

DISCUSSION

Tradition, and the Way Ahead

Dadi Pudumjee: Over the last few days, we have seen a number of performances, and have also interacted with most of the puppeteers participating in this festival-cum-workshop. Only a few of the troupes invited to the event failed to turn up — troupes from Manipur and Maharashtra for example.

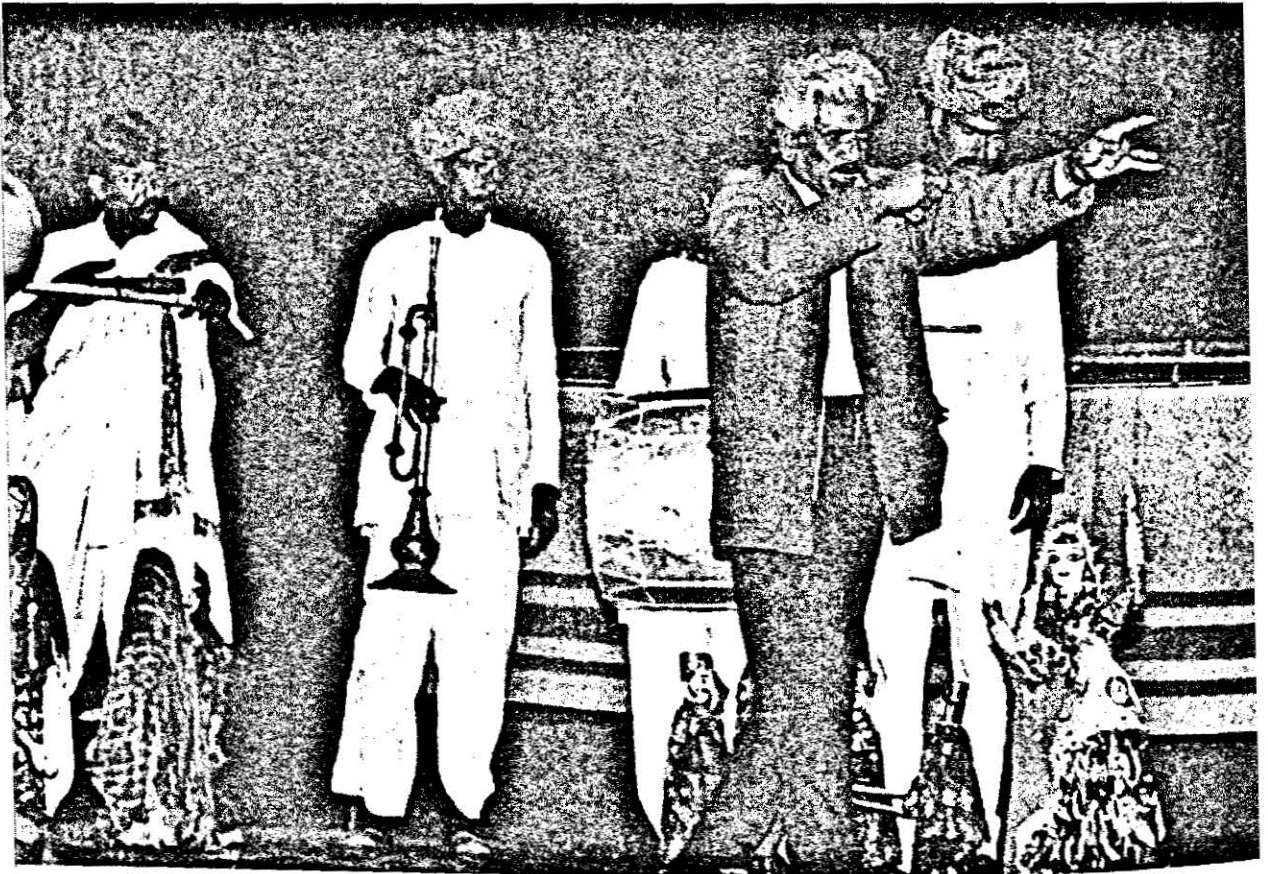
Many of the participating artists here are traditional performers, therefore it's not surprising that in discussions during this workshop, there have been repeated references to tradition as a matrix of performance. Now, it is self-evident that most of India's puppet theatres are the creation of hereditary artists who have preserved the various forms of puppetry in India through practice continued over generations. Nevertheless, I think we should be forewarned that a preoccupation with tradition, and worse, a narrow allegiance to one's own regional tradition, can blind us to practices in puppetry in other regions, and can eventually hamper the development of puppetry in one's own region. It is important to recognize diversity — the fact that each region has a different style, a different tradition, differing techniques. The materials puppeteers use are different everywhere, depending on availability in a particular location. And there is much to learn from the usages of puppeteers everywhere. We will have to bear that in mind. Otherwise, there would always be the danger that we withdraw into a shell, or become like so many frogs in the well. It is very important to ensure that that does not happen. Otherwise, one's own tradition will not prosper.

Now I should like to ask you [traditional puppeteers] a question. You talk of tradition. What is your view of tradition? What is tradition? I would like any one of you to answer.

Mahipat Kavi: In my opinion, we are not carrying on with what we call our tradition. We are in fact destroying it. Do you know, the tale of Amar Singh Rathore was once propagated far and wide by puppeteers to awaken the masses? In 1857, it is said, when the Mutiny was raging, Rajasthani puppeteers went into the camps of [Indian] soldiers in the British forces and performed the play, carrying the message of revolt against their masters. What are these people doing now? If they are carrying on with their tradition, then they should be carrying it forward: they should think about society and the nation. They are doing nothing of the sort. What they had learnt, they have now forgotten. And they actually take no pride in their tradition, though they make tall claims that they are holding fast to it.

Dadi Pudumjee: Well, that was Mahipat Kavi. Is there anyone else to comment on this matter?

Komal Kothari [explaining Dadi Pudumjee's initial observations to the Rajasthani puppeteers, using a metaphor]: It's like this — you prepare the soil for a sowing, you put manure in it, and then you sow the seeds. If you haven't done all that, can you grow anything in the [barren] soil? Unless you draw water from outside your little plot of land, will your



Babulal Bhat (in Western dress) shows off his dancer, *boli* held in his mouth.

crop ever grow? Do you think your tradition needs manuring? Now, you don't want to turn the soil. You don't want to manure it or water it. Will your crop grow just by sowing the seed? Can any one of you say what you feel about this [problem]?

