CHAPTER 1

AN OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL SHADOW PUPPETRY

INTRODUCTION

Development is a continuous process involving people and community in our society. It is necessary to understand people for an effective development. Development also involves achievement of a higher standard of living, spread of literacy, eradication of poverty, improved nutrition and health, population control, mental peace and power of thinking in individuals etc.

For development to take place, the people directly concerned by it must understand, accept and act upon new ideas. Fostering development is not just a matter of providing more and better technology. It also calls for education and communication (Ranganath, 2000).

PACE OF DEVELOPMENT

The world is developing at a greater speed but the progress is not very significant in Indian villages because its social system is still not able to overcome its prejudices, beliefs and values. Indian rural masses are immersed in superstition, myths and beliefs resulting in underdevelopment.

According to Roy Chowdhury (2002), the superstitious practices in India exclusively focused on women, elaborates how every year in the month of March, in Chandragutti village, Shimoga district, Karnataka, men and women offer nude worship to a Goddess in fulfilment of a vow. In another incident, resurgence of sati and the growing popularity of sati in shrines and temples in Rajasthan, prevalence of the devadasi system, dowry deaths, female infanticide and foeticide still continue discreetly in south India in spite of the very strict legislative measures.
The Five-year plans are evolved with emphasis on rural development. The Tenth five-year plan envisages reducing the poverty ratio from the existing 26% to 21% by year 2007 and population ratio from 21.3% to 16.2% before 2011. The literacy rate to be increased from 65% to 75% by 2007 while the infant mortality to be reduced from 72 to 45 by 2007. Gender gaps in literacy and wage rates will be specially attended to. The communication process has a greater role to play in the Indian rural society in the development process.

ROLE OF MEDIA IN COMMUNICATION

Communication media help to eliminate prejudices and wrong notions, generates awareness regarding human rights as well as improving the quality of life by showing the path to remove ignorance, poverty, hunger and diseases - the factors affecting the development of the village community.

Das (1992) is of the view that media from an unfamiliar source cannot influence the views and values of the villagers, especially when human mind has a tendency to resist anything new and accept the familiar ones.

TRADITIONAL COMMUNICATION

Traditional methods of information exchange and communication plays an important role in development especially in rural India because illiterate villagers have wisdom, knowledge based on deep-rooted cultural norms, values and traditions, as well as generations of experience. Traditional folk media in India is very popular among the rural masses

According to Swaminathan (1999), the renowned agricultural scientist, folk media are more effective in reaching the unreached. Rathore (2000), while pointing out the uses of traditional media in communicating information pertaining to agriculture in rural India writes that even the poorest man in India has access to the traditional media, cultural media or
folk media expressed in various forms such as story, poem, play, song, proverb, drama, wall paintings, symbols, socio-drama paintings, kavad and pad. Folk media have been in existence since time immemorial in diverse forms across the different states of India.

Malhan (1985), a media educationist elaborates that traditional performing arts can increase the impact of message due to greater acceptability and credibility because of direct approach through live programmes compared to radio, television and films. According to Sinha, traditional folk media are informal and flexible, and because of their close identification with the aspirations and values of the people, can play a very important role as facilitators of desired change and development. Guritno in his paper quoted that, Wayang purwa, a traditional shadow puppet form from Indonesia can convey development messages and still be relevant as a traditional form of art and entertainment. Wayang purwa is popular both in the rural and urban areas (Sinha, ed., 1973).

USE OF TRADITIONAL MEDIA BY GOVERNMENT

Communication involving the folk performances is not new to India. Recognising the importance of traditional communication in rural areas, the Government of India has been using it for creating awareness about various developmental issues since 1950. The Directorate of Field Publicity/ the song and drama division of Govt of India has been using live performances like puppet shows, dramas, dance, ballads, and harikathas to propagate messages concerned with family planning & health, adult education, family welfare, agricultural practices etc. In recent times, the messages conveyed are related to HIV/AIDS awareness, small savings, female infanticide, and child labour. Sahoo (2003) writes that the National Council for Science and Technology Communication has introduced the art of puppetry for science and technology communication recently.
Puppetry is a traditional art form used as an effective medium of entertainment and communication. Parmar (1994) describes that puppetry is an ancient art and its antiquity can be established through old scriptures. It was perhaps the primitive urge of men to create life-like movement through figures, which later developed into theatre form, imbibing elements of all arts form.

Puppetry, as an art form, not only provides entertainment but also conveys a meaningful and useful message. Over the years, it has developed into a powerful media of communication. Today, it is not merely a form of entertainment but also used by educators and students as a form of communication. Puppetry offers a real challenge to the imagination and creative ability of the individual. Of all art media, it is probably the least restricted in its form, design colour and movement and the least expensive of all animated visual art forms.

