

# **FOLK MOTIFS: THE MANIFESTATION OF LEATHER PUPPET ART FORMS IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

**Thesis Submitted for the Award of the Degree of  
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## DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis “FOLK MOTIFS: THE MANIFESTATION OF LEATHERPUPPET ART FORMS IN ANDHRA PRADESH”, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Journalism, Film and Creative Arts, Lovely Professional University, is based on the results of the research work carried out by me and written out by me under the guidance of Dr **Vishweshwari Tiwari**. The manuscript has been subjected to plagiarism by the software Turnitin. This thesis or any part thereof has not been submitted for any purpose to any other university or institute. I have prepared it under the guidelines, and no part of this thesis has previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis titled “FOLK MOTIFS: THE MANIFESTATION OF PUPPET ART FORMS IN ANDHRA PRADESH” submitted to the Department of Fine Arts, Lovely Professional University, Phagwara, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Fine Arts is a record of original and independent research work conducted by Adisheshaiah Sade (41800786) under my supervision and guidance. The thesis has not formed the basis for the award of any degree/diploma/associateship/fellowship or any other similar title to any candidate by any University. The candidate has pursued the prescribed coursework of research, and he has incorporated all the suggestions given by the Department of Doctoral Board of the University during her annual presentations.

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## **ABSTRACT**

For most readers of this research, the primary purpose is to understand the manifestation of motifs of leather figures. This research helps to understand the influence of artists in contemporary times—an analytical study investigating the various painting techniques used by modern Indian painters. Using different colours on different surfaces gives the artwork a naturally aged or antique look. Thus, this is another example of the relationship between art and science, an experimental (technological approach) research with technical support in visual art -painting.

There are many reasons behind choosing this topic. To revive the lost puppetry acknowledges that folk motifs are hidden and made through leather puppetry. It continues the history, whose origin is traced back to the oldest civilization.

The term "motif" in folk art refers to the recurring elements present in specific folk communities, which are analyzed, assessed, and compared to the folklore of other cultures and nations. By identifying motifs in folklore, folklorists can gain insights into the beliefs, customs, and lifestyles of different societies and learn where, how, and why these motifs are employed. Motif definition in cultural anthropology and folklore encompasses its usage in music, literary criticism, visual arts, and textile arts.

The folk art of India is known for its variety, especially in the realm of painting, where one can find scroll paintings, miniature murals, manuscripts, and wall

Paintings. Moreover, different regions of India offer unique forms of artistic expression, including floor decorations, Pata Chitra, leather puppetry, Kalamkari paintings, Cheriya paintings, and more.

While Indian folk paintings may not exhibit formal grace or technical excellence, they compensate for it with their endearing simplicity and warmth. One of the most remarkable features of Indian art is its distinct and pervasive influence of the folk idiom on the courtly traditions.

The town of Sanchi, which lies in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh, is well-known for its Buddhist complex, which has the magnificent Great Stupa perched atop a hill. A surrounding fence and four finely carved Toranas were built in the first century BCE to further accentuate the architectural grandeur. The Sanchi Stupa was constructed initially with bricks during the Mauryan era. Serving as a focal point in the region, Sanchi is surrounded by several other stupas within a few miles of the town. The Sanchi Stupa's importance to Indian cultural heritage is evident by its depiction on the 200 rupee Indian currency note.

Chitrakathi is a form of storytelling that utilizes visual aids to narrate tales. It has a deep-rooted history in the Thakar community of Maharashtra, dating back to ancient times. Despite the decline of Pratisthana, the former imperial capital of the Satavahanas, Chitra Kathi continued to thrive as a significant pilgrimage centre, and its knowledgeable savants were highly regarded by the Maratha Peshwas of the 18th century for their expertise in addressing complex societal problems.

Phad painting is a religious scroll painting and folk art originating from Rajasthan, India. It is typically created on a long piece of fabric known as

A Phad features stories about Rajasthani folk deities, with a focus on Pabuji and Devnarayan.

Pattachitra or patachitra is a traditional, cloth-based scroll painting from the eastern Indian state of Odisha, as well as parts of Bangladesh and West Bengal. These paintings depict stories of Hindu deities and are well-known for their intricate details and mythological and folk tale themes. Initially created for ceremonial purposes and as gifts for Puri and other Odia temple guests, patachitras are an example of a classic narrative art form in Bengal. These pieces of art were used as visual aids while songs were performed.

India has a rich history of ancient painting traditions, one of which is Cheriya scroll painting. This art style originated in the small village of Cheriya in Telangana. Some believe that the Mughals may have introduced Cheriya paintings to India in the 16th century, while others suggest that it dates back to the 5th century. Cheriya paintings are heavily influenced by Kalamkari and Deccani scroll paintings and temple art traditions, with similarities to even the 12th-century Kakatiya paintings. Cheriya paintings can be found in temples such as Pilalamarri temple in Mahbubnagar, Telangana, and the hill temple of Tripurantaka.

The history of Lepakshi is intertwined with Andhra Pradesh's cultural heritage, which is rooted in Telugu traditions and enriched by the Sastras and Puranas. While the adjacent bull is a well-known feature of this Andhra Heritage Site, the Lepakshi temple serves as a reminder of the region's cultural renaissance during the political, military, and economic recovery. However, the tendency of "uber-secularists" to denigrate Hindu royalty is also evident.

Aripa paintings are a type of floor painting prevalent in the Mithila region of Bihar state. These paintings are characterized by linearity and mythological symbols, created using white rice paste on the ground, and based on online drawings. Although traditionally, only white was used, modern artists incorporate a range of colours. The tantric cult is also linked to aripa art, considered auspicious and frequently used in vrata, puja, and wedding ceremonies.

Folk art significantly reflects a culture's artistic expressions, providing historians and anthropologists with valuable insight into daily life and beliefs. Andhra Pradesh produces hand-painted cotton cloths using natural dyes in a twenty-step process.

Leather puppetry is an important aspect of Indian traditional culture that has gained global interest due to its rich representation of Indian ethos, values, and myths. The historical art form has provided accurate depictions of ancient legends and myths, rooted deeply in the country's culture. Leather puppets have special significance as they depict gods and goddesses, emphasizing the idea that humans should not play their parts. The puppetry tradition reached its peak during the reign of the Sathavahanas, Rashtrakutas, and Vijayanagaras. Folk art, on the other hand, is not limited to a particular community or village but represents both rural and urban public. Folk artists do not have formal training but rely on their consciousness of beauty to create unique compositions, experimenting with new forms while preserving traditional styles. Folk art can be found on various surfaces, including paper, pots, leather, and wood, and it reflects the simple and natural lifestyle of the people.

Realisticism, rural life, and societal philosophy are common themes in folk art. Indian epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata are frequently shown in Kalamkari. Additionally, the Kalamkari style has also been used to depict Buddha in Buddhist art, and Hindu symbols like the swastika, musical instruments, miniature creatures, and flowers have been incorporated into various folk-art styles.

The art of leather puppetry in India is an excellent example of sustainable and eco-friendly art that uses natural materials readily available in nature. Many scholars, including the late Prof. Nanjunda Rao, Sampa Ghosh, and Utpal K., have contributed to the knowledge of this art form through their books, articles, and research papers. Primary data collection for the study was aided by the research of Parul Bhatnagar, Banerjee, Nagabhushana Sharma, and others.

Additionally, advancements in computer-aided software have made it possible to alter the colors and patterns of the puppets. By studying the technological changes occurring in the textile industry, we can envision how this process can benefit future generations in the art of puppetry.

To summarize, leather puppetry is a traditional form of shadow puppetry that originated in Andhra Pradesh, India, and has served as a medium for entertainment, folklore, and knowledge for many years. The art form involves the combination of leather crafting and painting, and its products go beyond just puppets to include various other items. Research in this field has explored the use of computer-aided software technology for leather puppet performances and the development of innovative accompanist music as part of marketing strategies. Dalavay Kulayappa, a skilled craftsman from Nimmalakunta, is notable for creating puppets for performances.

This research aims to examine the concept, influence, importance, and parameters of folk art, with a particular focus on highlighting the idea, importance, and perspective of leather puppet art motifs. The study also seeks to provide insights into the relationships and perspectives of the elements that make up leather puppet art.

While the main objective of this study is to examine folk art motifs, it is also recognized that commercialization can bring financial benefits to the artists. This is explored in detail in the literature review, and therefore it is deemed necessary to investigate the impact of folk motifs on the lives of artisans. It is crucial to consider the current socio-economic status of the artists in relation to the complete motifs and symbols of the art. By observing folk motifs from the perspective of Indian culture and heritage, as well as the producers and market, this study aims to propose solutions for the preservation and promotion of traditional leather puppetry art in Andhra Pradesh.

This research emphasizes the following objects, which are woven throughout the core chapters: To examine the concept, influence, significance, and parameters of folk art. To highlight the idea, importance, and perspective of leather puppet art motifs.

To increase understanding of the relationships and perspectives of the elements that make up leather puppet art.

Leather puppetry, also known as Tolu Bommalata, is a traditional shadow puppetry art form that has its roots in Andhra Pradesh, India. It serves as a means of entertainment, folklore transmission, and knowledge dissemination, and is heavily influenced by social context. This art form involves the fusion of leather crafting and painting, and the materials required for creating the puppets are mostly prepared by the performers themselves. Additionally, leather puppet art has given rise to various products such as wall hangings, ornaments, and handbags. The shadow puppetry art form of leather puppetry, sometimes referred to as Tolu Bommalata, has its origins in Andhra Pradesh, India. It is primarily impacted by the social environment and functions as a source of entertainment, folklore transmission, and knowledge sharing. In this style of art, leatherwork, and painting are combined, and most of the materials needed to make the puppets are prepared by the performers themselves. In addition, leather puppetry has inspired the creation of several goods, including wall hangings, jewelry, and handbags.

Preserving culture is beneficial to society in multiple ways. Firstly, traditions reinforce values such as freedom, faith, integrity, education, personal responsibility, a strong work ethic, and selflessness, forming the foundation of families and society. Secondly, sustaining cultural diversity benefits both those whose traditions are preserved and those who can learn from different concepts and modes of thought. Thirdly, cultural legacy shapes a nation's identity by reflecting its values, beliefs, and aspirations. Fourthly, cultural preservation involves supporting the practice of indigenous or tribal languages and customs, documenting, and studying languages, and maintaining and repairing historical artifacts important to a culture or history. Finally, cultural and natural heritage are valuable assets that distinguish the industry.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 The Concept of Folk Art's Influence on Traditional Knowledge**

Every nation has its history, customs, and cultures. Each culture can be traced back to its social, political, historical, and artistic roots. India also has its native cultural heritage in art. In India, there are two different artistic streams. One is associated with religious customs, supported by the patronage of the wealthy and regal, and is primarily practised by men. The other is rooted in the folk tradition that women practice daily. It is vital to understand the indigenous roots of Indian painting to determine its genesis.

What is art? Various scholars have answered This question in different ways and at different times throughout the endless journey of academia in the pan-world context. The etymology of the word ‘art’ in the English vocabulary has its origin in the Latin word ‘ars’, meaning skill, way, or method. Usually, art, in our general perception, is designated as plastic or visual countenance, but precisely, it should also include the art of literature and music.

(Read, 1961) . In their words, “Art is associated almost equally with the two senses of the word “culture” – culture as a way of life or body of ideas and knowledge, and culture as the metaphysical essence of society, incorporating standards by which the finest products of society are judged.” (Howard & Perkins Morgan, 2006) In this context, the anthropology of art examines human endeavours that emerge from individual or community experiences and that manifest aesthetic success. This field encompasses various forms of expression, including literature, painting, music, dance, weaving, poetry, and crafts like stone carving and woodworking. While aesthetic success is a fundamental criterion for an object to be considered art, other factors—such as personal or communal beliefs, ritual traditions, and the lives of individuals—also significantly influence the transformation of a utilitarian object into a work of artistic expression. (Anthony Shelton, 1992)

At the onset of the discussion on folk art, we should organise our thoughts by considering the definition of folk, folklore and folk-life. Folk, or folkways, are the customary ways people act in their daily lives. According to scholarly order, folklore is active and significant enough for communicating social identity, collective memory, cultural anxieties, and

worldview. According to Jonas Balys, folklore comprises traditional creations of people. Moreover, folklore is not a science about the folk, but the traditional folk science and folk-poetry (Jonas, 1940)

When creating any form of art, an artist draws deeply from their personal experiences, making the artwork a direct reflection of their inner world. Throughout history, art has been an integral part of human existence. Early artworks were primarily utilitarian, yet they were also aesthetically pleasing. With the advent of agriculture, humans began to settle, leading to the formation of villages. During this period, art took on a folk-religious character. Folk art, in particular, is closely connected to ordinary people's lives, often reflecting the customs, beliefs, and traditions of specific communities, castes, and religions. (Agarwal, 2015)

Folk art is a vital component of our civilization and is a way for people to express their joy and sadness to one another and the wider world. Folk art is a creative way for people to show their battle for civilization in a certain setting by making beautiful and functional items for use in daily life. The average citizens of a country or region create folk art. It typically reflects the traditional culture in their daily activities, especially during the holidays when they produce or adorn goods by untrained artisans. (Varma, 2018)

Folk Art encompasses a range of utilitarian and decorative media, including cloth, wood, paper, clay, metal, leather, and more. It is made by individuals or the community whose creative skills convey their community's authentic cultural identity. (Bhattacharya & Dr. Abhijit Das, 2021)

When we refer to Indian folk art, we anchor our understanding of the earliest period of Indian history—when art was indeed the art of the people. During this era, from a social structure perspective, everyone, regardless of their group or status, had the opportunity and the right to participate in crafting and using the functional and aesthetically pleasing objects they created. (Chandra, 1985)

Even the earliest villages show signs of a shift towards a class-based society. However, in the term's original sense, most early village artefacts, like painted vessels or terracotta figurines, can still be considered true folk art. These items were created before the emergence of class divisions and thus belonged to the entire community. Practically, no aspect of village culture or tribal life remained untouched as cultural exchanges and reciprocal influences between folk art and high art became the general rule. Almost every aspect of village culture and tribal life was influenced by the widespread cultural exchanges

and mutual influences between folk art and high art, making such interactions the norm. (Chandra, 1985)

This implies that the clarity of visual images should be understood within the context of the conventions of their time. However, it's clear that in contemporary art, symbols like the sun and moon are interpreted differently than they would have been by, for instance, a community of hunters and gatherers. Generally speaking, the external, formal aspects of folk art are more accessible to grasp than its deeper meanings.

Our aim is not only to deepen the understanding of folk art but also to present it as a legitimate art form. To achieve this, we've taken a balanced approach, combining a historical overview of its development with an analysis based on material types. In doing so, we find that Indian folk art demonstrates a clear preference for certain techniques, forms of expression, and specific categories within the fine arts. A thorough examination of the subject reveals the prominence of painting within folk art or, more broadly, the significance of two-dimensional art. The earliest evidence and the regional distribution of such art forms support this conclusion. Techniques like painting, weaving, and plaiting are deeply rooted in folk art traditions and closely linked to its symbols, narrative elements, and visual styles. Other branches of folk art—such as pottery, wood carving, metalwork, and occasionally stone sculpture—will also be included in our discussion.

Focusing on tradition and historical heritage should ultimately serve the present and guide shaping for the future. With this objective, it is essential to discuss the current significance of Indian folk art and its role today. (Chandra, 1985)

In Orissa, there is a special box made of bamboo or papier-mâché, richly decorated with folk motifs, traditionally used for exchanging gifts. This box has a unique feature—when shaken, it creates cloud scenes with shadow effects, all serving religious purposes. Similarly, in Rajasthan, a unique cloth called 'Babuji Ka Pad' narrates the heroic stories of warriors. These works are created freehand, either from memory or inspired by hymns they have been taught to recite, and are pure folk in style, using vegetable colours.

However, when it comes to South Indian art, its strong religious references and strict adherence to certain traditions typical of classical art make it difficult to classify as folk art. (Chandra, 1985).

Folk art significantly influences traditional knowledge by serving as a medium through which cultural heritage is preserved, expressed, and transmitted across generations. This art

form encapsulates specific communities' values, beliefs, and practices, making it a vital component of their identity and continuity.

The famous artist Henry Moore declared that “folk art is something made by people with a direct and immediate response to life and for that matter rural art was not a matter of arithmetical calculation and academism, but a channel for expressing powerful beliefs hopes and fears.”

## **1.2 Theoretical Insight into Motif Development and Conceptual Elaboration of Folk Motifs**

Folk art plays a crucial role in shaping traditional knowledge by acting as a medium through which cultural heritage is preserved, expressed, and passed down through generations. Folk motifs, the small but distinctive elements within folk art and folklore help build larger narratives or designs. These motifs can include representations of animals, plants, and geometric patterns, each carrying its own cultural or symbolic significance. Often recognisable across various folk traditions, these motifs reflect a shared cultural heritage, highlighting the interconnectedness of different traditions.(Thompson, 1960)

The term "motif" originates from the Latin word “*motivus*”, which means "movement" or "cause of movement." In French, the term evolved to encompass meanings such as "reason for acting" and "the subject that dominates a work." It was first used in the context of music in 1703, and by 1824, the term had also been applied to painting. Over time, the concept of a motif also spread to other fields. (Rey, 1992)

Webster defines a motif as a single or repeated design or colour that features decorative elements, often depicting animals, flowers, or trees. Motifs can sometimes appear as blocks and squares, and within a particular piece of work, they may be of uniform size or vary in size. They are the basic building blocks of complex networks, a concept first introduced. (R Milo, et al., 2002)

The term "motif" is highly complex and evolving due to conceptual innovations and technological advancements, as noted by Legallois and Koch (2021).

Cultural anthropologists and folklorists define motifs as recurrent elements in the popular traditions of an artistic community. Motifs can be found across various fields, including written and oral literature, such as tales, visual and textile arts and music. Motifs and myths are essential elements of a society's culture. They are best understood as valuable cultural resources. ( Brokerhof, W, & Agnes, 2006)

While myths embody forms of traditional wisdom, motifs are created through artistic expression, craft techniques, and careful workmanship. They reflect local identities and often have a myth associated with them. (Chudhavipta, 2021)

Motifs take on various forms and themes, broadly categorised into four types: geometric, floral, abstract, and animal. (Goswami & Yadav, 2019)

Natural, abstract, and stylised forms are the other three categories of motifs found in artwork. Typically, these motifs include representations of gods and goddesses and animals such as ducks, fish, peacocks, and elephants. Additionally, floral and geometric patterns are commonly featured motifs in various artistic expressions. (M & A, 2012) Motifs are utilised on the surfaces of scroll paintings, embroidery, textiles, block printing, and leather puppetry. Each motif possesses an origin, evolution, and diversity in shape and presentation. In design, artisans such as weavers, embroiderers, dyers, painters, and printers bring forth visions of beauty by employing motifs deeply rooted in culture, religion, environment, and history. These motifs emerge from a community's religious practices, customs, and social beliefs. (veenu, Charu Kattare, & Sharma, 2016) Time, culture, philosophy, geography, and various groups of individuals can institutionalise or transform motifs over an extended period. (Purwar & Shristi, 2021)

According to Daemmrich, motifs encompass five characteristics: frequency of recurrence, avoidability or unlikelihood of appearance, the significance of contexts, coherence, and symbolic correlation. (Daemmrich, 1985)

### **1.2.1 Conceptual Development of Symbols, themes, and motifs**

Motifs possess significant interpretative value. A motif functions as a symbol rather than a mere sign; hence, it signifies meaning and reinforces the notion that it is a symbol at its core. Motifs and themes are frequently used interchangeably. (Karris & J, 1985) However, themes often overshadow motifs in discussions. Motifs and themes are typically regarded as the two most common forms of narrative repetition. François Jost (1988) emphasises this distinction to illustrate this point further. Motifs are "moveable stock devices" that have emerged across various genres, eras, and locations. (Würzbach & Natascha, 2005). François Jost (1988) states, "One critic may call motif what another designates as a theme." However, Morgan highlights that these concepts are distinct and define each other.

According to Morgan (2015), motifs possess unique identities, functions, and rhetorical impacts. They serve as narratives by conveying situations and ideas within a creative

tradition. William Freedman's essay from 1971, "The Literary Motif: A Definition and Evaluation," discusses the specific aesthetic significance of motifs in creative expressions. Defines a motif as a discrete element or image repeated within a narrative.

In contrast, a theme represents a more generalized or abstract concept suggested by these motifs. In simpler terms, motifs are typically concrete and represented through repeated objects and expressions, while themes are abstract ideas that convey main concepts and values. Symbols and motifs are frequently used synonymously. Both have meanings that are symbolic. However, there is a distinction between symbols and motifs. A motif differs from a symbol in that it is repeated and leaves an imprint that builds over time. A motif can be defined as "a family or associational cluster of literal or figurative references to a given class of concepts or objects, whether it be animals, machines, circles, music, or whatever," according to Freedman (1971). Another way to depict a sign is in a non-objective or non-representational manner. Regardless of how the symbol is portrayed, those who utilize it culturally are aware of its implications or meaning. Concepts and meanings are conveyed using symbols. A symbol can be both secret and revealed at the same time. Symbols help people communicate by providing a shared frame of reference for a wide range of unique, distinct concepts. Symbols are timeless, meaning they exist beyond time.

### **1.2.2 Conceptual Elaborations of Myths and Folk Motifs**

Myths symbolise the worldview embraced and conveyed by a culture. They express common beliefs and assumptions about the elements of nature, the universe, and the boundaries and workings of the natural and spiritual worlds.

The term "myth" refers to both fictional and true stories and originates from an ancient Greek word meaning "story" or "plot." A myth is a belief system, often involving supernatural beings or forces central to a culture's identity. Creation or origin myths, in particular, describe how the world came to exist in its current form and typically present the cultural group telling the story as the original or "real" people. (Murfin & ray, 2003) These kinds of sacred narratives or stories deal with the beginnings, goals, and futures of a people and the objects in their universe.

Mythmaking and storytelling are universal cultural practices. Folklore, urban legends, and myths provide valuable insights into how people perceive and interpret the world. When comparing myths from different cultures, fascinating connections emerge between the

themes, plots, imagery, and characters, as well as in the phenomena they seek to explain and the issues they address. (Murfin & ray, 2003)

Myths are a central topic of discussion in fields such as Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Folklore Studies, Philology, Marketing, Advertising, Fashion, and Philosophy. They are typically narratives that recount events from the past. In this context, it is relevant to quote Cassirer (1853), who suggested that myths are close to the members of a society and remain hidden in obscurity. (Murfin & ray, 2003) (Baklanov, Baklanova, EroKhin, Ponarina, & Akopyan, 2018) Myths represent social beings and their consciousness, playing a crucial role in shaping our perception (Bubandt, 2014).

The term “myth” comes from the Greek word *mythos*, whose Latin equivalent is *mythus*. A myth is a traditional tale, story, legend, or folklore that seeks to explain certain social or natural phenomena and often upholds a belief. Sometimes, myths contrast reality or truth, presenting fictitious ideas and explanations (Dictionary, 2019) Myths frequently serve as a descriptive language, forming the foundation of a culture and influencing human behavior.

A myth is a story with frequent moral lessons to be learned. Moral stories, often narrated by the elderly, serve as a means of passing them on to the younger generation. The culture, beliefs, and customs of a long-established community are passed down through and maintained by myths. They are strong, exert social control, and produce historical knowledge. (Degenaar, 2007) Myths portray people's historical identities, origins, religious customs, cultures, traditions, and ancestors. These are the stories of the common people, who can be elemental, theriomorphic, or anthropomorphic, as well as gods, demigods, and legendary warriors. They refer to the events that took place in the past and the creation of the objects in our immediate environment. Therefore, myths do not provide factual knowledge; rather, they symbolise the fundamental ideals of a particular community.

Myths differ from fantasy in that they carry distinct social implications. While myths are never universal, they are always specific to a particular culture, religion, community, or group. This social aspect sets myths apart from fantasy or delusion. (Doty, 2000) From this perspective, two additional characteristics of myths become evident: (a) myths are a type of narrative, and (b) myths serve as a model of thought.

There are four primary theories of myth: the psychological myth theory, the rational myth theory, the functional myth theory, and the structural myth theory. The rational myth theory proposes that myths were created to explain natural forces and events. The functional myth

theory argues that different types of myths were developed as tools for societal control. Structural myth theory is based on the variations observed in human thought and nature. Finally, the psychological myth theory suggests that myths are rooted in human emotions (Joseph, 1996).

Myths and Folk motifs are closely interconnected. Folk Motifs often carry myths, acting as a medium through which myths are expressed. These motifs are cultural creations designed to project myths in a way that gains popular acceptance and appeal. Humans have always crafted myths, and motifs are supported by myths that have been passed down through generations. Myths in Visual story narrative art forms are particularly speculative, as they transform the cultural context and provide symbolic meaning to the Folk motifs used. In this way, while Folk motifs represent styles, myths function as symbols rooted in a society's mythology, culture, beliefs, and practices. Folk Motifs that depict myths help to sustain culture.

With his "thick description" approach, Clifford Geertz encourages us to shift our focus from seeking explanations to seeking meaning. He emphasized the importance of using one's perspective to understand and develop sensitivity to other people's viewpoints.

The continuation of the narrative on the motifs depends on the artist's talent and expertise and the viewer or potential customer's attraction to the Folk motifs due to their comprehension of the tales embedded in them. The mythology of mythology behind the folk motifs is made clearer to the viewer through their knowledge of the material and spiritual cultures of the society.

### **1.2.3 Uses of Folk Motifs as a Metaphorical Language in Hindu Mythology**

In textile arts, motifs are decorative elements, while story-telling visual art forms act as metaphorical language. These visual narratives are preserved legends or folklore, passed down from generation to generation through reciting stories.

The term 'mythology' is rich in meaning, encompassing the collective experiences of generations, often preserved in the form of legends or folklore passed down through the recitation of stories. The ethical foundation of mythological narratives is deeply rooted in moral values, guiding humanity to pursue truth. In Indian mythology, most stories centre around gods and demons, often conveying specific ideologies and concepts. These narratives remain prevalent today through oral traditions or illustrated texts like the Jataka tales, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Geet Govinda. This study explores Indian

paintings incorporating mythological symbols, examining how these timeless stories are visually represented and interpreted. (Shazia Rehman & Zeba Hasan, 2015)

Traditional Indian storytelling is rich with symbolism and metaphors, where motifs are used to craft stories by linking simple elements to various qualities. The multi-dimensional nature of symbols has always played a significant role in traditional Indian art forms. Depending on the theme and the artist's intentions, the same motif can carry different meanings across various paintings. Some motifs are shared across multiple traditional art forms, while others are more rarely used. Specific Folk motifs were believed to ward off evil and were used as charms for protection, while others symbolized prosperity and joy. All motifs carry multiple meanings, reflecting their depth and versatility in Indian art and culture. (rooftop, 20023)

The tree goddess depicted in the Figure Tree Goddess (Bharhut 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C.) stands above an elephant. (Heinrich Robert Zimmer, 1992) This relationship between an anthropomorphic figure and an animal is typical in Indian iconography. The animal, placed beneath the human figure, is interpreted as a "vehicle" (vahana) that carries the human representation, symbolising the energy and character of the deity. For instance, Shiva is often depicted riding a bull, while his consort, the Goddess, is shown on a lion. Their son, Ganesha, the elephant-headed god known as "The Lord and Leader of the Hosts of Shiva" and "The Lord and Master of Obstacles" (vighnesvara), is represented above a rat. Ganesha navigates obstacles in a manner akin to how an elephant traverses a jungle. At the same time, the rat also means overcoming challenges and serving as an apt, albeit physically incongruous, mount for the sizeable pot-bellied deity with an elephant head. (Heinrich Robert Zimmer, 1992)

The elephant quickly moves through the wilderness, trampling shrubs, bending, and uprooting trees while fording rivers and lakes. In contrast, the rat can access secured granaries, thereby representing the power of Ganesha to overcome any obstacle encountered on one's path. Kubera, the overlord of all the genii (yakshas), is frequently depicted standing atop a crouching man. His common title is "He whose mount or vehicle is a man" (nara-vahana). Kubera and his entourage are genii associated with fertility, wealth, and prosperity, primarily linked to the earth, mountains, and the treasures of precious stones and metals that lie underground. They are considered protective deities of Indian households, drawing influence from pre-Aryan aboriginal traditions and playing significant roles in Hindu and early Buddhist folklore. The man-vehicle beneath Kubera's feet sets him apart from other

superhuman kings and princes, just as the hoods of cobras distinguish the superhuman nagas.

Overall, folk motifs are not merely decorative but integral to understanding a culture's identity and values. They bridge the past with the present, preserving heritage while allowing for continued creativity and expression in folk traditions.

The symbolism likely predates the chalice of the ancient Sumerian king, Gudea. However, Mesopotamian Sumer may have served as the origin of this formula, travelling westward to Greece and modern Europe while also moving eastward into ancient India and later reaching more distant regions like Indonesia. (Heinrich Robert Zimmer, 1992) A magnificent elephant, searching for its share of lotus stalks and roots, has wandered too deeply into the water and has been captured and bound by the serpents of the deep. The great creature, struggling helplessly, ultimately calls upon the assistance of the High God. In response, Vishnu appears, seated upon Garuda. The cosmic lotus is referred to as "The highest form or aspect of Earth," as well as "The Goddess Moisture" and "The Goddess Earth." It embodies the essence of the Mother Goddess, through whom the Absolute enters into creation. Most importantly, the characteristics that will define her in the later "classical" period of Hindu mythology and art are already evident in this earliest hymn in Puranas. In this apocryphal hymn, which is appended to the Rig Veda, the Lotus Goddess is identified by her two traditional names, Shri and Lakshmi, and intricately linked to the lotus symbol in many ways. (Heinrich Robert Zimmer, 1992) The elephant, serving as a "determinant," is commonly found beneath the anthropomorphic symbols of divine powers in the early Buddhist reliefs at Bhirhut. Many deities depicted are not labelled, making identification difficult; however, some are recognised by the names of certain yakshas and yakshinis—male and female earth spirits representing fertility and wealth. The depiction of a pair of elephants alongside the goddess Lotus is also prominent in Buddhist art from the second and first centuries B.C., as seen in sites like Barhut and Sanchi. This motif can be traced throughout the extensive history of Hindu and Buddhist iconography, extending to the late Hindu temples in the southern regions of India. In Hindu miniatures and contemporary famous drawings, the image of the elephant remains a frequently recurring theme. (Heinrich Robert Zimmer, 1992).

### **1.3 Significance of Visual Storytelling: The Metaphorical Language of Leather**

#### **Puppetry Art Motifs**

Visual Storytelling, the art of conveying ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons, can be defined as a sequence of related events in written or oral form. (Stein, 1982). It is a powerful method for effective learning. From the dawn of human history, visual images have been crucial for communication and information sharing. Visual storytelling, as noted by Caputo (2003), involves presenting a narrative through media that incorporates still or moving visuals and graphic elements. This approach enriches the material with images, graphics, illustrations, films, and audio components like music, voice, and sound effects ( Caputo & Anthony, 2003)

Visual storytelling, a form of non-verbal communication, dates back to the Prehistoric era when humans used cave paintings to record their achievements and experiences. These visuals allow us to trace history, culture, and lifestyle across time. Visual storytelling has continually evolved from ancient hieroglyphics and Chinese tapestries to statues, canvases, photographs, film, television, and multimedia. It involves conveying messages through visual media, such as graphics, images, pictures, and videos, and is widely used in film, video production, advertising, marketing, and online learning. (Scherman, 2016)The key to effective visual storytelling lies in choosing the right way to present information to the audience. When paired with the right visuals and intention, it can create a powerful impact, evoking emotions and leaving a lasting impression.

The Buddha stupas and various visual storytelling art forms exemplify the profound metaphorical language found in folk art motifs. These structures and artworks are not merely decorative but imbued with rich symbolism that communicates spiritual and philosophical teachings. With its dome shape, the stupa represents the universe and the path to enlightenment, encapsulating the Buddha's teachings and the journey toward nirvana. Each element of the stupa—from the base to the pinnacle—holds specific symbolic meanings, such as the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) and the stages of spiritual attainment. (SusanL.Huntington, 1985)

Similarly, other visual storytelling art forms, such as Chitrakathi, leather puppetry, and Pata Chitra paintings from Orissa, Bengal, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, use intricate designs and motifs to convey complex spiritual concepts and narratives. Chitrakathi combines oral narration with vivid illustrations to depict epic tales, while leather puppetry employs shadow play to bring mythological stories to life. With their detailed and vibrant imagery, Pata Chitra paintings narrate religious and historical tales.

The term 'mythology' is rich in meaning, encompassing the collective experiences of generations, often preserved in the form of legends or folklore passed down through the recitation of stories. The ethical foundation of mythological narratives is deeply rooted in moral values, guiding humanity to pursue truth. In Indian mythology, most stories centre around gods and demons, often conveying specific ideologies and concepts. These narratives remain prevalent today through oral traditions or illustrated texts like the Jataka tales, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Geet Govinda.

These visual narratives explore Indian storytelling paintings incorporating mythological symbols, examining how these timeless stories are visually represented and interpreted.

These visual narratives explore Indian narrative imagery incorporating mythological symbols, examining how these timeless stories are visually represented and interpreted.

Folk motifs in folk art serve as powerful metaphors, encapsulating deeper meanings, cultural values, and shared experiences within a community. These motifs, whether patterns, symbols, or themes, transform simple visuals into rich, layered narratives that reflect the collective identity and beliefs of the people.

Visual metaphors play a crucial role in artistic performances, effectively communicating abstract ideas to individual viewers and the broader public. Symbolic and surrealistic paintings, which often incorporate both concrete (source) and universal (target) domains in their metaphorical structures, have the power to suggest alternative realities and potential outcomes. According to R. Arnheim's concept of the openness of fine artworks, J. Bruner's theory of the narrative mind, storytelling, and possible worlds, and Ch. Forceville's analysis of visual metaphors addresses two philosophical and epistemological questions: (1) How are universal themes depicted, perceived, conveyed, and understood in metaphorical paintings? (2) What distinguishes the structures of visual metaphors in these paintings from purely literary parabolic forms? By analyzing selected symbolic and metaphorical works by Malczewski through the lenses of conceptual metaphor and blending theories, the paper aims to explore the extent to which his painting methods and narrative structures are intertwined with Polish national and cultural history, and their significance in cognitive studies, as well as in the history and theory of fine arts. (Hetmański, 2020)

The professionals talked about some details when creating or designing visual storytelling. The experts categorized visual storytelling elements based on their resemblance and most common usage across different professions. The visual storytelling components that came from the content analysis are displayed in Table 1. Based on what professionals utilize most frequently, a total of five elements have been selected as appropriate for use in visual storytelling. (Cognitive, 2021)

**Tible:1.1 Visual Storytelling Five Elements**

Sl. No	Components of Visual Storytelling	Summary
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1	Storytelling	There should be a beginning, middle, and end to every story.
2	Infographic	An infographic is a compilation of images, minimal text, and data visualizations such as bar graphs and pie charts that provide an understandable summary of a subject. As seen in the example below, infographics employ eye-catching, captivating images to convey information clearly and swiftly.
3	Animate & Motion	A motion prop and a character's facial expressions enhance the entertainment value and audience involvement of visual storytelling.
4	Colour	The piece's style and tone are established through the use of colour; a well-chosen colour scheme can elicit a range of feelings and experiences. Demographic groupings ought to be the foundation of colour psychology.
5	Sound	Sound includes ambient sound, voiceover, sound effects, and background music.

Storytelling is a fundamental component of visual storytelling, serving as a powerful tool to evoke emotions and convey insights. Through narratives, it expresses ideas, opinions, and personal experiences. In the context of social media, storytelling is crucial for capturing the audience's attention. As noted by ( El-Desouky, 2020), every story should have three essential parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end, with the ending providing closure and motivating the audience to act. Walter and (Walter & Gioglio , 2014) emphasize that storytelling is as important as the visuals themselves in a successful visual marketing strategy on social media.

The second essential element is infographics, which combine images and data visualisations like pie charts and bar graphs with minimal text to offer a clear overview of a subject. Infographics blend data and visuals to craft a compelling story. (Walter & Gioglio , 2014) , allowing audiences to absorb information quickly, as the human brain is wired to recognise visual patterns more quickly than text. However, considering different cognitive and cultural perspectives, selecting the right image is critical. (Ghaddar, 2022).

The third element, animation and motion, enhances the engagement of visual storytelling. They help guide viewers through the narrative and draw attention to key details. Adding humor and charm to animations can further boost audience engagement. For example, animating a character's expression or the motion of a prop can make visual storytelling more entertaining and engaging (Cognitive, 2021).

The fourth element is colour, which plays a significant role in setting the style and tone of visual storytelling. Colour can evoke emotions and establish mood, making it an essential aspect of creating an impactful visual narrative. (Cognitive, 2021).

### **1.3.1 The Metaphorical Language of Leather Puppetry Folk Art Motifs**

Visual storytelling in leather puppetry Traditional art forms have played an essential role in passing legends to generations for thousands of years; in this process, they use selected folk motifs such as Animals, Plants, trees, Flowers, Gods, Goddesses, demons, Sun and Moon etc., are their vocabulary; these motifs communicate very well with audience; these motifs were crucial in the mode of communicate the myths and legends such as Jataka stories, Ramayana, Bhagavata—Mahabharata, etc.

To effectively communicate with the Indian masses, it is crucial to connect with their traditions. Folk media, deeply rooted in rural life, are particularly effective in this regard. Respondents often consider these forms of media credible because they utilize familiar signs and symbols. Folk media convey messages in both feasible and culturally resonant environments, and the socio-psychological connection they establish fosters a deeper awareness of the messages being communicated. Traditional folk arts like Tamasha, Nautanki, and Puppetry have long been used to educate and inspire change among the masses. Participation is vital to communication and development, making traditional folk media particularly effective for development initiatives, as they operate on a participatory model. (Shaika, Lal, & Jonjua, 2021).

Puppetry, a traditional form of folk theatre in India, has been a popular and respected source of entertainment for centuries. The government and NGOs have effectively used puppet shows to disseminate development messages and highlight folk media's potential, such as puppetry, theatre, dance, and storytelling, as powerful tools for successful health communication. (Padmanabha & Kumar, 2020)

For instance, animal Motifs are frequently used as metaphors for human traits or societal values, with lions representing courage and leadership, snakes symbolising danger and transformation, and doves embody peace and spirituality. Similarly, colours carry profound meanings and express emotions, statuses, or spiritual beliefs, such as red for passion and danger, white for purity and peace, and black for mourning and mystery.

Plants and flower motifs are also rich in symbolic meaning, with the lotus symbolising purity and enlightenment, the olive branch representing peace, and the rose denoting love and beauty. Geometrical motifs like shapes and patterns often symbolise unity, eternity, and life cycles, with circles representing wholeness, triangles denoting strength and stability, and spirals illustrating growth and evolution. The portrayal of human figures, their postures, and activities can also be symbolic, such as raised hands symbolizing praise or supplication, embraces representing love and unity and journeying figures depicting life's journey or a quest for knowledge.

The Motifs of Natural elements like the sun, moon, and water symbolise various aspects of life and the cosmos, with the sun representing life and energy, the moon symbolising mystery and change, and water denoting purity and transformation. These symbols work as metaphors, allowing artists to communicate complex ideas and emotions through visual representation. This symbolic language is often universally understandable, bridging cultural and linguistic gaps to convey shared human experiences and values. Using symbolism as a metaphor in folk art enriches the artwork, making it aesthetically pleasing, deeply meaningful, and reflective of the community's collective psyche.

