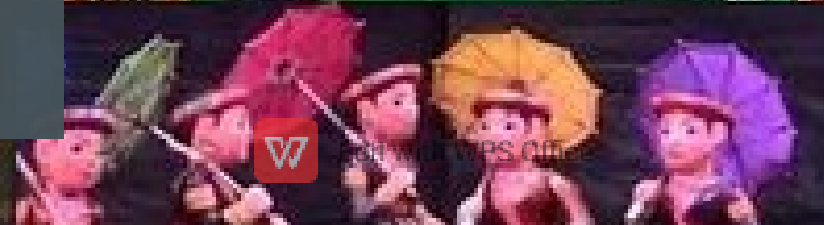
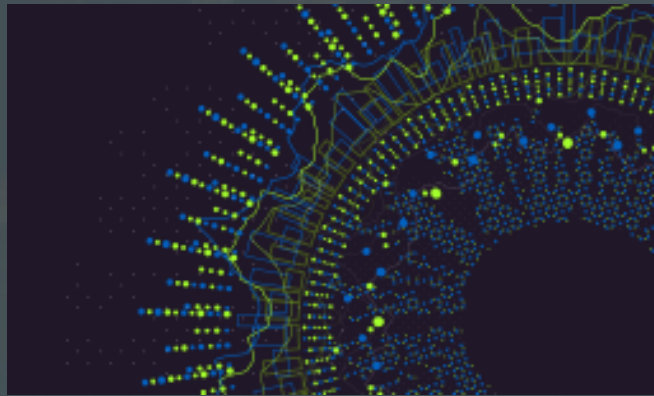


PUPPETRY AS AN ART FORM IN INDIA

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- Introduction

Indian puppetry is a subject as varied as the many cultural traditions of the Indian subcontinent.

Several regional genres make puppetry one of the richest heritages of India. Though there is enormous diversity, there are common traits.



- ## The Origin of Puppetry

The origin of puppetry in India cannot be dated, but mythology provides at least two stories that are witness to the importance of this art, even if they don't give any historical data. According to one legend, the creator Brahma gave life to the adi, the first puppet for the entertainment of his wife Saraswati. Not satisfied with his work, Brahma banished the puppeteers. This legend applies most probably to the Rajasthani tradition, nat bhatt being the name of the puppeteer cast from this region. An alternative legend has a protagonist the god Shiva, patron of puppetry, and his wife Parvati- the goddess and his divine companion entered the dolls and started an exquisite dance; and when they got sick of this play they abandoned the dolls and the artisan was very sad at his dolls being lifeless again. With the help and blessings of the gods, the artisan then invented a system of strings to move the dolls, and so puppetry was born.

☒ Divine origin of puppetry is stressed in both stories, and this testifies the importance of puppetry in India. Nowadays, traditional puppetry is regarded as a folk art typical of the rural environment- in the past it was taken into high consideration in the urban elite and among the nobles. Further evidence of the link of puppetry with the highest social groups is in the attestation of the word gombe, meaning puppet, used as a surname for Brahmin families in the southern regions.

☒ Several literary sources report the existence of puppetry in ancient times. Puppetry is mentioned in the the Mahabharata , and in Patanjali's texts. Tamil texts from the 2nd century BCE onwards mention dolls moved by strings. The antiquity of Indian puppetry has been highlighted by Richard Pischel, an important German scholar, who argued that India was the source of Western puppet traditions.

☒ These data reinforce the idea that the several living traditions of Indian puppetry are heirs of a refined and noble art prospering in the past . According to a scholar, puppetry outdates theatrical plays as the word Sutradhara , that indicates the director and the main storyteller in Sanskrit plays, literally means the 'string holder'.



Puppetry is a type of narrative theatre; at the crossroads between bardic storytelling and theatre plays. Shows include live music, narration and gestures taken from dance. In traditional puppetry; the plots are mainly derived from the Mahabharata , the Ramayana , and the Puranas (stories of gods and goddesses). This also happens with many other Indian performing arts, it should suffice to mention dance. Epic plays allow the puppeteers to cover a pedagogic role, teaching the masses about gods and heroes ,and the many ethical implications of the sacred stories. Over the centuries puppetry fulfilled at least two functions- education and entertainment.

Alongside religious education, in the last decades, government initiatives have also been propagated by puppetry ,such as hygiene and family planning campaigns. Moreover puppetry has also been used and incorporated in school education.

The puppeteer gives life to the puppet, creating for the limited time of the show a new form of life. Puppetry presents several regional forms in local languages, but some peculiar elements highlight the connection to classic Sanskrit drama.

There are many types of puppets in India ; some traditions have become extinct, while others struggle to survive in the modern world. Besides traditional puppet genres, India is home to many contemporary initiatives that renovate puppetry while supporting the preservation of heritage styles.



TYPES OF PUPPETS

Living traditions include different types of puppets: String puppets, rod puppets, glove puppets, and shadow puppets. Regional diversity and very distinct identities cannot hide the common traits among puppetry traditions such as the same literary sources, similar structure of the plays with opening invocation, comic skits, moral content mostly linked to religion etc.

- String puppets

String puppets, more precisely known as marionettes, can be made of different materials such as wood and terracotta; they are tri-dimensional and as the name suggests are moved through strings attached to the head and limbs.

Marionettes are widespread in India from North to South, celebrated traditions are reported from Rajasthan (kathputli), West Bengal (gopalika kundhei), Karnataka (yakshagana gombeyata), Kerala (nool pavakothu) etc.