A Rajasthan puppeteer: We have been following the path laid by our ancestors, even if we don't understand why we are doing so. Walking that path has become a habit with us. That is what we call our tradition.

Komal Kothari: That is one view. Any other?

Harji Ram Bhat: Mahipatji was saying that we are destroying our tradition, but we have really been carrying it forward. We started with small puppets, and now we have bigger puppets. We started with one-string puppets, but then we changed over to two-string puppets; now, we are even manipulating puppets with ten or more strings. We are continuing our tradition . . . But sometimes we feel like abandoning puppetry altogether. And why? We don't get anything out of it.

Dadi Pudumjee: Is there any other response?

M. Srinivasa Rao: What has been with us for a hundred years, we call that [body of practice] a tradition. The puppets that we call modern puppets today, even those [puppets and the practices associated with them] will become a tradition after fifty years. So it is no use sticking to old things [for their age alone]. Even while upholding a tradition, we can absorb what is new in our environment and can develop our art on contemporary lines. So far as our troupe is concerned, we have learned what is traditional in the puppetry of our region. And we are doing contemporary [i.e., modern] puppet theatre too.

G. Venu: There is actually no such division as contemporary and traditional, concept-wise. A tradition in theatre or other arts flows on, and the work in which it manifests is always contemporary. No art is a museum piece. Take the case of the oldest theatre in Kerala, Kutiyattam; the gurus bring innovations into it; no one forces them to do so, they do it from their own inner urge. Therefore the bifurcation of any [theatrical] art into contemporary and traditional [segments] is absolutely wrong. Theatre is always contemporary; and it is always a continuation of the older theatre.

Dadi Pudumjee: Yes, we have started talking about our theatrical arts in this manner only in modern times — especially in the last thirty years or so. We now say this is traditional and that is not. But what we call traditional today would also have begun at some point in time. A hundred or two hundred years ago, what we now regard as traditional was surely a new thing. Venuji says theatre is always contemporary, and I agree with that.

Old or new, the principle on which an art [or anything else] works [often] remains the same; only the materials and manner change with changing function. Let me give you a commonplace example. You have the bullock cart, and you also have the railway engine. Both are means of transport, old and new. Utterly different as the two might seem to be, both the vehicles run on wheels. The wheels are made of different materials, but the principle [of locomotion] remains the same. That is how it is with the arts too . . . so if you put your tradition in a glass-case, it will not live. It will die. It will go to the museum. You can check this out in any part of the world — when a tradition is not alive, it goes to the museum.

A tradition always changes. It doesn't ever remain the same. [*To the Rajasthan puppeteers*] You said you started with just one string, and now you have ten strings or more. Similarly, puppeteers elsewhere have started using controls for better manipulation. That is how a tradition grows. Whether one is a traditional puppeteer or a modern puppeteer, one has to adapt to new situations — and adopt new practices — according to one's own lights. And one has to think as one adapts, or brings in new features; you don't pick up something simply because it looks good, or is fashionable. I asked you the other day too — why have you started adding legs to your puppets? When you add on such an important feature, you should do it only after you have thought over the change. If your puppets perform as you wish even without the help of controls, then don't go in for controls. On the other hand, if you feel you would be able to handle your puppets better with controls, then use controls by all means. In any case, controls don't make manipulation any easier.

[Nevertheless,] we all need to improve our standards in every aspect of our art. And we know where the deficiencies lie — after all, we always know whether a show is going right or wrong. We don't really need an outsider to tell us whether or not we are doing things right.

Venuji showed us some slides of string puppets the other day. He has tried to recreate a tradition in this case. His only sources were a few people who could tell him how those puppets were made in the past. So he talked to these old hands, and he recreated the tradition as he understood it, moulding it to his own purposes. And the Kathakali glove puppets that had also completely disappeared — when did you revive them, Venu?

G. Venu: 1982.

Dadi Pudumjee: Just ten years ago. He saw some puppets in a museum, and he revived the art [with the help and guidance of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya — a process which began in 1978]. He brought back the old style; and he has an audience for it now.

We keep saying that films, television, and other media have destroyed puppetry. Now, we all see TV and films. They won't go away; they are here to stay. It is for us to create a puppet theatre that wins back the audience that has gone over to TV and films. That depends entirely on us.

[Specifically to the Rajasthan puppeteers] We can't go on blaming others, or saying this or that has spoiled things for us. You would admit that we also tend to create our own problems. One problem with you is, if any one among you does something new, everyone else starts copying him. Do your own thing. The audience will know what is good and who is doing the right thing. If you put up shows in your own region, people will definitely turn up to see them. If you perform in other States, problems of language might arise. But it would still be worth your while to explore new audiences . . .

Babulal Bhat: Why do we say we are following our tradition? Because we have lived by our puppetry for ages. We have carried our puppets on horseback and gone performing from village to village. You say the tradition is dead. How can it be dead? We have carried it on our shoulders, on our heads, on horseback — and have taken it to the people.

Dadi Pudumjee: Who says it is dead? It is not dead.

Babulal Bhat: It will not die. We will not allow it to die. We have been carrying it with us

for centuries.

Dadi Pudumjee: I have a question; don't mind it. Tell me, in how many of your families today do the children want to learn puppetry? I can't say about puppeteers in Rajasthan, but I can speak about families settled in Shadipur in Delhi. In some families, there are six or seven children, but in how many families do the children want to follow the tradition? The children really want to do something else these days — I am not saying that is either good or bad.

A Rajasthan puppeteer: The situation is bad — we don't have tents . . . In some cases, puppeteers have even to pawn their jewellery [to meet emergencies]. I am not ashamed of saying this, because it is the truth.

Dadi Pudumjee: Let me ask you a question: Is this a situation only Rajasthani puppeteers are faced with? I think it applies to every [traditional] troupe in every region.