Leather Puppeteer expressions transcend mere visual appeal, providing a sacred space for meditation, reflection, and transmitting cultural and spiritual wisdom. Using metaphorical language, these folk-art motifs connect the viewer to deeper layers of meaning, fostering a sense of continuity and shared heritage within the community.

According to Swaminathan (1999), a renowned agricultural scientist, folk media are particularly effective in reaching marginalised and underserved populations.

(Mahan, 1985) A media educationist further explains that traditional performing arts significantly impact the conveying of messages due to their higher acceptability and credibility. This is attributed to their direct, live interaction, making them more effective than radio, television, or films.

Traditional folk performances have long been a part of India's cultural landscape. Recognizing the significance of these forms of communication in rural areas, the Government of India has been leveraging them to raise awareness about various developmental issues since the 1950s. The Directorate of Field Publicity and the Song and Drama Division have utilised live performances, including puppet shows, dramas, dances, ballads, and harikathas, to promote messages related to family planning, health, adult education, family welfare, and agricultural practices. In more recent times, these performances have conveyed messages about HIV/AIDS awareness, small savings, female infanticide, and child labor. (Tyagi & Sinha, 2004)notes that the National Council for Science and Technology Communication has also recently incorporated puppetry as a medium for science and technology communication.

Puppetry is a traditional art form that has long served as an effective medium for entertainment and communication. (Parmar, 1994) Notes that puppetry is an ancient practice, with its origins traceable through old scriptures. This art form likely emerged from humanity's early desire to create life-like movements through figures, eventually evolving into a theatrical form that incorporates elements from various other art forms.

In its contemporary form, puppetry holds immense potential as a communication medium. (Currel & David, 1985), a world-renowned puppeteer, highlights the enduring popularity of puppetry, attributing it to the puppets' captivating nature and ability to attract and sustain attention compellingly.

Puppetry offers immense opportunities for originality in presentation and scriptwriting, puppet creation, dialogue, music, manipulation, and final production. Creating a puppet is a source of endless interest and enjoyment and a valuable visual aid. Crafting and operating puppet figures involve various skills, including drawing, painting, cutting, carpentry, wood carving, prop preparation, modelling, plaster cast making, costume design, clay modelling, and stagecraft.

#### **1.4 The Role of Andhra Pradesh Leather Puppetry in Preserving and Transmitting Legends to Future Generations**

Puppetry is one of the oldest forms of entertainment in nearly every culture worldwide. In India, shadow puppets date back to the 6th century B.C., with Andhra puppets believed to have influenced Javanese puppetry. Chinese puppetry flourished in the 18th century, while in Europe, puppets were linked to religious rituals, later evolving with the *commedia dell'arte* in 16th-century Italy. American Indians also used puppets in religious rituals long before European influence.

Puppet shows, though varied, often shared a common theme—the triumph of good over evil—serving both entertainment and moral instruction. Puppetry forms include string, rod, glove, and leather puppets. There is a rich diversity in India, with string puppets from Rajasthan, rod puppets from Western India, glove puppets from Bengal, and leather puppets from South India. The latter, with a history of over 500 years, has provided rural entertainment for centuries.

Known by different names in various regions—such as “Tholubommallata” in Andhra Pradesh, “Togalu Gombatta” in Karnataka, “Tol Pavaikottu” in Tamil Nadu, “Tolpa Pavakoothu” in Kerala, “Ravanachaya” in Odisha, and “Chamdyacha Bahulya” in Maharashtra—leather puppetry remains a vibrant cultural tradition. Notably, the shadow puppets of Odisha, Maharashtra, and Kerala are uniquely characterised by their black-and-white design (Rao L. P., 2000)

The shadow puppet cut from a piece of flat rawhide or stiff batching was famous, performed, and called regionally known in Andhra Pradesh. The Andhra and Karnataka ones are multi-coloured and more prominent in size because of their lateness. They are articulated at different Limbs of the body for considerable variations of moment again between the Andhra and the Karnataka Puppets. The Andhra ones are more extensive and contain a more Complex colour scheme and more worried articulated Limbs. Even among the Andhra Puppets, this belongs to the northern style East Godavari West Godavari and Visakhapatnam districts are still more significant, the largest being six and a half into three and a half and the smallest One into one and a half then the southern counterparts through the properties of both the styles of their Origins to a common ancestry. (Sharma, 1985)

The current state of Andhra theatre has evolved from two distinct shadow theatre traditions: ancient and relatively modern. The earliest reference to the older tradition appears in the 13th-century work *Pandita Aaradhya Charitra* by Palkuriki Somanatha, where he describes leather and rod puppets used during the Shivaratri festival at the Srisailem temple. Evidence

suggests that shadow puppet theatre was well-established in Andhra by the 12th century. Several inscriptions, including one from 1208 A.D., reveal donations and honours given to puppeteers, highlighting their significant cultural and scholarly status. Notably, puppeteers like "Bommalata Kala" were celebrated and even honoured by royalty, such as Krishnadeva Raya. This reflects the influence and prominence of puppeteers in Andhra's history.

Interestingly, one such piece of information comes from a Telangana inscription recovered from Gunduru in the Warangal district, known as the Guduru inscription. This inscription highlights the puppeteer's art and mentions the names "Sutradhar Kommajanaha" and "Bara Ha," indicating that the inscription was ordered to be written by the puppeteer Kommoju. Similarly, the Panugallu inscription refers to another puppeteer, Sutradhar Brahmoji.

These "Western" performers likely migrated with the Maharashtrian kings of the Nayaka dynasty in the 17th century. They are believed to have settled along the borders of Maharashtra and Andhra, particularly in the South Indian regions around Hindupur and Bellary under Nayaka rule. This migration supports the current evidence that a significant number of puppeteers in Andhra Pradesh, as well as in Karnataka, are of Maratha origin. These communities speak a dialect of Marathi called Aare, although it is mutually unintelligible between the groups.

This theory is further supported by the fact that similar family names appear in both regions. In Andhra, the Aare community consists of four different families, while in Karnataka, there are thirteen families, including the four from Andhra. This indicates that the Aare community of puppeteers, whether in Karnataka or Andhra, originally migrated from Maharashtra during the Nayaka period or another conquest. Despite their migration, most of these puppeteers adapted by learning Telugu or Kannada texts for their performances, while retaining their native dialect for use in their personal lives. (Sharma, 1985).

Puppetry has long roots in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, with many puppeteers originally performing in Telugu. Over time, especially after the Nayaka rule, they began using multiple languages. The Aare community, known as Kapus in Andhra and Gandholis in Maharashtra, has integrated into Telugu culture while maintaining distinct traditions. Various puppeteer groups in South India, such as the Jangams and Bondilis, have largely ceased performing.

Traditionally, Aare puppeteers traveled between villages for nine months a year, but many have now settled and taken up other jobs as puppetry alone no longer sustains them. Some, like the Aare Kapu Bommalata performers, have preserved their cultural identity through

their unique marriage and burial customs and continue performing during festivals like Sri Rama Navami. They often adopt children from other communities and train them in puppetry.

In 1895, Vanarasa Krishnaji's adoption of Govind Appa in Kadapa led to the founding of the Surabhi family theatre, which transitioned from puppetry to live theatre. The Surabhi groups remain prominent today.

Despite the decline of puppetry due to the rise of movies and modern entertainment, some puppeteers continue their craft out of dedication. Puppet figures are treasured family heirlooms, with the most revered ones, like Rama and Hanuman, worshipped before performances. Some families are closely tied to village temples and perform plays in honor of Lord Rama during Sri Rama Navami.

Visual storytelling in leather puppetry has been a crucial medium for transmitting legends across generations for thousands of years. Utilizing a rich visual vocabulary of folk motifs, such as animals, plants, trees, flowers, gods, goddesses, demons, the sun, and the moon, these motifs effectively communicate myths and legends like the Jataka tales, Ramayana, Bhagavata, and Mahabharata. The folk motifs hold significant interpretative value, functioning as symbols rather than mere signs, imbuing them with deeper meaning.

Puppet Evolves from Performing Art to Visual Art: Puppetry, once solely a performing art, has evolved into a visual art form, especially in the Anantapur and parts of the Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh. Despite being an endangered tradition, puppetry thrives thanks to the efforts of artists, particularly from Nimmalakunta in Anantapur, who have revitalized this ancient craft and taken it to global stages. These traditional artisans, who once focused on puppetry performances, have expanded their skills to create handicrafts adorned with folk motifs, such as lampshades, wall clocks, and wall hangings. Folk motifs in puppetry have long been a vehicle for cultural transmission, carrying forward mythological narratives and artistic traditions. The dedication of these practitioners is essential to preserving this art form, ensuring its continuity, and transmitting mythology to future generations through both performance and visual art.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Research is a cyclical and cumulative process that builds on existing knowledge, drawing from prior studies to provide historical context, theories, and tested methodologies that deepen understanding and prevent duplication. This foundation enhances efficiency and inspires new investigations by highlighting gaps, inconsistencies, or questions for further exploration. Fresh findings are then evaluated concerning existing knowledge, allowing researchers to confirm, refute, or expand upon earlier results. By integrating discoveries with previous data, research progresses toward a more comprehensive and refined body of knowledge, continuously advancing the field. As suggested by Mouly (1964), humans have the distinct advantage of not needing to start from scratch with each generation but can instead build upon the knowledge accumulated over centuries. Reviewing existing literature allows researchers to tap into this accumulated wisdom and understanding.

The literature study involves the systematic examination of a wide range of written works, including formal research reports that present data, findings, and methodologies from past studies, as well as informal sources such as casual observations and opinions that offer personal insights. It also includes comments and suggestions found in various forms of writing, such as books, monographs, bulletins, pamphlets, and magazines. These diverse materials contribute valuable perspectives and supplementary information, providing a rich and multifaceted foundation for understanding a topic. Ultimately, literature study requires piecing together data and ideas from multiple sources to comprehensively understand the subject. In many Southeast Asian countries, including India, traditional puppetry has been predominantly used as a folk medium for entertainment and to convey religious, epic, and mythological messages. Research and literature specifically focused on Folk motifs manifestation in shadow puppetry in India were almost nonexistent. Over the years, popular magazines and journals have occasionally published articles referencing various visual and performing folk arts studies. However, despite India's rich tradition of puppetry, the documented research and available literature in this area remain limited. This chapter aims to present a concise overview of the existing studies and literature on traditional puppetry, emphasizing the significant contributions made and acknowledging the gaps that persist. By reviewing the available sources, this chapter seeks to clarify the current state of research in

traditional puppetry and highlight areas that warrant further exploration. Folk art, and motifs, as well as other visual narrative art forms such as Buddhist stupas, temple paintings from Lepakshi and Hampi, Maharashtra's Chitrakathi paintings, and the Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana's Cherial scrolls.

This chapter offers a concise yet comprehensive overview of the studies, reports, and literature on traditional leather puppetry, with a particular emphasis on the rich cultural heritage of Andhra Pradesh. It uses folk motifs—distinctive designs, symbols, and patterns rooted in local traditions—that play a central role in Andhra Pradesh leather puppetry. These motifs not only showcase the region's artistic heritage but also carry deep cultural and symbolic meanings that shape the aesthetics and storytelling of this art form. By examining existing research, the chapter explores the evolution and significance of these motifs, highlighting how they distinguish Andhra Pradesh puppetry from other regional traditions. The insights gathered serve as a foundation for further exploration of the relationship between visual design, tradition, and the socio-cultural context of leather puppetry in the region. The review highlights three critical areas of research. Firstly, it examines the concept of folk art and motifs, exploring their significance in leather puppetry. It also draws comparisons with other storytelling art forms like Buddha stupas, Chitrakathi, Kalamkari, and the murals of Lepakshi and Hampi to trace the evolution of folk motifs. A particular focus is placed on these motifs' mythological and symbolic meanings, as puppetry's primary role is to preserve and transmit legends across generations.

Secondly, the review investigates shadow puppetry traditions across Asia to provide a broader context for understanding the art form. Lastly, it explores how leather puppetry has served as a metaphorical language for conveying epic stories and legends to the masses, functioning as folk media. Significant contributions to the study of shadow puppetry in Andhra Pradesh include the works of M.S. Nanjunda Rao (2000) and M. Naga Bhushan Sharma (1985), who offered early contemporary accounts of puppeteers' practices, laying a foundation for further research. The book *Indian Puppetry* (2012) by Sampa Ghosh and Utpal K. Banerjee also provides a comprehensive overview of puppetry across India.

Chandra, H. M. (1985), in *Indian Folk Art*, traces the roots of folk art to the earliest periods of Indian history, when it was created by and for the people. John Marshall's *A Guide to Sanchi* (1955) offers a detailed analysis of Sanchi's artistic techniques, while the reliefs of the Bharhut Stupa reflect an advanced understanding of narrative, symbolism, and

decorative art in early Buddhist traditions. Heinrich Zimmer's *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization*, edited by Joseph Campbell, explores the symbolic portrayal of Indian themes, demonstrating how these metaphors became a powerful visual language. Additionally, C. Siva Ramamurti's *Vijayanagara Paintings* (1985) provides a detailed account of the intricate murals on the Maha Mandapa ceilings in the Lepakshi temple.

## **2.1 The Concept of Folk Arts and Motifs**

In their work, Howard, M., & Perkins Morgan (2006) explore "The Anthropology of Arts: A Reflection on its History and Contemporary Issues" within the anthology "The Anthropology of Art: A Reader." They articulate that the anthropology of art investigates human endeavours arising from individual or communal experiences that result in aesthetic success. This field encompasses diverse expressive forms, including literature, painting, music, dance, weaving, poetry, and crafts such as stone carving and woodworking.

While aesthetic success is a primary criterion for categorizing an object as art, other elements—such as individual or communal beliefs, ritual practices, and creators' personal lives—also play a vital role in transforming functional objects into artistic expressions.

Agarwal, R. (2015). *Madhubani Painting: Women Dominated Folk Art*. *International Journal of Applied Research*, when creating any art form, an artist draws deeply from their experiences, directly reflecting their inner world. Throughout history, art has been an integral part of human existence. Early artworks were primarily utilitarian, yet they were also aesthetically pleasing. With the advent of agriculture, humans began to settle, leading to the formation of villages. During this period, art took on a folk-religious character. Folk art, in particular, is closely connected to ordinary people's lives, often reflecting the customs, beliefs, and traditions of specific communities, castes, and religions.

In her study, Varma, P. (2018) examines "Indian Folk Art: Impact on Contemporary Fashion." She emphasizes that folk art is an essential aspect of our civilization, serving as a medium for individuals to convey their joys and sorrows to each other and to the broader community. Folk art creatively expresses people's struggles for identity and cultural heritage by producing beautiful and functional items used in everyday life. Typically crafted by the average citizens of a country or region, folk art reflects the traditional culture embedded in their daily activities. This is especially evident when untrained artisans create or embellish goods during festive occasions.

In their article, Bhattacharya, K., & Dr Abhijit Das (2021, January) explore "Madhubani

Painting: The Marker of Indian Civilization" They note that folk art encompasses a variety of utilitarian and decorative media, including cloth, wood, paper, clay, metal, leather, and more. This art form is created by individuals or communities whose creative skills reflect their cultural identity. The study examines the interrelationships among castes, the themes and styles of paintings, the rise of specialized artists from folk painting traditions, and the evolution of traditional villages into centres of artistic expertise. Additionally, it highlights how traditional community art shifts from its original authenticity to individualistic expressions in contemporary art production.

### **2.1.1 Theoretical Insights on Folk Motifs**

In their work, Goswami, M. P., & Yadav, P. (2019) discuss "Dots and Lines: Semiotics of The Motifs in Gond Painting," explaining that motifs can take on various forms and themes, which can be broadly categorized into four types: geometric, floral, abstract, and animal. Each motif has its origin, evolution, and diversity in shape and presentation. Artisans— weavers, embroiderers, dyers, painters, and printers—utilize these motifs to create visions of beauty deeply rooted in culture, religion, environment, and history. These motifs often arise from a community's religious practices, customs, and social beliefs. Over time, cultural, philosophical, and geographical influences and the practices of various groups can institutionalize or transform these motifs.

Additionally, Daemmrich, H. S. (1985), in "Themes and Motifs in Literature: Approaches, Trends, Definition", identifies five key characteristics of motifs: frequency of recurrence, the likelihood of appearance, the significance of contexts, coherence, and symbolic correlation. In "Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux" (Vol. IV), Thompson, S. (1960) highlights the significant role of folk art in traditional knowledge. Folk art is a medium through which cultural heritage is preserved, expressed, and transmitted across generations. Folk motifs are the smaller components or distinguishing features within folk art and folklore that contribute to creating larger narratives or designs. These motifs can encompass animals, plants, and geometric patterns, each serving a specific cultural or symbolic function. These motifs are often recognizable across various folk traditions and reflect a shared cultural heritage.

In "Dictionariéed Histories de la Langue Française" (Paris: Le Robert), Rey, A. (1992) notes that the term "motif" derives from the Latin word "motives," which translates to

"movement" or "cause of movement." In French, the term evolved to include "reason for acting" and "the dominant subject of a work." It was initially used in the context of music in 1703, and by 1824, it had also been applied to the field of painting. Over time, the concept of a motif expanded to encompass various disciplines.

Webster defines a motif as a single or repeated design or colour that includes decorative elements, often depicting animals, flowers, or trees. Motifs may sometimes appear as blocks or squares, and they can be either uniform in size or vary within a specific work. Serving as the basic building blocks of complex networks, the concept of motifs forms an essential foundation for artistic expression.

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### **2.1.2 Development of Symbols, Themes, and Motif**

In "Luke, Artist and Theologian: Luke's Passion Accounts as Literature," Karris & J R. (1985) discuss the interchangeable use of the terms "motifs" and "themes" in literary analysis. They note that themes often overshadow motifs in discussions, yet both are recognized as two of the most prominent forms of narrative repetition. François Jost (1988) underscores this distinction, describing motifs as "moveable stock devices" that have appeared across various genres, eras, and locations. While motifs and themes can be used interchangeably, critical differences exist between them. Jost remarks, "One critic may call motif what another designates as a theme." However, Morgan emphasizes that these concepts are distinct and serve to define one another.

In "The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory," Wurzbach & Natascha (2005) define the term "motif," while Murfin and Ray(2003) elaborate on the concept of myth in "The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms." Myths symbolize the worldview embraced and conveyed by a culture, expressing common beliefs and assumptions regarding nature, the universe, and the boundaries between the natural and spiritual realms.

The term "myth" refers to both fictional and factual stories and is derived from an ancient Greek word meaning "story" or "plot." A myth represents a belief system often involving supernatural beings or forces central to a culture's identity. Creation or origin myths, in particular, explain how the world existed. These narratives commonly depict the cultural group that tells the story as the original or "real" people. According to Murfin & Ray (2003), such sacred narratives address the beginnings, purposes, and futures of people and their universe. Mythmaking and storytelling are universal cultural practices that provide valuable insights into how individuals perceive and interpret the world. By comparing myths from different cultures, intriguing connections can be found in themes, plots, imagery, and characters, as well as in the phenomena they aim to explain and the issues they address.

In "Myth as a Means of Ordering and Organizing Social Reality," Baklanov, O. A., Erokhin, A. M., Ponarina, N. N., & Akopyan, G. A. (2018) examine the significance of myths across various disciplines, including Sociology, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Media Studies, Folklore Studies, Philology, Marketing, Advertising, Fashion, and Philosophy. Myths are primarily narratives that recount events from the past. In this context, it is pertinent to reference Cassirer (1853), who posited that myths are deeply connected to members of a society, often remaining hidden in obscurity.

Doty, W. G. (2000) in "Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals" emphasizes that myths are differentiated from fantasy by their distinct social implications. While myths are not universal, they are inherently specific to particular cultures, religions, communities, or groups. This social dimension distinguishes myths from fantasy or delusion. From this standpoint, two additional characteristics of myths emerge: (a) myths function as a type of narrative, and (b) they serve as a model of thought.

In "Ramblings of an Illiterate," Joseph, P. (1996) outlines four primary theories of myth: the psychological myth theory, the rational myth theory, the functional myth theory, and the structural myth theory. The rational myth theory posits that myths were created to explain natural forces and events. In contrast, the functional myth theory suggests that various types

of myths evolved as tools for societal control. Structural myth theory examines the variations observed in human thought and nature, while the psychological myth theory asserts that myths are rooted in human emotions.

In their work, Shazia Rehman & Zeba Hasan (2015) discuss the symbolism found in Indian paintings, noting that motifs serve as decorative elements while storytelling in visual art acts as a form of metaphorical language. These visual narratives often represent preserved legends or folklore, transmitted through generations via the recitation of stories.

### **2.1.3 Folk Motifs as a Metaphorical Language**

The term 'mythology' encompasses a rich tapestry of collective experiences that are often preserved in the form of legends or folklore. These narratives are grounded in moral values, guiding humanity in the pursuit of truth. In Indian mythology, most stories focus on the interactions between gods and demons, frequently conveying specific ideologies and concepts. Such narratives remain relevant today through oral traditions and illustrated texts, including the Jataka tales, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Geet Govinda. This study explores Indian paintings that incorporate mythological symbols, examining how these timeless stories are visually represented and interpreted.

In "Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization" (8th ed.), Heinrich Robert Zimmer, J. C. (1992) describes the tree goddess in the Figure Tree Goddess (Bharhut, 2nd century B.C.), who is depicted standing above an elephant. This relationship between an anthropomorphic figure and an animal is common in Indian iconography. The animal, positioned beneath the human representation, is interpreted as a "vehicle" (vahana) that symbolizes the energy and character of the deity. For example, Shiva is often shown riding a bull, while his consort, the Goddess, is depicted as a lion. Their son, Ganesha, the elephant-headed god known as "The Lord and Leader of the Hosts of Shiva" and "The Lord and Master of Obstacles" (vighnesvara), is represented above a rat. This imagery suggests that Ganesha navigates obstacles similarly to how an elephant traverses through a jungle. The rat, although an incongruous mount for the giant, pot-bellied deity, also symbolizes the ability to overcome challenges.

Elephants are known for swiftly moving through the wilderness, trampling underbrush, bending and uprooting trees, and fording rivers and lakes. In contrast, rats can access secured granaries, representing Ganesha's power to conquer any obstacles encountered on one's path. Additionally, Kubera, the overlord of all the genii (yakshas), is frequently

depicted standing atop a crouching man, earning the title "He whose mount or vehicle is a man" (nara-vahana). Kubera and his entourage are genii associated with fertility, wealth, and prosperity, often linked to the earth, mountains, and the treasures of precious stones and metals buried underground. They serve as protective deities of Indian households, influenced by pre-Aryan aboriginal traditions, and play significant roles in Hindu and early Buddhist folklore. The man-vehicle beneath Kubera's feet distinguishes him from other superhuman kings and princes, just as the hoods of cobras set apart the superhuman nagas.

Overall, folk motifs are not simply decorative elements but essential for comprehending a culture's identity and values. These motifs serve as a bridge between the past and the present, preserving cultural heritage while fostering ongoing creativity and expression within folk traditions.

The symbolism likely predates the chalice of the ancient Sumerian king, Gudea. However, Mesopotamian Sumer may have served as the origin of this formula, travelling westward to Greece and modern Europe while also moving eastward into ancient India and later reaching more distant regions like Indonesia.

A magnificent elephant, searching for its share of lotus stalks and roots, has wandered too deeply into the water and has been captured and bound by the serpents of the deep. The great creature, struggling helplessly, ultimately calls upon the assistance of the High God. In response, Vishnu appears, seated upon Garuda. The cosmic lotus is referred to as "The highest form or aspect of Earth," as well as "The Goddess Moisture" and "The Goddess Earth." It embodies the essence of the Mother Goddess, through whom the Absolute enters into creation. Most importantly, the characteristics that will define her in the later "classical" period of Hindu mythology and art are already evident in this earliest hymn in Puranas. In this apocryphal hymn, which is appended to the Rig Veda, the Lotus Goddess is identified by her two traditional names, Shri and Lakshmi, and intricately linked to the lotus symbol in many ways.

The elephant, serving as a "determinant," is commonly found beneath the anthropomorphic symbols of divine powers in the early Buddhist reliefs at Bhirhut. Many deities depicted are not labelled, making identification difficult; however, some are recognised by the names of certain yakshas and yakshinis—male and female earth spirits representing fertility and wealth. The depiction of a pair of elephants alongside the goddess Lotus is also prominent in Buddhist art from the second and first centuries B.C., as seen in sites like Barhut and Sanchi.

This motif can be traced throughout the extensive history of Hindu and Buddhist iconography, extending to the late Hindu temples in the southern regions of India. In Hindu miniatures and contemporary famous drawings, the image of the elephant remains a frequently recurring theme.

The ethical foundation of mythological narratives is deeply rooted in moral values, guiding humanity to pursue truth. In Indian mythology, most stories centre around gods and demons, often conveying specific ideologies and concepts. These narratives remain prevalent today through oral traditions or illustrated texts like the Jataka tales, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Geet Govinda. This study explores Indian paintings incorporating mythological symbols, examining how these timeless stories are visually represented and interpreted.

#### **2.1.4 Leather Puppetry Art Motifs as a Media**

Visual storytelling, a form of non-verbal communication, dates back to the Prehistoric era when humans used cave paintings to record their achievements and experiences. These visuals allow us to trace history, culture, and lifestyle across time. Visual storytelling has continually evolved from ancient hieroglyphics and Chinese tapestries to statues, canvases, photographs, film, television, and multimedia. It involves conveying messages through visual media, such as graphics, images, pictures, and videos, and is widely used in film, video production, advertising, marketing, and online learning. (Scherman, 2016) The key to effective visual storytelling is choosing the right way to present information to the audience. When paired with the right visuals and intention, it can create a powerful impact, evoking emotions and leaving a lasting impression.

In "The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain" (1985), Susana Huntington discusses the Buddha stupas and various visual storytelling art forms as exemplifications of the profound metaphorical language inherent in folk art motifs. These structures and artworks are not simply decorative; they are imbued with rich symbolism that communicates spiritual and philosophical teachings. The stupa, with its dome shape, represents the universe and the path to enlightenment, encapsulating the Buddha's teachings and the journey toward nirvana. Each element of the stupa, from the base to the pinnacle, holds specific symbolic meanings, such as the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space). These elements also reflect the stages of spiritual attainment, making the stupa a detailed visual representation of the path to enlightenment. Hetmański's (2020, August) paper, "Visual metaphor and its narrative

function," delves into Forceville's analysis of visual metaphors, posing two critical philosophical and epistemological questions. Firstly, it investigates how universal themes are depicted, perceived, conveyed, and understood in metaphorical paintings. Secondly, it examines what differentiates the structures of visual metaphors in these paintings from purely literary parabolic forms. Through the analysis of selected symbolic and metaphorical works by Jacek Malczewski, the paper aims to explore the degree to which his painting methods and narrative structures are intertwined with Polish national and cultural history. Using both conceptual metaphor and blending theories, Hetmański elucidates the significance of these methods and structures in cognitive studies and the broader context of the history and theory of fine arts.

Cognitive (2021, June 1) discusses the key components of visual storytelling, noting that professionals in various fields have identified essential elements based on their common usage and similarities. Through content analysis, five primary elements have been selected as most appropriate for effective visual storytelling.

Meanwhile, El-Desouky (2020, October) explores the role of visual storytelling in advertising, emphasizing that storytelling is a fundamental aspect that evokes emotions and conveys insights. Narratives are employed to express ideas, opinions, and personal experiences, crucial in capturing audience attention, particularly on social media. El-Desouky highlights that every effective story should consist of three essential parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end, with the conclusion providing a sense of closure and motivating the audience to take action. Furthermore, effective storytelling is equally as vital as the visuals themselves in a successful visual marketing strategy for social media.

## **2.2 Leather puppetry**

Parmar, S. (1994) discusses traditional folk media in India, highlighting puppetry as a significant and ancient art form that has long functioned as a powerful medium for entertainment and communication. This practice traced back to ancient scriptures, likely emerged from early humans' desire to create life-like movements through figures. Over time, puppetry evolved into theatrical performances incorporating various artistic elements, showcasing its adaptability and cultural significance.

The origins of leather puppetry are particularly ancient and challenging to pinpoint. The narratives depicted through puppets often weave together elements of myths, legends, and history, with many of these stories having been preserved through oral traditions for

generations. This art form's evolution can be traced from India to regions such as Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bali, as well as through China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The spread of leather puppetry has been significantly influenced by the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism, with central themes often revolving around religious principles, economic achievements, and military exploits.

Shaika, S., Lal, R., and Janjua, M. (2021) discuss the effectiveness of utilizing folk media as a powerful communication tool in India to advance Sustainable Development Goal 3. To engage effectively with the Indian population, connecting with their traditional values is essential. Folk media, deeply embedded in rural culture, play a significant role in this connection. Respondents often view these media as credible due to their use of familiar signs and symbols. Furthermore, folk media convey messages in culturally relevant and accessible environments, fostering a socio-psychological bond that enhances understanding of the communicated messages. Traditional folk arts such as Tamasha, Nautanki, and Puppetry have historically been employed to educate and motivate the populace towards change.

Participation is a crucial aspect of communication and development, which is why traditional folk media is particularly effective for development initiatives, as they function on a participatory model.

Padmanabha, V. K., and Kumar, S. (2020) discuss the role of folk media in health communication, specifically through Yakshagana, a traditional South Indian dance-drama focusing on COVID-19. Puppetry, a revered form of folk theatre in India, has been a respected entertainment source for centuries. The government and non-governmental organisations have effectively utilised puppet shows to disseminate developmental messages, emphasising folk media's efficacy. Puppetry, theatre, dance, and storytelling are potent instruments for successful health communication.

Mahan, P. N. (1985) emphasises that traditional performing arts significantly impact messages due to their high acceptability and credibility. This is mainly because of their direct, live interactions, which render them more effective than other mediums such as radio, television, or films.

Tyagi, B. T., and Sinha, A. (2004) highlight the profound cultural significance of traditional folk performances in India's history, noting their deep roots in the country's social and artistic landscape. These performances have long served as more than just entertainment;

they have played a crucial role in communication, particularly in rural areas where access to mass media and formal education might be limited. Recognizing the effectiveness of folk performances as tools for spreading important information, the Government of India has harnessed them for public outreach since the 1950s.

Various government agencies, such as the Directorate of Field Publicity and the Song and Drama Division, have organized live folk performances, including puppet shows, dramas, dances, ballads, and harikathas (a traditional storytelling art form). These performances were designed to engage rural audiences and effectively communicate messages about key developmental issues, such as family planning, health, adult education, family welfare, and agricultural practices.

In recent years, the scope of these performances has expanded to address more contemporary and urgent issues. For example, live folk performances have been used to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS prevention, promote small savings, and combat social problems like female infanticide and child labor. Additionally, the National Council for Science and Technology Communication has adopted puppetry as a powerful medium to promote science and technology among rural populations. By integrating traditional forms of expression with modern developmental messages, folk performances have continued to be an influential means of communication and education in India, blending cultural heritage with social progress.

Currel and David (1985) assert that puppetry, in its modern incarnation, possesses significant potential as a communication medium. A renowned puppeteer notes the continued appeal of puppetry, attributing its enduring popularity to the captivating nature of the puppets, which effectively attract and maintain audience attention.

Chandra, H. M. (1985), in his book *Indian Folk Art*, highlights its connection to the earliest periods of Indian history when art was genuinely created by and for the people. During this time, individuals from all social standings had the opportunity and the right to engage in crafting functional yet aesthetically pleasing objects.

Even in the earliest villages, signs of a transition toward a class-based society began to emerge. However, in the term's original sense, many early village artefacts—such as painted vessels and terracotta figurines—can still be classified as true folk art. These creations predated the advent of class divisions and were communal. Every aspect of village culture

and tribal life was influenced by cultural exchanges, illustrating the reciprocal relationship between folk art and high art.

The objective is to deepen the understanding of folk art, positioning it as a legitimate art form. A balanced approach has been adopted, combining a historical overview of folk art's development with an analysis based on material types. This analysis reveals a clear preference for specific techniques, modes of expression, and particular categories within the fine arts. A comprehensive examination indicates that painting holds significant prominence within folk art, highlighting the importance of two-dimensional art. The earliest evidence and regional distribution of these art forms substantiate this conclusion.

Techniques such as painting, weaving, and plaiting are firmly rooted in folk art traditions, closely intertwined with its symbols, narrative elements, and visual styles. Other folk-art forms, including pottery, wood carving, metalwork, and, on occasion, stone sculpture, will also be considered in this discussion.

Focusing on tradition and historical heritage should serve the present while guiding future developments. With this aim in mind, it is crucial to discuss the contemporary significance of Indian folk art and its role in today's context.

Nagabhushana Sarma delves in his book called *Tolubommatalata: The Shadow Puppet Theatre of Andhra Pradesh* (1985) into the rich tradition of Andhra's shadow puppetry, examining its origins, clan affiliations, and various aspects of the craft such as puppet-making techniques, colouring, storage, figure design, troupe organization, script interpretation, stage setup, manipulation, and related rituals. Sarma highlights that, historically, puppeteers led a nomadic lifestyle, travelling for about nine months of the year and remaining in each location for just a few days. However, this tradition has changed significantly recently, with many puppeteers now settling in permanent locations.

The socio-economic challenges faced by these troupes are concerning. While some continue their traditional itinerant practices, others from the northern coastal regions have shifted to vending activities, trading plastic and stainless-steel utensils for old clothes, which they mend and resell to the less fortunate. In the southern districts, troupes often work as agricultural labourers. Influenced by the rise of cinema, the younger generation shows diminishing interest in maintaining the puppet tradition. Additionally, a cooperative puppet-making centre in Nimmalakunta, Anantapur district, now focuses on producing puppets for commercial markets, with only a few families actively engaged in the traditional craft.

A recent contribution to the study of Karnataka puppetry is Rao's 2000 work, *Leather Puppetry in Karnataka*, which compiles 35 years of research on the state's shadow puppet tradition. It provides a detailed exploration of leather puppetry, covering its origins and historical context, the literary sources of performance episodes, puppet-making techniques, stylistic Asia, performance details, artist challenges, and promotion efforts. variations, comparisons with other state traditions, multi-religious influences across

Rao highlights a distinctive feature of the Karnataka tradition: both eyes are projected in the puppet's profile, a style unique to this region and absent in other state traditions. The author also notes that the Killekyatha puppeteers have lost the patronage of local communities, forcing many to pursue other occupations. In some villages, the tradition of puppet-making has entirely disappeared. Over the past 30 years, the Tungabhadra irrigation project further contributed to the decline of this art form, as many puppeteers shifted to agriculture

In his 1997 book, *"Folklore of Andhra Pradesh"*, Telugu folklorist Raju provides a comprehensive exploration of various folk traditions, with a notable focus on Tholubommatala, the traditional shadow puppet theatre of Andhra Pradesh. In the chapter dedicated to folk art and entertainment, Raju emphasizes Tholubommatala as one of the most venerable performing arts, tracing its origins back to the 3rd century B.C. He delves into the historical development of this art form, offering insights into its evolution over centuries. Raju also examines the thematic content of Tholubommatala performances, highlighting the stories and cultural narratives depicted through the puppetry. Additionally, he details the manipulation techniques used in the art form, including the methods of controlling and animating the puppets to bring the stories to life. This chapter serves as a valuable resource for understanding the deep historical roots, artistic significance, and technical aspects of Tholubommatala, reflecting its enduring cultural importance in Andhra Pradesh.

In his 2001 book *Performance Tradition in India*, renowned Indian scholar of folk and traditional theatre, Suresh Awasthi, provides a concise overview of various art forms practiced across India. He dedicates a section to puppetry, discussing shadow puppet traditions in Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Kerala. The book briefly covers topics such as the creation and manipulation of puppets, the migratory lifestyle of itinerant

performers, and the current state of these art forms.

In her 1975 book *Handicrafts of India*, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay delves into the rich tradition of puppetry in India, highlighting its cultural, religious, and social significance. Among the many forms of puppetry she discusses, shadow puppetry holds a unique place due to its deep-rooted association with temple rituals and community festivals.

According to Chattopadhyay, leather shadow puppets were not merely a form of entertainment but were revered as auspicious symbols, embodying spiritual and ritualistic importance. These intricately crafted leather puppets, often painted in vibrant colours and perforated to allow light to pass through, were considered to bring good fortune to the community. Their use in temple festivals was integral to religious ceremonies, where they were performed as offerings to deities.

These performances served as acts of propitiation, a way to appease the gods and ensure divine favor. Communities believed that performing shadow puppet shows during festivals could invoke blessings for key aspects of life, such as a bountiful harvest, adequate rainfall, and protection from diseases or epidemics. The puppets, with their mythical and religious themes, symbolized the connection between the human and divine realms, making them a crucial part of ensuring the well-being of the community.

Through these performances, communities expressed their dependence on nature and the divine, reflecting the harmonious relationship between traditional art forms and religious beliefs.

Sampa Ghosh and Utpal K. Banerjee's (2012) book *Indian Puppets* offers a comprehensive exploration of Indian puppetry, detailing its various forms, craftsmanship, and cultural connections. Focusing on the traditional string puppets of Rajasthan, the book covers 17-18 distinct styles of puppetry in India, delving into their history, origins, and the creative world of puppeteers. Ghosh, an accomplished puppeteer, and Banerjee, a passionate advocate for Indian art and culture, provide technical insights and engaging narratives, making the book a valuable resource on the art and heritage of Indian puppetry.

In his 1974 book *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, James R. Brandon delves into the essential characteristics of theatre forms across the region, offering insights drawn from both his personal observations and interviews with practitioners. The book not only traces the

historical evolution of Southeast Asian theatre but also examines its role as an art form, a cultural institution, and a dynamic mode of communication within diverse societies.

Brandon provides a comprehensive overview of various theatre traditions, with a particular focus on shadow puppet theatre, a prominent genre in several Southeast Asian countries. His analysis touches on the unique practices in Indonesia, particularly in the islands of Java and Bali, as well as in Malaysia, Cambodia, and Thailand. These regions have rich traditions of shadow puppetry, which have developed distinct cultural and religious significance over time.

The chapter dedicated to the development of theatre genres gives special attention to the intricacies of these forms, with detailed descriptions of the techniques, stories, and symbolic meanings embodied in the performances. Brandon also explores the social hierarchy of theatre troupes in these cultures, offering insights into the prestige, roles, and communal status of performers, directors, and musicians involved in theatrical productions.

Of particular interest is his brief yet insightful account of *Wayang Kulit*, the shadow play tradition of Indonesia. In this section, Brandon sheds light on the performers themselves—highlighting the skills, training, and cultural importance of the puppeteers, known as *dalang*, who play a central role in maintaining the heritage of these ancient performances. The book thus provides a rich tapestry of how theatre, especially shadow puppetry, serves not only as entertainment but also as a significant cultural and communicative institution in Southeast Asia.

In *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (1993), edited by James R. Brandon, the emphasis is placed on various forms of theatre across Asia, focusing on the cultural importance of puppetry, especially shadow theatre. The guide highlights the widespread presence of leather shadow plays, which span from India in the west, across Southeast Asia—including Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines—and reaching as far as China in the east. It offers concise overviews of India's unique shadow puppet traditions, such as Gombeyatta, Pavakoothu, Ravana Chhaya, and Tolubommallata.

In his 1978 booklet on Ravana Chhaya, Jiwan Pani, a folklorist and Oriya poet, provides an in-depth examination of the shadow puppet tradition unique to Orissa. He delves into its historical roots, naming conventions, themes, and the detailed process of crafting the puppets. Pani also explores the techniques used in performing, including how the puppets are manipulated,

the arrangement of the stage, the use of light, and the role of music in the shows. He highlights the performance of various episodes from the Ramayana, which are central to the tradition.

