



Sutradhar

A UNIMA India Publication

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A Note from the Editor

In this, the 5th issue of Sutradhar, we look deeply at Unima India's third Master Class experience. The Master Class was led by Puran Bhatt, Master Puppeteer, Kathputli Tradition.

Puran Bhatt's practice, very different from Gunduraju's, provided an interesting comparative study. In the case of Kathputli tradition, the material used for making the puppets is wood. Sculpting wood needed a higher level of skill and a longer time frame as compared to shadow puppets. The tools in this case play an important role, as the puja and benediction sought before making the first cut on wood indicated.

The puppeteers, because the narrative was secondary in this form, got the freedom to create their own narrative within the technique of Rajasthani Kathputli.

Manipulation and carving wood at the outset seemed like a challenge, but the young and talented participants (all puppeteers this time) worked hard to grasp the subtleties of the technique.

Through Puran Bhatt, we also got to understand how the Kathputli tradition has always absorbed influences specially in the last few decades and how this has impacted both the technical language and characterization of Kathputli. In fact Puran Bhatt is unique as a Master because he actually straddles both the worlds, traditional, generational, and contemporary, and embodies the dynamism of a tradition. We understand Puran's journey in an article dedicated to his life and work.

Sammitha, appointed documentor for this Master Class gives a detailed account of the workshop in her article.

Anurupa Roy's article provides a valuable insight into the training courses in Puppetry in the West, their challenges successes and pitfalls.

In the next phase, we need to take a close look at our Asian counterparts, and learn specially from the Indonesian and Chinese models.

The third master class was very important. We had a chance to implement what we learnt in the previous two Master Classes. We also share the new learnings in this issue.

The discourse on puppetry deepens. Many questions have been thrown up, to be debated in an appropriate gathering.

Ranjana Pandey

**President
Unima-India**

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1 | The Making of a Master Puppeteer

By Sammitha Sreevathsa and Ranjana Pandey

Sitting over cups of chai in the cool air of Mussoorie on the balcony of Savitri Villa, Puran would ramble everyday...telling us stories about his favorite puppet characters- Anarkali, Jadugar, Behroopia. Interwoven with the stories of the many Katputhli puppets that Puran brought to the Masterclass, was his own journey. As he spoke about them, a layered narrative evolved which invoked many sides of the Master himself. His narrative of the puppets operated at three levels. Each puppet embodied a specificity, a history of its making, and technique and characters they represent from Amar Singh Rathod's story (the original narrative of the Kathputli tradition). These are three distinct yet inter related aspects of puppets.

When he referred to a specific puppet i.e. when his reference to Anarkali would denote his own Anarkali hanging by his side and no other Anarkali of any other puppeteer in the world, he invoked himself as an individual puppeteer. He brought into picture the stories of making, manipulating and travelling with that specific puppet which he has made. However, it was not possible to speak of his puppets without invoking the puppets' history and character just as it was not possible to speak of himself as an individual without invoking his identity as son, nephew, father, grandfather, grand son, and mostly as a member of the Katputhli community. He spoke of how they feature in Amar Singh Rathod's story and how these puppets were made and manipulated differently by his father and grandfather.

Crossing Boundaries and finding his roots

Puranji grew up in an environment where learning Katputhli occurred by default. To learn or not to learn was never an option, neither was it an imposition. It was simply present all the time. Surrounded by puppets and puppeteers perpetually fuelled a very organic kind of internalization of puppetry. Puppetry was as basic as living itself. This is the life and learning of a generational puppeteer.

Puranji remembers 1982 as a watershed year when he broke out of his traditional practice. He joined Shree Ram Center Puppet Repertory Company and began

working with non-generational puppeteers in Delhi. He came to work with puppeteers like Dadi Pudumjee, and Ranjana Pandey .

Through them he began engaging with other forms of puppetry like Rod, Shadow, Glove, and Muppets. He was introduced to new materials new skills. His experimental phase was not just restricted to puppetry, he found himself dabbling with other visual and performance media like film, theatre, TV serials. He even tried wood carving as a profession for some time but he realized that his heart was in puppetry and chose to dedicate himself to it. Engaging with contemporary puppetry brought him closer to his own roots of Rajasthani Katputhli. It is in these years that he became aware of himself as an individual puppeteer with traditional roots.



On the other hand it brought changes and influences into his work.

To look closely at the back story of Purans signature puppet item Jadugar shows us how the technique and characterization is always open to influences, how tradition is never static, it keeps evolving. It is this layering that gives dynamism to the form.

Jadugar was introduced during his father's professional days.

Quite contrary to the Kathputli which traditionally had only two strings and no joints, the jadugar is a complicated trick puppet. There is a lot of difference between his father's Jadugar and Puran's own Jadugar. The idea of Jadugar was initially inspired by the Kalajadugar of Bengal which was known to be the land of black magic. This puppet had six strings for manipulation and was made like a Rakshas, with bear-like features, it was black in colour and hairy. The idea of making a detachable head of the Jadugar, comes (Puran says) from Salavat Khan's Kathputli. Salavat Khan, a jealous General in the court of Shah Jahan, is an enemy of Amar Singh Rathod and is slain by him in the story. To show the beheaded body, Salavat Khan's puppet has always been made with a detachable head, which was so interesting that Puranji adopted the trick into his Jadugar.

Unlike the simpler Jadugar of yore, Puranji's Jadugar is a puppet with 14 strings, joints and complex movements. Rather like the trick puppets which every marionette tradition boasts of, his Jadugar can walk on all fours, lift his head with his hands, do a headstand and a handstand and lift the head with his legs.



Puranji, imagined his first magician to be proud and intelligent, not demon-like. So he had an intelligent walking style, and features like a long prominent nose and sharp eyes. Puran tells this charming incident of

how he found the freedom to innovate further with the Jadugar character. A young French puppeteer, irreverent and full of fun at one of his workshops made this funny movement which caught Puran's eye. Puran played with the movement too, till he refined it in such a way that it integrated with the characterization of his jadugar character. Puranji once saw Chinese Sumo puppet with a rotund face and a spherical body. He was inspired to create a totally different Jadugar puppet. He reduced the size and once on the path of innovation he decided to use styrofoam so that his puppet became much lighter to manipulate.

He was now pot-bellied, slanted eyes, sparse beard, different, clever and funny. When you juggle his trousers, his 'butt crack' showed. This has become his signature act and is hugely popular with all audiences young and old. All this began with "play time" in one of his workshops. He learnt from experience the importance of play and how crucial it is to experiment with the puppets in order to discover new possibilities, push the boundaries. You cannot emphasize the role of "play" in workshops enough. There is definitely a desire, a tammanna (desire) to use interesting designs, ideas but, appropriation and not copying gives a unique expression within the Kathputli vocabulary.

This story reminded him of his first love the Behroopia puppet (the two-in-one trick puppet). His memory took him back to much younger days. He recounts that as a boy of 9 he attended a workshop by an American puppeteer McPharlin. There he saw a twin-rod puppet, joint at the base with two heads. He took this idea and made his first Behroopia with two heads and four strings, which was carved completely from wood. Till then, the convention was to make a single head puppet with two strings and paint the back and front of this single head differently to create a two-faced puppet. Puranji decided to make an upside-down puppet joint at the waist. His Behroopia was named "Funtoosh" like the nickname McPharlin gave the young boy - Puran. He refined the puppet and made it dance to a popular Rajasthani folk song. Even today the audience gasps with surprise when the woman dancer magically turns into a man with the flick of a wrist!



The emergence of the teacher

Puranji, began facilitating workshops for aspiring puppeteers who did not necessarily come with a history of traditional puppetry. These workshops also offered a context for him to perceive his own puppets in a different light.



Puranji, expressed time and again, that he often gets to learn as much as he gets to teach in these workshops. He is grateful to Karen Smith for insisting that he learn English which has helped him to communicate with people from the south of India and with people from outside of the country. Moreover, teaching Kathputli in a workshop space implies that Puranji has to break down his practice and years of knowledge to make it understandable and transfer it to individuals who come from very different backgrounds. This breaking down makes him look at his own practice very closely and analytically. It has helped him fine tune construction, weight distribution, and the dynamics and science of movement.

