Jampang Jago Betawi* (Jampang, the Betawi Hero), and *Beningnya Hati Seekor Macan* (The Good Tiger), a *wayang* show designed for children with a flexible playing time of 30-60 minutes.

Tizar Purbaya was concerned about the future of the *wayang* form he created. “My worry for the *Wayang Golek Lenong Betawi* is its continuation. I do not want it to start and end with me. I’d like to see the city government become more involved, maybe making a course for Betawi youngsters on the art of puppetry,” he has said.

Tizar Purbaya wanted to see new Betawi puppeteers follow in his footsteps. “I did not create this for myself, this is for everyone,” he says.

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**Karen Smith** *trained and worked as a puppeteer, designer and builder at the Shri Ram Centre Puppet Repertory, Jan Madhyam, and Ishara Puppet Theatre in New Delhi. Student of Javanese wayang kulit at Sanggar Redi Waluyo under the*

*direction of Pak Kamsu and Sri Rahayu Setyawati. Served as curator for several exhibitions of Indonesian Wayang in India and the United States. Contributed to a UNESCO photo documentary on Indonesian Wayang. Member of the world puppetry organization, Union Internationale de la Marionnette (UNIMA), currently presiding over its publications programme and overseeing preparation of the English-language edition of the World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts.*



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