Pani expresses concern about the imminent disappearance of Ravana Chhaya, noting that only one puppeteer remains active in this art form. To prevent its extinction, he advocates for efforts to revitalize the tradition, emphasizing the need for public interest and financial backing. His suggestions for revival include initiatives proposed in the Fifth Five-Year Plan, such as providing funding for training new puppeteers, encouraging regular performances in rural and urban settings, and incorporating Ravana Chhaya into school curricula as an educational resource.

A shadow puppet tradition from Andhra Pradesh, South India, by Goldberg Belle(1984). The research offers ethnographic details of nine troupes, explores various performance elements, and compares this tradition with other performing arts in South India. It also looks into the use of literary materials within these performances. Only in the mid-20th century puppeteers lacked consistent sponsorship or patronage, previously receiving support through land donations or purchases of puppet-making materials. However, the rise of touring talkies, known as "tent cinema," further eroded their financial backing, forcing many troupes to seek alternative incomes.

Goldberg Belle notes that during the 19th and 20th centuries, puppeteers began adapting their art to contemporary tastes. This included redesigning traditional puppet styles and shortening performances from six hours to two or three hours to accommodate urban audiences. These adaptations, the scholar suggests, mark a period of significant change for Tolubommatala, offering a unique opportunity to study the tradition in transition.

“Shadow play” by Shenoy (2000) recounts a legend involving King Krishnadevaraya, who once honored a puppeteer for his performance. Shenoy notes that puppeteers were so prosperous in the past that they would donate entire villages in charity to fellow artists. She also reveals that, historically, puppet performances were carried out by large family groups, but this has shifted to smaller family units. Male puppeteers often had more than one wife, with the women actively participating in performances. Shenoy points out that women artists in Andhra Pradesh hold higher status, as they contribute to performances and receive a bride price, or *voli*, during marriage.

.Shenoy further mentions that contemporary Tholubommallata performances now incorporate themes on social issues like family planning and health awareness. She also highlights the success of a cooperative society run by artists in Nimmalakunta, Ananthapur district. This cooperative, supported by the Andhra Pradesh Handicrafts Department, produces small puppets and lampshades for the commercial market.

“Karnataka Puppetry”(1988)by Krishnaiah, is the first book on Karnataka leather puppetry. It covers a wide range of topics, including the history of the art form, cultural anthropology, stagecraft, lighting and screen techniques, musical instruments, and ethnographic details like kinship systems. The book also draws from census and Gazetteer reports about the puppeteer tribes, and explores the puppet-making process, associated rituals, iconography, border stone inscriptions, and the maintenance of puppets. It even touches on the tattooing art practiced by women and the performance aspects of puppetry.

Krishnaiah notes that during the Maratha and Vijayanagara dynasties, puppeteers often served as spies, disguised as artisans and charmers. The book also links the shadow puppeteers with the Killikynta or Sillekyta, wandering tribes in some districts.

In his 1985 book Pavakoothu, Swaminathan offers a detailed exploration of the rich puppetry traditions found in the southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. He delves into the origins and development of these regional puppetry forms, tracing their evolution from ancient times and examining the significant role that temples and religious institutions have played in supporting and sustaining them. Swaminathan discusses how these puppetry traditions were deeply intertwined with religious practices, often being performed as part of temple rituals and festivals to convey mythological stories, especially those from the epics such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The book also broadens its scope to include insights into global puppetry traditions, offering a comparative perspective on how different cultures have embraced puppetry as an art form. Swaminathan emphasizes the universal cultural significance of puppetry and calls for greater efforts to preserve and promote this traditional art form. Despite its broad title, Pavakoothu primarily focuses on shadow puppetry, a specific genre prevalent in the southern states, particularly Kerala, where it has a deep connection with temple rituals and religious storytelling.

Swaminathan's work advocates for renewed attention and support for puppetry to prevent

the decline of this ancient art form, highlighting the need for patronage, training, and public performances to ensure its survival in the modern world.

The article titled Influence of Leather Puppets on Upcoming Trends In Fashion & Textile Industry-By Sameeksha Pareek And Prof. Himadri Ghosh, One of the most important and beautiful inventions of the human race, leather puppetry allows individuals to inscribe their thoughts and ideas on leather before delivering them to the world to inspire the perception of numerous trends and dimensions of diverse culture and art. Vedic and historical announcements were where it all began, but as time went on, it also evolved into decorations and atmosphere mementos. Originally used as a form of entertainment, the folds of leather puppets have occasionally changed their personalities. They have performed various acts with a changing pace of development where open theatres have transformed into townships. Although leather puppets have been used as home décor and furnishings, the appeal of this craft has not diminished. The beauty of the art of leather puppetry can be found practically everywhere in the country, from Karnataka to Kerala, from Orissa to Rajasthan. The beauty of art has its areas and notions, but it has remained magnificent and breathtaking. Given that a puppet is the vehicle through which a puppeteer exhibits his creativity, it is important to note that puppetry calls for the highest level of expertise and commitment.

Puppetry as a form of Mass Communication: Indian Perspective –By Anindita Chattopadhyay(2017), this paper focuses on how puppetry is a powerful full mass communication medium and the types of puppetries in India. Shadow puppetry also plays a social role and helps in psychological therapies.

The piece "Leather Puppetry: The Art and Tradition in Andhra Pradesh" by Dr. Mallikarjuna Chiruthoti was released in July 2019. The article talks about how computer-aided procedures and traditional expertise were used to create leather puppet art. Folk art known as leather puppetry has been practised for many years in India, especially in the state of Andhra Pradesh. The article emphasises how crucial it is to keep this historic art form alive and spread awareness of it to upcoming generations.

In leather puppetry, puppets are made from goat or sheep leather and painted and embellished with elaborate designs. The Ramayana and Mahabharata epics, among other tales from Indian mythology and folklore, are told using puppets. The puppets in leather puppet shows are often lit by oil lamps or electric lights and performed at night.

The article also covers the connections between leather puppetry and other folk arts,

including Tholubommalata, a shadow puppet theatre, and Kalamkari, a hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile. It underlines the necessity of modernity while retaining traditional knowledge to maintain the existence of this antiquated art form.

Jurkowski, H. (2009) provides a historical perspective on leather puppetry, reiterating its ancient origins and the difficulty in identifying its exact beginnings. The stories conveyed through puppetry often blend myths, legends, and historical accounts, many of which have been orally transmitted across generations. The evolution of leather puppetry has roots in India and connects to various cultural expressions in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Bali, China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The influence of Hinduism and Buddhism has significantly contributed to the dissemination of this art form, with central themes often revolving around religious teachings, economic progress, and military history. Sharma's (1985) book provides a detailed account of the shadow play in Andhra Pradesh, while Krishnaiah (1998) focuses on puppetry in Karnataka. Govindaraju's (1993) and Rao's (2000) work addresses Karnataka's shadow puppetry traditions.

Lastly, Pandey, R. (2012) discusses Tolpava Koothu, a traditional shadow theatre from Kerala in southwestern India. The term "Tol" refers to leather, "Pava" denotes figures, and "Koothu" or "Kuthu" signifies dance or play. This form of shadow puppetry, featuring leather puppets, is prevalent in the northern districts of Kerala, especially in Palakkad and Malappuram. The exploration of puppetry and design across various cultures highlights the rich tapestry of artistic tradition and innovation. For instance, the works of Foley (2012) shed light on the diverse puppetry arts in Thailand, Vietnam, and Korea, while Rault and China (2012) provide insights into the unique characteristics of Chinese puppetry, all documented in the World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts available through UNIMA. This cultural exchange is mirrored in textile design, where Purwar and Shristi (2021) discuss motifs as a language of artistic tradition, emphasising their significance in representing local identities. Furthermore, the intricate murals at the Virabhadra Temple in Lepakshi, as detailed by Map Academy (2022), reflect a similar dedication to artistic expression. The work of Muthu Kumaraswamy (2012) on Tolu Bommalatam emphasises the importance of this puppetry form within Indian culture, paralleling the significance of motifs discussed by Thompson (1960) in the Motif-Index of Folk-Literature. Lastly, the digital analysis of Lepakshi Temple paintings by Rao, Thakur, and Singh (2016) contributes to understanding

how traditional art forms can be preserved and appreciated in the contemporary context, further connecting visual arts and performance within cultural heritage.

Anjali and Lingala Siva Deepti Reddy's research, titled "Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Practices: Reflections on the Folkloric Forms of Teyyam and Tolu Bommalata," explores how folklore, as a crucial aspect of human cognition, lifestyle, and worldview, reveals the complex layers of human existence across generations. Their study highlights how these folkloric traditions contribute to a sustainable future through their cultural dimensions, social functions, and ecological teachings.

This research explores how two distinct folkloric forms from separate geographic regions exemplify sustainable values embedded within their communities. Focusing on the ritualistic performance of Teyyam from Kolathunadu and the folk-art form Tolu Bommalata from the Nimmalakunta region, it highlights the deep connection between indigenous knowledge systems and their natural and cultural landscapes, showcasing a sustainable model. Teyyam, a cultic practice in Kolathunadu, is strongly linked to the region's tribal culture, reflecting its environmental, social, and cultural values. Meanwhile, Tolu Bommalata, a celebrated folk tradition of shadow puppetry from Nimmalakunta, merges performing and visual arts in its unique storytelling and entertainment. Utilizing a qualitative perspective, the research employs ethnographic methods, supported by the documentation and analysis of the tangible aspects of folklore. Beyond highlighting the cultural diversity of Indian folklore and crafts, the study reveals their coexistence with the landscape, embodying environmental, social, and cultural values, and thus demonstrating a sustainable model within Indian folklore.

A review of studies and literature highlights the global diversity of shadow puppetry, with a focus on Andhra Pradesh's Tholu Bommalata, a rich tradition of leather puppetry that brings epic tales like the Ramayana and Mahabharata to life. Despite its cultural and historical significance, academic research on this art form is limited, especially concerning the challenges faced by puppeteers. Many artists, often from marginalized communities, struggle with financial difficulties, shrinking audiences, and modern entertainment trends, threatening the tradition's survival. Little attention has been given to how globalization has affected puppetry practices. This underscores the need for further research to document and preserve this valuable cultural heritage.

### **2.3 Folk Motifs: Visual Storytelling in Indian Art Forms**

Caputo and Anthony, C. (2003) explore the concept of visual storytelling in their work

**Visual Storytelling: The Art and Technique.** Visual storytelling is the art of conveying ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons through a sequence of interconnected events, whether in written or oral form. This method is a powerful tool for effective learning, as visual images have played a vital role in communication and information dissemination throughout history. According to Caputo, visual storytelling involves narrating a story through various media that blend still images, moving visuals, and graphic elements. This technique enhances the narrative by integrating images, graphics, illustrations, films, and auditory elements, including music, voice, and sound effects, creating a more immersive and engaging experience for the audience.

John Marshall's *A Guide to Sanchi* (1955) offers a comprehensive understanding of Sanchi and its artistic techniques. The reliefs of the Bharhut Stupa demonstrate a profound grasp of narrative, symbolism, and decorative art, characteristic of early Buddhist traditions. These techniques reflect the cultural, spiritual, and educational values of the time, establishing Bharhut as a crucial site in Buddhist art history.

While the Sanchi Stupa is notable for its decorative gateways and grand domes, Bharhut stands out for its intricate reliefs and narrative complexity. On the other hand, Amaravati is recognised for its elaborate scene representations and floral motifs. Together, these stupas are critical religious monuments and key artistic legacies that showcase the evolution of Buddhist art in India.

During Ashoka's reign, stupas gained special significance among Buddhists. Ashoka is said to have distributed the Buddha's relics across his empire, enshrining them in numerous stupas—legend credits him with building 84,000. The relic stupa became a central object of veneration, and stupas were built to glorify the Buddha's relics and other sacred objects or sites. Over time, dedicating a stupa, whether it contained relics or not, was seen as a worthy deed, helping the patron move closer to salvation.

The Sunga dynasty, which lasted a little over a century until around 70 B.C., was succeeded by the Kanvas or the Andhras. The Andhras, dominant in the west and south of India, likely extended their influence over eastern Malwa a few decades before the Christian era. Under their rule, the early school of Indian art peaked, and some of Sanchi's most magnificent structures, including the four gateways of the Great Stupa, were erected. One of these, the southern gateway, bears an inscription recording a donation from Anamda, the chief artisan of the Andhra king Sri Satakarni.

The Jataka legends, which played a crucial role in the development of Buddhism, tell the stories of the Buddha's past lives, spanning 550 tales of his incarnations as various beings. These stories were widely known by the 2nd century B.C., as evidenced by numerous illustrations on the Bharhut Stupa. Each Jataka begins with an incident from the Buddha's life that prompted him to recount a past life. After the story, the Buddha reveals the characters' identities in their current forms. These legends, often accompanied by verses (Gathas), form an invaluable collection of fables, shedding light on ancient Indian folklore and civilisation.

Appleton, N. (2024) explores the "Kakkata-Jataka" stories at Bharhut, highlighting a medallion where an elephant emerges from the water, accompanied by a crab on its hind foot and two other elephants in the background, potentially representing the Bodhisattva's mate. An aquatic bird is depicted swallowing a fish, with additional fish swimming nearby. This relief showcases folk motifs—birds, crabs, elephants, fish, and water—demonstrating how Bharhut's sculptures communicate with viewers.

In *A History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon*, A. Smith, V. (1911) examines the artistic styles on the outer sides of gateway pillars. One design contrasts formal geometric patterns with bold, flowing elements, though the latter somewhat weakens the architectural strength of the pillar. The birth scene of Buddha features Maya seated on a lotus, flanked by two elephants pouring water over her. The lintel has a lotus tree of life and elaborate floral borders. The variety of patterns across medallions and bars is noteworthy, illustrating a charming lotus design worthy of close examination.

Dallapiccola, A. K. (2019) discusses the Lepakshi murals in Andhra Pradesh, which are significant examples of art from the Vijayanagara Empire. Built in the mid-sixteenth century by governors Virupanna Nayaka and Viranna, the temple features these murals across the ceilings of the maha mandapa and various shrines. The paintings depict themes from mythology and courtly life, including scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranic texts, illustrating the richness of cultural narratives in this artwork.

In *Vijayanagara Paintings* (1985), C. Siva Ramamurti describes the intricate murals of the Maha Mandapa ceilings in Lepakshi temple. The central figure of Virabhadra is surrounded by his consort Viranna and the ram-headed Daksha, who prostrates at the deity's feet. This elaborate composition is divided into thirteen panels, each featuring sub-panels that narrate scenes from the Sthalapurana (the local mythological history), as well as a procession

showing a guru carried in a palanquin by guards. Surrounding this mural are decorative paintings of mythical animals, birds, devotees, dancers, and musicians, emphasizing both mythological and cultural elements.

The clothing and adornments of the figures in these murals reflect the diverse material culture of the Vijayanagara Empire, which integrated various cultural influences. The style and content of these murals are considered precursors to the Leather Puppetry and Kalamkari painting traditions of Andhra Pradesh. The motifs of birds, animals, and foliage from the Lepakshi murals are now widely adapted in contemporary textiles, tapestries, and rugs.

Most leather puppets seen today were designed after the Vijayanagara period. The Kilyekatha community, originally from Maharashtra, migrated to South India centuries ago and helped preserve this art form. The making of leather puppets incorporates techniques from Chitrakathi paintings, which share stylistic similarities with the puppets. Chitrakathi, a unique art form, uses painted visuals in natural light to accompany recitations of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and other epics. It is believed that similar visuals were once created on leather and shown with light and shadow effects, leading to the evolution of leather puppetry from Chitrakathi.

Chitrakathi also draws inspiration from Jain miniature painting, where scientific accuracy is often overlooked to allow the artist greater creative freedom. The Jain miniature technique presents objects from multiple dimensions on a flat surface, often enlarging key elements of a scene while minimizing others to enhance storytelling.

Rajvanshi, R.A. (2013) discusses Phad painting, a renowned cloth painting tradition from Rajasthan, which serves as a visual accompaniment to ceremonies involving the singing and recitation of deeds of folk hero deities. These scroll paintings, particularly significant in the desert state, are created on long cloths known as "Phad." The oldest available Phad paintings, dating back to the late 19th or early 20th century, feature legends depicted on large rectangular cloths. Devnarayan Phads measure 35 feet by 5 feet, while Pabuji-ki-Phads are typically 15 feet by 5 feet.

In *Beautiful Timeless Art: Kalamkari Painting* (2021), D.A. Rani discusses Kalamkari, a hand-painted cotton textile art from Andhra Pradesh. Created using a 20-step process, Kalamkari uses only natural dyes. Two main styles of Kalamkari exist the Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam styles. The art was traditionally associated with temples and focused on

establishing unique religious identities, depicting scrolls, temple hangings, chariot banners, and religious epics such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, the first chairperson of the All-India Handicrafts Board, is credited with revitalizing Kalamkari in the 1950s alongside Jonnalagadda Lakshmaiah and Kalppa in the temple town of Srikalahasti.

Chandra, D. M. (1986) explores Jain Miniature Paintings from Western India, noting that the Chitrakathi works draw inspiration from this painting style to illustrate stories effectively. In these artistic forms, scientific accuracy is often sacrificed for creative expression, allowing artists the freedom to develop characters uniquely. The Jain miniature technique employs a multi-dimensional perspective on a flat surface, where key elements of an event may be emphasized through more enormous proportions while less critical details are minimized. Significantly, most puppets are presented inside profiles, with both eyes visible and hands posed in interpretative gestures, often complemented by floral motifs. This visual composition closely resembles figures found in Jain paintings, enhancing aesthetic appeal and creating an illusionary effect that engages viewers by connecting the imagined attributes of epic characters with the unfolding narratives.

Brokerhof, W. and Agnes (2006) define motifs in cultural anthropology and folklore as recurrent elements in the artistic traditions of a community. Such motifs can be identified in various forms of literature—both oral and written—as well as in visual and textile arts and music. They are essential components of a society's culture, functioning as valuable cultural resources.

Da Fonseca, A. (2016) examines the continuity and change in contemporary Cheriya paintings from Telangana, India, noting that this esteemed ancient painting tradition is recognised globally. The Cheriya painting style is rooted in the small village of Cheriya, with some historians asserting that the Mughals brought these paintings to India in the 16th century. However, many argue that its origins can be traced back to the fifth century in India itself. Influences from Kalamkari and Deccani scroll paintings are evident in Cheriya artworks, particularly those found at significant temples such as Pilalamarri in Mahbubnagar and the hill temple of Tripurantaka, which share similarities with Kakatiya-style paintings from the 12th century. Temple art traditions have heavily shaped the characteristics of Cheriya paintings.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

India's puppetry tradition, especially in Andhra Pradesh, remains a vibrant storytelling medium, particularly in Guntur and Anantapur districts where leather puppetry, or Tholu Bommalata, thrives. Crafted from treated animal hides and painted in bright colours, these flat puppets are designed to project intricate shadows when illuminated behind a white cloth screen. The translucent sections allow light to pass through, creating a captivating visual effect reminiscent of a television screen. Despite modern advancements, this ancient art form mesmerizes audiences, conveying cultural stories, moral lessons, and mythological tales through its dynamic, visually engaging performances.

Traditional Andhra Pradesh "Tholubommalata"(Leather puppetry) has unique features in this area, and Leather Puppets are made of animal skin. The art of puppetry making is very crucial in leather puppetry, which involves the process of leather making to drawing the images, colouring, and hole punching according to the design. The puppet cut-outs are intricately perforated, with split bamboo sticks attached vertically to them, allowing for smooth and precise manipulation during performances. The rich use of motifs in Andhra Pradesh's leather puppetry art has evolved, reflecting subtle changes in folk motif design, material usage, and decorative details into these motifs' associations, meanings, and symbolism, extending beyond mere decorative imagery to construct artistic facades. In some instances, different motifs mimic original forms.

Buddha stupas, temples, and significant folk visual storytelling paintings are crucial in preserving traditions. Folk designs in visual storytelling paintings express power and imperial statements characterised by geometry and proportion. These motifs, rich in variety, have become popular in later cultural contexts.

The study observed the conditions that influenced folk imagery and led to a distinct style of folk decoration. It also analyses popular and recognisable folk art, mainly paintings and Sanchi stupa relief sculptures, focusing on representation.

In Andhra Pradesh, traditional puppetry is a long-standing family occupation passed down

through generations, often serving as the sole livelihood for many families. This art form is deeply rooted in the community's cultural fabric, with families dedicated to preserving the craft through continuous practice and performance.

In certain regions, however, puppeteers have adapted to changing circumstances by taking up supplementary work, such as farming and other occupations, to support their livelihoods. Despite these additional jobs, the tradition of puppetry remains central to their identity.

The practice of puppetry is typically a family affair, where children are introduced to the art at a young age. Under the guidance of the head of the family—who is also the leader of the puppetry troupe—young members are rigorously trained in the nuances of the craft. Early initiation is seen as vital, not only for mastering performance techniques but also for developing decision-making skills necessary for successful storytelling and stagecraft. This lifelong commitment to learning ensures that each generation's knowledge, skill, and passion for traditional puppetry are sustained.

Considering these inquiries, the research aims to prove the following hypothesis: Folk motifs in Andhra Pradesh's leather puppetry art are expressions of culture and symbolism, rooted in India's rich traditional heritage and showcasing art and craftsmanship.

### **3.1. Research gap**

A review of the literature on folk iconography discussed in the second chapter reveals that research has yet to analyse the folk motifs of the historical establishment of Leather Puppetry in Andhra Pradesh.

A research gap in the study of "Folk Motifs and The Manifestation of Leather Puppetry Art in Andhra Pradesh" includes several critical areas that remain underexplored:

Leather puppetry: Works by Nagabhushana Sharma (1985), Bittu Venkateswarlu (1990) and M.S. Nanjunda Rao (2000) scholars have collaboratively discussed leather puppetry in their respective states of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka by prioritising puppetry as a show and its art form. However, they have given immense knowledge of leather puppetry but have not looked at the social and economic issues related to the livelihood patterns of those puppetry artists.

Visual Arts and Folk Arts: Works by Vincent A Smith (1911), Stella Kramrisch (1928), Joseph Campbell (1992) and Peter and Betty Ross (1985) scholars have well-defined the symbols, Myths and image making, visual elements and significance and characteristic features of Indian Arts concerning Folk Arts.

Though having scholarly works relating to the various art forms of the country, many of such scholars have not investigated their livelihood sources, which is an essential component towards the survival of the art form, and the support towards such art form is a matter of need.

The present works investigate such issues as the socio-economic conditions of the artists relating to the puppetry artists. A methodology has been followed to identify them.

### **3.2 Methods used**

The "Folk Motifs: The Manifestation of Leather Puppet Art Forms in Andhra Pradesh" research topic incorporates a qualitative approach to delve into leather puppetry's cultural, historical, and social contexts and motifs.

Qualitative research focuses on exploring human behavior and the complexities of the social world that people inhabit. Since human action (Hancock, 2002)s is challenging to define in straightforward, measurable terms; this research seeks to deepen our understanding of why our social world functions as it does and why individuals behave in specific ways.

Qualitative researchers seek to gain a deep understanding of human behavior and the functioning of social institutions by actively immersing themselves in the everyday lives of the people they study. Rather than relying on statistical data or broad trends, these researchers focus on personal interactions and experiences to uncover the intricacies of how individuals and communities operate.

Through this immersive approach, they aim to grasp not only the external actions of individuals but also the underlying motivations, values, and belief systems that shape their behaviour. They explore the rituals and traditions that hold significance in different cultures, examining how they reinforce collective identity and convey meaning. Symbols—whether in language, art, or social gestures—are carefully analyzed to understand the deeper layers of communication and representation within the society.

Furthermore, qualitative researchers are interested in emotions and how these feelings influence individual and group behaviour. By delving into the emotional lives of their subjects, they can uncover insights into how people make decisions, form relationships, and respond to societal expectations. This holistic approach allows researchers to construct a rich, nuanced understanding of the social world, providing context and meaning to behaviours and institutions that may not be apparent through other research methods.(Chava Frankfort-Nachmias & David Nachmias, 23 February 1996)The essential features of qualitative

research emphasize that it occurs in natural environments where human behavior and events naturally evolve. Qualitative research emphasizes the richness of descriptive data and the importance of understanding human behavior through subjective insights rather than numerical statistics.

This approach generates a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences, opinions, and behaviours. (Creswell, 2009)

Given these assumptions, the qualitative research paradigm has been applied in the present study to gain an in-depth understanding of shadow puppetry and the lives of the puppeteers. This approach allows the researchers to explore the intricate details of the art form and the individuals who practice it, focusing on the cultural, social, and personal factors shaping their experiences. By utilizing qualitative methods such as interviews, participant observations, and document analysis, the study captures the lived experiences, stories, and challenges the puppeteers face and the shadow puppetry tradition's evolution and contemporary state.

Through this methodology, the research delves into the nuanced, subjective realities of the puppeteers, seeking to understand their motivations, the meaning they derive from their craft, and how external forces like modernization, economic pressures, and cultural shifts may impact their art and livelihoods. By emphasizing a thorough examination of their lives and the practice of shadow puppetry, the study moves beyond simple descriptions or statistical analysis, offering a richer, more human-centred perspective on this traditional form of performance. This holistic approach also helps to preserve and document the intangible aspects of the craft, ensuring that the personal and cultural dimensions are not lost in the analysis.

### **3.2.1. Research Design**

#### **3.2.1.1 Selection of respondents:**

Louis Cohen described that this approach starts by placing a small group of individuals with the desired characteristics, who then serve as informants to identify others who meet the criteria. (Louis Cohen, 2007). These newly identified individuals, in turn, help locate additional participants, creating a "snowball" effect. The process begins with one or a few cases and gradually expands through connections to the initial cases. (Neuman, 2014) Due to the lack of documented information on the current population of puppeteers relevant to the research topic, the study utilized opportunistic sampling, gathering data from all puppeteers identified through random interviews. Nonetheless, a multistage approach was implemented,

beginning with selecting states, followed by districts, villages, and finally, the puppeteers. This method ensured a structured process for identifying participants while still accommodating the limitations in available demographic information.

#### **3.2.1.2 Selection of the State:**

Indian shadow puppetry is primarily concentrated in four southern states: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, with a limited presence in a few families in other states like Orissa and Maharashtra. Although the practice has become rarer in these regions, there are notable similarities in the puppetry traditions across these states, particularly in the themes used for performances, the methods of preparation, and the motifs depicted in the puppets themselves. These common elements reflect the shared cultural heritage and artistic practices passed down through generations.

The selection of states for this study was based on several important factors. First, shadow puppetry's traditional and historical significance in these regions played a key role. The art form has deep cultural roots with a long-standing history that continues to influence local communities. Second, the prevalence and continuity of shadow puppetry were considered, as certain regions have maintained the practice more consistently over time. Finally, the availability of existing literature and research on the art form in these states provided a foundation for further exploration.

In addition to these research considerations, the researcher's personal experience played a significant role in shaping the study. Having spent several years living in Andhra Pradesh and being familiar with the customs and traditions of rural society, the researcher was well-positioned to observe and understand the nuances of the puppetry traditions in this region. This familiarity allowed for a deeper, more intimate exploration of the subject.

The focus of the study, therefore, was to closely observe and analyze the influence of various folk motifs on the traditional leather puppetry forms in Andhra Pradesh, a region known for its rich cultural traditions in shadow puppetry. By examining the interplay between folk motifs and the artistic elements of puppetry, the study aimed to contribute to a greater understanding of how these traditional art forms have evolved and adapted within the context of broader cultural and social influences in southern India.

#### **3.2.1.3 Selection of the district:**

The largest concentration of leather puppetry artisans in Andhra Pradesh can be found in a few key districts, including Guntur, Anantapur, Kakinada, Nellore, Srikakulam, and

Visakhapatnam. These areas have historically been home to vibrant communities of puppeteers, where the traditional art form has continued to be practiced across generations. However, for the purpose of this study, only Guntur and Anantapur were selected for in-depth research.

The decision to focus on these two districts was influenced by several practical considerations. First, the accessibility and availability of the locations for visits were key factors, ensuring that the research could be conducted efficiently. Second, the mobility of the Leather Puppetry Artisans played a crucial role in the selection process. In some areas, puppeteers may have migrated or become difficult to reach due to geographical or economic constraints, while in others, they may still be active and available for interviews and observation. By focusing on Guntur and Anantapur, the study aimed to engage directly with a representative sample of Leather Puppetry Artisans while considering the logistical challenges of fieldwork.

#### **3.2.1.4 Selection of Puppeteers:**

The researcher surveyed to gather information on Leather puppetry Art from individuals of different interests and age groups across selected districts. Surveys offer flexibility in collecting diverse information, which can be used to study various aspects such as available raw materials, skills, branding, marketing, beliefs, values, and past behaviours. A semi-structured interview survey involves questions being administered by a researcher, while a questionnaire survey involves the respondents answering the questions themselves. Surveying efficiently collects data from many respondents, potentially accumulating substantial research samples.

#### **3.2.1.5 Questionnaire:**

The questionnaire, prepared by the researcher, consists of questions related to the research topic designed to gather opinions from respondents. These questionnaires were distributed among respondents, and their responses were collected for analysis. The researcher utilised online Forms to create a questionnaire for respondents with internet access, allowing for efficient data collection and analysis. The questionnaire was administered offline to puppeteers who need internet access or are unfamiliar with using online forms. Combining online and offline methods, this approach ensured broader response coverage and was well-suited for the target groups. These techniques were employed to collect the necessary information outlined in the questionnaire.

#### **Table 2.1 List of Personalities contacted for primary data (shift into case study)**

Sl. No	Name of Artisan	District	Place	Name of the Award
1	Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu	Guntur	Narasaraopet	National Award
2	V. Sri Koteswara Rao	Guntur	Yakkalavari Palem	State level Award
3	V. Venkat Kumar	Guntur	Yakkalavari Palem	State level Award
4	Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	Padmasri
5	Dr Dalavay Kulayappa	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award
6	Dalavay Shivamma	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award
7	Shinde Sriramulu	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award
8	Shinde Chidambaram	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award

### 3.2.1.6 Survey

The researcher surveyed to gather information on motifs and leather puppetry, engaging individuals from diverse backgrounds and age groups across India and overseas. Respondents will be approached through various means, including in-person meetings, telephone calls, and mail correspondence. Surveys offer the flexibility to collect a broad spectrum of data, making them useful for studying various factors such as attitudes, beliefs, values, availability of raw materials, branding, and marketing strategies. Questions relevant to the researcher's focus were carefully crafted, coded, recorded, and analyzed.

In a structured interview or researcher-administered survey, the researcher personally conducts the survey and asks the questions. Conversely, a questionnaire or self-administered survey is one where the respondents answer the questions independently. Surveying is a highly effective method for collecting data from many respondents, potentially resulting in substantial research samples that provide a wealth of information.

### 3.2.1.7 Personal and Group Interview

The interviewer conducted personal and group interviews by meeting with relevant informants who are experts in their respective fields. These interviews were designed to gather essential information related to the research topic.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted. These guided interviews began with predetermined questions but allowed new questions to emerge during the conversation. This

technique was particularly effective in collecting detailed information on topics such as the history of puppetry, the preparation and training involved, as well as beliefs, religious and social customs, visits, challenges, and plans of the puppeteers. Audio and video recordings and field notes were used as supplementary tools to enrich the data collection further.

#### **3.2.1.8 Site Visits**

Site visits involve the method of observation. This critical research technique often requires the researcher to assume multiple roles and employ various methods, including the use of all five senses to gather data. By immersing themselves in the actual environment, the observer or researcher can identify and extrapolate hidden details that might not be immediately apparent. Additionally, the researcher engaged in participant observation, actively participating in events or phenomena while simultaneously collecting data through observation.

The direct observation method was utilized when data gathered through other means proved limited in value or difficult to verify. This approach is particularly reliable, allowing the researcher to observe actual behaviours and confirm or challenge information obtained through face-to-face interactions. This study used direct observation to explore various physical artefacts, such as the materials and techniques involved in puppet-making and visual records like photographs and video documentaries. For the current research, direct observation was conducted to assess multiple aspects of the puppetry tradition, including puppet-making processes, economic and social conditions, customs, youth interest in the profession, and sources of income. The observations were carefully documented using handwritten notes, still photography, and video recordings to ensure a comprehensive record of these insights.

India currently lacks an established system for archiving its rich traditional puppetry heritage. Foreign connoisseurs, collectors, and museums have sold or taken many traditional puppets—sometimes without the government's knowledge. The remaining materials have not received the attention necessary for their preservation. Below is an illustrative list of extensive Indian collections in the public domain where puppets have been exhibited as part of more extensive collections or alongside toys and dolls.

#### **A) Chitrakala Parishath:**

Located in Bengaluru, Karnataka, Chitrakala Parishath has been active since 1967 and houses a collection of over 2,000 traditional puppets, including the famous Togalu Gombeyatta puppets, credited to the renowned artist Nanjunda Rao.

**B) Folklore Museum (Manasa Gangotri)**

Located in Mysore, Karnataka, this museum boasts an extensive collection of shadow and string puppets, reflecting the region's rich cultural heritage.

**C) Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA):** In Delhi, IGNCA is a national hub for Indian art and culture. Its archives include a collection of slides featuring Indonesian shadow puppets and films documenting traditional puppetry in India.

**D) Jag Mohan Palace:** Also in Mysore, Karnataka, Jag Mohan Palace features an intriguing collection of craft objects, including various traditional puppets.

**E) Bhartiya Lok Kala Mandal:** This renowned museum, located near the City Palace in Udaipur, Rajasthan, is dedicated to preserving folk arts. Its exhibits include an impressive array of traditional puppets, costumes, dolls, masks, musical instruments, and paintings. Established by Devilal Samar, the museum also features foreign puppets gifted by different countries and regularly hosts traditional Rajasthani puppet shows in its auditorium.

**F) Leather Puppet Museum:** Located at Shilparamam in Hyderabad, this museum collects old leather puppets and educates visitors about epic characters through various puppet forms.

**G) Sangeet Natak Akademi:** The Akademi's museum at Rabindra Bhawan on Ferozshah Road in New Delhi contains an extensive collection of traditional Indian puppets. The Akademi also maintains a vast archive of audio and video recordings, photographs, and films related to puppetry.

**F) Malliah Memorial Theatre Crafts Museum:** Situated on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg in New Delhi, this museum honours the memory of Srinivas Malliah, a patriot and key figure in the pre-Independence theatre movement in India. It features a rare collection of puppets, masks, and ornaments.

**G) Karnataka Janapada Trust:** Established in Bengaluru in 1979 by the celebrated writer and folk enthusiast H.L. Nage Gowda, this trust operates a folk museum that includes video recordings of Karnataka's shadow, rod, and string puppetry. The museum also houses a comprehensive collection of all types of puppets found in Karnataka, including miniature ones.

### **3.2.1.9 Case Study Method**

The case study method was employed to strengthen the study's objectives and thoroughly validate its findings. This approach is particularly effective when there is a need for a deep, comprehensive understanding of a specific issue or situation, as demonstrated in the present research. Case studies

allow for the collection of detailed, nuanced information that may not be easily accessible through other methods, providing valuable insights into complex phenomena.

According to Yin (2008), a case study is an empirical investigation that explores a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. It is especially useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon being studied and its context are not clearly defined, allowing the researcher to consider a wide range of factors, including cultural, social, and economic influences. In this way, case studies offer a holistic view, integrating multiple perspectives and variables to create a fuller understanding of the subject.

In the current study, the case study method was crucial in analyzing the traditional art of shadow puppetry. By examining the lives of puppeteers, their practices, and the various external factors affecting their craft, the research was able to delve into the complexities of the subject matter in its natural setting. This method allowed the researcher to document not only the observable aspects of the art form but also the underlying socio-cultural dynamics that shape its practice today. The use of case studies helped validate the findings by aligning them with real-world conditions, making the conclusions more robust and grounded in actual experience.

#### **3.2.1.10 Data Analysis**

The data gathered from multiple sources, including interviews, direct observations, and secondary sources such as existing literature and records, was carefully organised and thoroughly examined to address the objectives of the study. Each piece of information was categorised based on its relevance to different aspects of the research, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The analytical approach employed was descriptive, providing a clear account of the findings, and narrative, offering a detailed exploration of the lived experiences and contexts observed during the research. This combination of descriptive and narrative analysis allowed for a holistic interpretation of the data, facilitating a deeper insight into the complexities of the issues under investigation. The structured analysis ensured that the study's objectives were met through methodical examination and synthesis of all collected data.

#### **3.2.1.11 Limitation of the Study**

The study employed a qualitative approach, without using any standardized index or specific criteria to quantify or measure the presence of motifs in the leather puppets. Instead, it focused on descriptive analysis, allowing for a more in-depth exploration of the motifs and their cultural significance within the puppetry tradition. This includes motifs representing both male and female figures. Similarly, the study did not employ any formal methodology to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the puppeteers. Despite the absence of these quantitative measures, the research sought to explore and document a wide range of aspects concerning the lives of leather puppeteers in Andhra Pradesh. The study aimed to provide an

in-depth understanding of their daily existence, artistic practices, and the various challenges they face, including economic hardships, cultural pressures, and the evolving landscape of traditional art forms in contemporary society. Through this broader lens, the research intended to capture the complex realities and struggles inherent in the lives of these artisans, offering a rich, nuanced portrait of their world.

### **3.3 Research Objectives**

- Folk art concepts influence the significant importance of the Perspective of Leather Puppetry art Motifs
- To study the relationship between art and lively hood and the support mechanism towards leather puppetry art

#### **3.3.1 Chapterisation**

Chapter One provides an overview of folk art, offering a theoretical insight into motif development and a conceptual elaboration of folk motifs. It explores the conceptual development of symbols, themes, and motifs, as well as the elaboration of myths and their connection to folk motifs. The use of folk motifs as a metaphorical language in Hindu mythology is discussed in depth, emphasizing the significance of visual storytelling. Special attention is given to the metaphorical language of leather puppetry art motifs. The chapter also includes a brief history of puppetry, focusing on leather shadow puppetry.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive literature review, drawing from research reports, observations, magazines, journals, and books. This chapter briefly overviews existing studies on traditional puppetry, folk art, motifs, and other visual narrative art forms within leather puppetry. It further explores how leather puppetry has historically functioned as a metaphorical language, effectively conveying epic stories and legends to the masses and serving as a medium of folk communication. Chapter Three outlines the research problem, design, objectives, and methodology. Chapter Four delves into the manifestation of folk motifs within various visual narrative art forms in India, focusing on the evolution of leather puppetry in Andhra Pradesh. This chapter emphasizes how traditional motifs have been integrated into leather puppet art. Chapter Five analyses case studies to explore the current status of puppetry and the challenges practitioners face. Chapter Six concludes the study with a summary of findings, suggestions, and conclusions.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FOLK MOTIFS IMPACT THE VISUAL ARTS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF LEATHER PUPPETRY ART**

#### **4.1 Folk Motifs: Manifestation of the Various Visual Storytelling Art Forms in India**

A central objective of this study is to explore the concept of folk arts and motifs, focusing on how their decorative elements and symbolic significance shape the understanding of motifs in leather figures. To broaden the perspective on folk motifs, various visual narrative art forms were chosen for analysis, including Lepakshi and Hampi temple paintings, Chitrakathi from Maharashtra, Cheriya scrolls from Telangana, Kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh, and leather puppetry storytelling paintings. These art forms commonly use intricate composition techniques, colour schemes, and drawing traditions, employing complex patterns and motifs to express spiritual concepts and narratives.