G. Venu: In Kerala, no folk artist can make a living only by doing theatre. Theatre is only a part-time occupation [for most artists]. They do other things too for a living.

A.R. Dattatreya: What Babulal said is very true. In Karnataka, too, almost all our puppeteers are being forced to think of giving up their profession. Even Mr Kogga Kamath. He performs very well, but he is unable to make a living by puppetry alone. He has some land — that is how he is able to manage*. Even in Magadi, all the puppeteers depend on agriculture. It would be very difficult for them to survive [solely by their practice of puppetry].

T. Sankaranathan: In Tamil Nadu, too, we are going through a very difficult time. It is really very hard to make both ends meet. We get some opportunities to perform only for four months in a year — from January to April. As television is spreading, our audience is dwindling. We are having a hard time. And so we have to accommodate the changing tastes of our audiences; we have been changing our older practices as a result. We don't get enough [by way of compensation] to sustain ourselves. Because we are born into the tradition, we stay with it. This is our sole occupation, we don't have any other means of earning a living.

G. Venu: Do you have any agricultural land?

T. Sankaranathan: No, we don't. We don't have any property to fall back on. This is our only source of income.

Komal Kothari: How do you keep your instrumentalists engaged?

T. Sankaranathan: They are all with us [in the family]. All of us depend on puppetry for our living.

Komal Kothari: Do they go out and perform elsewhere or do anything else?

T. Sankaranathan: No, they are always with us.

Dadi Pudumjee: Are you able to live by just four months' work?

T. Sankaranathan: Those are the months in which we perform in temple festivals; we get

The late Kogga Kamath (1927–2003), who was widely recognized for his contribution to the traditional puppet theatre of coastal Karnataka, also worked in a tile factory to supplement his earnings. — Ed.

invitations to perform there. During the rest of the year, we do get some invitations from individuals and *sangeet sabhas*. But they are not regular, like temple invitations; they are occasional.

Babulal Bhat: They get regular work for four months. Why don't we get it?

Dadi Pudumjee: But your puppetry is different. I am coming to that later.

Komal Kothari: You would put up a show on Anarkali or Amar Singh Rathore, for example; can you do that in a temple?

Dadi Pudumjee: The Rajasthan tradition, as I said the other day, is a balladic tradition. But the Tamil Nadu tradition is a religious one. [*To the Rajasthan puppeteers*] Their stories are from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Yours are different.

Babulal Bhat: All right — they get their invitations from the temples; and we have the Amar Singh Rathore story.

Dadi Pudumjee: But who is going to look for the descendants of Amar Singh Rathore? You will have to look for them . . . In England, for example, they have Punch and Judy shows — that is the tradition puppeteers there follow. But these puppeteers introduce in their shows personalities and events that are contemporary. They also joke and entertain their audiences. The stories they weave in comment on what is happening in parliament; they even joke about their queen! That is why people are still attracted to Punch and Judy shows. Otherwise, the audiences would complain — 'We have been seeing the same old Punch and Judy show for years . . . why should we?' Again, in South India, there is the Vidushaka who comments on contemporary affairs in the puppet theatre; he pulls the legs of important people in society . . . You too had been doing things like that earlier — picking up events for a story wherever you travelled.

Every puppeteer tries to attract an audience. If the audience doesn't like the show, it goes away. Take for instance yesterday's show. All the items were old ones — Dhobi-Dhoban, snake charmer, and so on. But the audience applauded the show because . . . you can still improvise [on the old acts] and hold the audience in your grip. You have that skill. Unlike you, the South Indian puppeteers depend on texts — mythological stories from the Ramayana and other sources. But they are still able to introduce a contemporary element in their plays through the Vidushaka. So there must be something new for the audience if the show is to go on . . . And how to bring in that depends on the individual puppeteer.

Even this morning, we talked about employing some of you [in an institution] and giving you monthly salaries. All right, a salary will fetch you a full meal every day, but is it going to be of any use to your art? There are thousands of puppeteers who sell puppets for a living, but does it help the art of puppetry? To go on with your art, you have to grow in new ways, and proceed in a direction of your own choosing. You could do new plays, for example.

Babulal Bhat: You know very well that it costs five hundred to six hundred rupees to make a puppet [for a new play]. It may even cost more. If I spend so much on making a new puppet, what am I going to eat?

Dadi Pudumjee: You have been in this profession right from your childhood; you have grown up with it. All these years, you must have made puppets somehow, isn't it? Komal

Saheb, you answer him.

Komal Kothari: Even if one were to set up a paan shop, one would have to invest some five thousand rupees in it . . . Funds can be raised if one has a clear plan in one's mind; and the way to raise the funds depend on the plan itself. For instance [*to the Rajasthan puppeteers*], if you want to make puppets for sale, you can go and take a loan from a bank. But if you want to make, say, something like ten puppets for a show, and each puppet costs five hundred rupees [excluding other expenses for the show], then you have to work out a plan to get the money. You have to prepare a proposal saying that you want to put up such a show, that you want to produce it in such a way, and finally that the project would cost so much money. You have thus to convince the authorities [in an institution] about your project. Then you might get financial assistance for a performance too.

Dadi Pudumjee: Quite a number of puppeteers do take loans. And in a few days all the money is gone. [*To the Rajasthan puppeteers*] You know how that money gets spent; all of you know it very well. Maybe not all of you spend it that way, but even if one or two of you do, the whole lot of you get a bad name.

Babulal Bhat: What Komalda says and what you say is correct. We are also right in our own way. We are not prepared to spend money from our pockets; we want to take the [seed] money out of your pockets. Unless we spend a few rupees from our own pockets, why should others pay us anything? . . . Now, if you give us some stories, it would be a great thing. Komalda said he will give us some learned adviser.

Komal Kothari: That is the trouble with you all. You see TV, you meet people. You should know who can give you a good story. You can even employ such a person in your troupe. You can tell him you will give him a share from the shows.