Many times, he explains, the Kathputlis transform into something completely new in the hands of contemporary puppeteers mostly because they are disconnected and free from the religious aspect and the rules of the practice. Traditionally it is believed that the goddess "Bhavani" resides in the puppets and hence the puppeteers treat their puppets with

respect and reverence. Puranji, bound by tradition, would probably not have thought of manipulating the Jadugar with as much freedom as his foreign students. So he wonders whether sometimes the religious context limits innovation.

Evolution of Kathputli : Then and now

As he arrived at this contemplative stage, looking back at his life, he spoke of puppets of his forefathers. Giving his Pattebaaz a long look, he told us that his father was a Master in manipulating this puppet. Many Kathputli walas have mastery over specific puppets. For example his chacha (paternal uncle) Mohanlalji, was a master in manipulating Sapera (snake charmer), his Dadaji(paternal grandfather) was an expert in Raasdhaari (the older version of Anarkali), his Mamaji (maternal uncle) was a master in manipulating Ghudsavar (the Horse-rider) and his father was an expert in manipulating Pattebaaz.

His father's Pattebaaz was stiff, carrying a wooden talwar. Puranji gave this puppet joints and replaced the wooden talwar with a steel one. He also gave this puppet the movement of drawing the sword. He explained that the puppets have evolved a lot in terms of their appearance, anatomy and manipulation technique. He feels amazed, however, at his forefathers' ability to manipulate the puppets with minimum strings. "What they were able to manage with four strings, I cannot accomplish now even with eight strings."

In Puran's memory, the old puppets used only four basic colours extracted from natural dyes; yellow, black, red and white. Sometimes, these colours were mixed to get compound colours. The eyes were much bigger and wide open. The eyeball had a big black opaque dot in the middle of the eye and would not touch the outline of the eye at any part. He guesses that the colouring and stark stylization made them visible in the shaky light of the kerosene lamp, the only lighting for a traditional village performance. It is only when Puranji joined Shree Ram Center that he discovered paints and shading with an entire palette. Which is why today Puranji's puppets are painted

more realistically in a detailed manner with shading and minute outlines which are enhanced with the present day sophisticated lighting system. Even in terms of performance space, Puranji got rid of the physical frame within which Kathputli was traditionally performed. He discovered a freedom in movement and performance. In comparison, the traditional frame was really restricting. He now makes performances using the whole stage thus also altering the size of some Kathputlis.

Thus, change in one aspect of the tradition cannot be isolated, it impacts other aspects of tradition as well. The changes in performative spaces and lighting brought changes in the technique and physicality of the puppets including aspects of colour of faces and clothes. However, he said, though there is an obvious change and evolution in every aspect of Kathputli (technique, making, manipulation, appearance, audience, performative space), it is necessary that one keeps the essence of the tradition alive in the practice. So naturally the question comes to mind: what makes a kathputli a kathputli? What is traditional and what is not traditional?

Thus provoked, Puranji thought about it and referring to Gagans project "Anarkali" like puppet, he said he would never paint his Anarkali blue or green. Further he would never put a cross at the end of his strings. If a cross comes in between the puppeteers' fingers and strings, it ceases to be a Kathputli.

All this is subject to debate. How far one can take the liberty to play with traditional parameters is vague. For example - if one considers these markers as representatives of tradition, then there has been a clear break when Raasdhaari became Anarkali. The shape of the crown changed, the attire underwent changes and the character itself underwent a change.

So would one call this a break from the tradition or a change within tradition? If we take Puranji's example,

he has introduced brown beards and mustaches which were always black before, he made a Jadugar with complete mongoloid features and even used Styrofoam as a material to make traditional puppets.

Brown hair, he says came into the picture when he saw foreign faces and began interacting with foreign people. He even said that one could make a puppet with complete foreign features but it could still be a Kathputli. So how does one set a bar? Is it subject to who the puppeteer is? Does Puranji have more liberty within the tradition on the grounds of being a generational puppeteer? If a Westerner made a traditional Kathputli with features of a blond person, will the puppet still be a Kathputli?

To this Puranji acknowledges that the categories of what is traditional and what is not traditional cannot be set in stone. There could be many external aspects of puppets like technique and appearance that are

subject to change within the tradition. Although Jadugar looks chinese and the puppets of Dhola Maru have very little stylization. However what makes a kathputli one is the stringing and the lack of a "control"

This is what makes it unique amongst the marionettes

of the world besides the aesthetic language and stylization which makes it recognizable. With respect to himself, he says, what has not changed at all are his feelings, his feelings towards his own tradition and his community.

The relationship between him and the Kathputli community is not simply of him belonging to the community. The community also resides in him as he experiences the collective emotions, needs, struggles with the rest of the members. The community resides in his practice of Kathputli.

Puranji embodies his identity as a puppeteer at an individual, familial and at community level. His identity as a son, grandson, nephew, father or husband is not

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separate from his identity as a puppeteer. So puppetry becomes a part of all his worlds integrating all of them together and erasing the boundary between the personal and professional.

At the center of his multiple identities is the art and craft of Katputhli. Puranji's community life, his family life, his work and himself all have a coherence because they all draw their identities from the practice of Katputhli.

Credits

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She explores along with the people in the collective the idea of the human body as a site of knowledge through writing and documenting various performing arts, especially dance.

Ranjana Pandey is a puppeteer, playwright, television director and educator. She has worked extensively using puppets for therapy and in educational puppets 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.

2 | A Master Class in the Kathputli Tradition by Master Puppeteer Puran Bhatt

By Sammitha Sreevathsa

UNIMA India with Katkatha organized its third Master Class from 10th August to 28th August 2015 in Savitri Villa, Mussorie. The workshop was led by Katputhli Master Puppeteer Puran Bhat. The documentors were Sammitha (written documentation) and Shankhajeet De (film) while Anurupa Roy and Ranjana Pandey mentored the participants. The Master Class drew participants from Bangalore, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Kerala, Delhi and France. The seven participants were all puppeteers in different stages of their career.

The Documentors Diary: Day 1 (August 10, 2015)

The day began with everyone introducing themselves and narrating their own journey which led them to this Master Class in Mussorie. There were seven participants; all of whom were pursuing puppetry as a career. Having dabbled with various other forms of puppetry such as muppets, rod puppets and glove puppets most of them were present in the workshop with a purpose to experiment and explore the string puppet. None of them were generational puppeteers. Ranjana recognized a sense of serendipity in all their journeys, as a sense of flow pervaded across all their narratives as they described their journey with the art form of puppetry. During the round of introductions, Puranji asked me "What is the place of puppetry in your life?" This is an important question one has to ask oneself if she/he wants to engage with puppetry.

Puranji had asked this question to himself and the rest of the day was spent in listening to Puranji speak about it. His life as a puppeteer and the intensity with which he has engaged with puppetry over many many years of his life. The life he has lived, also tells us the story of the life his community has lived and finally about the lived journey of Katputhli itself. Puran Bhatt's community was a community of wandering puppeteers (Ghumantru, as he called it in Hindustani). The story of the origin of Katputhli, as Puranji's grandfather and father told him, can be traced to the reign of the Rajput King Amar Singh Rathod of Nagaur, Rajasthan. Amar Singh Rathod was a general in the army of Shah Jahan. He died an unfair death. The people of the Rajput community, in order to keep his memory alive decided to spread the story of his life and death through the

medium of puppetry. Though the community was a nomadic one, they had a collective identification with the King of Nagaur because they were born in Nagaur. Puran Bhat, has also been told another story of origin, one that takes us to the court of the King Vikramaditya. According to this narrative, the court of Vikramaditya housed 52 statues which are known to be the source of inspiration for the repertoire of 52 puppets, (not one more not one less) that a Katputhli repertoire is supposed to have. These stories of birth of Katputhli triggered an important question about the origin of string puppets – did the form and puppeteers exist before these historical events?