In textile arts, motifs are decorative elements, while story-telling visual art forms act as metaphorical language. These visual narratives are preserved legends or folklore, passed down from generation to generation through reciting stories (Shazia Rehman & Zeba Hasan, 2015)

Myths and Folk motifs are closely interconnected. Folk Motifs often carry myths, acting as a medium through which myths are expressed. These motifs are cultural creations designed to project myths in a way that gains popular acceptance and appeal. Humans have always crafted myths, and motifs are supported by myths passed down through generations. Myths in Visual story narrative art forms are particularly speculative, as they transform the cultural context and provide symbolic meaning to the Folk motifs used. In this way, while Folk motifs represent styles, myths function as symbols rooted in a society's mythology, culture, beliefs, and practices. Folk Motifs that depict myths help to sustain culture.

Various Visual Story Narrative Art Forms: Visual Storytelling, the art of conveying ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life lessons, can be defined as a sequence of related events in written or oral form. (Stein, 1982). It is a powerful method for effective learning. Visual images have been crucial for communication and information sharing since the dawn of human history. Caputo (2003) noted that visual storytelling involves presenting a narrative through media that incorporates still or moving visuals and graphic elements. This approach enriches the material with images, graphics, illustrations, films, and audio components like

music, voice, and sound effects ( Caputo & Anthony, 2003)

Similarly, other visual storytelling art forms, such as Chitrakathi, leather puppetry, and Pata Chitra paintings from Orissa, Bengal, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh, use intricate designs and motifs to convey complex spiritual concepts and narratives. Chitrakathi combines oral narration with vivid illustrations to depict epic tales, while leather puppetry employs shadow play to bring mythological stories to life. With their detailed and vibrant imagery, Pata Chitra's paintings narrate religious and historical tales.

These visual narratives explore Indian narrative imagery incorporating mythological symbols, examining how these timeless stories are visually represented and interpreted.

#### **4.1.1 Temple Murals at Lepakshi and Hampi**

The early Buddhist stupas at Sanchi, Amaravati, and Bharhut significantly influenced Indian temple murals, including those in Lepakshi, Hampi, and the Pata Chitras. These stupas' narrative reliefs, symbolic motifs, and intricate patterns laid the groundwork for later art. The continuous storytelling style and detailed human figures in the stupa carvings are reflected in these temple murals. Additionally, the ornamental designs from the stupas were adapted into temple art, creating a visual continuity between Buddhist and Hindu traditions.

##### **4.1.1.1 Lepakshi Temple painting**

Lepakshi About 80 km from the village of Nimmalakunta, a centre for leather puppetry, is the temple complex of Lepakshi. Built in the 16th century, it is a significant example of Vijayanagar architecture and is characterised by huge granite statues. The Vijayanagara Empire held sway in the Deccan region from the 13th to the 17th centuries and was a uniting force in southern India. Under its stable rule, the region saw trade, technology, arts, and architecture growth. The frescoes, created with vegetable and mineral colours, depict stories from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and the Puranas, with intricate details in facial expressions, costumes, and jewelry. These frescoes resemble the figures seen on leather puppets, indicating that the surrounding visual culture heavily influenced the leather puppet craft.



**Figure 4. 1** Shiva Parvathi Wedding- \_Natya mandapam third bay from the east south and centre, Lepakshi, Virabadra temple, 16<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure 4:2 Patterns of cloths in Lepakshi Virabhadra Swamy temple mural painting [Image source; (Rao, Thakur, & Singh, 2016)]

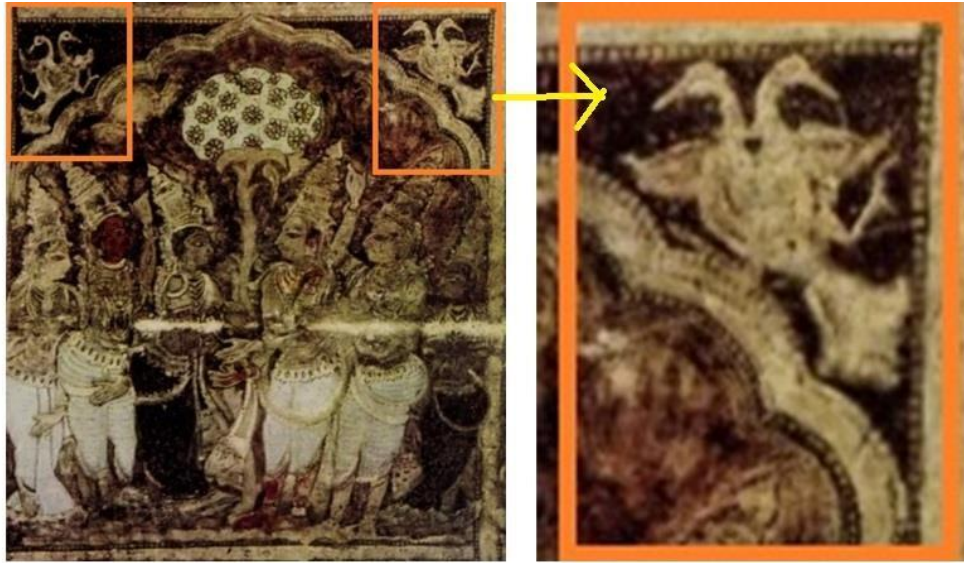
In Andhra Pradesh, the Lepakshi murals are some of the most important surviving pictorial representations from the Vijayanagara Empire in southern India. The temple, built by the brothers Virupanna Nayaka and Viranna, who were governors of Penukonda under the Vijayanagara ruler Achutaraya in the mid-sixteenth century, is adorned with these murals. The paintings, completed around the same time, cover the ceilings of the maha mandapa and

various shrines within the temple, illustrating various themes from mythology and courtly life, including scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranic texts. (Dallapiccola, 2019)

The compositions are arranged in long panels corresponding to the bayed columns of the temple's mandapas, verandahs, and corridors. Consequently, the lengths of the painted strips vary greatly, ranging from 5 meters to as much as 25 meters in length. (Map Academy, 2022)

The temple's Maha mandapa ceilings showcase the largest composition, with a central figure of Virabhadra, accompanied by Viranna, his wife, and the ram-headed Daksha, who is depicted prostrating at the deity's feet. The composition is divided into thirteen panels, each containing several sub-panels that narrate scenes from Lepakshi's sthalapurana, mythological stories, and a procession featuring a guru carried in a palanquin by guards. Surrounding the mural on all four sides are decorative paintings of mythical animals, birds, devotees, dancers, and musicians. In terms of content, style, and detail, the art of puppet performance closely mirrors the culture expressed in the temples. The clothing of the human figures in the Lepakshi murals reflects the diverse material culture of the Vijayanagara Empire, which drew from a blend of sources, as shown in Figure 4.2. Stylistically, the Lepakshi murals are considered the precursor to the Leather Puppetry and Kalamkari paintings of Andhra Pradesh. The depictions of people, birds, animals, and foliage in the Lepakshi murals have evolved into motifs now widely used in contemporary textiles, tapestries, and rugs. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)

The Lepakshi murals were created by plastering the granite surfaces with a mixture of sandy clay from nearby riverbeds, red ochre, lime powder, and liquid molasses. The plastered areas were sketched with scenes using red ochre, later coloured and polished with fine black outlines. The figures are predominantly depicted in profile, characterized by sharp noses, pointed chins, and prominent eyes, as shown in Figure 4.1. The colour palette includes various shades of earthy red, black, green, yellow-ochre, white, grey, and occasional blue-green tones.



**Figure 4.3** Left and right highlighted Gandabherunda in “Rama’s Marriage painting, Vijayanagara, Hampi, 15th century. [Image Source: (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)] The Right Detail of the painting “Gandabherunda”

According to M.S. Nanjunda Rao of the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat, puppet designs were likely influenced by two distinct schools of art, as various artistic styles have shaped Chitrakathi itself. The similarity in costume designs found in many of these images to those in the Lepakshi and Hampi murals suggests this connection. Additionally, the influence of these two schools can be observed in the standing postures and overall composition of the puppet designs.

As we explore the history of leather puppetry through the migrations of its artists, we can observe a clear shift in the style of this traditional art form. Many leather puppets, especially the smaller ones, feature an umbrella on their heads, reflecting distinctive elements of Hampi temple architecture. Leather puppet artists have also emphasized the Gandabherunda bird, a symbol associated with the Chalukyas and Vijayanagara kings (Figure:4.3)

The noble status of puppet characters can be identified through specific motifs and attributes. Royal characters are often depicted with drawings of elephants or horses, parrots perched on their shoulder or hand, or with a servant holding an umbrella above their head. Other symbols of nobility include pavilions, palanquins, crowns, armour, chowris (fans), and attendants. Ornamentation and costume decoration further reveal the character's status, with emblems like the moon or sun and gestures such as holding a flower, often signifying royalty. Queens may be shown with cages, birds, or surrounded by animals like deer, while

women typically wear plain saris or occasionally churidars, with married women having bun-shaped hairdos and dancers depicted with free-flowing plaits. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985) Hair is richly ornamented, and red dots, crescent moon designs on the forehead, or tattoo marks on the cheek indicate faith. Color patterns also denote character status; blue represents divine figures associated with love and kindness, while different skin tones and jet black indicate qualities like beauty or lustful nature. Forehead markings, such as vertical lines for Vaishnava affiliation and triple horizontal ash marks for Shiva faith, further distinguish characters.

The costumes highlight cultural backgrounds, with highly ornamented attire showing Mughal influences, such as sandals with curved fronts, jackets, beards, and moustaches. Male and female characters are often adorned with earrings, and Brahmin characters wear bead necklaces or Rudrakshisara. Some characters are depicted with rings on the neck and arm or a religious thread, such as a Shivaling Karadigge or Janivara, across the left shoulder. Kings typically wear crowns shaped like the gopurams of ancient North Indian or Maharashtrian temples.

A distinctive ear ornament featuring a crocodile-shaped mouth protruding forward is commonly found on noble characters, although any community no longer wears this ornament. Noble men are often depicted carrying bows or a short, straight knife known as Vajrayuda. In contrast, ordinary characters such as soldiers, guards, messengers, or even monkeys are depicted with guns. Designs of animals, birds, and lesser reptiles are frequently seen on the borders and bodies of the characters. However, these designs need more elaborate decoration, as excessive chiselling or punching would compromise the stiffness of the leather. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)

Certain general physical features are discernible among the puppet figures: female characters are shorter in stature than male characters, with slim waists, broad hips, and long breasts, while the legs of both men and women are depicted as thick. These paintings closely align with the norms found at Lepakshi, dating back to the sixteenth century. The vastness of the Vijayanagara Empire resulted in regional variations in the style and details of art, even when depicting similar subjects. Despite these differences, there remains a solid underlying unity in artistic expression. This is evident in the Deccani school miniatures, which display a clear Vijayanagara influence, as well as in the art of Orissa, where the impact of Vijayanagara is seen following Krishnadevaraya's victory over the Gajapati rulers.

The paintings from the Cuddapah school and Lepakshi, precursors to the enduring Kalamkari art, also reflect the influence of Vijayanagara. Additionally, a series of Gita Govinda paintings from Orissa, housed in the National Museum, further illustrates the powerful impact of Vijayanagara's artistic style and techniques. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)

Folk Motifs of Lepakshi: These paintings are primarily located on the ceilings, with some adorning the walls of the main shrines. The ceiling spaces between horizontal beams were creatively converted into long rectangular panels. For example, the ceiling of the Natya Mandapa features eight panels illustrating various mythological themes, including the different manifestations of Shiva—such as Shiva as Kiratha (the boar hunter), Dakshinamurthy, and scenes from Shiva's wedding with Girija. Additionally, the panels depict episodes from Krishna's childhood and the legend of the compassionate King Manu Neethi Cholan, who famously dispensed justice even to animals. (Rao, Thakur, & Singh, 2016)

#### **4.1.1.2 Virupaksha Temple Paintings in Hampi**

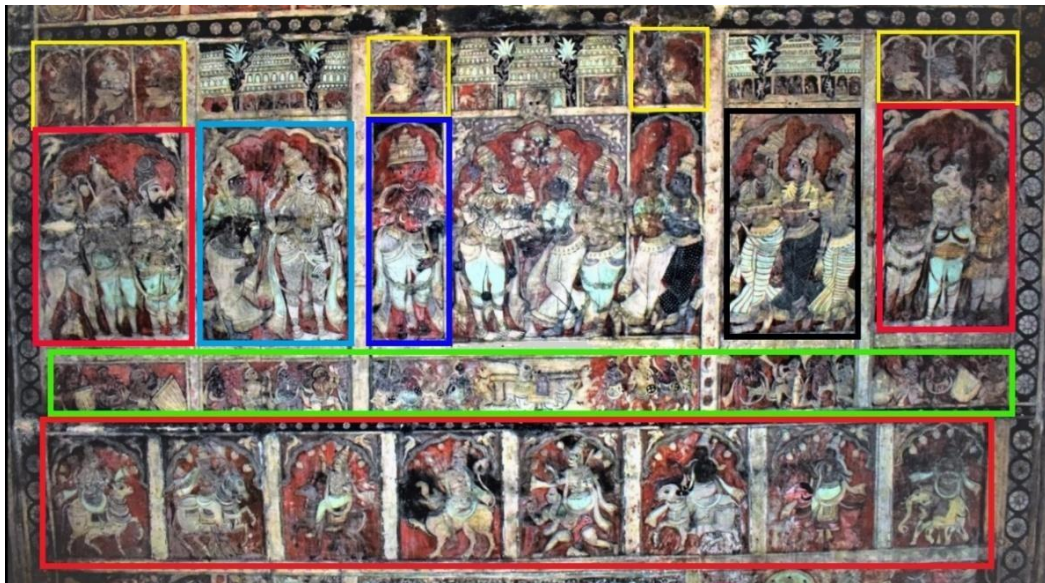
Devaraya is reputed to have honored him with a kanakabhisheka, a ceremonial shower of gold. Devaraya was also a great builder, initiating the construction of one of the finest examples of Vijayanagara architecture, the Vitthala temple at Hampi, which was later beautifully completed and embellished by Krishnadevaraya. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)

The story of how Krishnadevaraya brought the image of Balakrishna from Udayagiri, following his victorious military campaign and then built a temple for it in Hampi, where he installed the idol with grand ceremony, including the issuance of special gold coins bearing the figure of Balakrishna, stands as a testament to the king's religious devotion and artistic sensibility. Among his many contributions to Hampi, the embellishment of the Vittalaswami temple is his most remarkable achievement. The grand gopuras and mandapas in South Indian temples are hallmarks of the Vijayanagara period. The mandapas in the temples of Virabhadra at Lepakshi, Varadaraja at Kanchipuram, Vitthala at Hampi, Jalakandeswari at Vellore, and Ranganatha at Srirangam are each magnificent sculptural masterpiece of the Vijayanagara artisans. The pillars adorned with rearing animals—horses, lions, or the mythical creature vyala, with its elephantine trunk and lion-like body—exemplify Vijayanagara sculpture's dynamic and vigorous style. The imposing equestrian figures, in particular, were so influential that they continued to be crafted in miniature as decorative bracket figures in wood, adorning domestic architecture in affluent homes until nearly the

end of the eighteenth century. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)

The Vijayanagara Empire marks the final great chapter in South Indian history and culture. During this period, painting, like other forms of art, flourished under royal patronage. Numerous temples across South India feature paintings from this era. Fragments of such artworks can be found in various locations, including Anegundi near Hampi, as well as in temples at Tadpatri, Kanchipuram, Tirupparuttikunram, Kalahasti, Tirupati, Tiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Tiruvarur, Tiruvalanjuli, Tiruvilimalai, Kumbakonam, Srirangam, Tiruvellarai, Madurai, Tirupudaimarudur, and several other places that belong to both the Vijayanagara and Nayaka periods.

One panel depicts Bhikshatana Shiva as the charming beggar, accompanied by his dwarf attendants as he receives alms from the Rishi Patnis. Another panel portrays the popular theme of Rati and Manmatha, with Rati seated on a swan and Manmatha in the alidha warrior pose, holding his flower arrows on a chariot drawn by parrots. This imagery is reminiscent of a similar chariot depicted two centuries earlier on the ceiling of the Virupaksha temple at Hampi. (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)



**Figure: 4.4** Girija Kalyanam-wedding of Shiva Parvati[image source: (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)]

In the depiction of the Girija Kalyanam -the wedding of Shiva and Parvati, the entire Hindu pantheon is present, including Brahma and Vishnu, the other two deities of the Hindu Trinity, as well as the Guardians of the Eight Directions, known as the Ashta Dakala's (bottom of the Figure: highlighted with red coloured border). The scene is also graced by

rishis (sages), devas (demigods), and various celestial beings such as Gandharva's, Yakshas, and Kim purushas—mythical creatures with human bodies and heads of horses or lions (middle of the figure: extreme middle left and right both sides highlighted with red-coloured border).

The topmost rectangular frames feature Kinnaras at the extremes on the left and right (with a yellow border highlighted), with onlookers in the centre. The second panel from the top captures the actual wedding ceremony. At the centre, Shiva is depicted attempting to hold Parvati's hand. Behind them stands Brahma, with Vishnu shown with four hands, and his wife, Lakshmi, is also present. Narada, the matchmaker for the Shiva-Parvati alliance, is behind Vishnu and Lakshmi. Standing next to Narada is Tumbura, a Gandharva renowned as the finest musician of his kind. Both Narada and Tumbura are carrying musical instruments on their shoulders.

Behind Parvati are her parents, Himavata and Mena, along with female attendants. The figures in the last frame, with heads of lions, horses, and elephants, represent the mythical creatures from the forests.

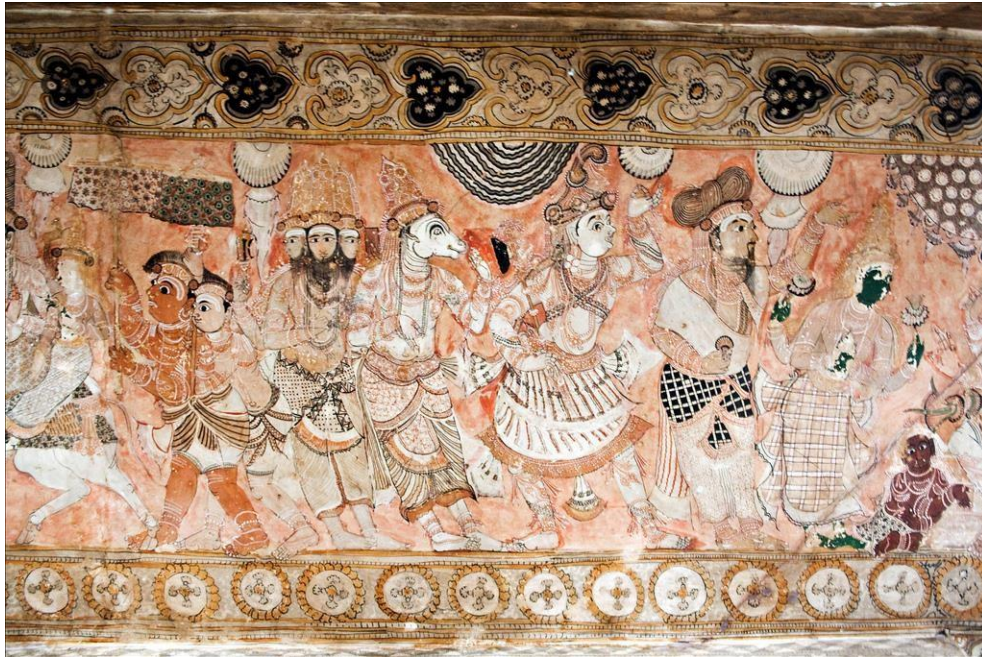
The topmost panel shows Kinnaras, beings with human heads and bird-like bodies. Below the wedding panel, ordinary people are depicted celebrating the event, playing music with drums and tutorials (trumpet-like instruments). The panel beneath depicts the Ashta Dikpalas, the Guardians of the Eight Directions (bottom of the Figure: highlighted with red border) as shown in Figure 4.4, and They are listed as follows, from left to right:

- Ishanya - Guardian of Ishanya (northeast), riding a Vrishaba (bull).
- Nairiti - Guardian of Nairuti (southwest), riding a horse and carrying a sword.
- Vayu - Guardian of Vayavya (northwest), riding a gazelle (antelope).
- Varuna - Guardian of Paschima (west), riding a Makara (a mythical crocodile-like creature).
- Kubera - Guardian of Uttara (north), riding a Nara (a man) and carrying a gada (mace).
- Yama - Guardian of Dakshina (south), riding a male buffalo.
- Agni - Guardian of Agneya (southeast), riding a ram (male sheep).
- Indra - Guardian of Purva (east), riding Airavata (a white elephant) and wielding his signature weapon, the Vajrayudha (thunderbolt).



**Figure:4.5** “Mamatha Vijaya” -Manmatha shooting Kamaainas at Shive, Virupaksa Temple Hampi,15<sup>th</sup> century [Image source: (Siva Ramamurti, 1985)]

This painting depicts a dramatic scene from the Shiva Purana, where Manmatha, the god of love and desire, attempts to awaken passion in the meditating Shiva by striking him with his *kama banas* (arrows of love). Following the death of his wife Sati, Shiva, overcome with grief, retreats into deep meditation, causing a significant imbalance in the world. Meanwhile, Sati is reborn as Parvati, and the gods, desiring Shiva to marry Parvati, seek to end his meditation. To achieve this, Indra, the king of heaven, sends Kama to disrupt Shiva's meditation and ignite his passion. In the image, Kama stands in an elegant pose within a chariot driven by his vahana, a parrot. Behind him is his consort, Rathi, while Shiva, seated on a majestic throne in a meditative pose, is the focal point. Below, Agni, the god of fire, rides a ram, and Parvati waits anxiously for Shiva to open his eyes. As Kama releases his arrows, made of flowers and shot from a sugarcane bow, Shiva awakens, his eyes burning with rage, as shown in Figure 4.5.



**Figure:4.6** Lepakshi temple painting Virabhadra, attended by Virana with his wife [Image source: Internet]

**A. Folk Motifs appear on Temple sculptures and Paintings of Lepakshi and Hampi:**

**Natural motifs:**

- Animals-Elephant, Deer, Male Buffalo, dog, ram (male sheep), Crocodile, Horse, wild bore
- Birds -Parrots, Gandabherunda, Swans, peacock, Swan
- Flowers: Lotus and other floral designs
- Trees- commonly appear trees

**Geometrical:**

- Circle, triangle, square, dot, line

**Others:**

- Mythical creatures-
- Gandharva- Human body with a horse or lion head
- Yakshas- wings with human body
- Kim purchase— human heads and bird-like bodies, Moon, sun,

**4.1.2 Folk Paintings- Maharashtra Chitrakathi, Rajasthani Phad, Kalamkari and Cheriya Scroll Paintings**

Jain texts such as *Adipurana*, *Chaurapanchashika*, and *Kalkacharya Katha* gained prominence and added a new dimension to our visual arts. Though these visual narratives had a structured format, they retained a distinct folk flavor. Notably, the use of minimal

colours, thick black contours, side profiles of faces, and distinctive hand gestures in these works are all examples of folk influences on leather puppetry. (Rao N. , 2000)

#### **4.1.2.1 Maharashtra Chitra Kathi Painting**

Most leather puppets seen today were designed during the post-Vijayanagara Empire period. The Kilyekathas, who migrated from Maharashtra centuries ago, have now spread across South India. The making of leather puppets incorporates many techniques from Chitrakathi paintings, and there are notable stylistic similarities between Chitrakathi and leather puppetry. Chitrakathi is considered an art form in its own right, where descriptive pictures are displayed in natural daylight and used alongside the recitation of the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and other mythological tales to convey the essence of these epics. It is widely acknowledged that similar pictures were once drawn on leather and displayed with a light and shade effect, leading to the evolution of leather puppetry from Chitrakathi (Rao N. , 2000).

Chitrakathi has been influenced by other art styles, particularly evident in the costume designs in many of the pictures, especially those depicting women, which closely resemble the styles found in the Lepakshi and Hampi murals. The influence of these two schools can also be observed in the initial postures and compositions of the artworks.

The Chitrakathi painting shown in Figure 1.4(c) depicts scenes from Ramayana, reflecting its storytelling tradition that combines painted panels with oral narration. The figures, engaged in various interactions, possibly represent stories from the Ramayana, with a central figure likely being a hero of the scene or the story. Where we can see this kind of presentation of stupa relief sculptures and Ajanta cave paintings. The painting features a limited colour palette of reds and earthy tones, with expressive faces and gestures essential for conveying emotions. The sequential arrangement of scenes allows storytellers to explain each panel's significance, emphasising the characters' poses and interactions.

Folk culture possesses a unique ability to create a radiant aura around any event, acting as a conduit for a momentary mystical experience. This principle forms the foundation of folk art. All forms of folk art share a standard set of values and potentialities. A careful observer will notice the sharp lines of colour and the sounds that accompany the recital of prayers, as well as in the designs of rituals, apparel, dance, and music. In this way, ritualistic practices are intricately intertwined with mythological narratives, contributing to a meaningful and vibrant folk culture. Consequently, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* incorporate subplots

that embrace folk traditions, blending various visual and performing arts aspects. This integration has greatly enriched these two epics. (Rao N. , 2000)

**A. Influence of Jain Miniature Style on Chitrakathi:** Both leather puppetry and Chitrakathi works draw inspiration from the Jain miniature painting style to illustrate stories effectively. Scientific accuracy is often set aside in these forms, allowing the artist creative freedom in character creation. The Jain miniature technique depicts objects with a multi-dimensional perspective on a flat surface. For instance, key aspects of an event may be painted in larger proportions while other details are minimized. (Rao N. , 2000) Additionally, most puppets are shown in side profiles, with two eyes visible and hands posed in interpretative gestures, often with a flower positioned between figures. Another significant similarity is the composition of the figures, which closely resembles the forms found in Jain paintings. This stylistic choice enhances the aesthetic appeal, creating a sense of metamorphosis. The illusionary effect engages the viewer, forging a connection between the imagined attributes of the epic characters and the unfolding sequences in the portrayal. (Rao N. , 2000)

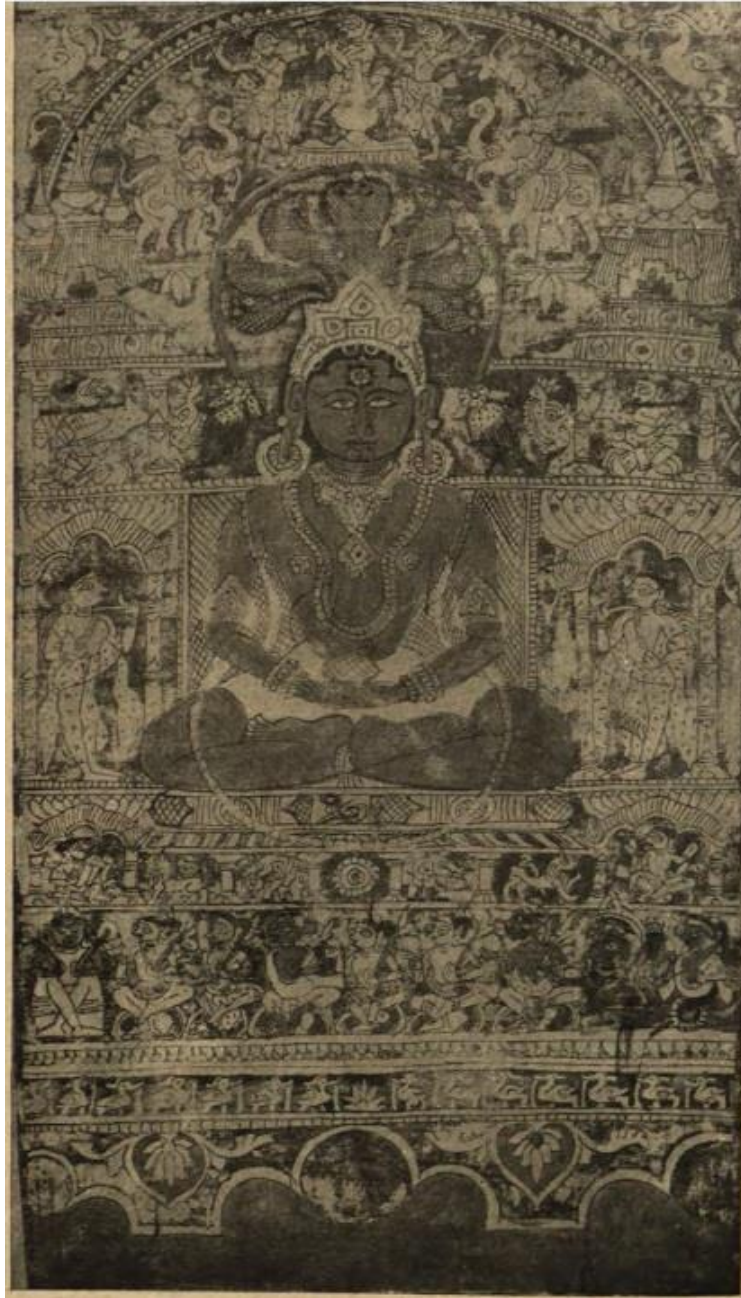
Each leather puppet possesses its unique charm, drawing inspiration from various art traditions such as Jain narrative pictures, the Maharashtra Chitrakathi tradition, Lepakshi paintings, Hoysala sculptures, and the Kalamkari art of neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. These puppets are crafted using stylised yet straightforward designs rooted in folk forms. Exploring these aspects opens up an entirely different and fascinating world. (Rao N. , 2000) After this historical overview, we can focus on the variety of characters to better understand the key features of this visual art form. Alternatively, we might examine the influence of other art historically accurate, cross-cultural interactions have also influenced the larger puppets. (Rao N. , 2000)

**B. Folk Motifs in Chitrakathi paintings:**

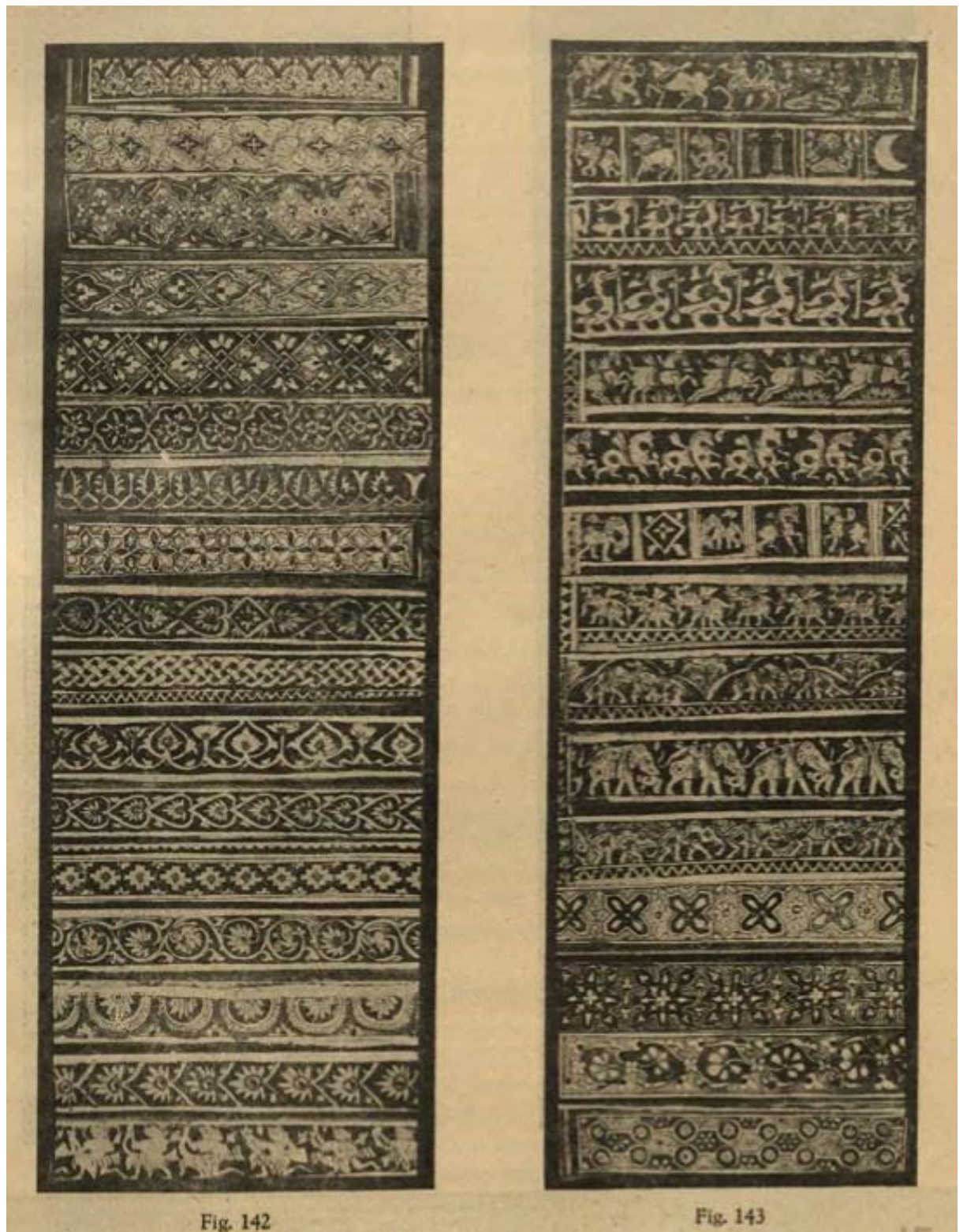
The motifs used in Chitrakathi paintings include intricate patterns, floral designs, and elaborate depictions of gods, goddesses, and mythical creatures. These paintings are known for their bold lines, vivid colours, and dynamic compositions, which bring the stories to life. Chitrakathi paintings have been thoroughly analyzed and described by Anna L. Dallapiccola, who notes, "There is a certain monumentality reminiscent of wall paintings. Clear and elegantly sweeping lines define the scenes, which, though simple in design, are extremely sophisticated in detail." In these paintings, the human figure takes center stage. Males are depicted as imposing figures, with powerful chests and narrow waists, while

women are portrayed in beautiful attire, adorned with jewelry. The emotions of the characters are conveyed through their posture and stance as shown in Figure 4.8

The paintings are typically laid out horizontally, with the climax of the episode or scene prominently depicted. The narrator would engage the audience with the additional details of the episode using mime and other techniques. Diagonal lines are used to suggest situations of fear or flight. The main character in a scene is often depicted larger than the others, who are shown flanking them. When groups are portrayed, they share the same platform, sitting or standing if they are of equal importance. A recurring pattern can be observed in these paintings, with individuals given their own space, often defined by a tree or shrub in outdoor scenes as shown in Figure 4.9



**Figure: 4.7** Illustration from the Jain Pancha Tirthipata, Cloth -painting, Jain Tadapatriya Pustak Bhandar, Patan. Size 30ft. by 32inches.A.D.1433[Image source: ( Chandra, 1986)]



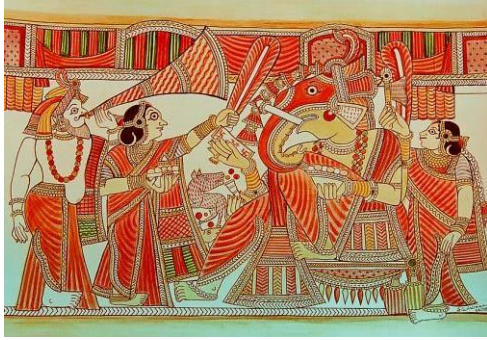
**Figure:4.8** Left and Right decorative border[Image source: ( Chandra, 1986)]

**Figure: 4.8 (Left) From the top:**

- (a) A decorative festoon facing upward decorated with palmates and flowers
- (b) Square Lozenges decorated with a complex Maze of flowers and leaves
- (c) a chain of onion shaped compartments field with flowers
- (d) Cartouches altering with trade lozenges decorated with flowers and leaves
- (e) Chequers and lozenges decorated with flowers
- (f) Chains of scalloped circles filled with floral designs.
- (g) A double festoon decorated with the palmate and honeysuckle
- (h) A chain of scalloped circles filled with floral design
- (i) Hearts and lozenges decorated with vertically palmates
- (j) Guilloche
- (k) An upward facing festoon decorated with hearts, palmates and lillies
- (l) A chain of hearts decorated with flowers and gees
- (m) Stepped suares
- (n) A lotus mander decorated with flowers and gees
- (o) A pattern adopted from room hangings
- (p) Flowers with bifurcated twigs

**Figure 4.8 From the top:**

- (a-b) Sacred symbols
- (c-d) Rows of gees
- (e-f) Rows of galloping and trotting horses
- (g) Elephants, Horses and lozenges
- (h) A row of running elephants
- (i) Fighting pairs of elephants under trefoil arches
- (j-k) Rows of stately elephants
- (l) The Maltese cross alternating with rosettes
- (m) Peculiarly shaped square rosettes decorated flowers
- (n) An arabesque
- (o) Two chains of circles with rosettes on flowered ground



**Figure 4.9** Chitrakathi painting story narrative following the first Ganesh Prayer, secondly Saraswati prayer, then they show the central scene Painting to tell Story [Image source: internet]

Chitrakathi's relationship with leather puppetry, particularly the leather Styles of leather puppetry and the diverse styles that exist within it when considered in isolation. Such categorization is more applicable to miniature puppets. While this may be puppetry of regions like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, is rooted in their shared storytelling tradition. Both art forms use visual mediums to narrate epic tales and folklore. Motifs like those in Chitrakathi paintings, such as detailed character representations and ornate backgrounds, are often used in leather puppetry. The puppets are intricately designed with expressive features and vibrant costumes, akin to the painted characters in Chitrakathi. This interplay of motifs and narrative styles highlights the cultural interconnectedness and the collective heritage of these traditional Indian art forms, as shown in Figure 4.7.

### **C. Folk Motifs appear in Chitrakathi Paintings of Maharashtra:**

#### **Natural motifs:**

- Animals-Elephant, Deer, Male Buffalo, dog  
Horse, wild bore
- Birds -Parrots, Gandabherunda, Swans, peacock, Swan
- Flowers: Lotus and other floral designs
- Trees- commonly appear trees on the background

#### **Geometrical:**

- Circle, triangle, square, dot, line

#### **Others:**

- Mythical creatures-
- Gandharva- Human body with a horse or lion head
- Yakshas- wings with human body Moon, sun

#### **4.1.2.2 Rajasthani Phad Painting**

Phad painting, a stunning example of Indian cloth painting from Rajasthan, is created on scrollable cloth known as “Phad.” These paintings serve as visual accompaniments to ceremonies involving the singing and recitation of the deeds of folk hero deities, a tradition particularly significant in the desert state of Rajasthan. Phad painting is a type of scroll painting with smaller versions referred to as Phadhye. The oldest available Phad paintings date back to the late 19th century or early 20th century. These legends are depicted on long rectangular cloths, typically measuring 35 feet by 5 feet for Devnarayan Phad and 15 feet by 5 feet for Pabuji-ki-Phad. (Rajvanshi, 2013)



**Figure:4.10**Rajasthani Phad Painting “Pabhuji ki Phad” [image source: internet]

#### **A. Folk Motifs in Rajasthani Phad paintings**

Rajasthani Phad paintings are rich in motifs that vividly depict various aspects of folklore, mythology, and daily life. Central figures in these paintings often include gods, goddesses, and folk heroes such as Pabhuji, portrayed in dynamic and detailed forms. These motifs are rendered in vibrant colours and intricate details, creating a rich tapestry telling stories of courage, devotion, and cultural heritage, as shown in Figure 4.8

#### **B. Folk Motifs appear in Rajasthani Phad paintings:**

##### **Natural motifs:**

- Animals-Elephant, Deer, Male Buffalo, dog Horse, wild bore
- Birds -Parrots, Gandabherunda, Swans, peacock, Swan
- Flowers: Lotus and other floral designs
- Trees- commonly appear trees on the background

##### **Geometrical:**

- Circle, triangle, square, dot, line

##### **Others:**

- symbolizing the connection between nature and mythology
- Human figures, including ordinary people, dancers, musicians, and attendants, are commonly illustrated, reflecting social and cultural activities.
- Architectural features like palaces, temples, and forts provide a backdrop to the main narrative, showcasing traditional Rajasthani architecture.