This medium in its contemporary form, has tremendous potential for communication. According to Brooks (1955), puppets have unlimited possibilities for entertainment, education, self-expression and social action. She further elaborates that how the rural audience initially attends a puppet show for entertainment goes back home with a new idea based on the story or theme of the show.

Currell (1992), a world-renowned puppeteer while writing about the attractiveness of the art form mentions that the fascinating nature of the puppets and the compelling way in which it attracts and sustains attention are clearly major reasons for its popularity for many years.
Sahoo (2003), mentions that puppetry, as an age old folk art, is the synthesis of various arts like sculpture, design, music, mime, dance and theatre. It is the crystallisation of the imagination and magic of the puppeteer. This medium gives tremendous opportunity for originality not only in presentation but also writing scripts, preparation of puppets, dialogue, music, manipulation and the final production. There is endless interest and pleasure in creating a puppet, besides using it as a visual aid. The creation and operation of puppet figures involves many craft activities including drawing, painting and cutting, carpentry, wood carving, props preparation, modelling, plaster cast making, costume making, clay modelling and stage craft.

HISTORY OF PUPPETRY

Writers, poets, journalists, media persons and reporters, often have mentioned 'puppets' and 'puppet plays' as a metaphor in their writings and works. Toys and dolls are often thought to be the ancestors of the puppet, which is pointed out when we check up the etymology of the word "puppet' in several Indian and European languages.

In south Indian languages Pava, Bonirna, Gombe all refer to a toy or a doll. Similarly, the name Putnl, Putli, Kundhei, is prevalent in Northern and Eastern parts of India. In Sanskrit, putrika, duhtrika, puttali, puttalika, all of which mean Tittle daughter'. The Greek term Score as well as the Latin pupa and pupula all mean Tittle girl'.

Pani (1986) defines a puppet as 'an inanimate figure which is articulated by human agency. Thus, it is different from dolls which are children's playthings and also from automata which are moved mechanically'.
In ancient Greece and Rome, clay dolls (and a few of ivory) were found in children's tombs. These dolls had articulated arms and legs, and what is significant is that some of them also had an iron rod extending upward from the tops of their heads. This rod was used to manipulate the doll from above, exactly as is done today in Sicily in their puppet theatre called the *opera dei pupi*, wherein legends of Charlemagne and his paladins are presented. In addition, a few of these dolls had strings in place of the rods (Rawlings, 1999).

Many scholars are of the view that puppet theatre originated in India and migrated to other Asian countries with the epic themes. In India, the word *sutradhar(a)* or *sutrmhari* refers to the show-manager of theatrical performances (or a puppet-player), and also means literally "string-holder" or "string-puller," which is similar to the Greek word *neuropasta*. Puppetry was very popular and impressive as an art in ancient India is evident from the way it has been referred to in poems, especially in *Srimad Bhagavatn*, in which the God is referred, is like a puppeteer who with the strings of *Sntta*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*, manipulates all creations in this universe.

**TRADITIONAL INDIAN PUPPETRY**

The early puppet shows in India mostly dealt with histories of great Kings, Princes and heroes and also political satire in rural areas. Religious portrayals in puppetry developed in South India with shadow puppets performing stories from *Ramayana* and *Mahabhamta*. Even today, especially in Kerala, shadow puppet is a temple ritual performed every year during a temple festival for a specified duration. With the progress and development of civilization, the mysticism connected with traditional puppetry slowly started to fade which was replaced with an element of entertainment. Slowly, this art form emerged from the precincts of the temple and villages to reach out to the outside world performing on various social and contemporary themes in Indian towns and cities.
Types of Traditional Indian Puppets: Different types of puppets are used in traditional puppetry. The differences exist not only in names, but also in form, structure, manipulation and presentation techniques. The different traditional forms are glove, rod, string, and shadow puppets. The local name given to puppetry varies from state to state within India.

Glove Puppets: The glove puppet, also known as hand puppets is a small figure having head and arms with a long skirt as part of its costume. The puppeteer wears the puppet like a glove and fits the index finger into the hollow head of the puppet. The middle finger and the thumb fit into the two hollow hands of the puppet. One puppeteer can manipulate two puppets at a time. Glove puppet shows are prevalent in the states of Kerala (Pavakathakali), Orissa (Sakhi Kundhei-nacha) and West Bengal (Bener Putul nach) (See Plate 1).