One cannot get away with speaking about origins without mentioning mythology. Chandni Zala, gave yet another mythical account of the origin of puppetry.



In this story, Parvathi is playing with a wooden doll. She asks Shiva who is looking admiringly at her to bring the doll to life. Shiva fulfills her wish. A carpenter



happens to witness the event. Mesmerized, he decides to make wooden dolls that not only have a body and a face but which also move.

This art of puppetry which is so primal to human kind, is unfortunately diminished under the bracket of “bachchon ka khel” meaning child’s play. This diminishing and devaluing the art, however is not limited to the perception of the state, society and layman but exists in the perception of the puppeteers themselves. Unless the puppeteers themselves do not value their art, it is not possible to raise it in the eyes of the society. This discussion raised many questions with regard to the difficulties (social, economic, and psychological) that puppeteers as individuals and as a community have to face in the present contexts such as funding performances and considering it lower in the hierarchy of arts.

The irony of this assumption, for Puran Bhat, is that puppetry, especially when one is talking about Katputhli, is a very complete art form.

The Puppeteer has to be a sculptor, a painter, a singer, a dancer a tailor a writer and storyteller.

Apart from being inclusive of all the art forms, a puppeteer himself traditionally, was more than just a puppeteer, he was a philosopher and an entertainer all at once. He held a place of power in traditional contexts as the popularity and the reach of the king depended on him. However, there is also an inherent place of power that a puppeteer assumes in a performative space. He has the power to be subversive and to create an event of transgression that is otherwise not possible. Puran Bhat narrated an event where a puppet invited the village Pradhan (head) to sweep the stage within the context of a performance. Unable to refuse this lighthearted request, the Pradhan was compelled to walk onto the stage to sweep it while the villagers watched on.

The Kathputli performances took place at night. While the puppeteer remained behind the curtain, the wife sat with the dholak to sing and interact between the audience and the puppeteers. Communicating



spontaneously with the puppeteer together they would control the flow of the performance and make spontaneous decisions such as : Who from the audience could be called on stage for what and how long to keep a performance going?

The lunch break brought us back to the here and now. As soon as we settled back, Puran Bhat demonstrated his masterful manipulation. One by one his puppets came to life; 7 characters and 8 puppets. They danced to recordings of traditional music scores (Rajasthani folk songs) while the participants observed in respectful silence. They observed keenly as puppeteers would, the technique, stylization and aesthetics of the Katputhlis. This observation became the first step towards learning the manipulation. Puran Bhatji also drew attention to the stringing of the puppets. While all marionettes across cultures use a wooden cross to control the strings, and move the puppet, the Katputhli is a unique form where the puppeteer uses only his

fingers to manipulate the puppets.

Each puppet had its own set of movements. Each one, was made and strung in a way to enable the very specific movements that the puppeteer intended for the puppet. A very important moment during this demonstration was when Puranji presented his own Jadugar. He had brought with him, two versions of the Jadugar puppet; one that was traditional and the



other which was his own variation of the traditional. Although, Puranji is a generational puppeteer, he has travelled widely and has engaged intensely with different styles of puppetry practices. These engagements find their expressions in his own practice of Katputli. Finally, the participants made brief presentations manipulating their own puppets which they had brought. Most of these puppets were made by the participants themselves. The purpose of this presentation was for Puranji to get a taste of the connect and the relationship that each of these participants had with their own puppets. A puppeteer

needs to be very connected with her own puppet. These short presentations were also instrumental in informing not just the master but also participants themselves of the nature and quality of each other's work.

The day was marked by an inward journey of inspiring and being inspired. Listening to the Master's journey set each one off on his own journey in the Master Class.

Developing Eyes on their Fingertips:Day 2 (August 11, 2015)

The second day of the workshop began with the morning warm-ups facilitated by Anurupa and Shravan in the first part and Puranji in the next half. Puranji's warm up included exercises for loosening the fingers, shoulders and strengthening of arms. These exercises were to support the manipulation of Katputlis. After the previous days observation, it was time to take the Kathputli off the hook and begin to practice playing with the Puranji's puppets. The first Katputli taken out for practice was the dancer, Anarkali. This was the first instance of coming in direct contact with the traditional puppets for the participants. This intersection between the traditional puppets, participants and the master was a charged space as it was not just learning of manipulation of the puppets but an exchange between many worlds. When the participants held the strings of the Katputlis, the strings felt unfamiliar. They began familiarizing their hands to the weight, holding their body in a particular way, their arms at a height, the hands and fingers ready to bring movements to the puppets. With this they arrived at the second important aspect of learning; imitation, wherein they attempted to reproduce what they had observed the Master do. This reproduction of observed knowledge found a different methodology in each participant. Many participants took videos of Puranji manipulating and observed it many times while trying the manipulation themselves. Chandni sketched out the hands and fingers with strings. She numbered each string and labelled the part of the puppet's body that it controlled in order to have a better understanding of the manipulation. Kunhiraman ji also



resorted to sketching. He made systematic diagrams of the puppet with the strings from various angles. The act of imitating drew attention to each one's own limitations in reproducing the same movement making their further observations more specific and deeper. Photos of sketches

Their job was, as Puranji said once "to develop eyes on their fingertips" and this process had begun. To see the puppet through the finger tips, they required an understanding of the puppet which can emerge only through complete immersion into the puppet and into the practice of manipulating them. The immersion of the puppeteer with the puppet was catalyzed by repetition. The participants spent long hours with the puppet just repeating the movement again and again. With repetitious movements the learning became more internalized. This process of internalization was facilitated by music. (Puranji always travelled with his music for the puppets on his mobile and the songs were put on loop for hours.) The repetitious beats and rhythms filled Savitri Villa and triggered movement impulses among everyone present and people were moved into action. The difference between the imitation and repetition is visible in the quality of the manipulation. While imitating the movement appears imposed, during repetition the movements appear more emerged. This also brought them face to face with many technical aspects of manipulation such as the connection of their body with the puppets body, the connection of the puppets body with the space around it, the tension of the strings, gravity and the role of their own stillness in manipulation.

Stillness of the puppeteer plays a very important role in manipulation because a small movement of the puppeteer creates a very large spatial movement in the puppet's body. Puranji explains that this happens because of the difference in the size of the two. Hence, a lot of puppets movements happen by moving fingers and wrists and keeping the rest of the body of the puppeteer very still.

Anarkali's movements involved swirling her skirt and bringing her to a sitting position with her skirt spread around her. To get this movement right, one has to

swirl Anarkali in a very precise way to collect the wind in the skirt. Puranji, often paired his instructions for this movement with audible breaths to indicate collecting and easing the wind. This inhale and exhale was instrumental in suggesting the quality that playing with the wind must bring into the movement. Photo of manipulation exercise

The strings, connect the puppeteer with the puppet. Since a puppeteer does not have the luxury to look at the complete profile of the puppet he is manipulating from above, he feels the movements of the puppet through the strings. He recognizes whether the puppet is rooted on the floor or whether it is floating a few inches above the ground through the feeling of weight he receives in his hands through the strings. How well a puppeteer holds the strings and moves them decides how well the puppet moves. The puppeteer has to keep the right degree of tension in the strings. Thus, the string plays a dual role of drawing the information from the puppet to the puppeteer's hands and carrying the intentions of the puppeteer from his hands to the puppets body.



strings, stillness (and movement) of puppeteers body are all there for a reason, a reason which is at the heart of puppetry i.e. to bring the puppet alive. The puppeteer has to have an unwavering involvement with the puppet while coordinating the strings. If the string is



held loosely the puppet appears sloppy and dead. If the puppeteer moves a little more or a little less than intended, the puppet's movements will become much larger or it will become too still, thus immediately making the puppet a dead object.