- Moon, sun

Borders and backgrounds are adorned with repetitive floral and geometric patterns, enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal. Additionally, scenes of daily life, including rural activities, festivals, and rituals, are woven into the narratives, offering a glimpse into the everyday life of Rajasthan.

Though distinct in their mediums and techniques, Leather puppetry and Rajasthani Phad painting share striking similarities in motifs, colours, and themes, reflecting the rich tapestry of Indian folklore and tradition as shown in Both art forms use vibrant and bold colours to bring their stories to life, with a preference for reds, yellows, greens, and blues that capture the viewer's attention and convey the drama of the narratives. The motifs in leather puppetry and Phad paintings often include intricate depictions of gods, goddesses, and heroic figures adorned with elaborate costumes and expressive features. Themes of courage, devotion, and mythological tales are central to both, showcasing the heroic deeds and moral lessons of folk deities and legendary heroes. Using detailed patterns and symbolic elements, such as flora, fauna, and architectural features, further enhances visual storytelling, creating a rich, immersive experience that celebrates India's cultural heritage and artistic ingenuity.

#### **4.1.2.3 Andhra Pradesh Kalamkari Painting**

A type of hand-painted cotton textile known as kalamkari is made in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. In the twenty-step process of Kalam Kari, only natural dyes are employed. There are two distinct Kalamkari art styles in India: Srikalahasti and Machilipatnam. This artistic movement flourished in temples that strongly emphasized forging distinctive religious identities. It may be seen on scrolls, temple hangings, chariot banners, and representations of gods and scenes from Hindu epics, including the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas. As the first chairman of the All-India Handicrafts Board, Kamaladevi Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay popularized the dying art in the temple town Sri Kalahasti near Tirupati, with the help of Jonnalagadda Lakshmaiah and Kalppa in 1950, and is credited with giving the style its current stature. (Rani, 2021)

Kalam Kari was formerly known as Pattachitra, an art form still practised in Nepal and other parts of India and the bordering state of Odisha. The word "Pattachitra" (from Sanskrit, "Patta" means cloth, and "Chitra" means "picture") describes a painting done on fabric scrolls in ancient Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain literature. Since Pattachitra culture first arose, Lord Jagannath, a manifestation of Lord Krishna, has been its primary source of inspiration.

Under Islamic authority in the Middle Ages, the words "Kalam" and "Kari", which both mean workmanship in Persian, were combined to form the name Qalam Kari." The Golconda sultanate helped this phrase become well-known.



**Figure:4.11** Kalamkari Scroll Painting-Mahabharata [Image source: Internet]

From outside the community, musicians and painters came to share Hindu mythology with the locals. They used enormous canvas bolts spontaneously painted using basic tools and plant-based colours to convey their claims. Like Buddhist thangka paintings, the large Kalamkari panels that depict Hindu mythology and iconography scenes can be found in Hindu temples.

**A. Folk Motifs in Kalamkari Painting**

The process begins by steeping the fabric in astringent and buffalo milk, followed by sun-drying. The material is then immersed in alizarin water after outlining designs in red, black, brown, and violet with a mordant. Wax is applied, except to areas for blue dye, before the fabric is submerged in indigo dye. After removing the wax, the remaining areas are painted by hand, like Indonesian batik. Artists use a bamboo or date palm stick with a fine hair bundle to outline designs, dipping it in a jaggery-water solution before applying vegetable colours. In Iran, wooden stamps with intricate designs are used, while natural substances like crushed flowers, plants, seeds, and cow dung create effects. Kalamkari incorporates buffalo milk and myrobalan, eliminating the milk's odour and fixing colours. Alum is used to set natural hues and prevent bleeding.

**B. Folk Motifs appear in Kalam Kari Paintings of Andhra Pradesh:**

**Natural motifs:**

- Animals-Elephant, Deer, Male Buffalo, dog  
Horse, wild bore
- Birds -Parrots, Gandabherunda, Swans, peacock, Swan
- Flowers: Lotus and other floral designs
- Trees- Tree of life

**Geometrical:**

- Circle, triangle, square, dot, line

**Others:**

- Mythical creatures-Ramayan, Bhagavat and Mahabharat characters
- Gandharva- Human body with a horse or lion head
- Yakshas- wings with human body
- Moon, sun

**4.1.2.4 Telangana Cheriya Painting**

India's ancient painting traditions are well-known worldwide. Cheriya scroll painting is one such art style. Telangana's Cheriya is a tiny village. So, it is clear that this is where the roots of this painting style lie. The Mughals may have taken Cheriya paintings to India in the 16th century. However, many contend it has roots in India, dating to the fifth century. The Kalamkari and Deccani scroll paintings have a significant effect on Cheriya paintings. The Cheriya, particularly those found at the Pilalamarri temple in Mahbubnagar, Telangana, and the hill temple of Tripurantaka, bear similarities to even the Kakatiya paintings from the 12th century. Temple art traditions heavily influence cheriya Paintings. (Da Fonseca, 2016)



**Figure: 4.12** The left side is the Telangana Cheriya Painting “Ramayan”, and the Right side is the Andhra Pradesh Leather Puppetry Painting “Sri Krishna Lela” [Image source: artists]

#### **A. Folk Motifs of Cheriya Painting**

Cheriyal Pata Chitra, a traditional miniature painting from Odisha, is renowned for its intricate detailing and vibrant colours. Techniques include preparing surfaces with chalk and tamarind seed paste, outlining them with fine brushes, and using natural dyes. Themes often depict Hindu mythology from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Puranas, as well as local legends and daily life scenes. Common motifs include deities like Krishna and Rama, animals such as elephants and peacocks, detailed nature elements, and geometric patterns, showcasing Odisha's cultural richness and craftsmanship. (Da Fonseca, 2016)

#### **B. Folk Motifs appear in Cheriya Paintings of Telangana:**

##### **Natural motifs:**

- Animals-Elephant, Deer, Male Buffalo, dog  
Horse, wild boar, Cow
- Birds -Parrots, Gandabherunda, Swans, peacock, Swan
- Flowers: Lotus and other floral designs
- Trees- commonly appear trees on the background

##### **Geometrical:**

- Circle, triangle, square, dot, line

##### **Others:**

- Mythical creatures-
- Gandharva- Human body with a horse or lion head
- Yakshas- wings with human body
- Moon, sun

In 2010, artist D. Vaikuntam from Hyderabad created a Ramayana Cheriya scroll painting titled "Birth of Lord Rama to His Marriage." (Figure.4.17) This work captures critical events from Lord Rama's early life, including his divine birth, adventures, and marriage to Sita. Vaikuntam used traditional Cheriya techniques, preparing khadi cloth with tamarind seed paste and white clay and employing fine brushes with natural dyes. The painting features vibrant colours, motifs like Lord Rama, Sita, King Dasharatha, and Sage Vishwamitra, flora, symbolic objects, and dynamic figures. Decorative patterns frame the narrative, highlighting Vaikuntam's skill and the cultural heritage of Cheriya scroll painting. (MAP academy,

2021)

The Jain Miniatures, Temple paintings of Lepakshi, Hampi, Cheriya, Kalamkari, Rajasthani Phad, and Chitrakathi Visual story Narrative Art forms and leather puppet paintings share a common goal of storytelling through vibrant visuals. They depict mythological tales with intricate details and bold colours. Cheriya scrolls use fine brushwork and natural dyes on cloth, while leather puppetry employs cutouts and shadow play on leather. Despite different mediums, both emphasise narrative compositions and cultural preservation, underscoring their role in Indian visual storytelling, shown in Figure 4.12.

#### **4.2 Folk Motifs - Leather Puppetry Art of Andhra Pradesh**

**Puppet:** The word puppet comes from the French word 'Poupee' or the Latin word 'Pupa', both of which mean dolls. In Sanskrit, Puppets are called 'Putraka' or 'Putrika' or 'Puttalika', derived from the root putta, equivalent to Putra means son. It seems from the ancient Indian thoughts that Puppets have life. Modern and ancient puppeteers generally operate hand and string figures and distinguish between them only on an extensive skill they call all animated figures. Puppets differentiated them only on a vast scale. They call all animated figures Puppets, differentiating them only when necessary. Interestingly, Walter Wilkinson, an English papa Teer who authors the book The Peep Show, says the idea that Puppets or inanimate creatures controlled by human beings is incorrect and that the position is precisely the opposite: the showman is at the mercy of his puppets.

Incidentally, early Italian puppets were all dolls that worked mainly by string. Whatever the etymology, Puppets have been recording recognised, according to Bill, as a part of men's ancient architecture, recreating a life that results in this many layers of art more drivers than painting culture, Dance, song, or story puppetry has something of all of them it is also a means of communication and extension of human expressions when a person finds around him a man and animal a shape or a situation and a something strikes him as a funny and build it into a puppet.

An art scholar, Suresh Awasthi, noted some cultural links between India and Southeast Asia. First, the iconographic tradition of Bali Temple has a lot in common with Paithan painting based on Karnataka and Andhra Temples, which is represented in Shadow puppetry. Secondly, both India and Indonesia have the Clown tradition in Shadow puppetry. Third,

there is a strong storytelling tradition in the narratives of Bunraku, Wayang Kulit, and Kathakali. Fourth, the Ramayana and Mahabharata epic traditions are used in Shadow puppetry in all these countries. Fifth, there is a possibility that Shadow Theatre moved with the gypsies across the entire Silk Route. Sixth, Purbaranga (initiation) ceremonies in shows are common in India and Bali. Lastly, Southeast Asia uses one significant figure with a rod from head to neck without any joints or, with a rod through the body, as a spinal cord with loosely attached limbs.

Art likely originated from early humans' desire to simulate life-like movements through figures, eventually evolving into theatrical forms incorporating elements from various art forms.

Puppetry is an art form that involves storytelling through manipulating inanimate objects known as puppets. It shares similarities with magic and theatre, relying on the skilful transformation of these objects to bring stories to life. Despite requiring relatively modest resources, puppetry can create intricate and enchanting performances. Various cultures have adapted this ancient art, developing their unique versions of puppet shows that reflect their societal values and traditions. Over time, puppetry became a popular pastime for friends and families, especially as stories and fables were woven into performances, allowing these tales to be passed down through generations.

#### **4.2.1 Shadow Puppetry –Asia Leather Puppetry Art**

Hindu missionaries utilized puppetry to disseminate their religion, ideals, and doctrines. The enduring tradition of leather puppetry, which remains vibrant across Asia, reflects the continent's rich blend of religions and cultures. This art form embodies a confluence of Buddhist, Jain, Muslim, and Hindu traditions. Through oral narratives and moral and religious tales, leather puppetry has conveyed the essence of various faiths to millions of illiterate rural communities across the continent.

The origins of leather puppetry as an art form are ancient, making it difficult to pinpoint its exact beginnings. The stories depicted through puppets often intertwine myths, legends, and history, many of which have been passed down through oral traditions for countless generations. The evolution of leather puppetry can be traced from India to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Bali, with an alternate path through China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. The presence of Hinduism and Buddhism has significantly influenced the spread of this art form across these regions. The central themes conveyed through leather

puppetry include religious teachings, economic achievements, and military exploits (Jurkowski, 2009).

#### **4.2.1.1 Leather Puppetry in Malaysia**

The Calantan region, predominantly inhabited by Malaysians, served as a hub for leather puppetry, reflecting the influences of Indonesia and Indochina. The Javanese have been trading with Malaysia and Thailand since ancient times, with certain regions in these countries even coming under their administration briefly. India, too, maintained early trade relations and cultural ties with neighboring countries, which allowed Hinduism and its culture to persist in these regions even after the introduction of Islam. (Rao N. , 2000)

In Malaysia, the multi-religious influences are evident even in string puppetry. There are two main types of leather puppet plays: Vayang Java and Vayang Siam. Malaysians believe that the Siam tradition traces its origins to the Ramayana, with the central theme being the reunion of Ram and Sita. Interestingly, the Malaysian version of the Ramayana has become more popular than the original epic.

The leather puppets of Malaysia, modeled after the main characters of Java Vayang, exhibit distinctive features in their design. The front portion of these puppets reflects elements of the physical world, with figures characterized by long hair, slightly bent bodies, graceful torsos, long arms, and delicately crafted features. The strings are attached in a unique manner, setting them apart. Malaysian puppets are notably large and sturdy, and they feature special headgear. The male puppets wear long, crown-like headpieces, reminiscent of those seen in Thailand, while the female puppets sport hairstyles that closely resemble traditional Malaysian styles.

The leather puppets of Malaysia, inspired by the main characters of Java Vayang, showcase intricate elements of the physical world in their design. These figures are depicted with long hair, slightly bent bodies, elegant torsos, and long arms, with delicate details carefully crafted into their form. The strings are attached distinctively, different from other styles. Malaysian puppets are notably large and sturdy, and they feature unique headgear. The male puppets wear long, crown-like headpieces similar to those seen in Thailand, while the female puppets have hairstyles that closely resemble traditional Malaysian styles.

#### **4.2.1.2 Leather Puppetry in Indonesia**

Politically, the islands of Java and Bali are now part of what we call Indonesia. These islands are home to some of the most significant traditions of leather puppetry outside of India. Leather puppetry in Indonesia can be examined under Bali and Java. Performances in

these regions explore unique possibilities not found elsewhere. During a performance, men sit on one side of the screen, where they can watch the Dalang puppeteers, their movements, and the shadows they cast. Meanwhile, women sit on the opposite side, observing only the shadows. This setup provides two distinct perspectives on the same performance.

#### **4.2.1.3 Leather Puppetry in Java**

Leather puppetry is deeply rooted in Javanese culture, where it enjoys great popularity and a rich tradition. These puppets visually embody the history of the Javanese ancestors, who claim their heritage is linked to the tradition of Hindu gods. While Javanese culture has been profoundly influenced by Hindu culture, the Javanese did not adhere to Hindu traditions due to certain constraints. Instead, they have developed a unique blend, separating their ancestry from Hindu culture. (Rao N. , 2000)

Leather puppetry has been performed since prehistoric times, possibly evolving from shadow plays in Central Asia, influenced by Indian traditions. It may have also originated in Southeast Asia, China, or other ancient civilizations. Hindu missionaries used puppet plays to spread religious ideals and doctrines, and Indian travelers likely carried leather puppets as they journeyed to Java, Malaysia, and Bali. In Java, leather puppetry remains closely tied to Hindu tradition, though all the words used in these performances are of Javanese origin, not Indian(Figure 4.13(a)).

An edict from 'Kangal' reveals that Hindu culture had established firm roots in Java as early as the 8th century.

#### **4.2.1.4 Leather Puppetry in Bali**

The culture of Bali is a confluence of Chinese, Indian, and Japanese influences, with its history centered around a series of battles. Following the fall of the Majapahit Hindu Empire at the end of the 16th century, Hinduism in Bali began to decline, gradually being replaced by Islamic culture. The puppets of Vayang Kulit are modeled after pre-14th century Hindu and Buddhist sculptures found in Candi, Java. (Rao N. , 2000)

Bali's puppets are distinctly different from those of Java. Their shadows and the chiseling methods used to create them are highly realistic, with the necks and shoulders proportioned to match the human body. The stories of all Vayang plays are drawn from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, and the poems in these plays have been passed down through oral tradition, either in Sanskrit or local languages.

Since these plays were intended for entertainment, they often incorporated folk elements. The unique features of Bali's Vayang Kulit closely resemble sculptural art. Leather puppet

performances also continued, with the folktales of Vayang Purwa predating Hindu culture and relating to the history of the land(Figure 4.13(b)). These stories revolve around themes such as agriculture, the wars of the gods, and their exploits, covering various subjects like birth, death, moksha, and confession. Islamic culture detached these stories from their association with idols and infused them with greater emotional depth. (Rao N. , 2000)

Another major story is Sahasrarjuna's victory over Arjuna, originating from the Ramayana. The third division of these stories focuses on the tale of Ravana, Rama, and Sita, while the fourth part highlights important Pandava characters from the Mahabharata.

#### **4.2.1.5 Leather Puppetry in Cambodia**

It is believed that the Khmers arrived from Southeast Asia in the pre-Christian era. Indian influence on their literature and art is evident until the 15th century. However, after Thailand's victory over Cambodia in 1411 AD, leather puppetry was introduced to the region. The narrators memorize the stories of the Ramayana from the 'Teenkar' books, and the puppet postures resemble those of 'Angkor' sculptures. (Rao N. , 2000)

(Figure 4.13(f))

#### **4.2.1.6 Leather Puppetry in Thailand**

Folk artists in Thailand have used four types of 'Han' puppets to create captivating performances, a tradition that dates back to the 15th century. These four types are: 'Hanlavung' (giant court puppets), 'Hanlek' (small puppets), 'Hanlakhon Lek' (small puppets used in dance dramas), and 'Hankrabog' (bamboo spring puppets) (Rao N. , 2000).

The influence of Indian Maharashtra's Chitrakathi and shadow theatre is evident in the Nang Yai tradition, both in its day and night performances. While leather puppetry made its way to Thailand via neighboring Cambodia, it's important to note that the origins of this tradition can be traced back to the region of Sri Vijaya, which ruled Sumatra in the 7th century A.D., and its connections to South India (Rao N. , 2000).

Nang Yai puppets feature both independent and integrated images. The Matsya (fish) forms are based on the Ramayana. In Thailand, the Indian Ramayana is locally known as 'Ramakien,' with characters such as Garam (Rama), Fralak (Lakshman), Nangsidha (Sita), and Thosakan (Ravana) depicted as independent images. These figures are often portrayed sitting in meditative poses or flying in the air, ranging from three to six feet in height(Figure 4.13(c, d, &e)). The integrated images, on the other hand, depict crowds of people, battle scenes, and multi-storied buildings, with sizes comparable to the independent figures (Foley, Thailand-World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Art, 2012).

#### **4.2.1.7 Leather Puppetry in China**

Much like traditional human theatre, Puppetry in China is a comprehensive art form that integrates various disciplines such as music, song, dialogue, mime, dance, storytelling, martial arts, ritual, visual design, and craftsmanship. It educates, entertains, and conveys philosophical and religious ideas, offering psychological and mental enrichment to its audience. Although some forms, like water puppetry, have disappeared, others, like glove puppets, rod puppets, iron rod puppets (manipulated by an iron rod in the figure's back), and string puppets(Figure 4.13(g))



(a)Java



(b) Bali



(c)Thailand



(d) Thailand



(e) Thailand



(f)Cambodia



(g) China

**Figure:4.13** (a), (b),(c),(d),(e),(f)&(g) Asian Shadow Puppetry

(marionettes), and shadow puppets continue to thrive. While globalization has introduced changes, particularly affecting the rural farming culture traditionally supporting puppetry, this art form persists, adapting to new contexts. ( Rault & China, 2012)

Although an ancient edict in China does not directly mention leather puppetry, certain practices underscore the significance of shadows in Chinese culture, offering a clear connection to the tradition of leather puppetry. This makes the edict, dating back to 121 BC, highly significant in this context. Later, in the 7th century AD, as Buddhism began to play a pivotal role in Chinese culture, Buddhist monks utilized shadow theatre to disseminate their faith, crafting shadow plays from religious texts. Over time, folk artists incorporated social themes into these performances. Documents from 1050 AD provide insight into leather puppetry performers in the Pian-Liang region, shedding light on the status of the art during that period. (Rao N. , 2000)

It's fair to say that performances of the ancient traditions of 'Laun Chow' and Loping significantly contributed to the development of Chinese puppetry. The preparation of leather for puppetry in China is similar to methods used in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, where the leather is made translucent before the contours are drawn and inner details are composed as needed. Bamboo sticks are then attached to stabilize the puppets. Chinese leather puppets can be classified into four varieties based on their composition. In addition to human figures, these puppets also depict natural scenes such as hills, ocean waves, trees, plants, buildings, furniture, ships, and weapons, all essential elements in Chinese leather puppetry.

#### **4.2.2 Shadow Puppetry in South India**

Historically, the tradition of Chhaya Natak(shadow theatre) seemed to have existed in Gujarat a thousand years ago but is not found today. In the book Dramas and Dramatic Dances, Prof. William Ridgeway quoted a Chhaya Natak play called Dutangada, presented at a festival in honour of Kumarpal Deva, a Chalukya king who ruled in Gujarat in the 12th century. The particular event commemorated the restoration of a Shiva temple by the king at Somnath in Kathiawad.

The shadow theatre migrated from Gujarat to Rajasthan and Maharashtra, where it was given high patronage by the local potentates and allowed settlement in different regions. The Killekytes, who work as a wandering tribe, spread their art as they migrated further south and performed Shadow Place in Maharashtra. In South India, mainly in Andhra Pradesh, the

Art form became highly respected, and the educated clan of The Tribe adopted local languages like Telugu to recite original verses from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Another clan of the original tribe migrated from Maharashtra to Karnataka, taking their art form with them.

The sculptures and frizes of the regional temples- in their original forms- usually inspire the figures of the Puppets. New puppets, of course, derive their design from the older ones.

Indian puppets are the principal leaf of four forms, glow road string, and Shadow. There are a few composite and rare forms that are also dealt with here from some particular category.

This does not use the original puppets but their shadows: in black and white or in colour.

The screen forms a barrier between the audience and the Puppet, creating a projection of the image. The impact on the audience, enveloped by darkness, is quite dramatic. A Shadow puppet may be a single shape or sectional and articulated using hinged, overlapping segments. Materials used vary from leather, metal, and cardboard to PVC sheets.

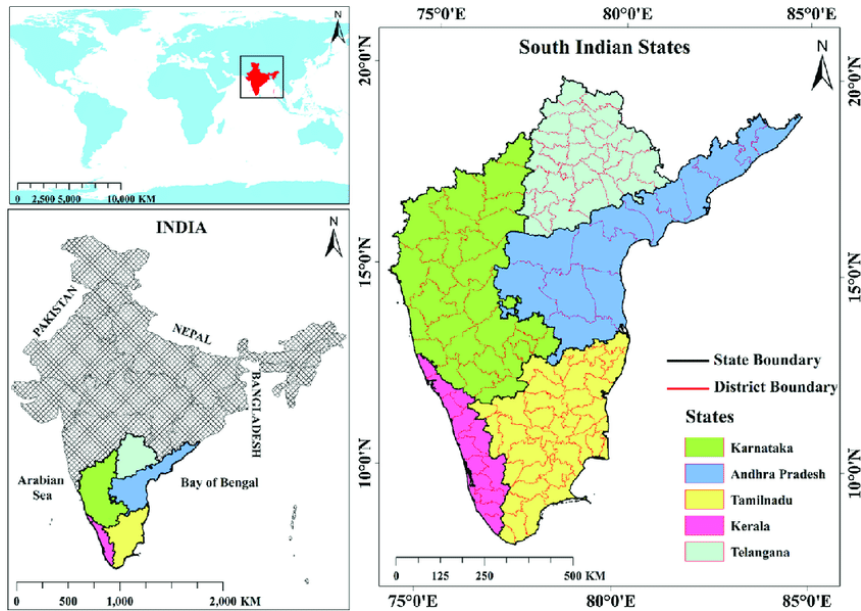
Experiments use overhead projectors as light sources to permit rare projection and other technical effects.

Shadow Puppets have an attractive Genesis as one of the oldest art forms of India derived from the visual art performances like a Chitra Katha scroll painting of Maharashtra of South India, the Jadon role painting of Bengali, the Chitrakathi of Maharashtra impact of Bihar and the painting of Rajasthan this Puppets mainly made of leather. Occasionally, hall paper and cardboard go back to the origin of civilisation given to our figures, but little is known of this property when Scholars first begin to criticize it and publish their findings.

**Table:4.1 Puppetry of Soth India states and neighbouring states**

Sl. No	Shadow Puppetry	State	Community
1	Tolu Bommalattam	Tamil Nadu	Killekyata
2	Tholpavakoothu	Kerala	Nair
3	Gombeyatta	Karnataka	Killekyata/ Dayat
4	Tholu Bommalata	Andhra Pradesh	Killekyata/ Are Kapu
5	Ravana Chaya	Orissa	Bhat
6	Chamdyacha bahulya	Maharstra	Bahulya Thakar

The Shadow puppets are very widely prevalent in South India and coastal areas beside these areas found in the states of Maharashtra and Orissa. Shadow Puppets are known by different names in different states, such as Tamil Nadu– Tolu Bommalatam, Kerala - Tholpavakoothu, Karnataka-Gombeyatta, and Andhra Pradesh -Tholu Bommalata (Rao N. , 2000).



**Figure: 4. 14** South India map [image source: (Arif, 2021)]

#### 4.2.2.1 Tamil Nadu – “Tolu Bommalatam”

In Tamil, "Tolu" (or "Thol") means leather, and "Bommalatam" refers to a figure, doll, or puppet. In Tamil Nadu, the Tolu Bommalatam shadow theatre is traditionally performed by members of the same family, with troupes typically consisting of three to nine people. These families, belonging to the Mandikar community, originally migrated from Maharashtra during the 18th century under the rule of the Thanjavur Maratha kingdom and now reside in the central and southern parts of the state. Shadow theatre has gained increasing popularity in south Tamil Nadu, with leaders in Thirumathi providing support for this art form. (Muthukumaraswamy, 2012)



(a) Tamil Nadu-  
Tolu Bommalatam



(b) Kerala-  
Tholpavakoothu



(c) Karnataka- Gombeyatta



(d) Andhra Pradesh-  
Tholu Bommalata

**Figure:4.15** (a), (b), (c), &(d)South India Shadow Puppets

#### 4.2.2.2 Kerala - “Tholpavakoothu”

Traditional shadow theatre from Kerala, located in southwest India, is known as Tolpava Koothu. The term "Tol" means leather, "Pava" refers to figures, and "Koothu" or "Kuthu" signifies dance or play. ( Pandey , 2012)Tholpavakoothu, or shadow puppetry with leather puppets, is a ritual art form popular in the northern districts of Kerala, particularly in Palakkad and Malappuram. This art form has a rich history in Kerala, having been practised for over five hundred years.

In Kerala's “Tholpavakoothu” tradition, characters and stories from the Ramayana are rendered vividly on an illuminated screen using leather puppets(Figure 4.15(b)). An epic performance in its entirety could take up to forty-one nights, but a shortened version could be finished in just seven days. Unlike other shadow play traditions, such as wayang in Indonesia, “ Tholu Pava Koothu” is a cooperative endeavour involving several puppeteers participating in the collective performance.

India's puppetry arts exhibit regional nuances, with women frequently taking on prominent roles in shadow play theatre across the country, excluding Kerala and Maharashtra.

#### **4.2.2.3 Karnataka – Gombeyatta**

Togalu Gombeyatta puppets are categorised into three broad types: Badagalapaya (North Karnataka), Tenkalapaya (Old Mysore State), and Mudalapaya (border of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh). This classification considers puppet size, stage settings, and artist positioning during performances.

These leather puppet shows can be further divided into two major types, primarily based on the size of the puppets used during the performance. The performances occur on an enclosed stage, outside the village or within the temple yard dedicated to the village goddess. Each type offers a glimpse into regional characteristics, including folk music styles, craftsmanship, stage techniques, and puppet articulation. The two types are Chikka Togalu Gombeyatta (Small Leather Puppet Play) and Dodda Togalu Gombeyatta (Life-Size or Larger Puppet Play). In Mudalapaya performances, the lead artist stands due to the large size of the puppets, making them challenging to operate while sitting.

In the northern region of Karnataka, from Dharwad to Gulbarga, the puppetry reflects the vibrant Mughal grandeur, evident in the costumes and jewellery reminiscent of that period. These puppets feature beards symbolizing Muslim influence, triangular faces, slim bodies, fish-like eyes, shoes, and an average height of around 35 inches. Conversely, puppets from the southeastern part of Karnataka display the influence of the Vijayanagara Empire, with decorative elements inspired by Chalukya, Hoysala, and Vijayanagara architecture (Figure 4.15(c)). These puppets are typically 20-24 inches tall, with heavier bodies and round faces resembling those of the Hindu community. Smaller "Chikka" puppets can be found from the Bidar district in the north to the Mysore and Kolar districts in the south. (Rao N. , 2000)

#### **4.2.3 Andhra Pradesh - “Tolu Bommalata”**

Visual storytelling in leather puppetry Traditional art forms have played an essential role in passing legends to generations for thousands of years; in this process, they use selected folk motifs such as Animals, Plants, trees, Flowers, Gods, Goddesses, demons, Sun and Moon etc., are their vocabulary; these motifs communicate very well with audience; these motifs were crucial in the mode of communicate the myths and legends such as Jataka stories, Ramayana, Bhagavata—Mahabharata, etc.

The European Scene is no less bright. Puppets, associated with religious rituals, were known to the early Greeks. During the Middle Ages, their functions continued to be religious. They regained some of the characteristics of the classic Roman Theater with the rise of the *commedia dell'arte* in 16th century Italy and moved to the parts of Europe with the spread of

Renaissance art. among the American Indians; Puppets were used for magic effects in religious rituals long before the white man stepped into the country with European puppets. (Sharma, 1985)

#### **4.2.3.1 The Origin and Traditions of “Tholu Bommalata”**

“Tolu” means Leather, and “Bommalata” means playing puppets. Traditional art forms have played an essential role in passing legends from generation to generation for many years.

The current state of Andhra theatre differs significantly from its historical roots, which encompasses two distinct shadow theatre traditions: the ancient and the relatively modern. The earliest reference to the older tradition appears in the 13th-century poetic work *Pandita Aaradhya Charitra* by Palkuriki Somanatha, a Shaiva poet. In the first canto, Somanatha mentions two types of puppets: those manipulated in front of white saree curtains and those operated with rods. The former refers to leather puppets, while the latter are rod puppets. This evidence indicates that shadow puppet theatre was already a well-established tradition in Andhra by the 12th century. Somanatha's description relates to the Shivaratri festival at the Srisailem temple, suggesting that only native forms of entertainment would have been accepted at such a significant religious event.

Numerous inscriptions, epics, and legends also reference puppeteers' existence, popularity, and scholarly status in various parts of Andhra Pradesh. A 1521 inscription records that a group of puppeteers was honored by royalty. A mathematics textbook, written at the behest of a puppeteer, praised the talents of a puppeteer known as "Bommalata Kala," who gained the favour of the great South Indian king, Krishnadeva Raya, and was honoured by him. Similarly, in A.R. 316 of 1928, an inscription from the Cuddapah district recounts how two master puppeteers, Chandramayya and Bommalata Amrita Kavi, donated the village of Chidipirala in Kamala Puram Taluk, Cuddapah district, to another puppeteer, Pedda Chittayya, to ensure the continuation of shadow puppet performances. This illustrates puppeteers' considerable wealth and influence during that era, enabling them to donate an entire village to support the arts.

The present-day Andhra theatre differs significantly from its historical form. There were two distinct shadow theatre traditions: ancient and relatively modern. The earliest reference to the older tradition is found in the 13th-century poetic work *Pandita Aaradhya Charitra* by Palkuriki Somanatha, a Shaiva poet of the 13th century. In the first canto, Somanatha describes two types of puppets: those manipulated in front of white saree curtains, which

were leather puppets, and those operated with rods, which were rod puppets. This indicates that shadow puppet theatre was well-established in Andhra by the 12th century. Somanatha's description is associated with the Shivaratri festival at the Srisailam temple, suggesting that only native forms of entertainment would have been accepted at such significant religious events.

The art of shadow plays is frequently referenced in Telugu classics. The central focus of these puppet shows is the story itself, as highlighted in a late 16th-century poetic text called *Gangavatharan*. Another text, *Chandran Gada Charitra*, written around 1650, describes an entire puppet show and its various elements. According to the poet, the essential components of a puppet show include the curtain, the audience seated before it, the commentator behind the curtain, the light source that casts shadows on the screen, the actors, and the puppets themselves. (Sharma, 1985)

#### **4.2.3.2 Migration of Andhra Pradesh Puppeteers**

The fact that puppet shows were performed throughout the night is mentioned in another text, *Panchali Parinayam*. References in *Bhaskara Satakam* and *Vemana Satakam* further emphasize the contemporary significance of puppet shows. These references suggest that shadow puppetry was a vital part of rural entertainment in Andhra, dating back to at least the 12th century. The puppeteers mentioned in these texts were typically native artisans, often known by the professional title "Bommalata Vallu," which sometimes became their surname or family name. However, later inscriptions from the 19th century reveal the presence of non-Telugu people who had settled in the region and made their living through shadow puppet performances.

Interestingly, one such piece of information comes from a Telangana inscription recovered from Gunduru in the Warangal district, known as the Guduru inscription. This inscription highlights the puppeteer's art and mentions the names "Sutradhar Kommajanaha" and "Bara Ha," indicating that the inscription was ordered to be written by the puppeteer Kommoju. Similarly, the Panugallu inscription refers to another puppeteer, Sutradhar Brahmoji.

Inscriptions from the late 18th and early 19th centuries provide evidence of a divided tradition within Andhra's shadow puppet theatre art. The earlier puppeteers were of native origin, having established themselves as traditional performers, with their craft passed down through generations. However, the mention of names like Kommoji and Brahmoji, which

are not native Telugu names, suggests the emergence of a secondary tradition that began with puppeteers of Maharashtrian origin in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

These "Western" performers likely migrated with the Maharashtrian kings of the Nayak dynasty in the 17th century. They are believed to have settled along the borders of Maharashtra and Andhra, particularly in the South Indian regions around Hindupur and Bellary under Nayaka rule. This migration supports the current evidence that a significant number of puppeteers in Andhra Pradesh, as well as in Karnataka, are of Maratha origin. These communities speak a dialect of Marathi called Aare, although it is mutually unintelligible between the groups.

This theory is further supported by the fact that similar family names appear in both regions. In Andhra, the Aare community consists of four different families, while in Karnataka, there are thirteen families, including the four from Andhra. This indicates that the Aare community of puppeteers, whether in Karnataka or Andhra, originally migrated from Maharashtra during the Nayaka period or another conquest. Despite their migration, most of these puppeteers adapted by learning Telugu or Kannada texts for their performances, while retaining their native dialect for use in their personal lives. (Sharma, 1985).

#### **4.2.3.3. Community of Andhra Pradesh Puppeteers**

It can also be inferred that most puppeteers who initially settled in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh started by performing exclusively in Telugu. However, over time, particularly after the Nayaka rule, they began performing in two different languages. This is evident from the old Karnataka puppeteers, who still sing their Ganesha Stuti, an invocation to Lord Ganesha, in Telugu. In Andhra, the Aare community is known as Kapus, integrating themselves into Telugu cultural life. The term "Kapu" refers to a Telugu agricultural community that also served as military chieftains. In Maharashtra, these puppeteers are known as Gandholis, likely named after the humorous character in the original Marathi puppet plays—Gandhi or Gandholi Gadu.

However, not all of these puppeteers remain active in South India. Various groups, such as the Jangams in Mysore, the Kuthubus along the Bombay-Mysore border, the Kuttadis in the Madura-Tanjore area, the Balijas in Bellary, the elite Bondilis in Vizag, and some Golla families in the Godavari Delta, have all practiced the puppetry tradition. Unfortunately, most of these groups have ceased to perform.

Due to the difficulty of sustaining themselves and their families through puppetry alone, many Aares turned to other occupations (Sarma, 1985)

The main villages where these puppeteers have established permanent homes are scattered across regions, from Sringavarapukota in the Vizag district to Bommalatapalle in the Bellary district. In 1937, about forty families of Aare puppeteers made Madhava Patnam near Kakinada their permanent home. In contrast, families in the southern parts of Andhra Pradesh still prefer a nomadic lifestyle and do not have permanent residences (Sharma, 1985).

#### **4.2.3.4 Social Cultural Customs of Andhra Pradesh Puppeteers**

The Aare Kapu Bommalata performers of Andhra Pradesh have seamlessly integrated themselves into the cultural traditions of the Telugu people while maintaining their unique social identity. Their customs closely resemble those of their ancestors in Maharashtra. The four families—Thota, Shinde, Anaparti, and Rekandar—belong to the Rekandar and Vanarasa sects, and they intermarry exclusively within these groups. Unlike the typical Andhra social custom where the bride's parents must provide a dowry (Vara Katnam) to the groom's family, the Bommalata families adhere to their traditional practice, where the groom's family pays the bride's family for taking the bride into their household. They bury their dead and observe a thirteen-day period of mourning known as *Maila* (impurity), concluding with a social dinner on the last day. Their major festivals include Sri Rama Navami and Sankranthi, and they traditionally begin their puppet show performances during the Sri Rama Navami festival in temples in honor of Lord Rama.

It's interesting to see how the Bommalata families have adapted to local conditions. They often adopt children from other communities and train them in their art. One such adaptation had a significant impact on both their profession and the rural drama tradition of Andhra. In 1895, a touring Bommalata family in Kadapa, led by Vanarasa Krishnaji, adopted a neglected boy named Govind Appa. Govind Appa later founded the Surabhi family theatre groups. These troupes transitioned from puppet shows to regular theatre performances, and today, the Surabhi theatre groups, numbering around twenty, are among the most prominent professional theatre groups touring rural Andhra Pradesh, with a repertoire of about twenty-five plays.

#### **4.2.3.5 Economic Status of Andhra Pradesh Puppeteers**

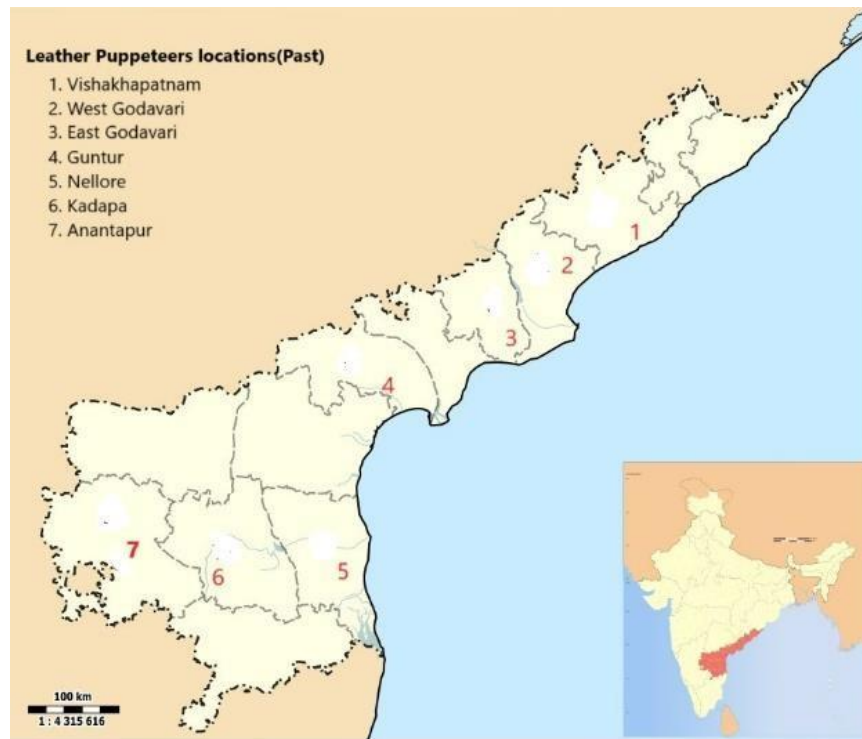
While touring puppeteers were once well-supported by society, their condition today is quite dismal. Movies and sophisticated dramatic productions have become a greater attraction for

village audiences, leading many puppeteer families to abandon their traditional profession. In East and West Godavari districts, many former puppeteers have taken up a new livelihood, exchanging utensils for old clothes, mending them, and selling them to poor customers. Although still a wandering profession, many have found better earnings in this new line of work than they did from puppet shows. In Anantapur district, some puppeteers have turned to farm labor, taking on odd jobs during the rainy season when puppet shows are infrequent.

