



PUPPETS

can enrich child's life

Puppetry is not just a form of entertainment but is being used to create social awakening on issues related to superstition, health, education, sanitation and water conservation, reports **Bhagyashree Kulthe**



A well-known puppeteer and founder of Puppet, Ranjana Kanitkar, displays puppets at her residence on Friday —Ravindra Joshi DNA

Unusual as it may seem, objects as ubiquitous as paper, a spoon, an empty bottle or even cartons can be used to make puppets to help your child learn and even be applied for therapeutic use. Sadly, the art of puppetry has not been explored beyond entertainment.

That's what the People's Universal Popular Puppetry Educational Theatre (PUPPET) stands out for. For nearly three decades, Puppet has popularised this art form as a medium of educating the masses on social issues. And now, it's on a new mission—to assist city educationists, psychologists, councillors and even doctors.

While puppetry is being explored as a medium for imparting knowledge, therapy, personality development and awareness in other countries, it is still not taken as a serious art form in our society, rues Ranjana Kanitkar, a well-known puppeteer and founder of Puppet.

Some educational institutes in the city have invited Puppet to conduct shows and train teachers. It easily en-

gages the young ones and the lessons are delivered more effectively.

Kanitkar recalled how a shy girl in a school came up to her after the puppet show and started talking to 'Chingi' (puppet's name).

The organisation, founded in 1982 by Hemant and Ranjana Kanitkar has been a strong propagator of the art.

The couple travelled almost in every state, in urban and rural areas to train non-governmental organisations and rural artists all over the country to use puppetry to spread awareness about social issues.

So far, over 55,000 people have been trained under Puppet through more than 800 workshops. They also worked in collaboration with Unicef and ministry of science and technology to educate people through puppetry.

Realising its potential as a strong medium to reach out to the masses, the couple also set up a training centre in Karjat. They designed training modules and trained various people about making puppets of different types, writing scripts and presenting shows.

But the demise of Hemant in 2007

So far, over 55,000 people have been trained under the People's Universal Popular Puppetry Educational Theatre through more than 800 workshops

was a major setback to Puppet organisation. However, Ranjana has decided to go on with the mission.

"We tried to promote it as a source of social awakening on issues related to superstition, health, need for education, sanitation, water conservation, sex education and various other issues. But now we need to move ahead. Few know that it can educate, heal, distress, help one to express, bring suppressed feeling to fore, help people connect and do lot more," said Kanitkar.

She added, "Let children make pup-

pets and play with it and see how they connect. Through puppets they open up, project their thoughts as well as explore their strengths and talents. That's how it helps in therapeutic process of patients as well," she added, as she made a puppet with two paper cups by drawing a face on it.

Kanitkar said that one doesn't necessarily need string dolls or big puppets, as shown in television shows; regular household items can also serve the purpose. "It appeals to all ages and we want this art form to reach parents, teachers, therapists, social workers and corporates," she said.

After Hemant's demise, the organisation had to sell the building in Karjat to carry forward the work of Puppet. They are planning to set up a centre in Pune which would serve as a training centre, museum of puppets and also library with literature about puppetry. They also plan to bring experts for lectures and training.

However, her desire to take it to the masses needs financial support. Those interested in the art can contact Kanitkar on 020-25380112.



Students of Bal Shikshan perform contemporary dance

Want to heal? Just dance

Hrishikesh Pawar teaches NGO kids a way to build their identity through dance

Nisha Garud

Pankh jhatak yeh udh jayenge, Aasmaan mein kho jayenge mumble on their lips, the children take their steps gracefully on the count of their instructor and stop only when the song is over. These seemingly routine dance steps however, are a tool for these children to step into the world more confidently.

Dance has been known to heal physically and emotionally but for these 12 children from the red light area, it has become a means of building their identity.

The children have been training in contemporary dance under city-based Hrishikesh Pawar who has developed a theme-based choreography titled 'Love in Dark Times' specifically for the group. The project is in association with the NGO Ekalavya Bal Shikshan and Arogya Nyas.

"I had just returned from Germany, where I learnt contemporary dance and could not find any students because in India, nobody knew what it was. This was when I got an opportunity to do a pilot project with these kids. The initiative was one of the many programmes undertaken by Ekalavya Bal Shikshan and Arogya Nyas to give the children a platform to express themselves," said Pawar, who holds the classes on the weekend.