Rod Puppets: The rod puppets, often larger than glove puppets are supported and manipulated by rods of various types and sizes. In rod puppets the action of the rods are concealed in many ways. The main holding rod that supports the puppet may be hidden by a robe or costume of the puppet. The action rods are usually connected to the hands of the puppet and manipulated by the puppeteer to show action. Rod puppet shows are prevalent in the states of Assam (Putula nach), Orissa (Kathi- Kundhei-nach) and West Bengal (Danger Putul nach) (See Plate 2).

String Puppets: The string puppet also known as marionettes has jointed body and limbs that allow movement. String puppets are made of wood, or wire, or cloth stuffed with cotton, rags or saw dust. The puppet is suspended from a hand held control strings that are attached to different parts of the puppet's body. The puppet is manipulated by operating the control as well as by loosening or pulling the relevant string(s). Some of the traditional string puppets are very heavy.
PLATE 1

TRADITIONAL GLOVE PUPPETS

Pic. 1 Orissa Puppet
Pic. 2 Orissa Puppeteer
Pic. 3 Kerala Puppeteer
Pic. 4 Kerala Puppet
PLATE 2

TRADITIONAL ROD PUPPETS

Pic. 1 Rod Puppets - West Bengal

Pic. 2 Rod Puppets - Orissa
For the convenience of manipulation and support, two rods are attached to the hands of the puppets. This method is used only in the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Traditional string puppet shows are prevalent in the states of Andhra Pradesh (Koyyn Bommalnta), Assam (Putala Nach), Karnataka (Sutrada Gombeyata), Maharashtra (Kalasutri Bahulya), Rajasthan (Kathputli), Orissa (Gopalila), Tamil Nadu (Bommalatam) and West Bengal (Tarer or Sntor Putul) (See Plate 3).

Shadow Puppets: Shadow puppets are flat puppets that are operated against the rear of a tightly stretched white cloth screen with a light behind it so that the audience looks at the shadow of the puppet on the screen. Traditional shadow puppets are two-dimensional and are made of animal skin. The puppet shapes or cutouts are perforated and split bamboo or cane sticks are attached vertically to the puppet for handling and manipulation. The puppets are pressed against the screen and manipulated for the performance. The shadow puppet performance is known as shadow (Leather) play or shadow theatre. The Shadow puppet theatre is practiced in the states of Andhra Pradesh (Tholu Bommalata), Karnataka (Togalu Gombeyata), Kerala (Tolpavakoothu), Maharashtra (chamadyache Bahulya), Orissa, and Tamil Nadu (Tolpavaikoothu) (See Plate 4).

HISTORY OF SHADOW PUPPETRY

Many scholars consider shadow puppet theatre as the oldest form of puppetry. Some scholars are of the view that this form originated in India; while others feel that it migrated from China to other countries including India. There is much controversy about the origin and antiquity of shadow theatre in India.
PLATE 3
TRADITIONAL STRING PUPPETS

Pic. 1 Rajasthan
Pic. 2 Andhra Pradesh
Pic. 3 Karnataka
Pic. 4 Tamil Nadu
PLATE 4

TRADITIONAL SHADOW PUPPETS

Pic. 1 Maharashtra

Pic. 2 Orissa

Pic. 3 Andhra Pradesh

Pic. 4 Karnataka

Pic. 5 Kerala

Pic. 6 Tamil Nadu
According to some scholars the words *rupani dasayitu janesa* in the fourth rock edict of Ashoka, and *rupparupnkam* of *Theirgatha* (Buddhist tenet), refer to shadow theatre and shadow puppeteers of ancient India. Sitabenga cave was designed to project shadow puppet shows (Varadpande, 1987 and Keith, 1992).

According to Ramaswami (1983), the earliest reference to shadow puppetry has been available in the literary classic *Thiruvasagam*, the great south Indian system of philosophy and religion, written by the saint poet Manikavachagar (before A.D. 898) in Tamil language. Other South India literature furnishes evidence later than 10th century A.D.

According to a Chinese legend, an emperor Wu-ti during the Han dynasty was heart broken at the demise of his favourite queen Madam Li. He ordered his court magicians to summon her spirit. The magician created a 'shadow' that resembled the dead queen using a dark chamber and a distant screen. This made the emperor happy. According to Wong (2001), the 'trick of shadow' which originated from Han Dynasty during B.C. 2 to A.D. 2 was popular and deeply believed by the Emperor and was the initial period of shadow puppetry in China.