Despite these challenges, it is heartening to note that some old-timers refuse to abandon their craft. Even though puppet show productions may not be financially rewarding, they remain committed to preserving their tradition, continuing to perform despite the hardships.

Puppet figures are the most cherished treasures of puppeteer families. When brothers from the same family establish separate households, they divide their only significant property—the puppets. It is a tradition that each brother receives a share of the puppets. Typically, a collection contains around a hundred puppets, and those who inherit the family property often need to purchase additional puppets with their own earnings. The families hold These puppets in the highest esteem, with the figures of Rama, Laxman, Seeta, and Hanuman being the most revered. On Sri Rama Navami, these sacred puppets are worshipped before being used in performances. Some puppeteer families have a special connection to village temples, particularly those dedicated to Sri Rama. On Sri Rama Navami, these families are required to perform a play free of charge, as they receive an annual honorarium (Varshikam) from the temple funds.

#### **4.2.3.6 Location of Andhra Pradesh Leather Puppeteers**



**Figur:4.16** Andhra Pradesh Leather Puppeteers Locations (Past 1,2,3,4,5,6,&7) (Present 4&7)[Image Source: internet and research scholar]

#### 4.2.3.7 The Art of Leather Puppet Making

Making leather puppets is a deeply skilled craft traditionally performed by puppeteers. From cleaning the leather to projecting the puppets onto the screen, these artists meticulously prepare every item needed for their puppet shows. In earlier times, the eldest member of each puppeteer family was typically equipped with the expertise to design and create puppets independently. However, in later years, a specialized craftsman, often a puppet maker who had inherited the skills from his father, would prepare the necessary puppet figures for a group of performing families. This art of puppet-making remains deeply embedded within puppeteer families today. Although the Leather Research Institute in Madras has introduced mechanical processes for puppet preparation, handmade puppets still possess a unique, native beauty and originality. The cottage industry at Nimmalakunta in Hindupur, Anantapur District, is the only one of its kind in the state where small puppet figures are made for commercial purposes. However, these smaller puppets are not used for performances, as they are too small for that purpose. (Sharma, 1985)

- A. Selection of the hide:** In traditional puppet-making, particularly for large ceremonial or theatrical puppets, natural materials like goat or deer skins are commonly used due to their durability, flexibility, and cultural significance. Giant puppets typically require three skins,

while medium-sized ones need two, reflecting the different construction needs based on size. The use of animal skins not only serves a practical purpose but may also carry symbolic meaning, representing a connection to nature or tradition in some cultures. Each puppet, whether medium or giant, consists of three main parts: the head, body, and limbs. The head is often the most expressive, with intricate carvings or decorations to give the puppet a distinct personality. The skins are molded to create facial features, and for larger puppets, a lightweight framework is used beneath. The body serves as the structural core, with skin stretched tightly to create a lifelike texture, sometimes enhanced with clothing or armor. The limbs, designed for mobility, are operated through rods or strings, allowing the puppet to move fluidly. For giant puppets, multiple puppeteers may be needed to control the limbs during performances or parades.—each made from a separate skin. In the past, local patrons donated these skins to the puppeteers, but today, the cost of each wet skin ranges from Rs 250 to Rs 300, compared to just Rs 10 earlier.

- B. Tanning and soaking in the lime pit:** The primary material used for making a leather puppet is the wet skin of a goat or deer. The skin is purchased while still wet, immediately after being removed from the animal, to prevent it from drying out. The wet skin is soaked in warm water, and the inner side is meticulously cleaned with a sharp knife to remove any hair and sticky residue. No salt is used during this process, and no tanning is involved. Once the skin is thoroughly cleaned and softened, it is made uniformly thin and translucent. This cleaning and thinning process takes about a day.
- C. Stretching:** The softened skin is laid on a soft, level gunny mat and stretched tightly to prevent it from becoming stiff or wrinkled as it dries. Four people hold the skin taut from all sides, and it is then secured to the mat with nails around the edges to maintain its straightened form. After drying for a day, the skin becomes white, clear, and translucent, with a thickness of about 1/32 of an inch. It is now stiff enough to be used in puppet performances.



**Figure:4.17** (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), &(f)Traditional method of Leather preparation -Step-by-step[Image source: Research scholar]

**D. Designing the Puppet:** Outlining is the first step in carving a puppet figure from the translucent skin. Typically, this outline is traced from an existing puppet. The decision to create a specific type of puppet is made by the owner, guided by two factors: the available width of the skin and the need for a particular puppet in his *ganiyam* (the performer's collection of puppets, stored in a palm-leaf or bamboo box, known as the *ganiyam*).

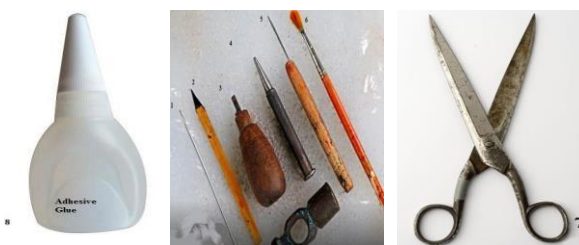
The outline is drawn on the skin using either a pencil or charcoal. Sometimes, if the artist is confident, they may trace the outline with a sharp instrument, leaving a groove on the skin. When old puppet figures are unavailable, or the artist desires to create an entirely new figure, they draw the figure directly on the skin, carefully checking the proportions before finalising the sketch with sharp chisel shown in Figure 4.20.

One such artist, Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu from Narasaraopet in the Guntur District, consistently draws new figures without tracing old puppets. "For a good artist, drawing a new figure each time is a welcome challenge," says Venkata Ramana, another master craftsman from Yakkalavari palem pet near Narasaraopet. "Every new figure becomes an original piece, distinguishable from the rest."

The vibrant leather puppetry art of India is deeply inspired by the intricate mural paintings of temples like Lepakshi, with this influence evident in various aspects of the puppets,

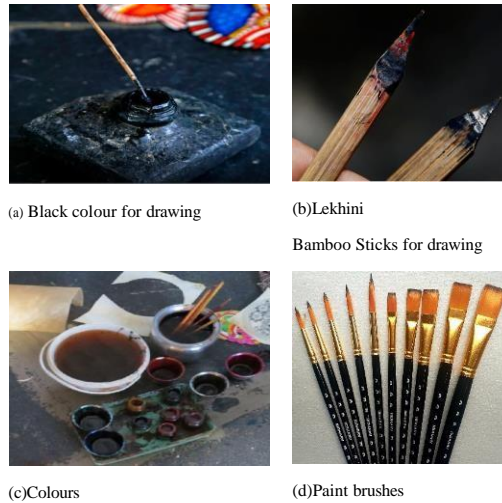
including colour schemes, patterns, ornamentation, gestures, and facial features. The bold colour palette of Lepakshi murals—rich in reds, greens, yellows, and blues—has been seamlessly adopted in leather puppetry, enhancing the puppets' visual appeal and symbolic meaning. Traditional designs and intricate detailing seen in the clothing and ornamentation of mural figures are meticulously mirrored in the attire of the puppets. In contrast, the elaborate and ornate jewellery of the murals is reflected in the puppets' adornments. Additionally, the expressive gestures and stylized facial features, such as long, sharp noses and side profiles, characteristic of Lepakshi murals, are prominently featured in the puppet designs, adding a dramatic and iconic quality to the characters. Combining mural aesthetics with leather puppetry preserves the region's rich artistic traditions and ensures this art form's continued vibrancy and cultural resonance within India's heritage. Nimmalakunta, Anantapur district Senior Artist Padmasri Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao said, “We used to sketch, draw images from temple arts, sculpture and paintings”

- E. Using different shapes of chisels to Punch holes:** Next, the artist designs the jewellery and clothing, showcasing the finest aspects of their craftsmanship. This is achieved by creating intricate patterns on the skin using sharp chisels. Circles, triangles, and crosses are the typical shapes cut into the skin to represent jewellery. At this stage, only the outlines are drawn. For example, suppose a necklace is to be depicted around a figure's neck. In that case, the artist selects a design from old puppets or other resources; they use floral motifs depending on the theme and character. Whether triangular, cross-like, or circular, sketch a rough outline. Once done, the figure is carefully cut from the skin using sharp scissors.



**Figure 4.18** Tools-1,2,3,4,5,6 in order needle, Lekhini, round shape and ‘V’ shape punching Chisels and left(8) side adhesive, right(7) side scissors[Image source: Research scholar]

The next task is to punch holes into the skin following the designs already outlined, primarily representing jewellery. This involves cutting out uniform holes that follow the pattern of the puppet figure.



**Figure:4.19** Drawing Black colour, Lekhini (Bamboo sticks) and Brushes[Image source: Research scholar]

The artist alternates these designs to suggest different types of ornamentation. For instance, if one necklace is depicted with small, circular holes, another might be shown with triangular holes, and so on. This variation adds variety and enhances the beauty of the figure. When the figure is properly coloured, and these holes are placed in the right spots, they resemble finely crafted jewellery in various shapes and colours. This delicate process requires skill and an artistic sense of colour and design, reflecting fine craftsmanship and a keen aesthetic sense.

These holes are made using sharp chisels of different widths. The small, sharp-edged chisel is placed along the lines—whether circular or triangular—and delicately tapped with a small hammer. Any haste or heavy-handedness can ruin the skin entirely.

The next step involves assembling the different parts of the figure. Up to this point, the work has been done on separate pieces of skin—one for the head and headgear, another for the torso, and different pieces for the limbs. These pieces are joined together after the figure is cut and the perforations are made. This is the general approach for medium and large-sized figures.

- F. Cutting the figure according to the shapes and joining all limbs:** The leather pieces are either kept as single units or divided into separate sections for ease of movement. Similarly, the hands consist of three parts: the palm, forearm, and upper arm. This division is essential for depicting gestures in speech or simulating actions like fighting in a battle. Typically, a

large puppet comprises ten pieces: 1 for the head, 1 for the body, 2 for the legs, and 3 for each hand, making a total of 10 pieces.

These various parts, including the limbs (both legs and hands), are hinged together using strong strings made from thickened thread, commonly prepared from skin. These strings are threaded through holes made specifically for this purpose, allowing the limbs to be easily detached if needed. While the limbs are connected with stitches, the head and body are joined using a strong bamboo stick, which is fixed through loops running from the head down to the lower part of the torso. The stick extends slightly below the torso, enabling the puppet to be handled by grasping the lower part of the stick. This design also allows both sides of the puppet to be used by rotating it with the help of the attached bamboo stick. The loops near the head are arranged to allow the direction of the face to be changed as required. The process of attaching and stitching the pieces is completed before colouring begins. This is done to ensure that the colouring is applied with the entire figure in mind, allowing for a consistent pattern that extends across the middle and lower sections of the puppet, representing the costume. If the pieces were disjointed, achieving a uniform colour pattern for the dress would be impossible.



(a) Hide Stretched on sapling frame.



(b) Dried Hide ready for draw



(c)Cutting into shape



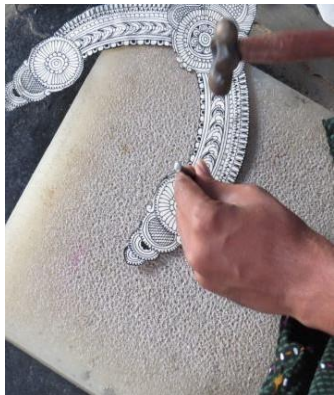
(d)Drawing with white chalk



(e)Giving outline with Lekhini (Bamboo stick)



(f)Colouring



(g)Punching



(h)Final puppet



(i)Performance

**Figure:4.20** (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f)(g), (h)&(i) Traditional method of Step-by-step Leather Puppet Art[Image source: Research scholar]

#### 4.2.3.7.1 Folk Art Motifs in Leather Puppetry Art Forms

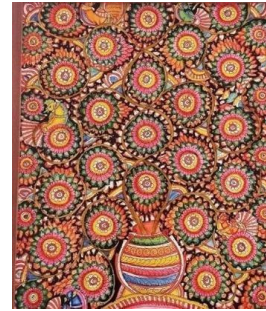
Artists create folk motifs based on the themes of performances and market demand for stage presentations and handicrafts. These motifs include natural elements, animals, birds, flowers, floral patterns, and characters from the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata, as shown in Figure 4.21. The designs are inspired by their ancestors, who were puppeteers, and local temples. Additionally, they incorporate trending contemporary folk and traditional art styles to keep their work relevant and appealing.



(a)Flora-Crysanthemum



(b)Lotus on Table Lamp



(c)Tree of life



(d)Bird



(e)Peacock



(f)Swan



(g)Camel



(h)Cow



(i)Horse



(j) Deer



(k) Tiger



(l) Elephant

**Figure:4.21. A** (a), (b), (c),(d),(e),(f),(g),(h),(i),(j),(k),(l), Natural Folk Motifs Created and used by Leather Puppetry artists from Andhra Pradesh



**Figure:4.21. B** (m), (n), (o), (p),(q),(r),(s),&(u) Natural Folk Motifs Created and used by Leather Puppetry artists from Andhra Pradesh[Image source: Research scholar]

#### 4.2.3.8 The Art of Performing and Presentation of Puppetry Art Forms

The stage setup with a curtain is essential for a leather puppet show. Unlike doll or string puppet shows, where the puppets are operated in front of the audience, in leather puppet performances, the puppets appear behind a white screen. The manipulation of the puppets happens on the opposite side, behind the screen. The white curtain, usually measuring 8'x6' (or larger, such as 10'x6' or 10'x8' for bigger performances), is tightly secured to poles on all sides, including the top and bottom. This tightness is crucial to allow the puppets to press against the screen so their figures are visible to the audience. The curtain is typically mounted on bamboo poles, about 1½ feet above the ground or platform.

The white cloth must be neither too thick nor too thin. Too thick reduces the shadow's translucency; if it's too thin, the performers are visible through the lit screen. If the curtain were completely vertical, it would be harder to maintain the position of more enormous puppets with minimal effort from the puppeteers.

The puppets are mounted on the white screen from behind, with all the action happening

backstage, or more accurately, "back-screen." The audience never sees the puppets; only their shadows are cast onto the screen by lights from behind. Two lamps or lights are usually positioned 1½ to 2 feet behind the screen at a height of about 6 feet. Traditionally, a row of earthenware lamps filled with castor oil was used. However, due to the high cost of castor oil, performers later started using petromax, now electricity lights. It is important to light the screen evenly to ensure the puppets glow uniformly during the performance.

With their natural and uniform light diffusion, the older lighting systems enhanced the performance by giving the dark-coloured puppets a marvellous translucent silhouette, almost bringing them to life. However, modern petromax and electric bulbs create more concentrated light, leading to uneven lighting with concentric circles on the screen. The lights are kept at a lower height to prevent the shadows of the puppeteers from falling on the screen. To counter the brightness of modern lights, puppets are now made with softer colours.

Unlike traditional folk theatre forms, the shadow puppet stage is not elevated and can be at ground level. However, a 1½ to 2-foot space should be left between the ground and the screen's bottom edge. This space is covered with a black cloth to conceal the puppeteers and provide enough height for them to stand while operating the puppets (Sharma,1985)

Recently, leather puppetry handicrafts have evolved significantly, incorporating the traditional art of shadow play to create stunning and intricate designs. This innovative use of shadow techniques has captured modern buyers' attention, making these crafts highly desirable for their cultural value and aesthetic appeal in home interiors. When illuminated by light, the intricate patterns and vivid colours create captivating shadow effects, adding a unique and artistic ambience to any space.

Artists and craftsmen, rooted in this ancient tradition, have expanded their repertoire beyond puppets to cater to contemporary tastes. They now produce a wide variety of products, blending tradition with functionality. These include exquisitely designed lampshades that cast mesmerizing shadows, wall hangings and paintings that showcase detailed craftsmanship, and even functional items like wall clocks, which combine utility with artistry.

In addition to home décor, these artisans have ventured into creating fashion accessories such as necklaces, Rakhi's, handbags, and pouches, adding a modern touch to this timeless craft. These items are beautiful and reflect the rich cultural heritage of leather puppetry.

Whether used for decorating homes or as fashion accessories, these handcrafted products are sought after for their distinctive blend of tradition, creativity, and functionality.

#### **4.2.3.9 Art of Preservation**

"Ganiyam" refers to a sturdy bamboo box holding the entire collection of puppet figures from a puppeteer's repertoire. This collection, often called a puppet-treasure, typically includes around 100 figures used for performances of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Approximately 50 figures are specific to the Ramayana or the Mahabharata, while the remaining 50 are shared between the two epics. Familiar figures include kings and demons, which appear in both stories. In case of necessity, a puppeteer can swap the head of one puppet for another to fit the storyline. Comic characters are also featured in any performance, regardless of the portrayed epic. In addition to human figures, the Ganiyam contains representations of animals and birds, such as the large figure of Jatayu from the Ramayana. The box also includes complex designs of trees and chariots, with some intricate figures combining multiple elements—like Hanuman perched on a tree or Sita and Ravana on a chariot. The contrasting colours and detailed figures offer a visual feast. For grand performances, such as Padmavyuham, two Ganiyams containing about 200 figures might be required. However, a typical four-hour play can be effectively presented with around 60 figures.

Visual storytelling art forms such as Buddha stupas Chitrakathi paintings (Figure4.9), Rajasthani Phad paintings (Figure4.10), Telangana Cherial paintings(Figure4.12), Andhra Pradesh Kalamkari (Figure4.11), Lepakshi and Hampi temple paintings(Figure4.5&6) share a rich tapestry of similarities in themes, preparation techniques of surface and colour, and the use of folk motifs, which can be effectively manifestation in south Indian shadow puppetry, specifically Andhra Pradesh Tholu Bommalata. Both mediums revolve around mythological narratives from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, communicating cultural, moral, and religious lessons. Religious stories focusing on deities and events are prevalent, aiming to educate and inspire devotion. Cultural traditions are captured, depicting daily life, festivals, and rituals, reflecting societal norms and practices.

#### **4.3 Folk Motifs in Visual Storytelling Art Forms**

Definition of Motif in Visual Arts: Folk motifs are the minor components or distinguishing details within folk art and folklore that contribute to forming larger narratives or designs. They can include elements such as animals, plants, and geometric patterns, each serving a

specific cultural or symbolic purpose. Such motifs are often recognisable across different folk traditions, showcasing shared cultural heritage. (Thompson, 1960)

The term "motif" originates from the Latin word "*motivus*", which means "movement" or "cause of movement." In French, the term evolved to encompass meanings such as "reason for acting" and "the subject that dominates a work." It was first used in the context of music in 1703, and by 1824, the term had also been applied to painting. Over time, the concept of a motif also spread to other fields. (Rey, 1992)

Dictionaries of art describe a motif as the theme or pattern in the structure of any work of art; the subject -being developed or treated as a distinctive idea or feature in art creation, any characteristic of a work's design recurring to create similar moods. Also, motifs inspire the conception of a work of art. The general understanding of the term 'motif' is that it is the central 'in a large design.

A motif similarity is part of a design that is prominent in the entire design either because of its size or its repetitive nature, symbolic depth, etc., and the other similar designs around it. There are broadly two types of motifs: uniformly distributed over the entire canvas and predominant in a routine design, which stands out as distinct from the background of designs over which it is super-imposed. This predominant design is the main decorative element in the canvas, with the other portions serving as mere fillers.

#### **4.3.1 Purpose and Classification of Folk Motifs:**

Cultural anthropologists and folklorists define motifs as recurrent elements in the popular traditions of an artistic community. Motifs can be found across various fields, including written and oral literature, such as tales, visual and textile arts and music. Motifs and myths are essential elements of a society's culture. They are best understood as valuable cultural resources. ( Brokerhof, W, & Agnes, 2006)

While myths embody forms of traditional wisdom, motifs are created through artistic expression, craft techniques, and careful workmanship. They reflect local identities and often have a myth associated with them. (Chudhavipata, 2021)

Motifs take on various forms and themes, broadly categorized into four types: geometric, floral, abstract, and animal. Natural, abstract, and stylised forms are the other three categories of motifs found in artwork. (Goswami & Yadav, 2019)

Typically, these motifs include representations of gods and goddesses and animals such as ducks, fish, peacocks, and elephants. Additionally, floral and geometric patterns are

commonly featured motifs in various artistic expressions. (M & A, 2012) Motifs are utilised on the surfaces of scroll paintings, embroidery, textiles, block printing, and leather puppetry. Each motif possesses an origin, evolution, and diversity in shape and presentation. In design, artisans such as weavers, embroiderers, dyers, painters, and printers bring forth visions of beauty by employing motifs deeply rooted in culture, religion, environment, and history. These motifs emerge from a community's religious practices, customs, and social beliefs. (veenu, Charu Kattare, & Sharma, 2016)

Time, culture, philosophy, geography, and various groups of individuals can institutionalise or transform motifs over an extended period. (Purwar & Shristi, 2021) A visual metaphor often intrigues the viewer by blending seemingly unrelated attributes of different objects, thereby challenging conventional perceptions. While verbal metaphors can be visually represented and are typically easy to recognise, purely artistic visual metaphors are more subtle and complex to decipher.

Visual metaphors express abstract ideas through concrete imagery, effectively bridging conceptual gaps in art. These powerful tools enhance understanding by linking familiar visuals to complex concepts. Visual metaphors transcend linguistic barriers as a universal language in art and literature. In this context, motifs are crucial in enriching the visual arts.

The motifs symbolise and reflect the beliefs, culture, and religion of the various clans and communities that practice the art. Folk motifs in visual narrative arts are categorised into three groups: Natural Folk Motifs, Geometrical Folk Motifs, and Other Folk Motifs, as shown in Table 4.2.

Natural folk motifs include various elements such as trees, plants, flowers, and fruits. Birds like parrots, peacocks, swans, cranes, ducks, and the mythical Gandabherunda are commonly depicted. Domestic animals featured in these motifs include horses, bulls, buffaloes, cows, dogs, and goats, while wild animals such as lions, tigers, cheetahs, elephants, bison, and boars are also represented. Additionally, water animals like fish, tortoises, and crocodiles, as well as creeping animals like snakes and jumping animals such as deer and monkeys, are often used in these artistic designs.

Among geometric designs, circles, loops, triangles (both single and double), squares, pentagons, hexagons, checker patterns, and cross-like designs are notable. The triangle and loop designs were particularly popular in ancient Indian ceramic art. These geometric patterns continue to be fashionable today, with triangle and loop designs maintaining their

prominence.

Even today, geometrical designs are trendy among the tribals and are primarily decorative. But in some places, we find geometrical representation unrelated and sympathetic to any external form of life, for example, two or three lines and a circle - sufficient to represent the village or field deity.

Among other symbols, the sun, star, and Moon are particularly noteworthy. These symbols represent various phenomena of the physical world. Mythological motifs include symbolic representations of deities such as Lord Ganesha, the remover of obstacles; Brahma, the Creator; Shiva; Vishnu; Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth; Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge; and demons like Surpanakha, Kumbakarna, Ravana, and Hiranyaksha. Including these motifs, only a few have gained significant popularity compared to the other motifs.

**Table:4.2 List of the Folk of Motifs Manifestation in Various Storytelling Sculptures and Paintings**

NATURAL FOLK MOTIFS		GEOMETRICAL FOLK MOTIFS		OTHER FOLK MOTIFS	
Main Category	Subcategory	Main Category	Sub-Category	Main Category	Sub-Category
Animals	Domestic Animals-Cow, Bull, Buffalo, Goat, Dog, Horse, Camel,	Circle	Oval, semi-circle	Calligraphy	Scriptures
	Wild Animals-Lion, Tiger, Cheetah, Elephant, Bison	Square		Mythological Symbols	Ganesha, Shiva, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Parvati, Ravana,
	Water Animals-Fish, Tortoise	Rectangle		Phenomenal motifs	Sun, Moon, Star,
		Triangle	Star, Hexagon, Pentagon		
	Creeping Animals-Snake, Crocodile				
	Jumping Animals-Deer, Mokey				
Birds	Peacock, Goose, Parrot				

<b>Flowers</b>	Lotus,				
<b>Tree</b>	Peepul Tree, Banyan Tree				
<b>Fruits</b>	Mango, Grapes, Pomegranate				

**Table:4.3 List of the Folk Motifs of Manifestation in Leather Puppetry Art Forms in Andhra Pradesh**

Sl. No	Natural Folk Motifs		Geometrical Folk Motifs		Other Folk Motifs	
	Main Category	Sub -Category	Main Category	Sub-Category	Main Category	Sub-Category
1	<b>Animals</b>	Domestic-Cow, Bull, Horse, Camel	Circle	Oval, semicircle	Calligraphy	Scriptures
		Wild -Tiger, Elephant	Square		Mythological Symbols	Ganesha, Shiva, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ravana, Vishnu, Rama, Seeta, Lakshmana, Hanuman, Vaali, Sugreev, Jambavanta,
		Water-Fish, Tortoise	Rectangle		Phenomenal motifs	Sun, Moon, Star,
			Triangle	Star		
		Creeping-Snake				
		Jumping Animals-Deer, Mokey				
2	<b>Birds</b>	Peacock, Goose, Parrot				
3	<b>Flowers</b>	Lotus,				
4	<b>Trees</b>	Tree of Life, Peepul Tree, Banyan Tree				

5	<b>Fruits</b>	Mango, Grapes, pomegranate				
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In the leather puppetry art of Andhra Pradesh, a diverse array of natural, geometric, and mythological motifs is integral to the tradition, as illustrated in Table 4.3. Naturalistic folk motifs often draw from the environment, with artists depicting elements such as trees, plants, flowers, and fruits. Birds like parrots, peacocks, swans, cranes, ducks, and the mythical Gandabherunda are frequently featured. A wide range of animals is also represented, including wild creatures like lions, tigers, leopards, elephants, and buffaloes, alongside domestic animals such as horses, bulls, cows, dogs, and goats. Aquatic animals like fish, turtles, crocodiles, creeping animals like snakes, and energetic creatures such as deer and monkeys add further vibrancy to these intricate designs.

Geometric motifs hold a special place among tribal and folk artists, primarily serving decorative purposes. These designs can be symbolic without directly referencing living forms, with simple shapes like two or three lines and a circle effectively representing concepts such as a village or field deity. Despite their simplicity, these geometric forms carry deep cultural significance. Artists also use leather figures to create decorative borders, adding complexity and meaning to their work.

Astronomical symbols such as the sun, moon, and stars are prominent, symbolizing natural phenomena and physical forces in the world. Mythological motifs play a significant role, often portraying deities like Ganesha, the remover of obstacles; Brahma, the creator; Shiva; Vishnu; Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth; and Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom. Demonic figures from Hindu mythology, such as Surpanakha, Kumbhakarna, Ravana, and Hiranyaksha, are frequently depicted, see Table 4.3.

These motifs are essential not only in performances but also in the paintings associated with leather puppetry. They act as visual metaphors, expressing abstract ideas through concrete images, effectively bridging conceptual gaps in art. As powerful tools of expression, visual metaphors enhance understanding by connecting familiar scenes to complex concepts. In this way, they transcend linguistic barriers, serving as a universal language in art and

literature. Within this context, the role of motifs is crucial, enriching the visual experience and depth of the art form.

#### **4.3.2 Folk Motifs' impact on the Visual Arts Forms the perspective of leather Puppetry Art**

The influence of folk motifs on visual art forms, particularly leather figure art, is profound and multifaceted. In the leather puppetry tradition of Andhra Pradesh, a rich variety of natural, geometric, and mythological motifs plays an integral role. Naturalistic motifs often draw inspiration from the environment, featuring elements such as trees, plants, flowers, and fruits. Birds like parrots, peacocks, swans, cranes, ducks, and the mythical Gandabherunda are frequently depicted. At the same time, a wide array of animals is also represented, including wild creatures like lions, tigers, leopards, elephants, and buffaloes, as well as domestic animals like horses, bulls, cows, dogs, and goats. Aquatic animals such as fish, turtles, crocodiles, creeping animals like snakes, and energetic creatures like deer and monkeys further enrich these detailed designs. These motifs are central to shaping the artistic, cultural, and spiritual narratives expressed through leather puppetry, exploring various perspectives within the tradition.

A. Cultural Continuity and Tradition: Folk motifs in leather puppetry are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, often reflecting the socio-religious values of the community. They serve as a visual language to represent stories from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata and local legends, thus preserving oral traditions in a tangible, visual form. The motifs connect contemporary audiences to ancient cultural symbols, ensuring the continuity of these stories and beliefs.

B. Symbolism and Visual Narrative: Each motif used in leather puppetry carries symbolic meaning, often linked to religious and mythological stories. For example, Floral and animal motifs like lotuses, peacocks, and elephants represent divine beauty, grace, and strength, mirroring the depiction in temple murals such as those in Lepakshi and Hampi.

Geometric patterns signify order and structure, often used to balance the complex compositions of the puppets. These motifs serve both an aesthetic and narrative purpose, guiding the viewer's eye and enhancing the storytelling aspect of the performance.

C. Aesthetic Influence and Artistic Techniques: The decorative motifs in leather puppetry often influence other art forms, such as painting, textile design, and temple carvings. The intricate cutwork, vibrant colour schemes, and layered compositions seen in leather puppets

are echoed in the designs of Kalamkari or Pata Chitra, contributing to a shared visual tradition in Indian folk art.

Colour symbolism: The bright, contrasting colours in puppetry (reds, blues, greens) are drawn from the folk tradition of using natural dyes. Each colour has meaning red symbolises power and action, blue divinity, and green life and nature.

Composition and form: The way motifs are arranged in leather puppets — often to highlight key moments in a narrative — mirrors mural compositions where central figures adorn motifs that emphasize their importance in the scene.

D. Regional and Local Identity: Folk motifs are essential in expressing regional identity. For instance, the decorative designs in puppetry from Andhra Pradesh might differ from those in Maharashtra or Karnataka due to variations in local folklore, religious beliefs, and environmental influences. Puppeteers use motifs that resonate with the local audience, reinforcing regional identity and connecting communities through shared symbols.

E. Spiritual Significance of folk motifs: Many motifs used in leather puppetry are imbued with spiritual meaning. Figures of gods and goddesses are often surrounded by halos, celestial elements, or auspicious symbols like conch shells, reflecting divine attributes. These visual cues in the motifs help convey the religious and philosophical messages embedded in the performance, transforming the puppet show into a spiritual experience.

F. Folk Motifs Influence on Other Visual Arts: Leather puppetry motifs have inspired other forms of visual art, including Painting, mural painting and handicrafts. The stylisation of figures, use of elaborate borders, and narrative focus seen in puppetry are often adapted in other folk art forms like Cherial scroll painting or Chitrakathi, blending visual traditions and evolving them across mediums. For instance, the exchange of motifs between puppetry and temple murals is notable in the treatment of divine figures and storytelling styles.

G. Contemporary Artist's Innovation and Preservation: While traditional motifs remain a cornerstone of leather puppetry, contemporary artisans innovate by incorporating modern themes and new motifs that appeal to today's audiences. This fusion keeps the art form alive and relevant while preserving its roots in folk traditions.

Folk motifs in leather puppetry serve as a critical bridge between past and present, infusing visual arts with cultural meaning, artistic continuity, and regional identity. They shape the art's aesthetics, narrative style, and spiritual depth, making leather puppetry a form of entertainment and a rich cultural heritage vessel.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LEATHER PUPPETRY IN TRANSITION: A CASE STUDY IN GUNTUR AND ANANTAPUR, ANDHRA PRADESH

As per the research methodology discussed in chapter three, details are as follows bellow:

As the present study uses a qualitative research design, a case study approach has been followed to gather the relevant information to fulfil the study's objectives. According to Newman (1997), a case study is valuable when a large amount of information might have to be gathered on one or few cases with greater depth and details. Due to the overwhelming data, the study can examine people's lifestyles, cultures, actions, and words in the context of the complete case.

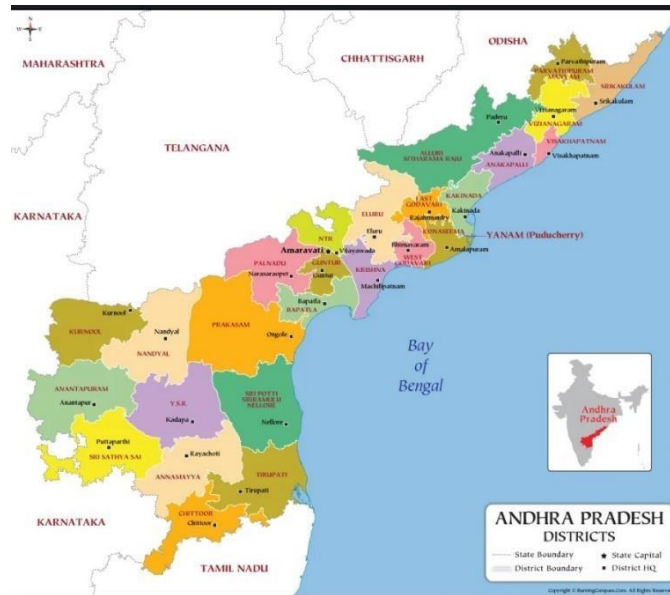
This chapter provides a comprehensive background on the agencies responsible for procuring leather puppet art in Andhra Pradesh. It offers an in-depth examination of the targets set by these agencies at the state level and evaluates the extent to which these targets have been achieved. The chapter also presents eight detailed case studies exploring the impact of procurement policies on the leather puppet art community in two districts, Guntur and Ananthapur, as given in Table 5.1. and Figure 5.1(a& b). These districts were selected for their historical and ongoing significance as hubs for leather puppetry, with many artisan families in these areas relying on this traditional craft for their livelihood.

**Table 5.1 Details of the Andhra Pradesh Districts**

<b>Andhra Pradesh District</b>	
Present Andhra Pradesh Districts	26
Previous Number of Andhra Pradesh Districts	13

The interviewer collected valuable data on various aspects, including the locations of puppeteers, performance venues, the presence of senior puppeteers, historical background and ancestry, family structures, puppet preparation and training processes, marketing,

branding, promotion, financial, occupations, youth interest towards puppetry profession, and the challenges faced by the puppeteers.



**Figure5.1.** (a) Present Andhra Pradesh District Map [Image Source: Internet]



**Figure5.1(b)** A Previous Number of Andhra Pradesh District Map [Image Source: Internet]

The study delves into how procurement policies have affected these artisans, focusing on their skills, knowledge, and ability to adapt to modern procurement practices. Additionally, the chapter highlights the social challenges these artists face due to the rapid advancement of technology, the rise of digital media, and the evolving dynamics of the market. These factors

have not only impacted the demand for traditional leather puppetry but have also led to significant social and economic challenges for the artisan families who have practised this art form for generations.

#### **5.1.1 Identifying and Selecting Research Respondents**

Given that the nature and size of the population were only approximate estimates for each district, the 'snowball' method was employed to identify the puppeteers. Louis Cohen described that this approach starts by placing a small group of individuals with the desired characteristics, who then serve as informants to identify others who meet the criteria. (Louis Cohen, 2007). These newly identified individuals, in turn, help locate additional participants, creating a "snowball" effect. The process begins with one or a few cases and gradually expands through connections to the initial cases. (Neuman, 2014) Since there is no documented information on the current population of puppeteers relevant to the research topic, the study employed opportunistic sampling, collecting data from all puppeteers identified through random interviews. Despite this, a multistage approach was adopted, starting with selecting states, districts, villages, and puppeteers.

#### **5.1.2 Criteria for Selecting the State**

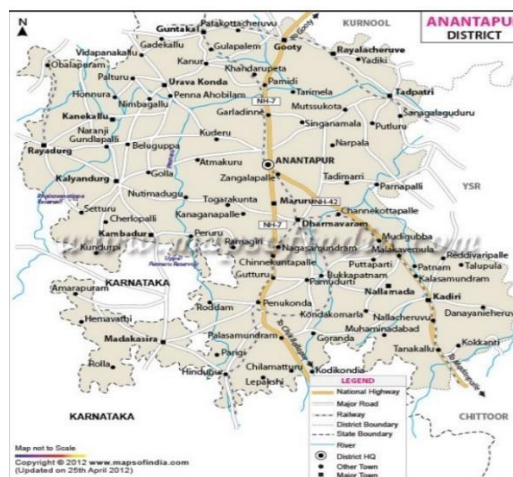
Indian shadow puppetry form is confined mainly to the four southern states, namely Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Orissa, and Maharashtra are the other states where this art form exists among very few families. However, Puppetry traditions in Southern states and other states have similarities in using themes for presentation, preparation, and motifs. The state selection is based on the traditional and historical evidence, prevalence and continuity of the art form, and the availability of adequate literature. In addition, the investigator has spent a few years in Andhra Pradesh and is also accustomed to the customs and traditions of rural society. The present study was, therefore, undertaken to observe very closely the influence of various folk motifs on traditional leather puppetry forms in Andhra Pradesh from southern India (Figure 5.1(a &b)).

#### **5.1.3 Criteria for Selecting the Districts**

The largest concentration of shadow puppeteers is settled in a few districts of Andhra Pradesh, such as Guntur, Ananthapur, Kakinada, Nellore, Srikakulam, and Visakhapatnam (Sarma, 1985). Among these districts, only Guntur and Ananthapur were selected (Figure 5.2&3). The selection of districts within different districts was based on the availability of the place of visit and the mobility of the puppeteers.

#### **5.1.4 Identifying and Selecting of Puppeteers for the Study**

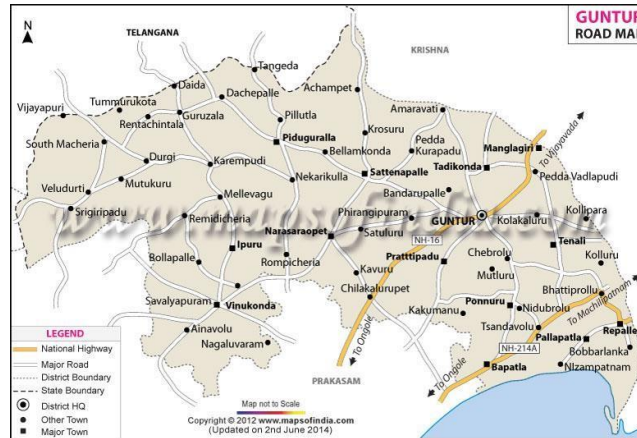
The researcher surveyed to gather information on Leather puppetry Art from individuals of different interests and age groups across selected districts. Surveys offer flexibility in collecting diverse information, which can be used to study various aspects such as available raw materials, skills, branding, marketing, beliefs, values, and past behaviors. A semi-structured interview survey involves questions being administered by a researcher, while a questionnaire survey involves the respondents answering the questions themselves. Surveying efficiently collects data from many respondents, potentially accumulating substantial research samples. See Annexure 1 for a detailed list of the participant artists.