Dadi Pudumjee: I think a point needs to be made here, though: when a new story is written, the puppeteer must understand the story and see for himself what techniques are required to tell that story. It is also very necessary for the writer to know what is possible in puppetry and what is not. Otherwise, one can get into all sorts of problems. Our troupe does invite people to write stories. But sometimes, when these writers come up with their stories, we get into problems presenting them; we then have to do a lot of improvisation. So it is very necessary for the person who writes a story for the puppet theatre to understand the method and techniques of puppetry.

Babulal Bhat: Then you give us a person of that kind.

Komal Kothari: Say that then. Let us recommend that a workshop be organized where you will participate as puppeteer, and where there will also be some writers. They will write stories for you, and you will do the rest.

Babulal Bhat: That we will do. We will buy wood; we will make the puppets; we will also stitch the costumes. But tell us where we can get such writers and stories.

Komal Kothari: Today, you need to work with specialists in every department of your craft — a costume designer, a tailor . . . If you get an assignment from TV, then you have to work on the lines TV requires. Again, if the West Zone Cultural Centre asks you to do some work, the requirements will be of a different kind. If it is Sangeet Natak Akademi which

gives you an assignment, the work that is expected will be of a different nature again. If you work for school children, you will have to meet a very different set of demands.

You have to propagate your puppetry. In what ways and in which fields you want to go forward so that your art registers a presence, creates an impact — that will have to be thought out by you. As for the technique and style of your puppetry, I would say that you need to stay within the bounds of your tradition. Sangeet Natak Akademi can support you in your work within the tradition; they have some small resources for sustenance to the traditional arts.

Once you have done something worthwhile, endless possibilities can open up. There are schools, there are the Zonal Cultural Centres, there is television. Now, TV is a medium that has immense possibilities and immense resources, yet Doordarshan has seldom been approached with a proposal for a puppet play with a suitable script. For TV, you don't need a tent and all your paraphernalia, but you have to think of stories and formats which suit the medium. In this manner, you have to think of the directions in which you will proceed in the future.

Dadi Pudumjee: Allow me to share some thoughts with you without immediate relevance to our discussion. It has earlier been mentioned in this workshop that the materials used for making [traditional] puppets are those available locally. The costumes, the dyes, the songs and stories, all likewise relate to the region where a form of puppetry belongs. Further, it is not difficult to appreciate — as Komalda had suggested in his presentation — that puppets are only a part of a whole spectrum of [culture and] artistic activity: the human theatre, music, painting, dance, etc. — puppetry is related to each of these arts; it is not something that exists in isolation. Recognizing this interconnectedness, what I want to suggest in the context of the practice of the older forms of puppetry in India is this: where there is a gap in our knowledge of the [older] practice in a traditional puppet theatre, one might look for the missing link in the related arts of the region. One may well find it there.

I would also like to make a point about changing practices in traditional puppetry [, brought about by changes in our natural environment]. A traditional puppeteer — like any other traditional artist today — will readily substitute one material for another as needed without necessarily changing the character of his art. Thus if sola is not available to a Bengal puppeteer, he will readily switch to styrofoam [thermocool] to make his puppets. To introduce more complex movements, he may start using controls for manipulation. That is how a living art develops, and such changes in practice should not be discouraged.

At the same time, I am aware that traditional practices and preferences have their own justification, rooted in the culture of a region. So I wouldn't say — for example — that the costumes of any traditional puppet theatre are either good or bad, or that one or other regional theatre uses too much brocade! When you see a puppet in action, you immediately know why something is done the way it is done.

Someone here said that puppets' costumes were changing as a result of the influence of cinema. The complaint in this case was that the regional tradition was being trampled and smothered. Of course I see the point in this complaint. But the puppeteer will respond to it by saying — 'It is not you on whom we depend for our living; it is the rural audience which comes to our shows, and they like clothes of the kind worn by cinema idols.' I would say

this is a valid position. In such a situation, it is for the puppeteer to strike a balance between the old and new. He could perhaps preserve the original style of clothing and the colours, but could — for example — use a new kind of cloth. That is a matter puppeteers have to think and decide about; it is an individual artist's decision.

G. Venu: Why is the traditional puppeteer so afraid of changing even the cloth of costumes for his puppets? From my experience, he is fearful of changing anything at all partly because of the power and influence of the so-called folklorists and research scholars, who go and accuse our traditional artists — You have done this, you have done that; you have committed this crime, you have changed this into that! This attitude must change. Actually, the enemy of our folk artists are the so-called foreign scholars.

Dadi Pudumjee: Venuji is right. In any living tradition of the arts, some features disappear and some features appear anew. While such things have always been happening in the past, why is it that questions are pointed at traditional artists only now, getting them scared? They ask — Can I do this? Can I do that? And the foreign expert warns them: If you do this, your tradition will die out. Puppeteers are scared. Someone in this gathering, perhaps Harji, said to one of us the other day — 'It is you who asked me to change this [detail], and it is you again objecting to the change.' It should really be left to the puppeteer to decide what to change and how much to change. With well-deliberated changes, a tradition will not metamorphose; it will grow instead.

B.R. Bhargava [explaining the above to the Rajasthan puppeteers]: If you want to make changes in your play, go ahead; there is nothing to fear. But you must know what you are changing and why; what you are taking in, and what it means to the total performance. You have to ask questions all the time. If a costume is coloured green, you have to ask why. If the beard on a puppet is styled in a certain manner, you should ask why. If the headdress is in a particular style, you must ask why. If you want to change any of these features, go ahead and change it. But before you make the change, give it a good thought. For example, if you change the headdress of a Mughal nobleman into the headdress of a *sahukar*, then you are inviting problems. On the other hand, If you think that the headdress of a *sahukar* in the old days was different and that now a *sahukar* wears it differently, then change the headdress by all means . . . Every input in your performance must be meaningful to the audience. The problem is, you change details for show, for effect.

Dadi Pudumjee [to the same audience]: Yes, any change should have a reason and a meaning, or a need. There was a reference to the Ghoomar puppet the other day; I think it was Komalda who said that this puppet has to wear a thin dress, or else it wouldn't dance. In the same way, before you try out anything new, you should ask yourself why you are doing it, and then do it effectively. You don't have to pick up techniques just because they are available.