Puppet Carving :Day 3 (August 12, 2015)

The participants continued to manipulate Puranji's Kathputhlis during the first half of the day after the warm up. By now each one of them had tried their hand with each of the Kathputhlis that Puranji had brought. The second half of the day was spent in wood carving. Puranji had sourced mango wood. Seven tool kits (one for each participant) consisting of a chisel, hammer, hacksaw blade and a file was provided to each participant to carve out their own puppet. A small ritual for invoking the blessings of Bhavani the protecting deity of the Bhatt community began by putting the vermilion mark on every one's forehead, sweets were offered and shared by all as prasad.

Bhavani is known to reside in the puppets themselves and all performances begin with a prayer to her. With a sense of respect for the material and tools that would be used to carve the Kathputhlis, the wood work began. Puranji taught them how to hold the tools, how to sharpen them and eventually how to use them on the wood. The third day of the Master Class came to an end with each participant removing the outer bark, smoothing the log and preparing it for carving.(photos of making)



Finding a Personal Place Within the Tradition Through Improvisation:Day 4 (August 13, 2015)

Anurupa and Ranjana began the day by bringing the focus back to the purpose of the workshop and then probing the participants to think how to link their own projects to this purpose. The purpose of the workshop was to connect the participants (who are all non-generational puppeteers) to the flow of the tradition – the tradition being Kathputhli in this case. Therefore, it only made sense for the independent projects of the participants to be inspired by, or take off from some aspects of the Kathputhli tradition. The participants presented their projects and were probed to find the



link between their project and the Kathputhli tradition. There was a common interest among everyone in the technical side to the Kathputhli, in stringing and manipulation of puppets.



Questions raised

However, could the use of strings be a sufficient parameter to qualify something to be within the traditional vocabulary even if it lacks the aesthetics and the narrative aspects of the tradition? If only the string is being used then what makes their puppets different from just any other string marionettes? Puranji's production of "Dhola Maru" could be one example of how the traditional vocabulary could be expanded while still keeping its identity intact. It does not tell us the story of Amar Singh Rathod but sustains the same aesthetic and the narrative style.

After having discussed each of their projects, the participants resumed manipulation of the Kathputhli. The time spent in manipulation however, was focused on improvising with the same Kathputhli puppets. They improvised without the music as the traditional music was limiting the scope of the puppets characteristics, actions and movement. The new

possibilities discovered through improvisation was to be presented later in the afternoon and the theme of the presentation being "One day in the life of....." Here the participant was expected to narrate through manipulation any small event or incident that occurred in the life any one of the puppets. This practice of improvising with the puppets led them to the edge of tradition, yet keeping them well within it. The nature of the discoveries were varied. Chandni discovered a new technique for the same movement of the Anarkali, Nanouchka discovered that the Nimbuwali could be



transformed into a pregnant lady just by pulling the strings differently and the Nimbu that falls into her hands could be made into a baby that falls into her arms, Thomas discovered a completely new possibility with the snake charmer by using a prop of a brass matka. Thomas's idea was to free the snake charmer of any external tunes. He was the only puppet in the collection with a music instrument and hence he could dance to his own tunes. Thus there was a transformation in the identity of the character as well, he was no more necessarily a snake charmer as Thomas rid him off the snake as well. Chandni also explored the possibility of making Anarkali a comic character by making her a sloppy dancer who is otherwise the beautiful graceful dancer of the troupe.

This exercise of improvising with the puppets was crucial for two reasons:

1. It was very useful in giving the participants a concrete idea of how traditional Katputhlis could be used in new contexts. It also gave an example of how one could explore infinite possibilities even within the boundaries of a tradition.
2. This exercise captured the movement within the tradition. It led to innovations and discoveries within the tradition and resonated with Puranji's story of his innovation of the new Jadugar.

Thus, on the fourth day learning for the participants reached a phase of re-enactment and appropriation. They re-enacted what they had learnt in their own way. What was observed, imitated and repeated several times had become internalized enough to be re-contextualized by each participant. It gave them the flow to appropriate the tradition in each of their projects. Moreover, improvisation enabled them to find their own individual expression within the Katputhli tradition which is necessary to sustain movement in the tradition. Often, in the name of preserving the tradition, people practice the art form without contextualizing it to the changes that a culture undergoes. Puppetry especially is one such practice which reflects the place from where it comes from, why it is being performed etc. In the case of Katputhli, the puppeteers felt the need to spread the story about their king and there is a collective identification with that purpose. What about the participants who do not feel this need because they are non-generational puppeteers?

With this experience of improvising Katputhlis, the participants were able to move to the carving verandah with a clearer picture of what it is that they would carve. This improvisation integrated their projects with the workshop. The puppets that they would carve would be inspired by the Katputhli puppetry. Most of them found the Jadugar's body very instrumental because of its detachable head. This quirk of the Jadugar could be used to create many out of body experiences on the stage. Shraavan's main character takes Jadugar's body

but transforms the character from being a comic one to a sad and poignant man.



Day 5 and 6 (August 14, 15, 2015)

The learning curve of puppet making was very different from the learning of manipulation. The carving and making of puppet was guided much more closely by Puran ji. There was no demonstration, observation, imitation in a linear pattern. The learning happened more hands-on. Puranji would sit with everyone helping them make the markings on the wooden log and giving the participants a step by step task.



By day five, the participants were given a rough template to carve out a basic human face and a fish face in case of Nanouchka.

To extend the improvisation activity, on the sixth day, the participants were divided into three groups of two each – Gagan and Nanouchka, Umesh and Chandni, Thomas and Shravan. Kunhiramanji contributed to each group assuming a different character. Thus, they improvised with each other. While the previous day's improvisation led to discoveries of new movements and techniques, improvising with a team led to a creation of a new narrative or a new event. These narratives concretized their characters as well.

Focus on Manipulation: Puran noticed a better stability and clarity in the movements of the puppets. With some more polishing of the skills and elaboration of the narrative, performative piece could emerge. Puranji gave his feedback with a vision of performance in mind. He noted that the participants were losing their momentum as they were depending on looking at the string. He repeated that the fingers need more experience manipulating the puppets as one cannot rely on vision to recognize the threads while manipulating during performance. When we look at the strings, in that moment we create a momentary disconnect with the puppet which immediately makes the puppet lifeless, dampening the whole experience.

Puranji explained that the puppeteer has to make himself as discreet as possible. Drawing attention to the puppeteer interferes in the suspension of disbelief of the audience. This triggered a lot of discussion about the relationship between the puppeteer and the puppet. Unlike most of the other performing arts where one has to be completely alive and present to draw the audience into believing in the performance, a puppeteer has to be as absent as possible in order to keep the performance alive and engaging. Katputhli traditionally is performed only with a frontal profile and from behind a curtain, which keeps the audience's attention away from the puppeteer. Puranji explained how and where a puppeteer should be placed in relation to the audience and the puppet when both are present in the same performative space. However,

in this session, at many points the puppeteers came in front of the puppets during performance masking the puppet from the audience's view. The puppeteer has to be present not in his own body but in the body of his puppet. The puppeteer hence has no perception of his own body on stage.

Ranjana noted that almost all the groups had used the Jadugar for their improvisation. His detachable body and interesting, quirky movements fuelled their imagination.



Day 7 and Day 8 (August 16 and August 17, 2015)

both days were full of hard work on manipulation. The participants were unraveling their ideas and experimenting with different permutations and

combinations for creating a new narrative which led them away from their original project ideas. Everyone's skill level in manipulation jumped up several notches. We filmed the improvisations intensively today. The making of the puppets is also moving much faster. Puranji's mature pedagogy has given space to the students to flower and find freedom within the tradition. The sense of elation and enthusiasm is infectious. The evening felt like a party!

Outing: We had learnt from our previous experience that a mid-session break is important. The day was spent in walking the length and breadth of Mussoorie. Also making a visit to the Heritage center which gave us all a context for the town we were in. We spent time in planning the show and making contacts with possible audiences

Day 9 (August 18, 2015)

(Puranji returned to Savitri Villa from his one day visit to Dehradun with young Rohit Bhat a Dholak player. The Bhat community migrated to different places when they moved out of Rajasthan. According to Puranji, just like how he settled in Delhi, some families settled in Dehra Dun. The families also practice Kathputli. It is interesting that the tentacles of the Bhat community are connected even though they are spread far and wide.