☒ Rod Puppets

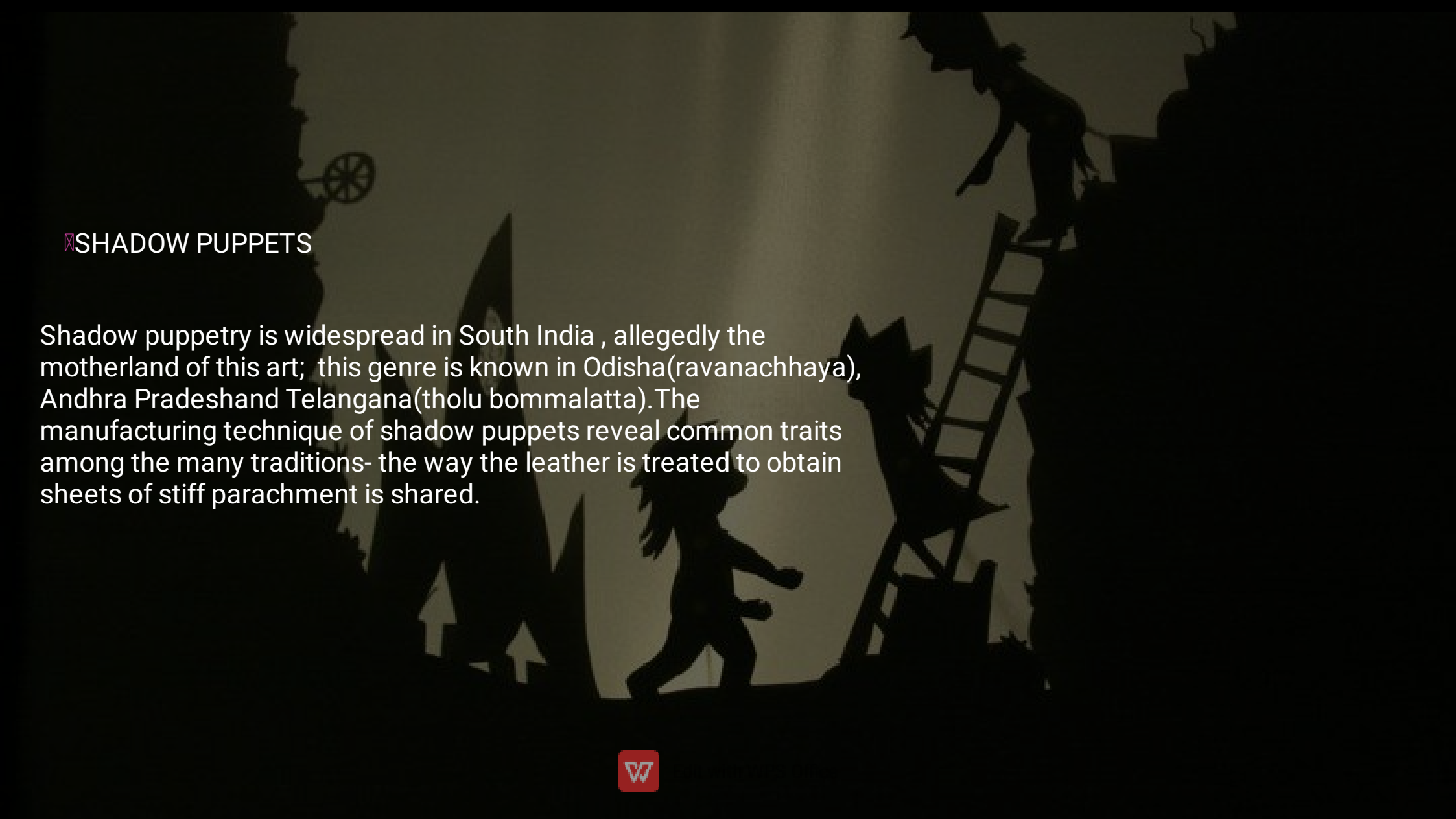
☒ Rod Puppetry was traditionally practiced in Eastern India (Odisha and Bengal), besides the mixed string-cum-rod bommalattam puppets from Tamil Nadu. Rod puppets are manipulated from below, with one or multiple sticks of different size.



☒ GLOVE PUPPETRY

In glove puppetry the puppeteer operate from below slipping his hand in the puppet; usually the forefinger operates the head, while the thumb and third finger move the hands. Also known as hand puppets, glove puppets are widespread in Odisha, Kerela, West Bengal, UP.



The background of the slide features a dark scene with several silhouettes of shadow puppets. On the left, a large, multi-limbed figure is partially visible. In the center, a smaller, more human-like figure is walking towards the right. On the right side, a figure is perched on a ladder that leans against a structure, possibly a building or a stage set. The overall atmosphere is dramatic and traditional, representing the art of shadow puppetry.

☒SHADOW PUPPETS

Shadow puppetry is widespread in South India , allegedly the motherland of this art; this genre is known in Odisha(ravanachhaya), Andhra Pradesh and Telangana(tholu bommalatta).The manufacturing technique of shadow puppets reveal common traits among the many traditions- the way the leather is treated to obtain sheets of stiff parchment is shared.



CONCLUSION

☒ There are several traditional puppet genres in India and the overview provided here cannot be all – inclusive as the topic is wide and diverse, but it conveys the main features of this theatre form. The birth of modern troupes and the opening to the international scene created new contexts for to flourish. So far modernity threatened the very survival of traditional puppetry, but a more conscious use of contemporary means and opportunities is actually the key to preserve this heritage of India.