Some of you have started using controls. Now, controls are of two kinds — vertical and horizontal. These controls are of foreign origin. When puppeteers abroad choose a particular kind of control, they do so with a definite purpose in mind. You may have seen controls of one or other kind used by [urban] puppeteers, but that doesn't mean you must have the same controls for your puppets too. Actually, I am not sure how much we need these controls in the traditional context. If at all used, the control should be held right above the puppet,

and there should be sufficient space between the strings so that they don't get in each other's way. The control you are using, and the spacing of the strings, will also differ according to the particular puppet. So, to save all this bother, if your puppet is working all right without a control, then it is best not to use one. You can bring in something new in some other part of your work.

M. Srinivasa Rao: It's a question of knowhow, I think. You have to give them the knowhow.

Dadi Pudumjee: As far as Rajasthan's puppeteers are concerned, they have retained the traditional knowledge [of their art]; and they have the ability to improvise, change, and adapt. They can absorb new stimuli very well; that is why their art is living. The only problem is, how to put in a story in their theatre. In your own [the speaker's] case, the tradition is narrative; the stories have come down to you from your ancestors. But in the case of Rajasthan's puppeteers, the story has disappeared and only the tricks have remained. The problem is one of creating stories for them. Even when you give them a story, the problem they face is in exploiting the dramatic potential. The point is not just to drag on a show for half an hour or an hour. In the old style, they know exactly when the dance should end, or how long the snake-charmer act can be stretched. The problem arises only when you introduce a story. You saw the effort they had to make [in the play] showing people drinking liquor. They made an effort all right. Some came out satisfactorily, but in the work of others, the dramatic element was missing. They went on monotonously, and they couldn't sustain the interest of the audience. It is here that they need some help. This is not a problem in the case of other traditional puppeteers, because they are already well-versed in the art of narrating stories.

A voice: Can they take up religious stories?

Dadi Pudumjee: Yes, why not? If they want to do religious stories, they could. In Japan they take on modern themes in the same traditional style; they also do their old plays. [*To the Rajasthan puppeteers*] Puppetry is a medium; the message lies in what you are communicating through your puppets. The medium survives in your case. The techniques are good. The lack is in the message — what you want to say through your puppet play. When such a gap comes about between medium and message, a tradition dies out. Also, when that gap appears, the audience doesn't get anything out of the medium. Then the tradition, whether in Rajasthan or anywhere else in the world, inevitably dies.

Babulal Bhat: You have explained the problem and we understand it. But we are illiterate [and confused by contrary instructions]. Earlier, in Delhi, Bhargava Saheb had once said to me, 'You shouldn't change anything; you should do what you have been doing traditionally. If you change things, I won't allow you into my office.' I was worried. I said, 'Sir, of course I will come to [see you in] your office.' I couldn't eat for days! I told him, 'I haven't really changed anything. In my opinion, you can't call what I have done [entirely] new; it's the same old thing for me. I have made some slight improvements, but the old style remains. So you cannot call it new. I have only introduced something new in the same old snake-charmer act — when the snake bites the man, there is a spurt of blood. This can't be called new! There is blood whenever anyone is bitten; you can't say there is no blood when someone gets bitten!' I had worked hard to achieve this effect.

Komalda has been advising us all — quite a number of our people. He has made many of us travel in aeroplanes — people who had not even ridden a horse before. He has pushed many people forward. All the Bhats and others have moved forward. If others don't go forward, is it Komalda's fault? He can't hold their hands and pull them forward!

Dadi Pudumjee: Komalda's complaint is that you are doing the same thing over and over again. Whatever he has said about your work is equally important to me as a puppeteer; it is meant for all of us. One thing that I always bear in mind is — if I put up a show, I won't get an audience without any effort I will have to work for it. This same problem confronts us all, whether one is a traditional puppeteer or a modern puppeteer: how to improve our shows and how to draw audiences to watch them.

Babulal Bhat: But why are we not getting any assistance?

Dadi Pudumjee: Who is getting assistance? Nobody gets any assistance.

Babulal Bhat: There are puppeteers like us in foreign lands too, roaming the streets. They were there in Holland; we saw them. They were there in Japan, even in America. They showed us their performances. They were also puppeteers like us. They get assistance of some kind from their governments.

Dadi Pudumjee: No, they don't always get assistance from their governments.

Babulal Bhat: That is what I am saying; they do their work. But if we are given some assistance in the way of stories, it would be very useful. We are not literate. We can't write. We can speak, of course; you ask us to speak in Marathi, Gujarati, Sindhi — we can do it . . . So far as our puppets and our music are concerned, we don't need any assistance from anywhere, not even a foreign country. I can tell my son — take the Dholak and play it; or, take that puppet and perform; take the harmonium and play a song on it. He can do all of that. We can do even more. What we want from you is — help to keep this tradition alive. I am not asking for help only for my sake: I am speaking for all puppeteers [of Rajasthan].