Rohit was from a family of Bhats who settled in Dehradun and specialized in accordion playing for wedding bands! With Rohit Bhat giving the rhythm to the puppet movement, a whole new dynamic was added to the work. Apart from accentuating and bringing clarity to certain emotions in the piece, bringing a musician to the space and music to puppetry altered the experience of practice. It infused a vision of a concrete performance which would happen on 26th of August. Rohit quickly merged himself into the mood of each improvised piece and fit his music. The next rehearsal with dholak was fixed so that Rohit could come again from Dehra Dun. The idea was to rehearse and work – not only on these pieces but also on the individual projects that would be performed in the school on the 26th of August.

Day 10 (August 19, 2015)

The carving now has reached a critical point requiring the Masters close engagement and guidance. Often he would take the chisel in hand and make a master stroke. All of them are completely absorbed and immersed in the carving, spending long hours bent over intent in their work. We added extra lights so that the fading daylight did not put a stop to the work.

Momentum picks up: Day 11 (August 20, 2015)

The energy became more intense as the deadlines were set keeping the final performance in mind. Carving the faces of the puppets was finished by everyone and the participants were beginning to give first coating of white powder to smoothen the rough patches on the wood. There was no specific schedule and the participants were left to decide for themselves as to when they have to carve, practice manipulation or exercise. However, with this deadline and a scope to personalize their schedule, most participants did not engage with manipulation at all. They were focused on finishing the making of the puppet and putting the body together. This was also the period when mentoring became more intensive. Anurupa and Ranjana were in constant conversation with the participants to help them arrive at clarity in their own projects. While the participants were engaged intensely in making of their puppet, there was a risk of losing vision of the broader picture of the narrative and the story board of their projects. It was important to make the puppet keeping a very clear picture of the storyboard because the storyline decided the very specific actions that the puppets would have to carry out. Every action demands a different kind of making. For example one had to decide before hand which joints of the puppet would have to move, whether the puppet would have legs? In which directions would they want their puppets heads to move. However, each participant had a different level of clarity about their projects and each worked differently.

Chandni had joined this workshop with an intention to realize her project in the Kathputli technique. She had come prepared with her story board and her Gujarati script with a clear idea of characters needed.



Gagan, on the contrary worked very differently, his story board was vague and got the clarity during the process of carving. While the story board decided the details of the puppet for some, the puppet gave different possibilities of storyboard for others. The mentoring at this point became crucial to keep the awareness of this process of evolving the project with all the participants. Mentoring was also important to keep the participants' attention on the question "Why puppets?" Anurupa insisted a lot on this question because one needs to be aware of the uniqueness of the form itself and constantly refine whether the theme, character chosen is puppet appropriate.

Day 12 (August 21, 2015)

The faces of the puppets are completed (the painting is done). The bodies are being made by stuffing cotton in cloth and stitching. Some participants are handling a sewing machine for the first time. There are many "firsts" in the Master Class! To give them credit they were not at all daunted by the difficulties.

While helping the participants make the bodies of the puppet, Puran ji speaks about how different the bodies of the older Katputhlis used to be and what implications it had in the way they were manipulated. The Katputhlis of the old days - his father and grandfather's time - would firstly have no legs, the arms of the puppet would have no elbow joints and the hands would not branch out into fingers. All of Puranji's puppets now have proper elbow joints, and the hands of his puppets have fingers. Though most of his puppets don't have legs, he has introduced legs in his Jadugar and Sapera. Both these puppets have distinct leg movements and knee joints as well. The older Katputhlis also had a maximum of four strings attached to them. Puranji is amazed that his father had mastered manipulating very complex movements of the puppets with such few strings. He noted, that those puppets were incapable of movement without the support of the floor and were impossible to control once off the floor. Puranji's puppets are less dependent

For Puranji, it is manipulating without the cross that makes a puppet Katputhli.

on gravity since they have greater support of strings. Ranjana, brought out an old puppet (kathputli) to illustrate what Puranji meant. Puranji, after examining the old puppet and its stitches for a couple of minutes declared that it was made by his Mother. A unique and unexpected connection is made. It was a special moment one to relish and cherish!

The question of how much of change could be considered to be within the framework of tradition is raised again and again. For Puranji, it is manipulating without the cross that makes a puppet Katputhli.

Day 13 and Day 14 (August 22 and August 23, 2015)

The bodies of the puppets are completed. The clothes are stitched the next day. The body is attached to the head and final touches are

given. Puranji begins helping the participants with the stringing of the puppet. Film documentation gathers momentum as Shankhajeet senses the beginning of a real conversation between Ranjana and Puranji, he brings out his third eye- the camera and begins filming. Puranji is talking about getting rid of the physical frame within which Katputhli was traditionally performed. The changes that the tradition has undergone is not just in the making and mechanism of manipulating but also in the performative spaces. Puranji felt a great deal of freedom by removing the frame from the performance. He felt more free in movement and was able to discover more possibilities in the movement of the puppet itself. Moreover, this subjects the puppeteer to the audience's gaze. Although, a puppeteer is to be as absent as possible in the performance, removing the framework exposes the relationship between the puppeteer and the puppet on stage.

By day 14, Puranji's role in the workshop has undergone a lot of changes. The participants were more and more being left to themselves and would seek Puranji only when they needed help with specific aspects of making or manipulation. It became less and less instructive.

The two mentors engage continuously and persistently with the participants, needling, persuading, questioning and supporting. Anurupa and Ranjana ask Puranji questions with respect to difficulties in realizing the projects that each person had come with. Anurupa felt that the biggest difficulty in this process for the participants was to take decisions within their own project – decisions like who the character should be? What should the story communicate? Anurupa wants to know from Puranji whether there are any activities and exercises that will help them improve in taking decisions better. Ranjana points out that this difficulty is actually that of there being a big gap between the imagination (khayalat) and reality (asliyat). Most of the participants had elaborate ideas for their projects which were unrealistic to achieve within the time limit. Puranji feels that conversations among each other and with their teachers and mentors is one good way of doing a reality check. Ranjana said that in this workshop, improvisation, gave the participants the much required reality check before they began the making of their puppets. It showed them what it is that they could actually make their puppets do. The improvisation was designed to help them define their own project and puppet character. The stringing complete, the puppeteers present their new puppets in the evening.

This brought each participant face to face with the difficulties in manipulating their own puppet. The puppets were new and raw not moving smoothly – unlike the Master’s puppets, seasoned, honed and perfect.

Individual feed back

Umesh experienced difficulties in making his puppet walk. The puppet did not have enough weight in its legs. Shravan faced difficulties in manipulating the legs too, for a different reason. The trousers were stitched wrongly and that restricted the movement.

Nanouchka’s fish had a very complicated stringing system which was unending. Her manipulation was hence not complete either. Chandni was swift in making and manipulation but music was a challenge for her as she had to sing the Gujarati song in the Rajasthani format. Her music remained undecided. So the process of making and manipulating came together but the sound track was missing. They were completely absorbed and even forgot to sleep that night. They were – obsessed and possessed – with their own puppet. Thomas, finally feeling better got down to a frenzied pace of work. Gagan and Kunhiraman worked through the night. The making of the puppet had extended way beyond the timetable.

Day 15 (August 24, 2015)

Puranji feels that conversations among each other and with their teachers and mentors is one good way of doing a reality check.

A meeting was called in the morning and deadlines were set. The participants were to fully focus on manipulation of their new puppet (irrespective of its stage of completion) so that the show begins to evolve. The participants were drowned in their own puppets. They were asked to be ready

with their full piece by evening so that each piece could be timed and the sequence of the performances could be figured out.

Day 16 (August 25, 2015) While the rehearsals carried on, the documentors focused on their work.

