

Commemorative Stamps on Puppets of India

Prelims: Current events of national and international importance | Art & Culture

Why in News?

Recently, the Department of Posts released 8 commemorative postage stamps on "Puppets of India" to celebrate India's traditional puppetry heritage.

- **Aim** - To celebrate India's rich puppetry traditions and cultural heritage passed through generations.
- **Forms Depicted** - Kathputli - Rajasthan
- Yakshagana Sutrada Gombeyatta - Karnataka
- Daanger Putul - West Bengal
- Kathi Kundhei - Odisha
- Benir Putul - West Bengal
- Pavakathakali - Kerala
- Ravanachhaya - Odisha
- Tolu Bommalatta - Andhra Pradesh



The earliest literary reference to the art of puppetry was found in the Tamil classic 'Silappadikaaram', written around the 1st or 2nd century B.C.

Puppetry in India

- It is a form of theatre or performance that involves the manipulation of puppets, often resembling human or animal figure, that are manipulated by a human called a puppeteer.
- **Etymology** - From Latin "Pupa" meaning doll.

The history of puppetry can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilisation in 2500 B.C. A terracotta doll with a detachable head was found by archaeologists.

- **Forms** - India's traditional puppetry is broadly classified into four forms — string, glove, rod and shadow puppets — each with its own distinctive style and regional character.

Types of Puppets

String Puppets

- India has a rich and ancient tradition of string puppets or marionettes.
- Marionettes having jointed limbs controlled by strings allow far greater flexibility and are, therefore, the most articulate of the puppets.

Puppet Form	State	Features
Kathputli	Rajasthan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carved from a single piece of wood, these puppets are like large dolls that are colorfully dressed. • Puppeteers manipulate them with two to five strings which are normally tied to their fingers and not to a prop or a support.
Kundhei	Odisha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made of light wood, the Odisha puppets have no legs but wear long flowing skirts. • The puppeteers often hold a wooden prop, triangular in shape, to which strings are attached for manipulation. • The music is drawn from the popular tunes of the region and is sometimes influenced by the music of Odissi dance.
Gombeyatta	Karnataka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Gombeyatta puppet figures are highly stylized and have joints at the legs, shoulders, elbows, hips and knees. • These puppets are manipulated by five to seven strings tied to a prop. • Episodes enacted in Gombeyatta are usually based on Prasangas of the Yakshagana plays.
Bommalattam	Tamil Nadu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puppets from Tamil Nadu, known as Bommalattam combine the techniques of both rod and string puppets. • They are made of wood and the strings for manipulation are tied to an iron ring which the puppeteer wears like a crown on his head. • The Bommalattam puppets are the largest, heaviest and the most articulate of all traditional Indian marionettes.

Shadow Puppets

- They are cut out of leather, which has been treated to make it translucent.
- Shadow puppets are pressed against the screen with a strong source of light behind it.

Puppet Form	State	Features
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Togalu Gombeyatta	Karnataka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These puppets are mostly small in size. • The puppets however differ in size according to their social status, for instance, large size for kings and religious characters and smaller size for common people or servants.
Tholu Bommalata	Andhra Pradesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The puppets are large in size and have jointed waist, shoulders, elbows and knees. • They are coloured on both sides. • Theme of the puppet plays are drawn from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranas.
Ravanachhaya	Odisha	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The puppets are in one piece and have no joints. • They are not coloured, hence throw opaque shadows on the screen. • The puppets are made of deer skin and are conceived in bold dramatic poses. • Apart from human and animal characters, many props such as trees, mountains, chariots, etc. are also used.

Rod Puppets

• Rod puppets are an extension of glove-puppets, but often much larger and supported and manipulated by rods from below.

Puppet Form	State	Features
Putul Nautch	West Bengal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are carved from wood and follow the various artistic styles of a particular region. • A bamboo-made hub is tied firmly to the waist of the puppeteer on which the rod holding the puppet is placed.
	Orissa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Orissa Rod puppets are much smaller in size. • The Orissa rod-puppeteers squat on the ground behind a screen and manipulate.
Yampuri	Bihar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlike the traditional Rod puppets of West Bengal and Orissa, these puppets are in one piece and have no joints. • As these puppets have no joints, the manipulation is different from other Rod puppets.

Glove Puppets

- Glove puppets, are also known as sleeve, hand or palm puppets.
- The head is made of either papier mache, cloth or wood, with two hands emerging from just below the neck.
- The rest of the figure consists of a long flowing skirt.

Puppet Form	State	Features
Pavakoothu	Kerala	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It came into existence during the 18th century due to the influence of Kathakali, the famous classical dance-drama of Kerala, on puppet performances. • The manipulator puts his hand into the bag and moves the hands and head of the puppet. • The musical instruments used during the performance are Chenda, Chengiloa, Ilathalam and Shankhathe conch. • The theme for Glove puppet plays in Kerala is based on the episodes from either the Ramayana or the Mahabharata.

Reference

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