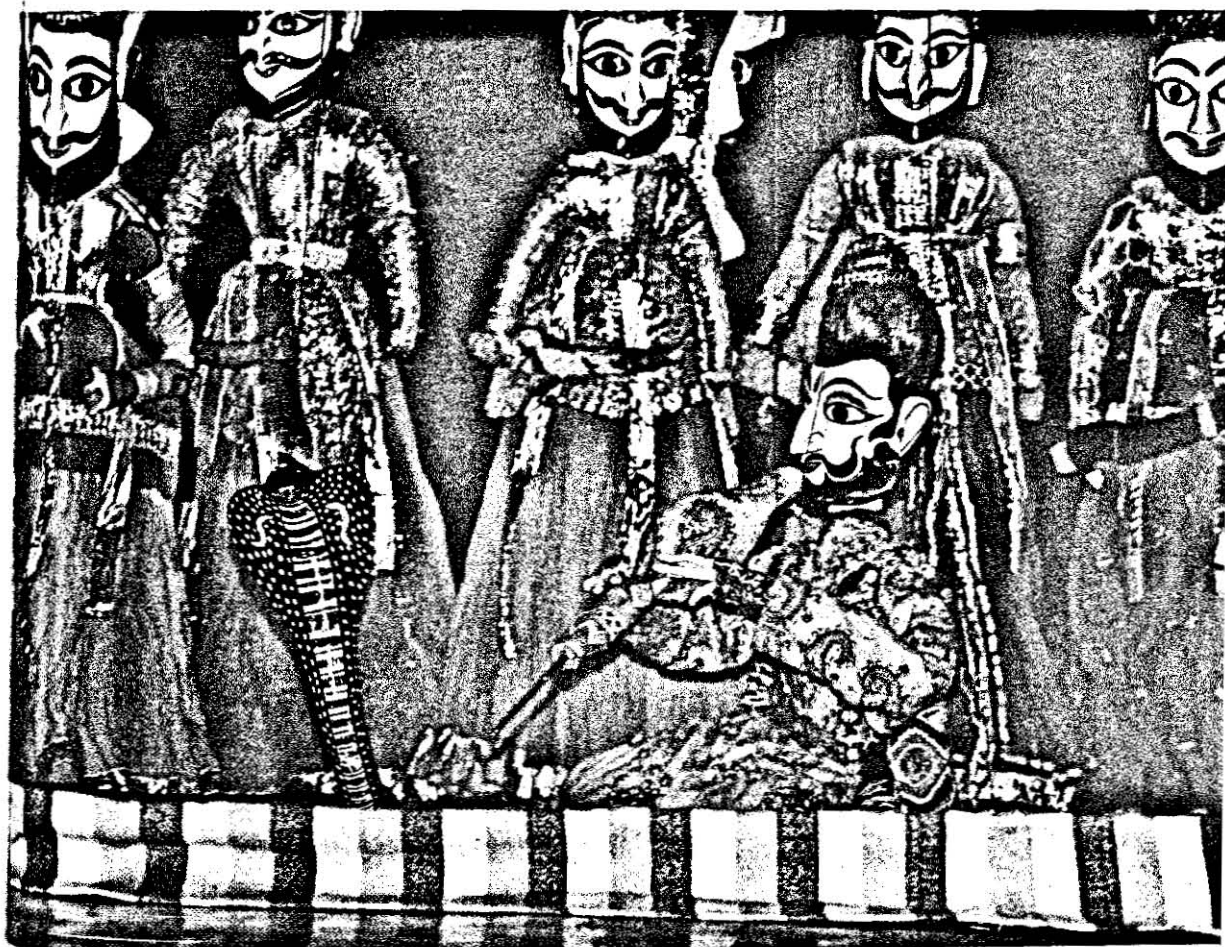
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B.R.Bhargava: Over the last five days in this workshop, which was planned with the concurrent festival of puppet theatre, we have all gained a new exposure to puppetry across the country. In the process, we have got to know the varied work of puppeteers in southern and eastern India, as well as in Rajasthan itself, rather better than we knew it before. In particular, I think we have learned better to appreciate the many pressing problems that beset our traditional puppeteers today. Solutions have been proposed, and these require action not by the state alone, but by non-government organizations as well as communities of traditional performers themselves.

The present event, limited to string puppets, is only the first of a series of workshops and festivals devoted to Indian puppet theatre. Sangeet Natak Akademi proposes to follow up this event with similar meetings of artists and experts in southern and eastern India in the coming years, as well as an event specifically focused on modern puppet theatre to be held in Delhi. We can hope that new pathways for India's puppeteers, traditional or modern, will open up through these interactions.

In conclusion, may I thank the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal — our generous hosts in Udaipur — for their cooperation in making this workshop and festival a success. The West Zone Cultural Centre and the Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi have our gratitude for sharing responsibility with us in organizing an event of such scale. Let us hope that we meet soon again, and are able to find ways to provide meaningful support to puppeteers in every part of India. Thank you.