Shankhajeet filmed as I spoke to Puranji and we documented at leisure Puranji’s recounting stories about his puppets. The participants have to be pushed to finalize the music for their solo performances and do a final rehearsal with ever obliging Rohit who is back once again from Dehra Dun. At last the evening sees a full dress rehearsal in sequence with music. Performances were timed and props were listed out.

Day 17 (August 26, 2015)

A last rehearsal is scheduled. The participants are still fussing over their puppets making changes and corrections, specially Thomas and Nanouchka. Everyone leaves for the school. It was a short walk



away and we carried rugs and props and stands which we needed. The show was advanced by one hour to suit the kids. We go and set up the stage and the sound system. There were last minute glitches with the sound. Anurupa kept the kids engaged with activities and stories till the show could start. Both the shows went well despite some last minute issues with the sound. The kids cheered and clapped as the performers show their little pieces. One of the kids in the audience is moved to tears by Shravana's piece. Instead of one, there were two shows now - one for school kids and one for the local audience of Mussoorie. The carpenter stopped his work, the book shop attendant left his shop, the Dhobi also dropped in, the school staff stayed back to watch and some guests trekked all the way from Landour. It was followed by a Q and A.

The Projects

Each participant brought his own experience of engineering, theater, folk art, street performances and crafting skills. Besides this because of our insistence they came with an "idea" about their project. For some like the challenge lay in a skill area like painting for others it lay in manipulation and for all of them the challenge of finding a narrative in the short span of the Master Class was daunting and an uneven path.

Gagan: His entry point into his project was his character Shurpanakha. He was sure to make a Shurpanakha puppet but was undecided about the narrative. He was not sure of the look and features of his character before he started carving. His project got better defined during the course of the Master Class. Typically this was the path for many. The first focus was on the technique and the crafting.

In the end, Gagan's Shurpanakha had a very emotive witch like face and his performative piece-a vignette, explored a rare form of sadness coming from wretched experiences.

Like many others in the Master Class, Gagan came to this intense experience early in his journey in the

path of puppetry. The Master Class brought clarity of where their own practice might lead them.

In this immersion they all encountered their own strengths and weaknesses. The role of the mentors was clearly to help them face and their weaknesses and discover their strengths. The constant needling was not always popular.

While for many the treatment changed dramatically because they veered towards creating a solo piece, it was different for those puppeteers like **Chandni** and **Kunhiraman** who work with an ensemble.

Chandni came with complete clarity of her project (a full production) and stayed rock-steady on track. Thomas too had a well thought idea in keeping with the shape of practice he anticipated for his project. **Nanopuchka, Umesh and Shravan** changed track several times, exploring different ideas emerging from their original one.

This tells us that the mentoring and the emergence of a solid and meaningful project has to be refined further.

Shravana: Shravana came to the Master Class with a character of a convict in mind and a loose narrative inspired by a French movie. He had a clear picture of what he would like for his character to look like. He carved a very expressive sad face with a body that was taken from Puranji's puppet. The journey for him was quite tortuous. All the participants worked on their soundscape and spent hours putting together a musical score. However, with the limitation of time and due to the complexity of the story, instead of the original narrative, a wonderfully original play about a sad clown evolved. It was a touching piece, which even moved the young audience to tears. It was his response to the character of "Jadugar". The inspirational quality of Purans characterization and technique played out fully in Shraavan's approach.

It took him time to come out of his confusion and respond sensitively to the traditional form creatively. The blend of his own creativity and the traditional technique made his sensitive piece stand out. It could

become the nucleus for a full fledged performance.

Nanouchka: The Master Class was about engaging with a legend “Puran Bhatt”!

Nanouchka had several ideas for her project when she came to the Master Class. She finally narrowed down on one puppet which could feature in two of her project ideas. She made a fish puppet using pipes for the body, cloth for scales and mango wood for the head. Both Thomas and Nanouchka were very clear that the narrative and dramaturgy was to have no interference or contribution from any other source (resistance to mentoring) The technique was fascinating (using the strings without a control) and they were quick and assiduous learners.

Thomas: Currently an itinerant puppeteer himself, living like a gypsy- wanted to create an old woman gypsy puppet!! and build an interactive performance around it. He imagined creating a street play. He carved her and called her his grandmother. He made two miniature puppet faces that emerged from his grandmother’s back- pack representing her alter egos. An interesting enough idea.

The participation of these two “foreign” puppeteers brought a fresh perspective to our teaching/learning model. The fact that they did not share the same cultural context as the Indians isolated them at times. It also kept them from the richness of the experience.

Chandni : She came to the Master class with a vision of a full -fledged production. She had her script and her characters. Her project was based on a Gujarati love story. Sheeagerto, the technique and crafting aspect as she did not have to engage with the “developing” a narrative, she had the time to carve two puppets. Her final presentation was neat. For her this is the first step in a longer journey.

She will need more hand holding, training workshops to include her team of puppeteers before she can expand her learning and create the full play.

Naturally she has expressed keen interest in organizing

puppetry workshops in Gujerat. One of her interests is to spread the word about the art of puppetry.

Umesh: For him the main draw was the Master himself. Engaging with Puran Bhat, learning from him, immersing in the technique. His previous experience in manipulating string puppets meant that he absorbed deeply and succinctly the technique of manipulating Kathputli. His main difficulty lay in creating a narrative for a future project. There was a huge gap between intention and reality and he constantly struggled. He found the mentoring overbearing

The nucleus that emerged from his effort was weak. He would have needed a longer Master Class as most of them said, to be satisfied with his end product.

Once again his experience raises questions about the structure of the Master Class:

Kunhiraman: Journey in the Master class was a unique one for this senior puppeteer,. Travelling from distant Kerala to this strange place was in itself an adventure for as a professional. The chief impetus was to enjoy a platform of like minded people and discover a peer group. Decades of experience has made Kunhiraman acutely aware of his isolation. He seemed to be thirsty for knowledge and information. He certainly appreciated the library and the films. He was the only participant who read every book and journal from cover to cover, subscribed to Sutradhar and renewed his Unima India membership.

He took full advantage of the exposure opportunity. He was enamoured and in full admiration of Puran’s mastery.

His script idea did not translate into a solo piece like the others. He was absorbed by the technique and his making skill was impressive.

Kunhiraman feels his main learning in the workshop was manipulating without the control which he will teach to the rest of his troupe in Kerala. He had always worked with marionettes (with a control).

1. He is planning an entire production.



2. He shared the difficulties and challenges of finding work, managing his troupe and their finances. He was reassured when he found that everyone had similar issues. Such is the life of a Puppeteer today. He felt that one of the important gains from this experience was discovering a peer group, a sense of belonging as against the isolation he felt earlier.

3. Language was a definite deterrent. We could not understand each other many times translations had to be made.

It is clear that the projects that may emerge from this Master Class will use the Kathputli technique

Questions raised during the Master Class

1. Should the Master Class be inclusive of projects? If yes, then a duration of 18 days is very limiting. The Master Class could be probably spread over 2 months where the first month goes in learning and manipulating puppets and the second month involves working on their projects.

2. Having come from a community where teaching and learning of traditional Kathputli happens within the family space, does it make a difference for the master to be engaging with participants from outside the familial boundary? There was a difference in master's involvement between the project and the non-project engagements. Would the teaching be different if the participants were generational puppeteers (children from his own family)?

3. Is there a perception of threat or insecurity about sharing the knowledge with people outside of the family? How can this issue be raised and addressed?

4. Should the Master be involved with the individual projects of the participants?

5. What can be done to increase awareness on the discourse of puppetry and kindle critical thinking that would inform the participants' practice?

6. What are the limitations of a traditional Master puppeteer?

7. How can traditional knowledge be broken down in order to transfer it to the participants in an understandable way?

8. What can be done to stimulate the participants' decision making capacity in the process of creating their projects?

9. How does one decide the line that divides contemporary puppetry from the traditional? Is it the technique that decides or the puppeteer?