Pawar, who has taught contemporary dance to all kinds of special children from visually challenged to slow learners and even hyperactive children, said teaching them was like making a person fall in love.

"Each child came with his own experiences. Some lacked concentration and didn't know the seriousness of the art. I remember two girls who were just laughing for two days. But we held regular lec-



Pawar (R) teaches dance to Parkinson's patients

REACHING OUT

The Hrishikesh Dance Academy and Sancheti Hospital together run classes for people suffering from Parkinson's. "Dance, for those with Parkinson's disease, is a novel way of exercising. Though there is no medical base to prove dance heals Parkinson's, participants have reported improvement in balance, control, flexibility and reduction in medication," said Hrishikesh. The classes are held every Wednesday and Friday from 4 pm to 5 pm

tures and demos for them and taught them the dance form. With practice came the confidence and when they did their own shows, the pride of achievement was there to see," said Pawar.

"As a teacher, I have seen them give reasons for not practising. My initial classes were on Marathi songs, and then there was a graduation to Hindi songs. Today, I am happy that students dance to Bach and Mozart. I love to see them relate to things through dance, feel confident about themselves and walk with confidence," said the dancer whose Centre of Contemporary Dance is affiliated to the Mark Morris Dance Group, USA. "I am striving since 30 years to give the children a life which they can live respectfully," said Pawar.

Move over men, women step behind the lens

With the 100th International Women's Day approaching, Priyanka Naithani finds out that wedding photography—an arena hitherto dominated by men—is a profession that is increasingly being taken up by women despite long and odd working hours



A bride's picture clicked by photographer Namita Bhope

Think of a wedding photographer and it conjures up an image of a hefty man carrying a bulky camera bag on his shoulder, instructing you to pose. But with weddings being an emotional affair, who better than a woman to approach this occasion with that extra tact and sensitivity?

With all the odd work hours, the travel and chaos that prevails at Indian weddings, capturing these memories is no longer restricted to male shutterbugs. In the last couple of years, the city has seen the emergence of several women photographers who are extremely popular on the wedding scene.

Aarti Das Choudhary, a professional photographer, feels that females can do much better when it comes to taking pictures. She takes pictures of would-be-brides and makes them feel comfortable during the shoot.

"I got married last year and realised how awkward it can get for a girl to get her pictures clicked by a male photographer," said Aarti.

"First of all, a would-be-bride is nervous and when it comes to getting clicked by a man, she might not always be comfortable. It is difficult for a girl to give a fake smile...it should come from within," she added.

Vinita Salome, a lifestyle photog-

rapher who has recently shifted to Holland has taken several outdoor assignments.

"I think the trend is changing gradually and today there are lots of professional female photographers. Pre-planning is very important as I make sure there is proper transportation and accommodation available for us," said Vinita.

As Vinita has a four-year-old son, she takes up only five weddings per year. "I have to arrange for somebody who can take care of my little son before heading for an outdoor shoot."

CHANGING TRENDS

When asked what precautions she takes while going for outdoor shoots she added, "I do inform at least one of my friends or family members where I am going. Also, I keep my cellphone fully charged and carry some cash along."

Interestingly, the perspective of female photographer plays an important role as she can relate to the bride. Vinita further added that these days, there is an increasing trend of having two wedding photographers in the event.

"One person fully concentrates on the bride and groom and another one takes general shots. It helps in the proper planning and captur-

ing pictures of every important ritual," she said.

Namita Bhope who started with street photography has now taken up wedding photography. This 28-year-old shutterbug doesn't mind travelling to outdoor locations for wedding assignments.

"Initially when I started going for weddings, people used to give me a surprising look but eventually they are getting used to it. My parents were also little sceptical in the beginning but when they saw my work they were quite happy. I think being a girl you can capture those candid moments and you tend to look at every ritual with certain emotions which reflects in the images," she said.

Mehul Chimthankar loves capturing images and is in this field since 20 years. He has a number of female photographers in his team.

"I feel the bride feels more at ease when it comes to female photographer. As we all know there are so many ceremonies in an Indian wedding, so every time a bride needs to change into new attire she doesn't feel shy in front of a female photographer. A female photographer can also help the bride with the touch-up and can capture the perfect emotion," said Mehul who works in an IT company and runs his company *clickmehul.com* on the sidelines.



Lifestyle photographer Vinita Salome (above) has taken various outdoor assignments including clicking wedding pictures of a Japanese couple