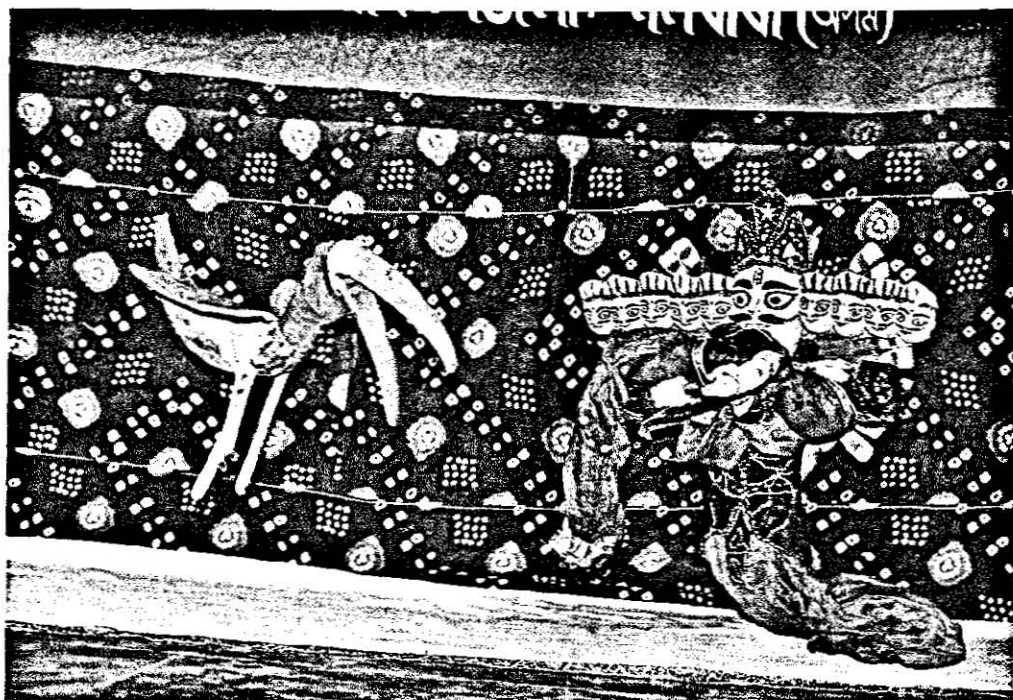
The Festival



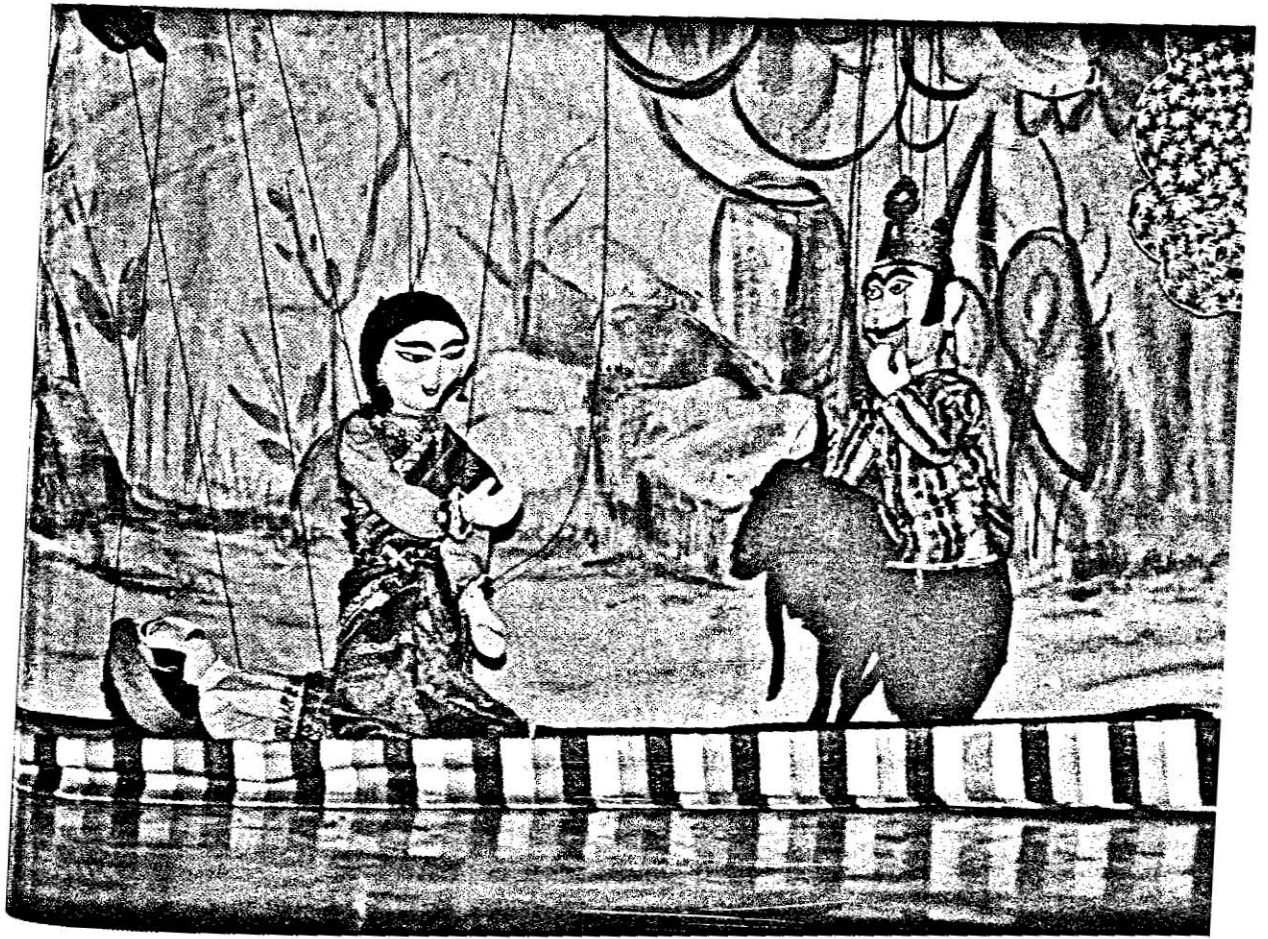
The snake charmer in the durbar: *Amar Singh Rathore*, produced by Babulal Bhat.



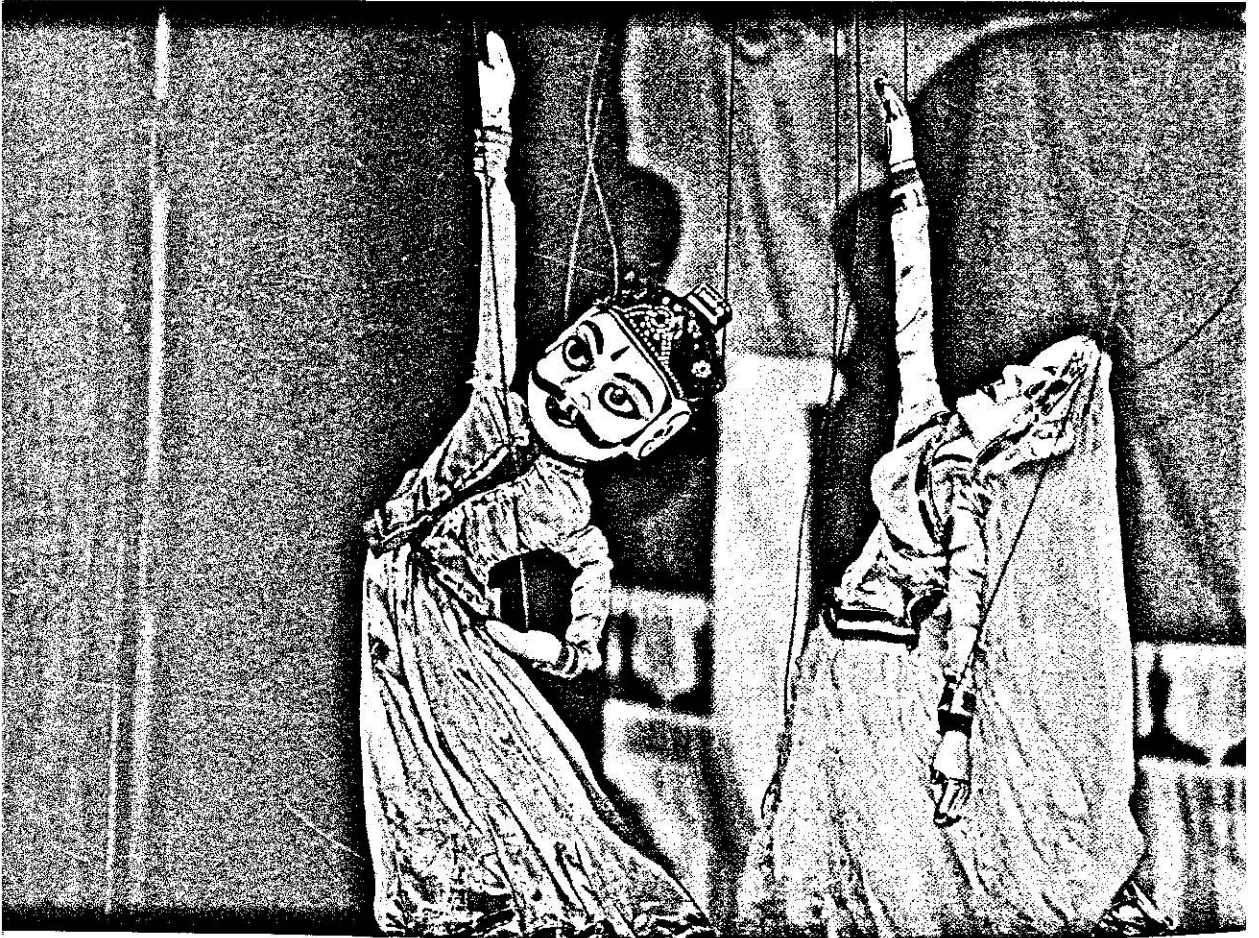
Satyabhama, produced by A.R. Dattatreya, Puthali Kalaranga, Bangalore.



