

Welcome Address

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Respected Komalji, puppeteers of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, West Bengal, Assam, and Kerala:

It is my privilege to welcome you all on the opening day of this workshop on marionettes being organized at this important centre of Indian puppetry — the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal in Udaipur — founded by the late Devilal Samar. The enthusiastic response of all who have gathered here is heartwarming, and a positive sign of an effort to build bridges of understanding between puppeteers of various States and regions. They have much in common, yet are very different from each other, and a dialogue could enrich the experience of all who are assembled here.

I remember well that this kind of workshop, which enables interaction, was very important to the late Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, who felt the needs of puppeteers and puppetry keenly. The festival of shadow puppets organized by her in Bangalore in 1978 was perhaps the first such event. Today, I also remember the late Meher Contractor, who represented the cause of the puppet theatre in national and international fora. I am grateful to Shri Komal Kothari, who has been a source of guidance and inspiration, and who has agreed to act as the Convener of this workshop; and also to Shri Suresh Dutta, Shri Dadi Pudumjee, Shri G. Venu, Shri K.S. Upadhyaya, Shri Jiwan Pani and others who discussed the core idea of the workshop in a meeting convened by the Akademi in Delhi last year. I am thankful to the Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi and its Chairman, Shri Bhanu Bharati, who has taken a keen interest in this project from its very inception. I would also like to thank the West Zone Cultural Centre for joining hands with us in organizing this workshop and festival.

Sangeet Natak Akademi earnestly desires to deal with the basic problem in Indian puppetry today, which is sustenance of this mainly rural art. In this festival, we have tried to arrange as many performances of the participating artists as possible in nearby towns and villages; we will bring them back to Udaipur to enable them to participate in the workshop in the morning every day. I would welcome any suggestion from the experts and artists gathered here as to what can be done by the Akademi to sustain puppetry within the limited resources that we have. This discussion could perhaps be reserved for the last day of the workshop. We have thought of similar festivals and workshops in eastern and southern India as well.

Our documentation team is here with its questionnaire. Kindly help us by providing whatever information is available. I have requested Shri Venkat Swaminathan to prepare a report of the deliberations in the workshop; based on that report, we could perhaps bring out a monograph on the subject eventually . . . We were discussing several ideas with Komal [Komal Kothari] earlier in the day; he could perhaps share them now with everybody gathered here.

Thank you very much.



Komal Kothari (*extreme left*) and Kherati Ram Bhat look on as Babulal Bhat demonstrates with his puppets, *boli* held between his lips.