**Figure 5.2:** Ananthapur District of Andhra Pradesh [Image source: Internet]

### 5.1.5 Questionnaire Development and Survey Method

The researcher developed a questionnaire designed to gather respondents' opinions on the research topic. These questionnaires were distributed to respondents, and their responses were collected for further analysis. Online forms were utilized for respondents with internet access to facilitate data collection, enabling efficient and timely data gathering. The questionnaire was administered offline for puppeteers who needed internet access or were unfamiliar with online forms. This dual approach of combining online and offline methods ensured more comprehensive coverage and was well-suited for the targeted groups. These methods were essential for collecting the necessary data outlined in the questionnaire.



**Figure:5.3** Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh [Image source: Internet]

The questionnaires in this study addressed various aspects of leather puppet artisans' personal and professional lives. They included questions about the sources and availability of raw materials, the artisans' skills and expertise, and the influence of different storytelling art forms on their work. The questionnaires also explored how the artisans determine the pricing of their artefacts. In addition, they examined the financial support available to the artisans, the promotional strategies they employ, and the puppets' quality in drawing, painting, and overall presentation.

Furthermore, the study investigated the younger generation's interest in continuing the craft, along with branding and packaging aspects of the products. The questionnaire also focused on the technical aspects of puppet-making and the broader concept of "Artisanship," looking at the social and cultural identities of the artisans.

The researcher assured participants that all personal information would remain confidential and unpublished. This guarantee was provided to protect the artisans' privacy and ensure their responses were honest and uninhibited.

The researcher conducted a survey to gather insights on motifs and leather puppetry, engaging participants from diverse backgrounds and age groups both within India and internationally. Respondents were contacted through various methods, including in-person meetings, telephone calls, and mail correspondence. Surveys provide flexibility in data collection, making them ideal for examining factors such as attitudes, beliefs, values, raw material availability, branding, and marketing strategies. Questions relevant to the research focus were thoughtfully designed, coded, recorded, and analyzed.

In a structured interview or researcher-administered survey, the researcher personally conducts the study and asks questions. In contrast, a self-administered survey or

questionnaire allows respondents to complete the questions independently. Surveys are a highly effective tool for gathering data from a large number of participants, often resulting in substantial sample sizes that offer a rich source of information for research analysis.

The researcher assured participants that all personal information would remain confidential and unpublished. This guarantee was provided to protect the artisans' privacy and ensure their responses were honest and uninhibited.

#### **5.1.6 Understanding Personal Journeys and Group Dynamics through Conversations**

The interviewer conducted both individual and group interviews with key informants who are experts in their respective fields to gather critical information related to the research. These interviews provided valuable data on a range of topics, including the locations of puppeteers, performance venues, the presence of senior puppeteers, historical background and lineage, family structures, puppet-making and training processes, marketing, branding, promotion, financial aspects, occupations, youth interest in the puppetry profession, and the challenges faced by puppeteers. This triangulation method helped enhance the validity and reliability of the various elements studied. Among the interviewees were distinguished experts and intellectuals, including Padma Shri recipients and state and national awardees in the field of leather puppetry.

Semi-structured interviews were a flexible yet focused method, starting with predetermined questions but allowing new inquiries to arise naturally during the conversation. This approach is highly effective in gathering deep insights into puppetry's history, preparation and training processes, beliefs, religious practices, social customs, challenges and plans of puppetry. Data collection was enhanced using detailed field notes and audio and video recordings. In addition, a semi-structured questionnaire examined the technical aspects of puppet making and the broader concept of "artistry" with an emphasis on the social and cultural identities of the artists. It aims to explore how these cultural practitioners preserve and adhere to traditions through their long-standing practices and motifs(see annexure-1)

A separate session of in-depth discussion was conducted by choosing eight among those artisans:

**Table:5.2 The Details of Artisans Selected for Separate Session In-depth Interview**

<b>S. No</b>	<b>Name of the Artisan</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Place</b>	<b>Name of the Award</b>
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1	Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu	Guntur	Narasaraopet	National Award
2	V. Sri Koteswara Rao	Guntur	Yakkalavari Palem	State level Award
3	V. Venkat Kumar	Guntur	Yakkalavari Palem	State level Award
4	Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	PadmaSri
5	Dr Dalavay Kulayappa	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award
6	Dalavay Shivamma	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award
7	Shinde Sriramulu	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award
8	Shinde Chidambaram	Ananthapur	Nimmalakunta	National Award

#### **5.1.7 Field Visits: Documenting the Cultural and Artistic Practices of Leather Puppetry Communities**

Site visits are a crucial component of research, often involving the method of observation. This research technique requires the researcher to adopt multiple roles and use various methods, including engaging all five senses to collect data. By immersing themselves in the environment, researchers can uncover hidden details that might otherwise go unnoticed. In some cases, researchers also engage in participant observation, where they actively take part in events or activities while simultaneously gathering data.

The direct observation method was employed when data gathered through other means proved to be limited or difficult to verify. This method is highly reliable, as it allows the researcher to witness behaviors and actions firsthand, confirming or challenging information gathered through interviews or other interactions. In this study, direct observation was used to examine physical arte acts such as puppet-making tools, visual records like photographs and videos, and other materials.

Direct observation was particularly important for understanding the various stages of puppetry, including puppet creation, stage setup, performances, storage practices, and associated customs. To document these observations, handwritten notes, photographs, and video recordings were employed.

## Preservation Challenges and Collections of Indian Puppetry

India currently faces a significant challenge in preserving its traditional puppetry heritage. Many traditional puppets have been sold or taken by foreign collectors, connoisseurs, and museums—often without government knowledge or intervention. Those that remain have not received the necessary attention for their preservation.

India is home to several notable public collections dedicated to traditional puppetry, where these cultural artefacts are displayed alongside broader exhibits, toys, and dolls. Chitrakala Parishath in Bengaluru, Karnataka, has been active since 1967 and houses over 2,000 traditional puppets, including the famous Togalu Gombeyatta puppets by Nanjunda Rao. In New Delhi, the Crafts Museum in Pragati Maidan features a diverse range of craft objects from across India, with a significant collection of puppets. Karnataka's Folklore Museum in Mysore boasts an extensive array of shadow and string puppets, reflecting the state's cultural richness. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) in New Delhi is a national hub for Indian art and culture, archiving slides of Indonesian shadow puppets and films documenting traditional Indian puppetry. In Udaipur, Rajasthan, the Bhartiya Lok Kala Mandal is dedicated to preserving folk arts, including an impressive collection of puppets, costumes, masks, and more. Established by Devilal Samar, this museum regularly hosts traditional Rajasthani puppet shows. Hyderabad's Leather Puppet Museum at Shilparamam focuses on collecting and educating visitors about leather puppets and epic characters. In New Delhi, both the Sangeet Natak Akademi at Rabindra Bhawan and the Malliah Memorial Theatre Crafts Museum on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg contain vast collections of traditional puppets, masks, and ornaments, preserving India's rich puppetry heritage. Despite these efforts, India still needs a comprehensive system for archiving and preserving this unique cultural legacy, with many traditional puppets being sold or lost to foreign collectors, highlighting the need for more robust preservation efforts.

### **5.1.8 Approaches to Case Study Methodology**

The case study method was utilized to reinforce the objectives and substantiate the study's findings in greater depth. This approach offers a wealth of detailed information, making it particularly valuable for comprehensively understanding a specific issue or situation. In line with the current study, Yin (2008) emphasizes that a case study is an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, mainly when the distinction between the phenomenon and its context is not clearly defined.

### **5.1.9 Framework of Data Analysis**

The information collected on various aspects of the study through interviews, direct observation, and secondary data sources was systematically organized, summarized, and analyzed to achieve the study's objectives. The analysis is both descriptive and narrative in nature.

Leather Puppetry is an ancient art form that has played a vital role in passing down Indian legends and myths across generations. Over time, however, this traditional art faced a decline. According to the Encyclopedia of World Puppetry, India is considered the birthplace of puppetry. While substantial research has been conducted on this subject, it has primarily focused on puppetry as a performance art, overlooking its potential as a visual art form. Artisans from Andhra Pradesh have revived this dying tradition by diversifying their craft, producing items like table lampshades, wall hangings, paintings, and wall clocks. A few dedicated artisans continue the legacy of leather puppetry, with some forming their troupes for performances.

Given this background, the study recognises the need for research from a visual arts perspective. The primary aim of my study is to explore how folk motifs within leather puppetry reflect traditional knowledge and function as a form of visual storytelling for the modern world. Though numerous scholars assert India's central role in puppetry's origins, much remains unexplored regarding its visual design elements.

Folk motifs are intrinsic to leather puppetry and other ancient art forms, including Buddhist stupas, which communicated the life of the Buddha through visual narratives. These stupas used meaningful motifs with distinct pictorial styles, colour schemes, and compositions that influenced other art forms. Understanding how these elements were used to communicate with rural audiences is key to comprehending the cognitive dimensions of puppetry, not only as a performance but also as a medium for education and visual storytelling.

In today's age of artificial intelligence, traditional art forms like puppetry have received insufficient recognition. As a visual artist, I believe studying how folk art motifs manifest in leather puppetry and other conventional forms is crucial. This research aims to contribute to the continuity of the knowledge passed down through generations.

Modern Indian visual artists are increasingly incorporating folk motifs into their work, highlighting the enduring relevance of folk art. During my fieldwork, this study observed the difficult living conditions of puppeteers. In this chapter, eight case studies will analyse their

social lifestyle, artistic skills, influences of various art forms and challenges, focusing on using folk motifs in their art forms.

### **5.2.1 Case Studies of Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh**

#### **Case Study -1 Nimmalakunta,(Padma Sri Dalavay Chalapathi Rao)**

Nimmalakunta is a small village about 10 km from Dharmavaram town in Anantapur District (now Satya Sai District), famous for its leather puppetry and puppet art. The community centre was closed when I reached the village by RTC Bus. I inquired, and the Lovable and Puppetry dedicated to Dalavay's Family welcomed me to help.

**Family Background:** Sri Dalavay Chalapathy Rao, 85 years old, a veteran leather puppetry artist from Nimmalakunta, has been in puppet-making and puppet shows for over six decades. He trains the youth in making and performing puppets.

The Indian government was honoured with the Padma Sri award in 2020 for its contributions to leather puppetry art, and he has won numerous accolades. He also received the Kala Ratna Award in 2016. He also earned Shilpa Guru Award Winner - 2006 New Delhi Golden Jubilee Award Winner - 1997 New Delhi, National Award Winner - 1988 New Delhi, Anantostavam Certificate - 2011 Anantapur, Suraj Kund Mela Certificate - 2005 New Delhi, Krishna Mahotsav Certificate - 2003 Vijayawada, Shilparamam Certificate - 2000 Hyderabad, France Appreciation Certificate - 1999 France Kalaneraajnam Certificate - 1995 Anantapur, Germany Appreciation Certificate - 1991 Germany, Berlin (From field notes)

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** A play called "Padmavyuham" requires at least two "ganiyams" (bamboo boxes for storing puppets) of puppets. It is a four-hour play and is performed with about 60 puppets. The number of these puppets has increased in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, especially in West and East Godavari districts. A considerable screen height and width of 10X 6 or 10 X 8 feet is required to display puppets. Heavy leather is necessary to make such giant puppets (Sharma, 1985).

Rao explained that a giant puppet requires three skins, and while making a leather puppet, large pieces of leather are well-spent; we use the cut pieces to make the motifs of tools like arrows, cattle, trees, baskets, etc. Moreover, with slightly bigger pieces, we make small, shaped figures of 1.5 feet of Hanuman figures. Medium figures are four feet tall, and prominent figures are five to six feet tall. Because Hanuman has about four or five forms. Colour fades, and almost all lost ones are re-painted and used, hidden away from rats, fire,

water and dogs. Therefore, baskets are carefully bamboo-made to store these leather dolls, which we carry with us wherever the show occurs. Only some people can do these; even if they have experience, they can. Now, we keep them in trunk boxes.

Quality management is critical during leather making, painting, and preserving puppets; advice and suggestions from senior artisans in this regard are essential.

Dalavayi said,

*“In those days, making puppets required goat or sheepskin puppets, a stage, lights, travelling allowances, food, accommodation, etc. After the performance, people would donate large sums of money and even land. Currently, prices have increased. The leather used to cost 5 rupees, then 50 rupees, and then 100 rupees, and now 200 to 300 rupees; if we buy leather and process it, it costs us 1000 to 1500 rupees, so we mostly buy ready-made leather.”*

*“If the skin is not cleaned correctly or the dead flesh is not removed, the skin will dry out in the sun if the skin is not stretched properly. Such leather is not suitable for dolls. Skin becomes dry during the day. Everything is cut with scissors. Well-processed leather is transparent, and other things are visible on one side. Hence, the lamp's light shines through this leather and gives the audience the beauty of the figures. Natural colours are used for puppets”.*

*“We draw figures on this leather with a pencil. After cutting the drawn figure, it is cut with scissors or on pencil lines. The shapes glittered like jewels in the lamplight. In leather cutting, the skin is cut from buffalo horn. Now, they use other types of wood, which are available and ready. Moustaches, moustaches, hair and use black colour. We paint according to the bodies.*

*For black colour, put a lamp on the wall, remove the soot, soak a well-soaked neem paste in water and dry it well. We leave the leather where we want the white to be painted. The light rays of the inner lamp pass through this skin, and the undyed part of the figure appears white. Currently, we use rose red, purple, yellow, green, dark brown and black candy colours in grocery stores. We use water-based colours. In the past, dyes were used to dye clothes, and the same colours were applied to leather toys. Those people we called "Rangarajulu"*

*“These puppets are made only by those with more experience. To paint puppets, some people wrap cloth, thread, or cotton around a stick and dip it in the colours. When the*

*colours are painted widely, these sticks should be widely spread. We paint very carefully when we paint. Usually, this work is done by women artisans”.*

*“We also make these puppets separately; if the body, legs, arms and head are characters, we make the limbs individually and then play by tying the figures with threads. People who draw, paint and make this puppet art can do it individually without any help, but while stretching, cleaning and drawing giant-size puppets, they need others' help; each performing family have 50 to 100 puppets, and those who know making and performing can earn more. (from field Note on 11th September 2022, Nimmalakunta)*

Puppeteers who are adept at depicting figures of gods, humans and demons are very careful when depicting birds and animals. In a rural environment, especially with children, the realistic representation of animals around attracts them. They consider elephants important when they invite guests, go to war, yajnas and other places; That is why we see elephants in different forms in puppetry (Rao, 2000)

Dalavayi Chalapati Rao said,

*"Artists also draw deer, bull, camel, peacock, swan, parrot, eagle (vehicle of Garuda), trees, and Lotus flowers, some of which are vehicles of deities and gods. If you observe today's leather puppet paintings, they even look like other scroll paintings". (from field Note on 11th September 2022, Nimmalakunta)*

Along with making leather Puppets, it is crucial to protect the puppets; for proper care of leather goods, oil treatments are essential, for which coconut oil is taken with a cloth and rubbed on the puppets periodically. Usually, this process is done before summer. (Nagabhushana Sharma 1985:27)

**Skilled Artisans:** Leather Puppetry combines visual arts and performing arts such as drawing, painting, music, dance, and theatre. These are all combinations in a single person, who may be an intelligent and highly talented artisan, and many leather puppeteers and special senior artists have these talents. Then Padma Sri Dalavayi Chalapati Rao said,

*“Artists who can do everything, such as drawing, colouring, designing, playing with puppets, and telling stories, are rarely available. I learned from my father when I was 13 years old. In those days, if we wanted to draw something, we traced or looked at old puppets as an example. The origin of all these are the shapes drawn by taking inspiration from the sculptures and paintings we see in the local Temples. Most were taken from Lepakshi and Hampi temples, so we still use the same forms and motifs, including flowers, animals, trees,*

*and people. Temple sculptures and paintings influence the characters in puppetry through such things as dressing, ornamentation, side faces, etc.” (from field Note on 11th September 2022, Nimmalakunta)*

**Language barrier:** History tells us puppeteers came from Maharashtra and settled in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Hence, Leather Puppeteers settled in Andhra Pradesh but mostly spoke their native tongue, Marathi. Nimmalakunta puppeteers speak Telugu well and have performed many shows in other countries. Dalavai Chalapathy Rao said,

*"In the early 90's, I demonstrated puppet-making in America, Germany and France. I have done 24 programs in Germany and ten programs in France. I have given 30 exhibitions in America with the Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), New Delhi, the Ministry of Textiles, and the Government of India".*

Padmashri Dalavayi Chalapathy Rao started touring the world with his troupe and started performing. In Germany, they held one-hour shows continuously for 45 days. Eventually, this audience fell utterly in love with the animated leather puppets.

**Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced:** Many visual story narrative art forms have similarities, such as Kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthani Phad, Maharashtra's Paithan and Chitrakathi paintings.

Then,

*Sri Chalapathi Rao describes his memories and experiences - "There are still many differences there are They paint on cloth, paper and walls, and we use leather as a surface, but there are some similarities, like we use lotus, swans, peacocks, Tree of Life and characters from legends in the puppets.*

*Nowadays, we also do paintings close to Kalamkari, Orissa pata chitras, and Cheryl's scroll paintings. What can we do? Many artisans have left this profession, and few are doing agriculture, and few are doing sofa repairing, stove repair and many other works; whatever should be done, everything should be done for the stomach (food) due to the development of movies, OTT's and mobile phones, those who watch puppetry have become thirsty, so to survive the puppetry has turned into an art form. My only concern is that Leather puppetry has a long history and should endure for future generations. To survive this ancient art form, performers should get to perform occasionally." (from field Note on 11th September 2022, Nimmalakunta)*

**Youth Showing Interest in Leather Puppetry:** Many people are not interested in this ancient art form today, even if your family and community

are young... Meanwhile, Rao Garu chuckles,

*"My sons, daughters-in-law, daughters, and sons-in-law are practising, but their children, my grandchildren, are not interested—one works as a teacher, and the other studies at MBBS. To perform a story from Ramayana, we require*

*It takes at least 8 to 12 performers for a show, at least 6 to 8 people; unfortunately, this art form is not surviving. Rao keeps saying, and bowing his head, that it's not just the fate of my family or community. It is the responsibility of all of us to protect traditions and cultures."*

(from field Note on 11th September 2022, Nimmalakunta)

**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:** It was probably around the turn of the century that shadow theatre spread from South India to Southeast Asia and beyond, and local styles developed in Indonesia, Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and China (Rao,2000;211-227)

Chalapathi Rao replied.

*"At that time, kings also encouraged these arts. Even in my childhood, the village's big landlords gave us many gifts. Now it has become commercial. The state and central government of the Handicrafts Department are playing a vital role in this regard".*

**Fixed Price for Handicrafts:** Today, artisans make many types of leather puppet crafts. The price ranges from 100 rupees to 100000 rupees depending on the size and theme of the item. Once ready for sale, consumers do not bargain and ask for 1000 items at 100 rupees at a time; We do not have fixed rates. No matter how much we spend, we want to have some left over after our expenses are gone, and we especially wish our art forms to be with them.

**Financial Support:** Numerous references in epigraphy and literature report that puppeteers occupied an essential social role in the past and were compensated with riches and goods by wealthy patrons. Nilakantha Pandita (a 12th-century commentator of the Mahabharata) reports that shadow plays with leather puppets were prevalent in South India at the time. At the same time, the Sarajevan inscription records the village's gift to the master puppeteer Sutradhar Bommalaiah (Nagabhushana Sharma, 1985, p. 15).

Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao says,

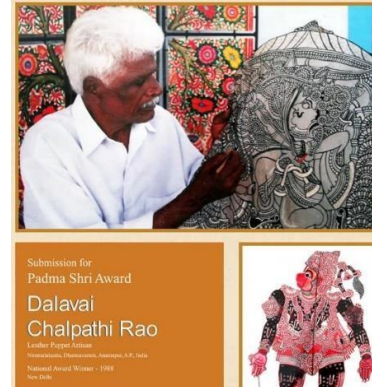
*"By God's grace, we have no financial problem; the government gives us stalls and exhibitions. However, it is perfect if banks or donors help the families of upcoming artists".*



(a)



(b)



(c)



(d)

**Figure:5.4**(a)Receiving Padmashri Award from the President of India,(b)Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao with Sri Narendra Modi, Prime minister of India,(c)Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao on Padmashri award cover page,(d)research scholar with Padmashri Dalavayi Chalapathi Rao [Image source: (a),(b),(c) Artist, &(d)Personal Visit]

## **Case Study -2 (Sindhe Sriramulu -National Award winner)**

### **Nimmalakunta, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh**

Nimmalakunta village in the Anantapur district is home to about 60 families involved in making leather puppets.

**Family Background:** A traditional family of puppeteers, Sri Sindhe Sriramulu, a National Award winner. Sriramulu continues to practice the art of his ancestors. He learned the skills and techniques of making leather puppets from his uncle, the famous Puppet Maestro Padma Sri Dalavayi Chalapati Rao. He makes a wide variety of items besides traditional puppets; He also makes lampshades. He exhibits and sells his work at exhibitions across the country. His wife, Lalitha, hails from a renowned puppeteer family, and her father is a recognized craft master.

*“We belong to the Chitra Kara community. Shadow puppetry has been a medium to educate people about social and moral values through stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata for centuries”.*

Says Sriramulu, a master craftsman and National Award recipient for leather puppet making.  
(from Field Note on)

This folk art traces its roots to 200 BCE during the rule of the Satavahana dynasty. The Satavahana kingdom comprised the present-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra, and the rulers patronized the puppeteers; most of them travelled from Maharashtra to South India and settled in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. Many of these puppet makers in Nimmalakunta speak Marathi even now.

*“Earlier, during the time of my father and grandfather, the puppet show was our only livelihood option. The whole family would make leather puppets while male members would travel from one village to another to conduct puppet shows, and we accepted whatever was given to us in return – rice, coconut, vegetables, pulses, etc.,”*

says 53-year-old leather puppet craftsman D Ramana.

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** Making leather puppets requires patience and an eye for detail. Craftsmen procure goat or sheep leather from local butchers and then process it as per the item they are making. Goat or sheep leather is easily pliable and lasts many decades. The leather should be as white as possible for lampshades to permit the play of light. But wall-hanging puppets can be coloured, too.

**Quality:** Sometimes, the skins are put in a Myrobalan (the cherry plum) solution to impart a

light burnish tone and then dried in the sun. The artisan first draws the design on paper freehand and then copies it on the leather without tracing it. The outline of the figures and motifs is black. The artist draws motifs according to the theme where the artist will perform, for example, Sriram in the forest, Ayodhya, and war. These are different costumes and different ornaments required to change. It is the same way with Hanuman, Ravana, Sita, etc. The piece is allowed to dry, after which grooving is done with small tools.

Says Sriramulu,

*“Earlier, artisans made natural colours for paintings. But now, ready-made colours are used as they save time and effort. But each item is unique and handcrafted, and no two designs are the same.”*

Finally, the leather is cut using a knife to get the shape of the puppet.

The iron frame is first made for lampshades, and then leather is stitched to give it a shape. Then, the drawing is done, and the lampshades are made more attractive by chiselling small holes in a decorative pattern. The perforation gives a bright and decadent appearance to the backdrop of light. Many artisans now use machine-finished leather for lampshades as it is whiter. Sriramulu’s son has also joined the family’s leather puppetry business. And if the younger generation continues to practice the craft, there is no threat. Innovation is required to continue the legacy. (from field notes and observation)

**Skill artist:** Artists with three skills work collaboratively on each tolu bomma (leather puppet). The first skill is drawing and cutting figures, bringing out the personalities of the legendary figures or motifs found in temple sculptures and statues.

*“Each figure is cut into several parts, such as the head, torso, hips, legs and arms, to facilitate movement. Senior Artists do this drawing and cutting. The third skill is to fill colours according to traditional patterns. Black, red and green are some of the colours commonly used for puppets, while female figures and sages are depicted in yellow. Women also perform these tasks. All parts are kept together and then loosely clamped, creating free movement at each joint. Three pierced bamboo sticks make the puppet work. It will take 30-40 days to complete. Nowadays, getting skilled artists with all the above qualities is challenging”,* Says Sriramulu( From Fieldwork notes)

**Language barrier:** For centuries, leather puppet artists have travelled from one place to another to promote the rich Indian culture and heritage. Today, Nimmalakunta is famous for foam puppetry, and these artists have performed at many shows nationally and

internationally.

*"Leather puppeteers migrated from Maharashtra, and many settled in several states, including Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. We are known as Are Marathi people; we speak Marathi and Telugu very well. We perform in Telugu Ranganathan Ramayana and successfully in Russia, Germany, Argentina, Budapest and Israel. Sinda Sriramulu said we have given it, where language is not a barrier; the dream is only for the brother-in-law and other countries to enjoy our performances very much".* He spoke proudly. (from field notes and observation)

**Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced them:** The impact of modernization has made people forget the great art forms of our country. Shadow puppetry or leather puppetry exists in the southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Orissa. There are villages along the Karnataka-Andhra border where people perform puppet shows or performances.

*"Paintings of Lepakshi and Hampi temple murals and Maharashtrian Chitra Katha paintings influence these art forms. There are close similarities between the two in compositional style, side-faced deities and human figures, and the use of fewer colour similarities".*

He concluded. (from field notes and observation)

**Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:** Sriramulu said,

*"He is confident that his son and daughter, who help in the exhibitions, will continue to be art practitioners"* (from field notes and observation).

**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:** Puppetry, the livelihood of many traditional performing artist families, faces its most significant challenge from television and smart mobiles, which significantly threaten their livelihood. In the fast-paced, fast-paced world of entertainment, few people have the patience to sit through a nightly show. Many now paint decorative objects such as lampshades and miniature figures to keep their art alive by entering new markets.

Sinda Sriramu says,

*"We have not studied much, thanks to central and state government for supporting us. They are helping us to some extent. But this is not enough; people like you, educated in various social media in movies and advertisements, should also spread more about us".* (from field notes and observation)

Fixed Price for Handicrafts: Artisans sell through exhibitions and work on WhatsApp orders. Puppets of 6 to 7 feet that fill the screen are priced at Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000, depending on work, but a small wall-hanging puppet of 18 inches can be bought for Rs 1200. A small lampshade starts at Rs 200 to 600 and can go up to Rs 20,000 for a 5-foot piece.

*“Some people still buy puppets, but the most sold are lampshades and wall hangings. I also provide training in making puppets and leather jewellery items and give lectures and sessions at various schools, colleges, and other institutions,”*

says Sriramulu. People from across the world visit India to attend his workshops on leathercraft.

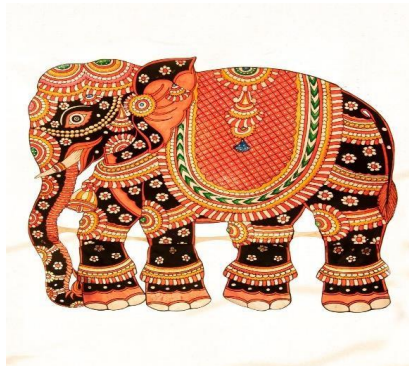
Most of the performances were held around Shivaratri and other religious festivals. However, the craft has undergone many changes in the last few decades. And for one show, it costs around 50000 rupees, which is very difficult to manage.

#### **Financial Support:**

*“The artisans made only puppets ranging from 15 inches to 6 feet tall back then. Through shows, we narrated the stories of the epics. Themes from these epics continue to dominate the designs, with huge puppets of Hanuman, Ravana with ten heads, and Lord Rama depicted in bright colours, and now the number of shows in villages has gone down. We perform at the Sangeet Natak Academy, private functions, and government events to raise awareness about family planning, water conservation, vaccination, tree plantation, etc.” - Sriramulu says.*

When I asked about today's state of Puppetry, Sriramulu replied,

*“Today, the artisans have diversified into making leather lamp shades, wall hangings, partitions, jewellery, household items and other products. “The government sent designers to help us make new products like lampshades and wall art pieces, who sell their products to LePakshi Handicrafts, the Andhra Pradesh government arm promoting the state's arts and crafts, Central Cottage Emporium and to private retailers”.* (from field note)



**Figure:5.5** clockwise Sinde Sriramulu “Shilp Gru National Award” received for 2006, Mask wear awareness puppets, Hanuman and Sri Rama, Lamp Shades and Elephant[Image Source: Artist]

### **Case Study 3 (Dr Dalavayi Kulayappa)**

**Nimmalakunta, Anantapur District, Andhra Pradesh**

**Family Background:** Dalavayi Kulayappa is famous for being a puppeteer. Kulayappa learned his skills from his father, Dalavayi Chinna Narayana, who was late. His mother is also a renowned artiste. He received an honorary doctorate from Vietnam University and achieved many national and international awards. He has a troupe of six artists, and the

name of the theatre group is “Chitra Kari Tolu Bommalata”. Artists formed a community to perpetuate their art. Society ensures that all members have opportunities and some form of income. Kulayappa also participated in online programs to prove creative dignity during the pandemic and proved himself adaptable to changing circumstances.

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** In those days, making puppets required goat or sheepskin puppets, a stage, lights, travelling allowances, food, accommodation, etc. After the performance, people would donate large sums of money and even land. Currently, prices have increased by 200 to 300 rupees

If the skin is not cleaned correctly or the dead flesh is not removed, the skin will dry out in the sun if the skin is not stretched properly. Such leather is not suitable for dolls. Skin becomes dry during the day. Everything is cut with scissors. Well-processed leather is transparent, and other things are visible on one side. Hence, the lamp's light shines through this leather and gives the audience the beauty of the figures. Natural colours are used for puppets.

*“We draw figures on this leather with a pencil or needle. After cutting the drawn figure, it is cut with scissors or pencil lines. The shapes glittered like jewels in the lamplight. In leather cutting, the skin is cut from buffalo horn. Now, they use other types of wood, which are available and ready. Moustaches, moustaches, hair and use black colour. We paint according to the bodies.*

*For black colour, put a lamp on the wall, remove the soot, soak a well-soaked neem paste in water and dry it well. We leave the leather where we want the white to be painted. The light rays of the inner lamp pass through this skin, and the undyed part of the figure appears white. Currently, we use rose red, purple, yellow, green, dark brown and black candy colours in grocery stores. We use water-based colours. In the past, dyes were used to dye clothes, and the same colours were applied to leather toys.*

*To paint puppets, some people wrap cloth, thread, or cotton around a stick and dip it in the colours. When the colours are painted widely, these sticks should be widely spread. We paint very carefully when we paint. Usually, this work is done by women artisans.*

*We also make these puppets separately; if the body, legs, arms and head are characters, we make the limbs individually and then play by tying the figures with threads.*

*A giant puppet requires three skins, and while making a leather puppet, large pieces of leather are well-spent; we use the cut pieces to make the motifs of tools like arrows, cattle,*

*trees, baskets, etc. And with slightly bigger pieces, we make small, shaped figures of 1.5 feet of Hanuman figures. Medium figures are four feet tall, and prominent figures are five to six feet tall. Because Hanuman has about four or five forms*

*Colour fades, and almost all lost ones are re-painted and used, hidden away from rats, fire, water and dogs. Therefore, baskets are carefully bamboo-made to store these leather dolls, which we carry with us wherever the show occurs. Only some people can do these; even if they have experience, they can. Now, we keep them in trunk boxes.*(From fieldwork notes)

**Skill artist:** People who draw, paint and make this puppet art can do it individually without any help, but while stretching, cleaning and drawing giant-size puppets, they need others' help; each performing family have 50 to 100 puppets, and those who know making and performing can earn more.

*“We formed a troupe with six artists, and the name of our drama troupe was “Chitra Kari Tolu Bommatala”. We have formed a community for artists to perpetuate their art. This association ensures that all members have opportunities and some form of income. This work consists of three stages, namely 1. Creating the visual form, 2. Presenting, 3. Voice over (Able to narrate epics of Ramayana, Mahabharata) Artists are scarce even with these three skills”.* Dr Kulayappa said

#### **Language barrier:**

For hundreds of years, leather puppet artists have travelled from one place to another to promote the rich Indian culture and heritage. Today, Nimmalakunta is famous for foam puppetry, and these artists have performed at many shows nationally and internationally.

*“I can speak Marathi and Telugu very well, as well as Hindi. We have successfully performed Ranganathan's Ramayana and Mahabharata in Telugu. We have given it where there is no language barrier; our troupe and other countries enjoyed our performances very much”.* Dr Dalavayi Kulayappa said.

#### **Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced them:**

The temple arts of Lepakshi, Hampi, and contemporary Karnataka have profoundly influenced the craft of leather puppetry in the region. The murals and frescoes of Lepakshi, renowned for their intricate depictions of divine figures and mythological stories, have provided a rich source of inspiration for leather puppet artisans. The sculptural grandeur of Hampi, with its detailed carvings of deities, dancers, and scenes from epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, has similarly shaped the visual language of leather puppetry,

infusing it with a sense of drama and movement. Contemporary Karnataka leather puppetry continues to draw from these artistic traditions, translating temple art's elaborate designs and iconography into vibrant, articulated figures that bring stories to life. This confluence of temple art and leather puppetry has helped preserve traditional narratives while allowing for creative adaptations that resonate with modern audiences. Through this ongoing exchange, leather puppetry remains a living art form deeply rooted in the cultural and spiritual heritage of Andhra Pradesh.

*" There are many differences; they paint on cloth, paper and walls, even though Lepakshi paintings have a close resemblance to Karnataka leather puppet paintings and Chitrakathi paintings; some artists were friends with Karnataka puppeteers during the time of My Grand Fathers and my brother-in-law Shinde Chidambaram's grandfather came from Karnataka and settled in Nimmalakunta. If Kalamkari artisans use paper and cloth, we use leather as a surface. Still, there are some similarities as we use lotus, swans, peacocks, tree of life and mythological characters in puppetry". Said Dr Dalavayi Kulayappa.*

#### **Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:**

*I have learned from my parents that today's youth need to pay more attention to this work; they prefer to study and do other jobs. It would be great if young people came into this profession; they would have the opportunity to take it further by using technology.* He shared his learning experience

#### **Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:**

Dalavay Kulayappa said

*"We studied only a little. We have only given the story learned from my father, especially Sri Ranganatha Ramayana, some events, and some social aspects of Mahabharata. We can learn a little about marketing. Nowadays, we are using Facebook, WhatsApp, and other websites."*

#### **Fixed Price for Handicrafts:**

*"We sell our products mainly in three categories. Firstly, the cost of leather puppets will start from Rs 1,000 to 30,000. It depends on size, and old puppets are in higher demand. Then secondly, handicrafts in this product mainly focus on lamp shades; lamp shades are available in more than 50 different designs, lamp shades cost around Rs 200 to Rs 6000, and lastly, paintings these painting for interior decorative purposes cost around Rs 1000 to Rs 100,000, these rates depend on size and theme of the paintings".*

**Financial Support:**

*“Nimmalakunta puppeteers have formed a community to perpetuate their art. Society ensures that all members have opportunities and some form of income. Tourism Varu, Lepakshi Handicrafts Varu, State and Central Government Support, and while the tourists who visit the village frequently, N. G. O's, these helps, it would be nice to have a permanent solution which would help in reviving the upcoming artists and other areas like Guntur, Nellore, Kadapa, Kakinada, etc.”.*



(a)



(b)

**Figure5.6.**(a) received an honorary doctorate from Vietnam University in 2012, and(b)he is working with his brother D. Raju in his Handicraft centre, Nimmalakunta Ananthapur district, Andhra Pradesh [Image Source: Personal visit]



**Figure:5.7** (a),(b),(c),women artisans Practicing at Nimmalakunta Leather puppetry center&(d)Lunch break [Image Source: Personal visit]

#### **Case Study -4 (Smt. Dalavayi Shivamma, Women Artisan & National Awardee) Nimmalakunta, Ananthapur, Andhra Pradesh**

**Family Background:** Dalavayi Shivamma's husband Chinna Narayana's family has been a puppet artist family for generations. Their three sons are all leather puppetry artists; although she passed away a few years ago, Shivamma is famous for making puppets and performing. Nimmalakunta woman artist Dalavayi Shivamma was awarded the National Award. Her husband Chinna Narayana's three sons are all involved in puppetry.

*"We have been a puppet family for generations. Since my husband, Chinna Narayana, passed away a few years ago, my children and I have been making toys, displaying them and setting up stalls. She said she was pleased to receive these awards nationally for 2019. Naturally, many puppeteers from Nimmalakunta village get an award, but it is rare for women to get it; they were not given at that time due to Corona and were announced*

recently”. (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

The officials informed them over the phone that the prize will be presented in Delhi soon.

**Raw material :**

*“As a woman artist, I do not go to the market to bring raw materials. My husband got all the materials from the market; when he was alive, I helped with the cleaning process of the leather, stretching, and cutting. After he passed away, my sons were taken care of, and sometimes I guided them in this matter. I can sing and perform as well as draw and paint. And if you see my latest national award-winning painting, Rama Ravana Yudham” (Rama Ravana war), it gives a new perspective to the audience, which is done in single leather. It is a huge painting. I brought full performance in a single painting, without any words, and this picture speaks a lot. The audience can see the difference between Rama and Ravana's chariots and his military; I draw these very minute details. We can see the expressions”.*

(Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Branding and promoting :** About her marketing, she said that

*“if your work has quality and concept, people are ready to buy because quality matters; even if I want to purchase a saree, I check all parameters of what I want; however, the buyer also thinks the same, so whenever I start painting, I will keep in my mind quality.*

(Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

Despite the accolades and recognition, constant exposure to these artists and artisans is the best. With the rise of modern entertainment media like television and mobile phones, leather toys are now less popular. As a result, artisans are now making commercial products such as lampshades and wall hangings to practice their traditional profession of leathercraft. Some artisans are now making leather toys as they see fewer buyers.

*“The younger generations in the artisan community are either not interested in the craft or are discouraged from practising it and instead are told to look for something more lucrative,” she concluded.* (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Skill artist:** In this modern world, getting traditionally skilled artists is very difficult, where technology plays a vital role in our daily lives.

*“Yes, acquiring skilled artisans is a big task today, as many have settled down in other fields, farming for years, some have moved to cities for jobs, and some have settled down in different professions. Most are in other professions, but only some people are interested in this profession”.* Shivamma said. (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Language barrier:** For centuries, leather puppet artists have travelled from one place to another to promote the rich Indian culture and heritage. Today, Nimmalakunta is famous for foam puppetry, and these artists have performed at many shows nationally and internationally.

*“When I used to go with my parents, husband, and now my children, I didn't have any problem with language; I can speak Marathi and Telugu”.*

Dalavayi Shivamma replied. (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced them:** As evidenced by the similarities between Lepakshi and Hampi temple paintings and leather puppet art, the artists used images and sculptural poses from nearby temples to tell stories from Puranas.

*“Even if the senior artist draws, we colour the figures; we also make punching holes for the figures; we take references from other contemporary arts; and occasionally, we also take references from the calendar our ancestors used to draw from nearby temple sculptures and paintings. From old puppets, we have been tracing or taking them as a reference. Nowadays, there are so many ways to draw”.* (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:**

*“She started to say,” There are many differences between our time and today; we have seen our parents since childhood and learned from them. Similarly, our children have also learned from us, but the youth of today's generation show little interest, and this mobile phone may be the reason”.* (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:**

*“Our biggest promotion in those days was the games we played, and each one of them was famous in a different field; some were in show storytelling, some in acting, some in painting, some in leather making, and if each one was an expert in one field, Konduru was in all fields. It was a big brand for them. Branding promotions are offered to people like you”.* (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

**Fixed Price for Handicrafts:** Leather puppetry products are available in a wide range of products, including puppets, pants, and handicrafts like lampshades, wall hangings, clocks, earrings, and necklaces.