10. Are these Master Classes meant for non-Indian participants? We saw two participants with absolutely no contact with the tradition. Tradition is also a sensibility that one grows up with. Although the Indian participants were not generational puppeteers they were clued into the tradition. They knew what *Jadugar* or *Anarkali* meant culturally. This cultural translation could never be fully accomplished for the non-Indian students even though they did get a good hang of the technique.

11. Should there be an age limit for the applicants?

12. How can documentation be a more inclusive practice? How to present and represent the voices of students, mentors, master puppeteer and balance out the overbearing presence of the documenter?

Credits

Sammitha Sreevathsa is research associate and documentarian at Antara Collective Bangalore, and works under the guidance of Aparna Banerjee.

She explores along with the people in the collective the idea of the human body as a site of knowledge through writing and documenting various performing arts, especially dance.

3 | In Search for an Appropriate Pedagogical Approach

By Anurupa Roy

In this article I have tried to present the situations of professional puppetry trainings in West Europe, East Europe, Canada and US and compare it to the Indian situation through the findings of the three Master classes organized by UNIMA India. The situation in the International training schools and courses is based on my observations made during the UNIMA International Training Commission conference “Provocation” held at Charleville Mezieres, France from September 16-18, 2015. The conference was attended by heads of several puppet schools across Europe, Canada, the US and South America. The fundamental principal that I could observe in the models of the schools was that they were a response to the situation of puppet theatre in their country. This included the status of the art form, the history of the form and how the practitioners are organized in the country where the school is situated. The general situation is the following

The International Situation

East Europe

Mostly has large state run puppet theatres and very few or in some countries no independent puppet theatres. The schools are large art academies which train the much needed puppeteers, technicians and builders which are needed to run these state run theatres. The course includes stage design, production techniques, dramaturgy, puppet making, puppet animation (moving the puppet to simulate life). The schools originally revolved around puppet masters but later came homogenous university structures. This does not allow diversity. In the theatres the puppets are made by specialized puppet constructors and the manipulator is a different person. Thus the fundamental focus of the training is to train a “puppet animator” or “puppet maker” and not a universal artist. Very interestingly, the academies of puppetry which fall under the university system also have very strict

mandates to run the program. This ERASMUS system a lot like the UGC system in India has certain pitfalls for an artistic course. This is an essential question to ask with regards to a school in India. What overall umbrella should or can it be under? Is it practical to be under a university program which demands that the teachers have compulsory PhDs? Is it necessary for students to receive degrees at the end of the course? The East European model also raises a very important question for us of whether it is the school’s job to supply to a market or is it to create new markets?

What overall umbrella should or can it be under? Is it practical to be under a university program which demands that the teachers have compulsory PhDs? Is it necessary for students to receive degrees at the end of the course?

West Europe- Germany and France

The situation in puppet theatre is mainly that there are many independent puppet theatre companies and the schools respond to this environment and further reinforce this environment by aspiring to give birth to individual artistic expressions. The market is not the main factor, though a market and a deep consciousness of a market exists in schools in West

Europe I. However, the focus for most schools is to provide an environment where the students achieve their own artistic expression and excellence, are able to run their own companies and challenge existing artistic norms.

The school at Charleville Mezeires, the Stuttgart Academy and DAMU are examples of this. Teachers of IIM like Pierre Blaise, Irina Niculescu and Claire Heggins shared some theoretical illustrations asking very crucial questions like “Why use a puppet?” “What is a puppet” and so how is training to be a puppeteer different from training to be any other kind of performer? Since the conference was held in Charleville we had the wonderful advantage of hearing some of the teacher’s speak. These are artists whose vision has contributed to the core principals



and techniques taught at IIM.

Pierre Blaise spoke of the Space on Stage and how it changes when there is the presence of only the puppet and then when there is the puppeteer and the puppet. IN the latter case it becomes double- The space where the puppet is playing and the space where the puppeteer is playing. This is different from the actor who occupies the “Second” space and the “Audience” which is the third space. The proportions change in each case. The size of the puppet changes space. When there are no humans on stage for reference, the scale the audience “wishes” to see exists. Any landscape can be invented. When the puppeteer appears on stage he gives a reference for size, say is a human hand appears it serves as a reminder to the audience. A puppet has no gravity, a puppeteer creates gravity. The puppet expands the expressive field of the human and the horizon of the spectator to the non living. The position of the human is not central and he can be many things at the same time- an actor, an object and a metaphor. Thus the spectator starts looking at signs and it changes the theatre space. Puppetry is a conflict between the Plastic and Performing Arts that causes theatrical turbulence and the aesthetic of both change. There are three categories of puppet theatre sources. These are The Marvelous, The Mimetic, The Fantastic. The Marvelous is a Universal genre like fairy tales or mythology where nature meets super nature. In the fairy tale you are somewhere else, invisible and can act from a distance and transform ourselves. We can live fantasies. Puppetry has very often been a form of expression for this space. The Mimetic is based on realism and observations of real life. Puppets “mime” life by observations of life, generating movement and action. Then this observation is transposed to an inanimate object. The Fantastic is based on the Mimetic but there is a possibility of the fantastic within it, in other words, Magic realism. It causes a certain duality to exist. Here the dream intervenes in reality. Time stops, repeats itself, space

Why use a puppet? What is a puppet? and so how is training to be a puppeteer different from training to be any other kind of performer?

transforms. This is very close to puppet theatre.

A manipulator provokes animation. The object moves and the manipulator disappears and if the manipulator does not manipulate, the actor appears behind the object.

Pierre Blaise also explained the difference between Animation which he says is “making an object live by giving it a soul” and Manipulation which is “Making it move”. The five major ways to give life to the puppet is through Support, or creating a sense of gravity, or floor, through Direction through the puppets gaze, through Attitude or a personality, through Movement and lastly through Movement.

The role of the audience is joining the dots.

Claire Higgins demonstrated the puppet/object and puppeteer relationship. It is important to know who leads and who is an accessory. She demonstrated with a mask held in her hand and how the situation changes is she leads the mask or if the mask leads her. Here she asked the question “who serves who?”. Irina Niculescu focussed on the question of Directing Puppet Theatre which is very crucial in the training in Charleville-Mezeires. According to her directing is a temperament which means creating something to articulate something or being an architect and a poet. This person may not be “on”stage but actually is one stage and before entering the stage the question to ask is “What do you want to say”. Thus dramaturgy and direction have a complicity that will bring a construction of a show. Here she raised the question of what tools can one provide the student of direction. In a situation of freedom of expression it is difficult to anticipate what the students want to do and hence what tools they would need. The guiding questions become the tools.

What do you want to say, what impact will it have on the audience. How would you guide the eye of the

audience, what would you stress on the object or the performer?

She raised the very interesting question of “How much freedom does one give the students?” The issue of Ethics and Aesthetics cropped up here. Talking about ethics can be important sometimes but she felt it was important for the teacher to keep an aesthetic distance, keeping one’s own aesthetic choices to oneself and not impose it on the students. The aesthetic sensibility of the student and teacher can be very divergent.

Irina’s question about the degree of involvement of the teacher is a crucial question we have been asking at the master classes. Who is an ideal master? The one who teaches skills alone? Surely it is someone who inspires the students too. Irina’s clear articulation of keeping an ‘aesthetic distance’ is something to keenly observe in all master classes. Often during projects masters need to guide the students. This guiding is a balancing act always. Often masters reach the situation of ‘giving an idea’. Mentors too do this. These ideas can sometimes fall into either category of “Aesthetic Interference” or “Guiding Questions”, since a very fine line exists between the two.

Eloi Recoing summed up all of the above very succinctly in addition to his own articulate vision for the school. He focused on tools the students should acquire by the end of the training. These according to him would be basic tools of puppetry, knowing the fundamentals of the relationship with objects, understanding that there are variations in expression, training them to break down boundaries between various disciplines, giving techniques of articulating puppets and also training them to have a certain rigour and concentration. Also giving students an awareness of Semiotics and producing of signs within one movement, the mise en scene of puppetry, the positioning of oneself in the art form in its entirety and continuity for e.g as a traditional artist or as a contemporary artist. Also the school tries to produce a conflict of ideas and friction between forms to give birth to new forms. An important concern of the school is to enable students to not just be performers but have a critical faculty. The school is able to have a very integrated training program as Charleville is also

the centre for publications, houses a library and is the host of the festival. It has close contacts with many puppeteers, practitioners and markets around the world.. These elements go hand in hand helping the students to find a connect between Art and Life.

