

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. • 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. • 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.
Tholu Bommalata	Andhra Pradesh	
Ravanachhaya	Odisha	

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. • The Orissa Rod puppets are much smaller in size. • The Orissa rod-puppeteers squat on the ground behind a screen and manipulate. • 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.
Yampuri	Bihar	

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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