However, Rawlings (2003) refutes the above legend as the origin of shadow puppetry though he initially cited to prove the existence of shadow theatre in China. He writes based on "Documentation Relating to the Origins of Chinese Shadow Puppet Theater", by Alvin P. Cohen, in Asia Major, vol. XIII, part I, 2000", that there was no hint as to how the image was produced and real shadow plays were never mentioned before Song Dynasty. According to Wong (2001), during Song Dynasty (A.D. 960-A.D. 1279), skin production technique was improved and 'shadow puppet' thrived well. During this period due to cultural and political movements in the border area, the shadow puppetry spread to every corner of China.
Rawlings (2003), as per the scholar and Professor Thomas Cooper's view mentions that distribution of transparent shadow figures and opaque ones in India seem to indicate that the transparent type seen in China must have migrated from the upper part of the Deccan in Southern India. The opaque type is found in the extreme south (east) of India, and Indonesia, which country possesses the opaque type, is just below that point from India on the map. All this seems to indicate that the spread of both types is likely from south India going north to China and going south to Indonesia. Turkish and Arab types show a resemblance to the translucent Chinese one and also they all utilize horizontally held control rods; the later spread of shadow theatre to the Middle East must have then been from China.

The greatest diversity of shadow play forms exists in India. All the other countries have one basic type. China, Turkey, and Egypt have articulated single-figure translucent types and not the opaque types, Indonesia possesses only opaque, articulated single figures (except in Cambodia and Thailand where articulated single-figure types exist alongside unarticulated composite "pictures"), whereas India has both the opaque and translucent types and many other variations; sometimes one performer handles all the puppets and narrates; sometimes many performers are present behind the screen; some have exclusively male puppeteers; others have both male and female performers; most use a portable screen, but one type, in Kerala, uses permanent buildings to perform their plays; etc. This evidence of so much diversity strongly speaks for an Indian place of origin for the shadow play (Rawlings, 2003). Keeping the above version of the scholars and researchers, it may be established that shadow puppet play in India had its origin around 8-9th Century A.D. while in China it was around 9th -12th century A.D and both may be taken as the earliest origin of shadow puppet theatre in the world. Shadow puppetry tradition in South East Asian countries, Turkey and Greece started much later.
SHADOW PUPPETRY TRADITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

A unique feature of the theatre in Asia is the special importance given to the shadow puppet theatre. Besides India, shadow plays are seen throughout Asia including China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand. The Asian puppet theatre forms have served as progenitors and models for the later development of human theatre forms and not used as 'child's' theatre (Brandon, ed., 1993). The shadow puppet theatre also exists in Turkey, Egypt, Greece and other European countries. A brief description on the different shadow traditions of the world is given below.

China: The shadow play in China is called 'Piying xi', which is a form of miniature opera. According to Banham (1995), during Song Dynasty (960-1279), initially folklore tales were depicted through shadow play, which later developed a distinct repertory of historic and Buddhist themes. The art form suffered from war and foreign invasion for a while and after the establishment of People's Republic of China, the Government grouped the troupes together and supported them. In the middle of 1980's, the growth of the troupes was stable. The troupes also performed in other countries. Some of the troupes started entertaining children and youth (Wong, 2001).

SOUTH EAST ASIA

Cambodia: The shadow play is known as 'Nung sbek thorn' and was popular in King Khmer's court. The puppets are large leather panels depicting scenes of Ramayana epic that are manipulated by 10 persons through dance and movement, while a narrator tells the story with musical accompaniments. Besides providing entertainment, some performance might be done to propitiate rain or cure epidemics (Brandon, ed./1993). Another form of shadow play is "ayang" that was derived from wayang tradition of
Indonesia: In Indonesia shadow plays are prevalent and popular in Java and Bali islands. In Bali, it is referred as 'Wayang Purwa' and as 'Wayang Kulit Purwa' in Java. 'Wayang' denotes 'shadow' or 'puppet' while 'Kulit' means 'leather'. The Wayang Purwa of Java is performed by a single puppeteer, who narrates and manipulates the puppets and takes the help of accompanist including female singers. The performance is conducted in open-sided pavilions or on the porches of homes. The audience sits on both sides of the screen; those on the screen side see a shadow play, while others on the puppeteer's side see the puppet play. The Wayang Kulit puppets of Bali are smaller than Javanese ones and are crudely designed. There is no female singer as in Javanese "Wayang". The audience watches mainly from the shadow side of the screen. The Indonesian Wayang uses stories based on Mahabharatha and Ramayana for performance (Brandon, 1974). According to Banham the Javanese shadow puppetry was carried to neighbouring Malaysia, Cambodia and Bali and the shadow play from India took 'Ravanachaya!' (shadow puppet play of Orissa) to Java (Banham, ed., 1995). Reusch (2001) mentions that Indonesian shadow puppeteers make an offering to the Gods before the beginning of a production. The same Indonesian shadow players have the status of priests and are invited to events such as births, marriages, cremations and the consecration of temples.