Sita Haran, produced by Mohkhali Putul Nach Samiti, Nalbari.



Savitri, produced by Mahipat Kavi, Puppets & Plays, Ahmedabad.



Mughal Durbar, produced by Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur.



Roothi Rajkumari, produced by Kherati Ram Bhat of Jodhpur.



Valli Vivaham, produced by T.N. Sankaranathan, Murugan Sangeetha Bommalata Sabha, Kumbhakonam.



Snake charmer in a play by Harji Ram Bhat of Nagaur.



Dancer and patron in a play by Sadhu Ram Bhat of Sikar.



The puppet with the string-ball in the belly, in a play by Gulab Bhat of Ajmer.
(See discussion, p. 19, in *'The Kathputli of Rajasthan'*)



The rural audience.

Participants in the Workshop

Komal Kothari, the Convener of the workshop, is known for his wide-ranging work in the music, theatre, and folklore of Rajasthan. Together with the writer Vijaydan Detha, he is a founder of the Rupayan Sansthan in Borunda in Jodhpur district, a centre for the study of Rajasthan's culture. **Susanta Haldar** has been President of the Paschim Banga Putul Natya Sangha and works with a group of puppeteers in the South 24 Paraganas district of West Bengal. **A. R. Dattatreya** is Director of the Puthali Kalaranga puppet theatre in Bangalore; he has produced a *Purana Kathamala* puppet-theatre serial for television in Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu. **C. Rajkhowa** has worked for the promotion of puppetry in Assam on behalf of the Ministry for Culture, Government of Assam. **G. Venu** heads the Natanakairali Centre for Traditional Arts in Irinjalakuda in Thrissur district of Kerala; his publications include *Tolpavakoothu: Shadow Puppets of Kerala*. **M. Srinivasa Rao** is Director of the Hyderabad Puppet Theatre; he is working to promote various forms of puppetry in Andhra Pradesh. **Mahipat Kavi** runs the Puppets & Plays theatre in Ahmedabad; he has had a special interest in educational and social puppetry. **Dadi Pudumjee** heads the Ishara Puppet Theatre in Delhi; formerly President of the Bharatiya Putli Sangh, he has edited Unima-India's newsletter *Sutradhar* for several years. **Ajay Paul** is based in Udaipur, and was earlier with the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal. **Harji Ram Bhat** was a caste puppeteer working in Nagaur district of Rajasthan; he passed away prematurely in the late 1990s. **Gulab Bhat** is a caste puppeteer from Nagaur working with the Rajasthan Kathputli Lok Kala Kendra evam Nritya Sansthan, Ajmer. **Sadhu Ram Bhat** is a caste puppeteer based in Sikar district of Rajasthan. **B.R. Bhargava** has headed the department of drama in Sangeet Natak Akademi (1982-1997) in the capacity of Deputy Secretary. **Suresh Dutta** is Director of the Calcutta Puppet Theatre, and is currently President of the Bharatiya Putli Sangh. **Bansi Bhat** is principally a puppet-maker from Nagaur now working in Jodhpur. **Kherati Ram Bhat** is a caste puppeteer from Nagaur now based in Jaisalmer. **Prem Bhat** is a caste puppeteer from Nagaur now working in Jodhpur. **Babulal Bhat** is a caste puppeteer of Rajasthan based for long in Delhi. **Shyam Mali** is Assistant Director of the Bharatiya Lok Kala Mandal, Udaipur; he has worked extensively in Rajasthan for the promotion of puppetry with social objectives. **P.L. Pawar** is a violinist who has worked in several capacities in Sangeet Natak Akademi, retiring in 1995 in the position of Assistant Documentation Officer. **Bhanu Bharati** was Chairman of Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi when the workshop was organized; **Sudha Rajhans** had been involved in the planning of the event as Secretary of Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi. **Usha Malik** was Secretary of Sangeet Natak Akademi, Delhi, in that period. **Venkat Swaminathan**, who drafted the proceedings of the workshop, is known as a critic of Tamil literature, theatre, and cinema; he lives in Chennai. **T.N. Sankaranathan** is a traditional puppeteer of Tamil Nadu, who heads the Murugan Sangeetha Bommalata Sabha in Kumbhakonam in Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu.

S. A. Krishnaiah, guest editor of this issue of *Sangeet Natak*, is Chief Researcher in the Regional Resources Centre for Folk Performing Arts in Udupi, Karnataka. His publications include a study of *Karnataka Puppetry* (1988).