In the discussion post this session some crucial questions were raised. These questions have a definite resonance with the training syllabus we are trying to evolve in India.

1. Puppets must be thought of as art of puppetry and nothing else. This puts the puppet at the centre of the practice.
2. Articulating the goal of the training- Means of expression of the individual artist by conceiving shows or fulfilling a function in a puppet company.
3. The question of consciousness- Is it necessary to be conscious of theory, history etc or does that make puppetry an intellectual pursuit only. Where is the place for instinct?
4. Should teaching be in a group or one on one?
5. The school needs to address the question of how to get work in the future.

America and Canada: Bart Roccoberton

Bart Roccoberton is the sole force behind the Dept of puppet theatre at the University of Connecticut. He presented an account of his journey with the puppet department in the university. Two outstanding statements that he made were firstly that during the selection of students he tries to see who already has the potential to become an artist. It is not so much about creating the artist but about providing the tools and skills or to quote him “to fan the flame”. The second outstanding aspect of his course is that it is a part of a larger university which houses many departments and often there are exchanges between the puppet department and the engineering or science departments which creates a very healthy “cross-pollination. . It is no coincidence that this facilitates a



certain kind of puppeteer who is also a technician and thus easily absorbed into the film industry.

Canada

We heard both the previous and the current head of the puppet schools speak. Dinaig is a young artist and brings to the school new energy and vision. Her past as a student in the Charleville Mezeires school clearly is a strong influence in the pedagogy. Similarly this can be noted with Ellika Mayer from the Stutgatt academy and of DAMU. It was important to see the trends among young pedagogues. Clearly, they rely on what they have learnt in their schools.

In the discussion with them three questions emerged.

1. Do those who learn in a certain school structure and then become teacher's within the same structure, question this structure. Do they have the distance to do this?

2. I observed a certain focus on technique and teaching of technique. However, from our master class learnings it feels like an overt focus on technique can lead to the compromise of content. Further with the rejection of pure forms and tradition in some schools, there seems to be a danger of missing out of some basic principles of puppetry and thus building a strong foundation. I feel there can be no correct formula for this. The balance between old fashioned technique and an improvisation based approach needs to be struck but for this a deep awareness of the balance between the two is crucial for pedagogues.

3. The younger generation of teachers is also struggling with the question of how much they should be present in the training process. I heard them debate about the degree of involvement with a student, with how much of one's own artistic opinion to bring into the school and how much to mentor. This question has a very strong resonance with our master class mentorships aspect.

Based on the above findings I have looked at the UNIMA India master classes with a certain comparative lens.

In India, we have never had a training program that creates puppeteers. Unlike most of Europe we have had continuous living tradition forms which are still practiced today. A lot of the traditional puppeteers are seasonal performers as their practice is attached to a ritual. Some function as professional companies also. Puppeteers who don't come from the traditional lineage often are organized as small groups or companies. There has never been a professional training program for puppetry in India. There have been a few attempts to run courses but they do not include all the aspects of Indian puppet theatre namely the traditional forms or an all rounded approach to design, aesthetic, theory, history and form. The Master Classes organized by UNIMA India are seeking to find if such a school is needed, if yes what should the curriculum include so that it learns from the other international models but truly responds to the unique Indian situation.

Learning: The Master Classes

The master classes are intensive training laboratories where we are trying to find the answers to certain questions. The components involve the master puppeteer teaching their own practice, then the participants responding to the form with their own projects that reflect the participants own artistic practice, thus there is a collaboration between the master and the participants. Added to this are mentors who facilitate this process, books and videos on puppetry and the specific form taught by the master and many sessions of discussions. A documenter and researcher map the entire process by asking questions, watching, recording and then creating a final report and film. The answers the master classes seek are to the following questions

1. Is a professional puppetry training program necessary in India? What kind of training should this be? Should this be an institutional school, a series of Master classes or something else? It is too early yet to know for sure whether we need a school or not but my gut tells me a professional training course will go a long way in creating a professional approach to this field both among practitioners and audiences and will

create a bigger community that engages in a deeper puppetry discourse. There is no puppet theatre market in India. There are no, large state run puppet theatres, nor sustained funding for independent puppet artists to produce regular new work or sustain day to day. The financial model for most puppet theatre groups involves accessing limited and sporadic Government grants, working with schools to do workshops and shows and doing a lot of social messaging for the NGO sector. The advantage in this situation is that a lack of a structured system provides many possibilities to create new markets. The questions for the training program are “how to integrate puppetry with new possibilities and markets”, “how to train the students to not just be artists but entrepreneurs”.

2. Who are the masters who lead these classes. How does one define a master? Our learning in the master classes is that each Masters carries some crucial aspects in their practice. These are rigour, immersion, mastery in one or more aspects of the practice and a certain, focus on perfection. This makes them masters of their craft but does this automatically make them pedagogues or teachers?

3. Pedagogic techniques differ in key aspects Scale and type of involvement. Each of our three masters involved themselves in the training process in different ways. These have varied from literally hand holding the participants in either making the puppets, and/ or learning to use the puppets and guiding them in a very step by step process towards making their own improvisations. The most interesting revelation was in seeing the master as a co-collaborator with the participants during the making of the project. Gunduraju ji chose to be an equal partner with some and a co director with others, really enjoying how the participants were beginning to own Togalu Gombeyatta to create their own artistic responses. Barbara Kolling chose to be a dramaturgist in the creations of the participants. She asked them crucial

questions about theatre making with materials. Puran Bhat chose to continue to be an instructor whose main focus remained manipulation and construction of puppets. For me the projects are very crucial. If the idea is to not run puppet workshops that teach puppet making and manipulation only but master classes that wish to facilitate the process of artistic creation and questioning the projects are what set the two apart. It has also become clear that the projects reveal a crucial aspect of the master. It is their approach to pedagogy. Some approach as training in skills alone and others as a much deeper engagement with artistic practice. Which is better? Later in the paper I will highlight aspects of the conference in France that echo the same debate.

How do they view their own art form, their practice, its future- The masters shared a lot of their personal journey, beliefs and concerns. It is important to note that watching videos of their work, interacting with them after the actual teaching hours, observing them with the participants during the projects which are often outside the comfort zone of a master gave one much deeper insight on their practice, beliefs and their vision for future of the art form. Those experienced in teaching workshops like Puran Bhat has a well evolved workshop technique and Gunduraju ji for whom this was a first was constantly drawing from memories

Why use a puppet? What is a puppet? and so how is training to be a puppeteer different from training to be any other kind of performer?

of childhood and how he had learnt from his father, breaking it down in front of our eyes and then passing it on. In the generational form context this is very important. These puppeteers are taught right from childhood and not in classrooms. They learn by seeing, hearing and doing and it is all around them. Breaking

down their own training is a very important for a new Indian professional puppet training program. The guru shishiya system has components that must be included in any puppetry training programs if we want to create a strong foundation for future puppeteers.



Many questions come to mind about the master puppeteer:

1. How were they taught, how do they interface with students
2. How much experience do they have in teaching- The more experienced in conducting workshops like Puran Bhat
3. How much is their general exposure to cities, other countries

Their personalities- ability to listen, ability to work with their students as collaborators, how much structure do they give, how much individual space, how much do they lead students from step to step. Case studies presented.

Credits

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



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<http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/schools/index.html>

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<http://www.sagecraft.com/puppetry/exhibits/>

Researchers-in-Residence , programs for puppetry. Deutches Forum for puppet theatre in Bochum-Germany
http://www.fidena.de/root/researcher-in-residence/mn_55

Sangeet Natak Akademi
<http://www.sangeetnatak.org>

The Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts
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