Malaysia: In Malaysia, there are two forms of shadow play - Wayang Kulit and Wayang Siam. Both the forms are similar in technique, the main difference being repertoire, appearance of puppets and music (Sweeney, 1972). Similar to Javanese Wayang, besides Ramayana and Mahabharatha epics, Islamic stories are also staged (Brandon, 1974).
Philippines: The shadow puppet theatre is known as 'Carillo' in Philippines. There is no proper evidence of its origin. However, Brandon mentions that shadow play in Philippines presented since 1879 using rough cardboard figures, emulated, perhaps, European experiments, which were themselves shadows of Asian models (Brandon, ed., 1993).

Thailand: There are two types of shadow puppet plays in Thailand called Nang yai and Nang talung. "Nang' refers to leather. The shadow play tradition was associated with court and temple performances using large leather figures that are related to Cambodian shadow puppet form. Nang yai requires a big group for performance comprising manipulators cum dancers, narrators and musicians. The Nang talung form is smaller and performed with less number of artists on an enclosed stage (Brandon, ed. 1993).

THE MIDDLE EAST: EGYPT AND TURKEY

Egypt: In Egypt, shadow theatre is known to have existed as early as the 13th century, long before Kargoz shows of Turkey. A physician, Muhammad ibn Daniyal, wrote three shadow plays that have survived. They were performed in the 13th century and depicted humour and satire using popular contemporary characters (Britannica.com).

Turkey: In Turkey, shadow play is called 'Kargoz' which means dark eyes and is also the name of the (hero) puppet character. Alok (2004) writes that the shadow play is believed to have been widely performed for the public and in private houses between the 17th and 19th centuries, particularly during the month of Ramazan every night. As per the ancient legend, a mosque was being built in the then Turkish capital of Bursa, and among the labourers were Karagoz and Hacivad, who kept distracting the others from their work with their humorous repartee. As a result, construction of the
mosque took longer than expected, and when the angry sultan heard about their antics he had them both executed. However, the pair of comedians were so missed by the townsfolk that a man named Seyh Kusteri made images of Karagoz and Hacivad from camel hide and began to give puppet shows. Before the advent of cinema and radio the Karagoz shadow play was one of the most popular forms of entertainment in Turkey. The modern media of television also telecasts Karagoz shows for the benefit of the people.

Europe: According to Reusch (2001), shadow play reached Europe via the old trade routes about the year 1650. But the European could not understand the unfathomable shadow. The European feels more at home with the tangible three-dimensional marionette or hand puppet. The shadow figure was from a culture in which the world of the supernatural, meditation, silence and spiritualism played an important part. As per Rawling's (2003) view, writers on early shadow plays in Europe mention the term *ombres chinoises* (Chinese shadows) in 1619 in Spain and in the 18th century in France.

Greece: In Greece, the shadow play is known as "Karagiozis" and is derived from folkloric traditions. There are also many legends and studies surrounding the popularity of Karagiozis in Greece. Among some of the theories are that Greek merchants brought shadow theatre from China or that a Greek created the folkloric art during the Ottoman rule to entertain the sultan. Due to domination of television and the cinema, Karagiozis remains a form of artistic expression of the past. Those who remember this magic, can revive it at the shadow theatre museum in Athens, watch a rare performance held in the poorer districts of the city or buy a puppet at one of the numerous tourist shops (Athens News Agency).
THE NEED FOR THE STUDY

The traditional shadow play around the world, no doubt rich with its rich heritage and origin, however, is facing a testing time with the development of other forms of communication. According to R.V. Ramani, a documentary filmmaker, the real filmmakers are the shadow puppeteers. For thousands of years they have been igniting people's imagination with a screen, light and shadow without lens and celluloid. Chandrasekar (1961) mentions that shadow puppetry is nearest to the modern technicolor film shows.

In some countries, the government patronises and renders support to shadow puppetry as Brandon (1974) mentions that Wayang Kulit in Java, Bali, Malaysia and Nang talung of Thailand receive a fixed fee for performing on occasions when tickets are not sold.

In India, the Song and Drama department of Government of India, Zonal Cultural Centres, art and craft organisations, and other voluntary bodies support very few traditional artists occasionally by providing performance opportunities. However, these are only isolated cases. Many researchers and folklorists have studied and understood the art form. The result of studies and articles pertaining to Indian shadow puppetry came to light in sixties. The previous researchers and scholars examined only the form, its preparation and performance themes in details but have not tried to analyse the performers and their problems in detail. The present status and problems of shadow puppeteers need to be studied in order to plan strategies for its promotion, which will go a long way in preserving the ancient cultural heritage of India.