She said,

*“We have no fixed rates because these are not essential items; handicrafts start from Rs.100 to Rs.30 lakhs, depending on the size, design, etc.”.* (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)

### Financial Support:

The majority of artisans come from rural backgrounds and require formal education. Although the government organises local trade fairs specifically for handicraft products, only a few artisans participate; The rest hesitate to showcase their skills even in their region. In addition, language barriers cause travel, accommodation and communication problems for some artists.

*"In this regard, the help of the Central and State Governments is not forgotten; Nimmalakunta is now the hub of Andhra Pradesh leather puppetry. However, I want the government to come forward for the development of other places and provide more financial assistance."* Dalavayi Shivamma said. (Fieldwork notes on 9-11-2022)



**Figure:5.8** right side woman Artist Shivamma painting on a Lampshade, and left-side Newspaper article[image source: Personal visit]



**Figure:5.9** (a) National award-winning Rama Ravana Yudham painting,(b)Half part of Rama Ravana Yudham Painting, (c) Magnified detail of Ravana Chariot [image source: Personal visit]

### **Case Study 5 (Sindhe Chidambaram)**

#### **Nimmalakunta, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh**

**Family Background:** Chitambara Rao's great-grandfather, Nayanappa Rao, was the first puppeteer in the family. He migrated from Solapur district in Maharashtra to Kolar district in Karnataka. He met with many leather puppeteers, forged friendships and learnt the art form. His son, Chinaveerappa Rao, moved to Dharmavaram and started practising art in the Anantapur district. Tholu Bommalaata was passed down to the hands of Chithambara Rao. He now performs with his wife, two older brothers and three nephews. Their troupe is called Chaya Nataka Brundam, which translates to 'Shadow Drama Troupe', and has performed in many cultural spaces across Europe and Asia. Three men are puppeteers, and the others are musicians and singers. Chitambara Rao himself is both a singer and a puppeteer.

National award-winning puppeteer Sindhe Chitambara Rao is an artist from Dharmavaram village in the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh. His uncle was a well-known leather puppeteer. His wife belongs to a family of puppeteers, and her father is a great artist. The family creates puppets from leather, which are beaten and processed to achieve a translucent quality. They are then hand-crafted and painted. Inspired by the paintings and motifs adorning the temple walls, Chidambara Rao drew the figures, and his wife Venkatamma cut small holes in the leather and puppets with signature, bright colours and added decorative ornaments.

He is the director of the 'Shadow Puppet Forum' in the state, and he and his troupe are known for their powerful performances in and around his village at national cultural venues, international festivals, and exhibitions.

Over the years, many puppets made by Chidambaram and Venkatamma have been added to the "Sharmaya"(a Mumbai-based not-for-profit curated repository of art, artefacts and living traditions from the Indian subcontinent. Founded in 2015) collection and the organisation strives to build awareness and engagement.

The detail and finesse in each puppet are a testament to the Sindhes' unparalleled skill. Here, Chidambara Rao tells us about his journey as a Tholu Bommalaata artist and his deep love for

the art form.

Chidambara Rao is a very active artist in his field, and he spoke.

*“My ancestors were from Maharashtra. They migrated to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Odisha. This was over 2,000 years ago. Everyone chose different professions to pursue. Some of them became daily wage workers. But many of these families didn’t know what to do. Some great men advised my ancestors to perform plays in the villages to earn a living. They followed his advice, and that’s how it all began.”* Said Chidambara Rao. (Fieldwork notes on 10-11-2022)

*“After I lost my parents in 1992, I used to play puppets but never knew the stories. I didn’t know how to make a living for myself. At that point, even getting food was difficult. I didn’t even have a spare set of clothes. I used to borrow clothes from the village every day. That’s how I would survive. Then, my four brothers, my sister and I formed a group. We worked together for over ten years.”*

*“Initially, it was just basic storytelling without songs. They thought it best to narrate. They asked the Brahmins for advice about which topics would attract the public and were advised to talk about the Ramayana. They felt that God would also bless us.”* Chidambara Rao concluded. (Fieldwork notes on 10-11-2022)

### **Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:**

*“In the past, they used deer skins to make the puppets. But during my father’s time, deerskin was banned, so he started using goat skin. My parents had five sons and two daughters, including me. I am the youngest. We all used to go to the village to perform plays; that is how we earned a living.”*

His wife, Smt. Chinna Venkatamma cut small holes in the leather and puppets with signature, bright colours and added decorative ornaments. And he continues to explain,

*“My wife and I work together to make the puppets; from pressing the goat skin to removing the hair, my wife is always with me throughout the process. We fix the skin to the bed frame and leave it in the sun for two days till it becomes transparent, like glass. Then, we sketched the story’s characters on it with chalk and reinforced the drawing with a needle. We polish it using a sharp blade, make a pen from the stem of a bamboo plant and make black marks where the design has to be drawn. After that, my wife cut out the leather design. She is far more talented and hardworking than me in every aspect”.* Said Chidambara Rao. (Fieldwork notes on 10-11-2022)

### **Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced:**

Sri Chidambaram is passionate and brings perfection to his art pieces; every artwork has its uniqueness, especially Gods, Goddesses, Bangarakka, Jottupoligadu, Ketigadu and demons, which directs rich Indian traditions, and he shared the secret behind his beautiful puppets is that,

#### **He started to say,**

*“There is inspiration all around us. There’s a saying, ‘An artist’s imagination reaches places where even the sun’s rays don’t go. It’s true for people like me who make handcrafted objects; it’s like making a song — deciding the tune and the rag that suits the song best. That’s how we form our ideas as well. Some old temples, statues and pictures serve as inspiration, an ancient art known as the Pinguli style. I go to the old temples to observe the movements, the lips of the sculptures, the eyes, the distinctive ears, the unique poses of Ram, Hanuman, Ravan, Kumbhakaran, Indrajit, and the characteristic features of the Pandavas. Eighty per cent of our ideas are derived from here.”*

*“I don’t take photos. I see the image, register it in my mind and store it in my memory. I came home and started drawing a few times. If I get a few details wrong, I don’t even feel like sitting near the puppet: it’s upsetting. But when I get it right, there’s no greater happiness. Tholu Bommalata has a distinctive style — the eyes or lips, the way of holding weapons like a sword or mace, and the style of holding a bow and arrow. You cannot change these, as that would dilute its authenticity.”*

*“The major attraction is now comedy, that engages them. Narrating the Ramayana is not enough anymore. They ask for a joke or two. We also try and showcase social issues like mobile addiction, wastage of water, domestic violence, family planning, etc.”*

*“For comedy, we have characters called Bangarakka, Jottupoligadu, Ketigadu and Alaatapaagaadu. The kids start laughing uncontrollably when these characters come onto the stage. The kids come to watch just for these characters. Kids love jewellery, and the characters are created accordingly. We try to convert the humour into something useful for kids—what’s known as Pandita haasyam. It’s not crass humour; it carries a message.”*

**Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:** Today, the youth are showing little interest in this field because it is so hard to succeed in it; in the past, they have been learning from childhood, and this art form is transferred from generation to generation. Many young people prefer to settle down in other fields like medicine or engineering.

Then Rao continues,

*“I’ve been interested in Tholu Bommalata since I was 8. I used to watch my father, older sister, and brother synchronise the puppets to the tunes of their storytelling. Since I loved puppetry, my father began to train me. He would ask me to play the puppets all night. The puppets used to weigh at least 3-5 kilos each. Since I was young, it was hard for me. But that’s how I learnt the art.”* (Fieldwork notes on 10-11-2022)

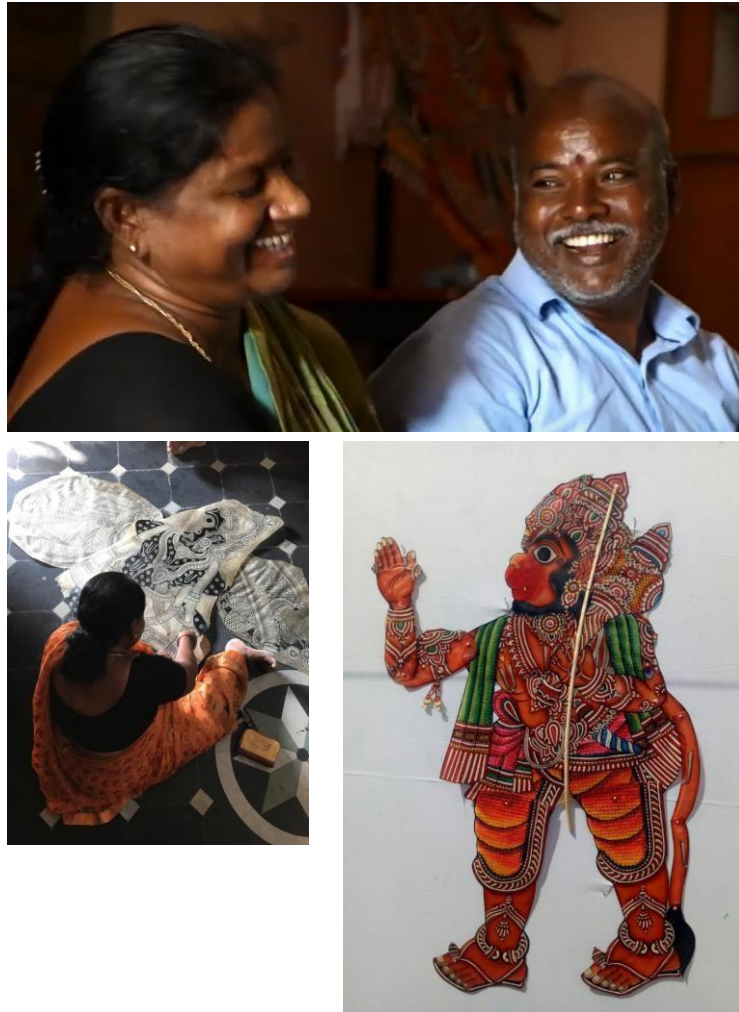
**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:** Shinde Chitambara Rao said, “We don’t know about Branding and promotion, but luckily, a Mumbai-based NGO, “Sharmaya”, showed me that it gives excellent publicity. It all depends on luck. I do about 15 programs in a year. I conduct programs in Mahabharat, Ganesh Chaturthi, and Ugadi. In the villages, during Ganesh Chaturthi, they sit the god for 4-5 days. At that time, we talked about Ramayana. We also get offers from other places as we attract the audience to our material and plays. Sometimes, the state government asks us to perform in places like government office quarters. When they like our material, we get more programs.”

Shinde Chidambara Rao, remembering something, started saying,

*“Yes. For Swachh Bharat, we made around 35 puppets to talk about the subject. We made Muslim, Hindu and Christian characters to showcase how everyone comes together for this cause. We’ve also addressed preserving the environment, not cutting trees, using natural fertilisers (cow dung) instead of chemical fertilisers, using organic food instead of food grown with pesticides and chemicals, eating other grains like bajra, jowar, etc.”* (Fieldwork notes on 10-11-2022)

**Financial Support:**

*“Sharmaya” (NGO) buys our leather puppets and paintings, and the NGO supports us immensely. During my parents’ time in Andhra Pradesh, there were over 180 groups in 13 districts. Now, there are not even nine groups. We don’t have an audience anymore. As a result, our groups have started pursuing other professions. We are trying to ensure this art doesn’t disappear into oblivion. But we need support to keep this going. If this art is developed, many families will benefit. We need help from the government or private organisations to strengthen this art.”* Said Chidambara Rao. (Fieldwork notes on 10-11-2022)



**Figure:5.10** clockwise Sri. Shindhe Chitambara Rao & his wife Smt. Venkatamma, Smt. Venkatraman ornamenting the puppet, Hanuman Leather Puppet [Image source: Artist]

**Summary:** In the Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh, five key puppeteers belonging to the Aare Marathe community have emerged as significant figures in shadow puppetry. These five individuals are performers and troupe leaders living within a joint family structure. Alongside their shadow puppetry expertise, they possess high levels of craftsmanship and have earned national and international recognition. One has been awarded the prestigious Padma Shri, while a younger member has been honored with a doctorate. Their economic situation is notably stable, as they benefit from the support of a leather puppetry community society. All five artisans reside in multi-story or pucca houses in Nimmalakunta, a village renowned for its puppetry tradition.

Two artisans are of similar age, with the third being older, and all three remain hopeful about the future of shadow puppetry in the district. Each of these artisans has received

national awards, one of which was a Padma Shri recipient. They have secured a stable livelihood through the sale of handcrafted items and their participation in major handicraft exhibitions across India. While they are optimistic about the future of the craft, they express a stronger interest in the performance aspect of shadow puppetry over the crafting of leather items.

These five artisans serve as role models for aspiring puppeteers in Andhra Pradesh, offering training and providing materials such as table lamps, stretchers, colours, and other crafting supplies. While much of their artwork is based on tracing traditional puppets and creating new designs to meet market demands, their artistic skills have led to developing a distinct style within South Indian shadow puppetry. Nimmalakunta leather puppetry has earned geographical identity status, and their performances often feature themes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, with motifs of animals, birds, and flowers being prevalent. Each artisan demonstrates a unique ability to create original designs that appeal to customers. Despite their mastery of traditional puppetry, they still require economic support to develop their skills further and explore more advanced techniques.

However, all five cases have noted a decline in shadow puppetry performances in villages, attributing the decrease to a lack of patronage and support, which they believe is mainly due to the rise of mass media, including cinema, television, and video.

### **5.2.2 Case Studies of Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh**

#### **Case Study -6, Narasaraopet, (Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu)**

Kotappakonda, also known as Sri Trikoteswara Swamy Temple, is a revered hill temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, located 20 km from Yakkalavaari palem (Konda Kaavuri) village in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. This temple, steeped in historical and cultural heritage, draws thousands of devotees, particularly during the Shivaratri festival. Beyond its spiritual significance, Kotappakonda is also a traditional hub for leather puppetry, an ancient art form integral to the region's cultural fabric.

**Family Background:** National award winner Sri. Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu struggles to give up the art that came to him. When I went to the fieldwork, he was living in a hut.

He learned the techniques and techniques of making leather puppets from his ancestors and continued the art inherited from his ancestors. He makes various Leather handicrafts apart from traditional puppets, lampshades, wall hangings, etc. He exhibits and sells his work at exhibitions across the country. His wife has gone to another town to trade in old clothes.

Anjaneyulu's younger son is studying for his B.Com and is waiting for someone to help him.

Shadow puppetry has been a medium for educating people about social and moral values through the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata for centuries. Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu is a master craftsman and national awardee in leather puppetry.

Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu said, "My wife went to another town to trade in old clothes and came home every two weeks. It was difficult to get rice if she depended on this art form and lost her faith. He pointed to the tiny leather dolls near him and said, *"I couldn't give up the art I had learned from my childhood"*. (from Field Note on)

This folk-art traces its roots to 200 BCE during the rule of the Satavahana dynasty. The Satavahana kingdom comprised the present-day Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Maharashtra, and the rulers patronised the puppeteers; most of them travelled from Maharashtra to South India and settled in parts of Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. Many of these puppet makers in Nimmalakunta speak Marathi even now.

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** Creating leather puppets demands patience and a keen eye for detail. Craftsmen source goat or sheep leather from local butchers, carefully processing it based on the specific item they are crafting. Buffalo, Goat and sheep leather are chosen for their pliability and durability, often lasting for many decades. For lampshades, the leather should be as white as possible to allow the light to shine through. However, for wall-hanging puppets, the leather can also be coloured.

For quality leather, the skins are sometimes treated with a Myrobalan (cherry plum) solution to impart a light burnished tone before being sun-dried. The artisan begins by sketching the design freehand on paper and then transfers it onto the leather without using a tracing method. The outlines of the figures and motifs are drawn in black. The motifs are created based on the theme of the performance, such as depicting Sriram in the forest, Ayodhya, or scenes of war, each requiring different costumes and ornaments. This approach is similarly applied to characters like Hanuman, Ravana, and Sita. Once the piece is dry, intricate grooving is done using small tools.

Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu explains,

*"In the past, artisans prepared natural colours for their paintings, but now, ready-made colours are used to save time and effort. Despite this, each item remains unique and handcrafted, with no two identical designs."* Finally, the leather is cut into the shape of the

*puppet using a knife.*

The iron frame is first made. First, an iron frame is crafted for the lampshades, and the leather is stitched to match its shape. The design is then drawn, and the lampshades are enhanced by chiselling small holes in decorative patterns. This perforation allows light to create a bright yet diffused effect in the background. Many artisans now opt for machine-finished leather for lampshades due to its whiteness.

*“We source iron frames, dyes, and other raw materials for these lampshades from Nimmalakunta,”*

explains Anjaneyulu of Vanaparathi lampshades, and then leather is stitched to give it a shape. Then, the drawing is done, and the lampshades are made more attractive by chiseling small holes in a decorative pattern. The perforation gives a bright and decadent appearance to the backdrop of light. Many artisans now use machine-finished leather for lampshades as it is whiter. Vanaparathi Chinna Anjaneyulu’s son has also joined the family’s leather puppetry business. And if the younger generation continues to practice the craft, there is no threat. Innovation is required to continue the legacy. (from field notes and observation)

**Skill artist:** Each leather toy is uniquely marked by artisans with their signature styles, reflecting various skill levels. The process begins with the drawing and cutting of figures, which are designed to closely resemble mythological characters or motifs found in temple sculptures and paintings. Each figure is cut into multiple parts, such as the head, torso, hips, legs, and arms, to allow for movement. This task is typically handled by senior artists. The next step involves filling in the colors according to traditional patterns. Common colors used for the puppets include black, red, and green, while female figures and sages are often depicted in yellow. Women artisans also participate in this stage. Once all parts are colored, they are assembled and loosely connected to enable free movement at each joint. Three pierced bamboo sticks are used to make the puppet functional. Completing a puppet can take over a month. Today, daily wage earners receive between 500 and 700 rupees for this skillful work. Although finding such skilled artisans is challenging, the demand for their craftsmanship remains high.

**Language barrier:** A master craftsman like Vanaparathi Chinna Anjaneyulu is renowned for his exceptional skill and dedication to the traditional art of leather puppet making.

Through these exhibitions, Anjaneyulu not only demonstrates the intricate craftsmanship and cultural richness of Indian leather puppetry but also serves as a cultural ambassador,

sharing the stories and heritage of his homeland with diverse audiences. His work is a testament to the enduring legacy of this traditional art form, as well as to his commitment to preserving and promoting it on the world stage.

Anjaneyulu's ability to blend traditional techniques with a deep understanding of mythological and cultural themes has made his creations unique and highly sought after. Each piece the crafts is a work of art, meticulously designed and executed, embodying the spirit of the past and the skill of a true artisan. His exhibitions have brought him acclaim and helped keep the art of leather puppetry alive and thriving in an ever-changing world.

Anjaneyulu said,

*"Language has never been a barrier for me. Although our performances are exclusively in Telugu, the stories we tell—primarily from the Ramayana and Mahabharata—transcend linguistic boundaries. These epic tales resonate with audiences of all backgrounds, as their themes of valor, righteousness, and moral dilemmas are universally understood. The power of these stories lies in their ability to connect with people on a deeper level, regardless of the language in which they are told. By focusing on these timeless narratives, we ensure that the essence of our cultural heritage is preserved and appreciated by all."*

**Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced them :**The influence of other indigenous visual art forms on puppetry has been profound, enriching the craft with diverse aesthetic elements and storytelling techniques. Traditional painting styles, such as Lepakshi Temple painting and sculpture, have inspired the intricate motifs and patterns seen on puppets, enhancing their visual appeal. The use of vibrant colours and symbolic motifs from Indigenous art has added depth to the puppets' representation of characters and themes, particularly in portraying mythological stories. Additionally, we draw images from calendars; this cross-pollination of art forms not only preserves these traditional practices but also ensures that puppetry continues to evolve as a dynamic and culturally significant art form.

**Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:** The art of leather puppetry is facing a critical challenge as the younger generation needs to show more interest in preserving this traditional craft. With the allure of more stable and modern livelihoods, many youths are turning away from the intricate and time-consuming art form of leather puppetry. Instead, they are pursuing work in other fields, such as trading steel utensils for old clothes, repairing gas stoves, and fixing sofas. Though less culturally rich, these occupations offer more

immediate financial security, drawing young people away from their ancestral art. As a result, the continuity of leather puppetry is at risk. With it, a vital piece of cultural heritage could only be recovered if efforts are made to revive interest and provide sustainable opportunities within the craft.

**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:** Puppetry, once the main source of income for many traditional performing artist families, now faces its greatest challenge from television and smartphones, which threaten their livelihood. In today's fast-paced entertainment world, few have the patience to sit through an entire nightly show. To adapt, many artisans have started creating decorative items like lampshades and miniature figures, finding new markets to keep their art alive.

Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu reflects,

*"My focus has always been on performances and preparing goods for exhibitions. I hadn't given much thought to branding and promotion, but now I realize it's something I need to consider. In my community, there are 30 families living here, but the government only supports established artists, not those of us who are still emerging."*

**Fixed Price for Handicrafts:** My fellow artists sell their work through exhibitions and fulfill orders via WhatsApp. Large figures, measuring 6 to 7 feet and designed to fill a screen, are priced between Rs. 40,000 and Rs. 50,000, while smaller 18-inch wall-hanging figures can be purchased for Rs. 1,200. A small lampshade ranges from Rs. 200 to Rs. 600, and a 5-foot painting can sell for Rs. 20,000.

*"Some people still buy puppets, but the most popular items are lampshades and wall hangings. However, I prefer to focus on giving performances rather than making handicrafts. Through performances, we can better promote our heritage and legends,"*

Says Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu.

Most performances traditionally took place during Shivaratri and other religious festivals. However, the craft has seen significant changes over the past few decades. The cost for a single show is now around 50,000 rupees, making it challenging to sustain.

**Financial Support:**

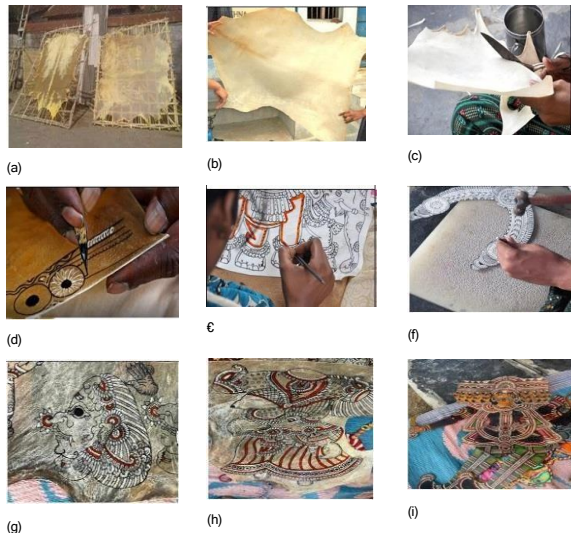
*"Puppeteers once crafted puppets ranging from 15 inches to 6 feet tall, using these creations to narrate mythological stories. The designs reflected the epic themes, with giant puppets of characters like Hanuman, the ten-headed Ravana, and Rama in vibrant colours. However, the number of performances in villages has decreased over time. We now perform at*

*Shilparamam during the Sankranthi festival season and at private and government programs to raise awareness about family planning, water conservation, vaccination, tree planting, and more.*

*To perform, we need 60 to 100 puppets, depending on the epic's story, and creating these large puppets requires an investment of 60,000 to 100,000 rupees. I need help to continue. Additionally, exhibiting handicrafts involves a minimum of one lakh rupees to prepare the goods. Everything is fine if the exhibition goes well; otherwise, upcoming artists face severe consequences. Some artists have even sold their properties to clear debts and loans. I earnestly request the government to look into this matter,"*

Said Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu, expressing his concerns emotionally.

When I asked about the current state of puppetry, Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu responded, "Today, artisans have branched out into creating leather lampshades, wall hangings, partitions, jewellery, household items, and other products. While this diversification has provided some opportunities, it is not a sustainable solution for the craft. Many people who once practised puppetry in the villages around Kotappa have abandoned this profession. The younger generation is moving into other fields, such as trading steel utensils for old clothes, gas stove repairs, and sofa repairs, etc." (from field note)





(j)



(k)



(l)

**Figure:5.11** (a), (b),(c),(d),(e),(f),(g),(h),(i),(j),(k),&(l) the process of making a puppet and present condition of their condition, showing his puppet [image source: Personal visit]

### **Case Study -7 (Vanaparathi Koteswara Rao, senior artist)**

**Yakkalavari Palem, Konda Kaavuri, Guntur district,  
Andhra Pradesh State**

**Family Background:** Vanaparathi Koteswara Rao, a senior artist from Yakkalavari palem, is a dedicated practitioner of the ancient craft of leather puppetry, a tradition passed down through generations in his family. He learned this art form's intricate skills and techniques from his parents, who were also accomplished puppeteers. Over the years, Koteswara Rao has mastered the creation of traditional leather puppets and expanded his repertoire to include a wide range of handcrafted items, such as decorative lampshades. These items, like his puppets, are intricately designed and reflect the rich cultural heritage of his community.

Koteswara Rao's work is showcased and sold at various exhibitions across the country, where it receives admiration from art enthusiasts and collectors alike. His wife plays a crucial role in supporting his artistic endeavours, assisting with various aspects of the production process. Their family upholds the tradition while adapting to contemporary tastes, ensuring the art form remains vibrant and relevant.

*"We are part of the Marathi community, and for centuries, shadow puppetry has served as a medium to educate people about social and moral values through stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata,"* Says Vanaparthi Koteswara Rao, a master craftsman from Yakkalavari palem. (from Field Note on)

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** Making leather puppets is a meticulous craft that demands patience and a keen eye for detail. Artisans begin by procuring goat or sheep leather from local butchers, which is then processed according to the specific item being crafted. Goat or sheep leather is preferred for its pliability and durability, often lasting for many decades. For lampshades, the leather must be as white as possible to allow light to play through effectively, while wall-hanging puppets can be vibrantly coloured.

The preparation of leather is a crucial step in ensuring the quality of the final product. In some cases, the leather is treated with a solution of Myrobalan (cherry plum) to give it a light burnished tone before being dried in the sun. The artisan begins by sketching the design freehand on paper, then transfers it onto the leather without tracing. The outlines of the figures and motifs are typically drawn in black. The motifs are designed according to the theme of the performance, such as scenes featuring Sriram in the forest, Ayodhya, or battles, each requiring different costumes and ornaments. The same meticulous attention to detail is applied when depicting characters like Hanuman, Ravana, and Sita.

Once the design is transferred, the piece is allowed to dry, after which intricate grooving is done using small tools, adding depth and texture to the artwork. This careful process ensures that each leather puppet is not only visually striking but also a durable piece of cultural heritage.

Vanaparthi Koteswara Rao shares,

*"When drawing an image on leather, I often use an old puppet as a reference or trace it, then outline the design in black. In the past, artisans created their own natural colors for painting, but nowadays, ready-made colors are used as they save both time and effort."*

*Despite these changes, each piece remains unique and handcrafted, with no two designs ever being exactly the same.”*

Once the design is complete, the leather is carefully cut with a knife to shape the puppet. Then Koteswara Rao explains,

*“For lampshades, an iron frame is first constructed, and then the leather is stitched onto it to create the desired shape. The design is drawn afterward, and the lampshades are enhanced by chiseling small decorative holes into the leather. These perforations create a bright and rich effect when the lampshade is illuminated. Many artisans now prefer to use machine-finished leather for lampshades, as it offers a whiter finish.”*(from field notes and observation)

**Skill artist:** Many young people are reluctant to pursue leather puppetry as a profession because they seek more immediate income opportunities. This art form requires a team of 6 to 8 performers, while the remaining artisans and family members focus on creating handicrafts.

Vanaparthi Koteswara Rao is deeply committed to preserving and promoting this traditional art in his village. However, he notes that many who once practiced leather puppetry have shifted to other businesses that offer quicker returns, such as stove and sofa repair, buying old clothes for resale, recycling steel, agriculture, or working in various companies. The decline in interest is largely due to the highly specialized nature of the craft, which involves multiple complex steps like leather preparation, drawing and painting, punching holes, cutting shapes, and assembling parts. While the art remains captivating, the number of skilled practitioners has dwindled, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the tradition.

**Language barrier:** When travelling to different states in India, our knowledge of Hindi typically suffices for daily interactions and managing various situations. Hindi is a widely understood lingua franca, especially in urban areas and among diverse communities, making it a practical communication tool. He said,

*“We have found the assistance of local artists and residents invaluable. These local experts often grasp regional nuances and can offer guidance or support when needed. Their practical advice, cultural insights, and help to resolve specific issues have been incredibly beneficial. Our overall experience has been positive, as we have not encountered any significant communication barriers or difficulties in meeting our needs while travelling across different states. Combining our language skills and the support of local artisans has*

*ensured smooth and effective interactions in diverse settings”.*

**Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced them:** Many visual story narrative art forms have similarities, such as Kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthani Phad, Maharashtra’s Paithan and Chitrakathi paintings. The use of vibrant colours and symbolic motifs from Indigenous art has added depth to the puppets' representation of characters and themes, particularly in portraying mythological stories. Koteswara Rao concluded,

*“We draw images from calendars; this cross-pollination of art forms not only preserves these traditional practices but also ensures that puppetry continues to evolve as a dynamic and culturally significant art form”.*

**Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:**

*“The youth are not inclined to pursue this profession because they seek opportunities that offer quicker income” "*

He answered in a very dull voice.

**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:** Puppetry, a vital livelihood for many traditional performing artist families, faces its greatest challenge from television and smartphones, significantly impacting their income. In today’s fast-paced entertainment landscape, audiences often lack the patience for lengthy puppet shows. To adapt and sustain their craft, many artists have diversified into painting decorative items like lampshades and miniature figures, exploring new markets to keep their art form vibrant. Vanaparthi Koteswara Rao emphasizes,

*"We need support from central and state governments. Additionally, it would be beneficial if educated individuals, who are well-versed in social media, movies, and advertisements, could help raise awareness about our art form."*

**Fixed Price for Handicrafts:** The product range varies from 100 rupees to 50,000 rupees, depending on the size and subject matter.

*“While some people still purchase traditional puppets, the most popular items are lampshades and wall hangings,”*

notes Vanaparthi Koteswara Rao. He also offers training in crafting puppets and leather jewelry, and conducts lectures and sessions at schools, colleges, and other institutions. His workshops on leathercraft attract visitors from around the world.

Historically, performances were commonly held during Shivaratri and other religious festivals. However, the craft has evolved significantly over the past few decades. Managing The costs for a single performance, which amounts to approximately 50,000 rupees, have become increasingly challenging.

**Financial Support:** Puppetry art is cost-effective, with the produce quality of performance, the leather is 200 to 300, and finally, it costs up to 1000 rupees.

There must be at least 100 puppets. To preserve the puppets, a box made of bamboo called "ganiyam", which does not have minimum materials, Senior artist Koteswara Rao, is wrapped in a saree and kept on top, as shown in Figure 5.12 The puppeteer families' lives in Yakkalavari Palem are very miserable.

*"I need help to continue. Additionally, exhibiting handicrafts involves at least one lakh rupees to prepare the items. All is well if the exhibition goes well; Otherwise, upcoming artists will face dire consequences. Some artists even sold their assets to pay off debts and loans. I sincerely request the government to look into this matter,"* said Vanaparthi Koteswara Rao.



**Figure:5.12** Left side Sri Koteswara Rao, and Research scholar; right side puppets wrapped in a saree and hanged, Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur District[image source: Personal visit]



**Figure:5.13** Senior Artisan Sri Koteswara Rao Showing model designed Puppet, Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur District[image source: Personal visit]



**Figure:5.14** Sri Koteswara Rao showing his photo album to Research scholar Yakkalavari

Palem, Guntur District [image source: Personal visit]

### **Case Study -8 (Venkata Kumar)**

#### **Yakkalavari Palem, Konda Kaavuri, Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh State**

Kotappakonda, also known as Sri Trikoteswara Swamy Temple, is a revered hill temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, located 20 km from Yakkalavari palem (Konda Kaavuri) village in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. This temple, steeped in historical and cultural heritage, draws thousands of devotees, particularly during the Shivaratri festival. Beyond its spiritual significance, Kotappakonda is also a traditional hub for leather puppetry, an ancient art form integral to the region's cultural fabric.

**Family Background:** A traditional family of puppeteers, Sri Venkata Kumar continues practising his ancestors' art. He learned the skills and techniques of making leather puppets from his parents. He makes a wide variety of items besides traditional puppets; He also makes lampshades. He exhibits and sells his work at exhibitions across the country. The artisan's wife is integral to the family's leather craft business. She diligently assists her husband by cleaning the leather, ensuring that the material is free from impurities and ready for further processing. She is also skilled at punching holes in the leather, a delicate task that requires precision to create the desired patterns and shapes.

Once the leather is prepared, she helps with painting, applying vibrant colours that bring the designs to life. Their younger daughter, currently studying in the seventh standard, often observes her parents' work with curiosity and interest, learning about the craft passed down through generations. Although focused on her studies, she occasionally helps with small tasks, contributing to the family's artistic tradition. *"We belong to the Marathi community. Shadow puppetry has been a medium to educate people about social and moral values through stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata for centuries",* says Venkata Kumar, a master craftsman from Yakkalavari Palem (from Field Note on)

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** Making leather puppets requires patience and an eye for detail. Craftsmen procure goat or sheep leather from local butchers and then process it as per the item they are making. Goat or sheep leather is easily pliable and lasts many decades. The leather should be as white as possible for lampshades to permit the play of light. But wall-hanging puppets can be coloured, too.

Preparation of leather is essential in leather puppetry to bring good quality. Sometimes, the skins are put in a Myrobalan (the cherry plum) solution to impart a light burnish tone and

then dried in the sun. The artisan first draws the design on paper freehand and then copies it on the leather without tracing it. The outline of the figures and motifs is black. The artist draws motifs according to the theme where the artist will perform, for example, Sriram in the forest, Ayodhya, and war. These are different costumes and different ornaments required to change. It is the same way with Hanuman, Ravana, Sita, etc. The piece is allowed to dry, after which grooving is done with small tools.

Says Venkata Kumar,

*“To draw an image on leather, I took an old puppet reference or used it to trace, then outlined it with black colour. Earlier, artisans made natural colours for paintings. But now, ready-made colours are used as they save time and effort. But each item is unique and handcrafted, and no two designs are the same.”*

Finally, the leather is cut using a knife to get the shape of the puppet.

All raw materials, such as iron frames for lamp shades, readymade leather, colours, etc., are available in Nimmalakunta, Dharmavaram and Ananthapur. Artists used to go there and bring 25000 to 30,000 of material at a time.

Venkat Kumar Says,

“The iron frame is first made for lampshades, then leather is stitched to give it a shape. Then, the drawing is done, and the lampshades are made more attractive by chiselling small holes in a decorative pattern. The perforation gives a bright and decadent appearance to the backdrop of light. Many artisans now use machine-finished leather for lampshades as it is whiter”. (from field notes and observation)

**Skill artist:** The youth are not interested in pursuing this profession professionally because they need more instant income opportunities. Performing this art requires a team of 6 to 8 people, while the remaining craft artists and family members focus on their handicrafts.

Venkata Kumar is deeply passionate about elevating this art form in his village.

*“However, many who once practised this art now turn to other businesses that provide immediate returns, such as stove and sofa repair, buying old clothes for daily use, recycling steel, agriculture, or working in various companies. The shift away from this art form is primarily due to its highly skilled nature, which involves leather preparation, drawing and painting, punching holes, cutting shapes, and assembling parts. Although the art is fascinating, finding skilled practitioners has become increasingly difficult”. He stopped to say. (from field notes and observation)*

**Language barrier:** Artists in Marathi communicate effectively in areas where these languages are spoken, including Telugu.

*“When we travel to other states in India, our knowledge of Hindi is usually enough to navigate daily interactions and handle various situations. Hindi serves as a widely understood lingua franca, especially in many urban areas and among diverse communities, making it a practical tool for communication. Besides Hindi, we found the help of local artists and people invaluable. These local experts often understand regional nuances and can provide guidance or support when needed. Practical advice, cultural insights, or help solving specific problems have proven beneficial in various contexts. Our experience has been positive as we have yet to face significant issues communicating or managing our needs while travelling across different states. Combining our language skills and the support of local artisans facilitated smooth and efficient interactions in diverse environments,”* said Venkata Kumar

(from field notes and observation)

**Other contemporary visual native art forms on Influence:**

Artists nowadays Mostly copy from old puppets and other images if necessary.

(from field notes and observation)

**Youth Showing Interest towards Leather Puppetry:**

The youth are not interested in pursuing this profession professionally because they need more instant income opportunities. Going for stove and sofa repairs

(from field notes and observation)

**Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms:** Puppetry, the livelihood of many traditional performing artist families, faces its most significant challenge from television and smart mobiles, which significantly threaten their livelihood. In the fast-paced, fast-paced world of entertainment, few people have the patience to sit through a nightly show. Many now paint decorative objects such as lampshades and miniature figures to keep their art alive by entering new markets.

Venkata Kumar says,

*"We need central and state government support. And people like you who are educated in various social media in movies and advertisements should also spread more about us".*

**Fixed Price for Handicrafts:** this product range starts from 100 rupees to 50 thousand.it is depending size and subject matter.

*“Some people still buy puppets, but the most sold are lampshades and wall hangings. I also provide training in making puppets and leather jewellery items and give lectures and sessions at various schools, colleges, and other institutions,”*

says Venkata Kumar. People from across the world visit India to attend his workshops on leathercraft.

Most of the performances were held around Shivaratri and other religious festivals. However, the craft has undergone many changes in the last few decades. And for one show, it costs around 50000 rupees, which is very difficult to manage.

**Financial Support:** "Puppeteers once crafted puppets ranging from 15 inches to 6 feet tall, using these creations to narrate mythological stories. The designs reflected the epic themes, with giant puppets of characters like Hanuman, the ten-headed Ravana, and Rama in vibrant colours. However, the number of performances in villages has decreased over time.

*“We now perform at Shilparamam during the Sankranthi festival season and at private and government programs to raise awareness about family planning, water conservation, vaccination, tree planting, and more.*

*To perform, we need 60 to 100 puppets, depending on the epic's story, and creating these giant puppets requires an investment of 60,000 to 100,000 rupees. I need help to continue. Additionally, exhibiting handicrafts involves a minimum of one lakh rupees to prepare the goods. Everything is fine if the exhibition goes well; otherwise, upcoming artists face severe consequences. Some artists have even sold their properties to clear debts and loans. I earnestly request the government to look into this matter,"* said Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu, expressing his concerns emotionally.



(a)



(b)



(c)

**Figure:5.15** (a) Venkat Kumar and Research scholar, (b)Research scholar doing artwork with Artist,&(c) Venkat Kumar's Family, and Research scholar Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh [image source: Personal visit]

### Summary

Aare Marathi community puppeteers living in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. The three belong to that community. Among them, one is a performer, with one serving as a troupe leader and two as troupe members. One individual lives in a joint family, while the others reside in nuclear families. In addition to shadow puppetry, two cases have improved their skills through training in leathercraft. However, the economic status of these three cases is

not vital, as they rely on alternate occupations for survival and have not fully developed the skills needed to produce high-quality leather items for better marketing.

Two cases are of similar age, while one is older, and all three remain hopeful about continuing shadow puppetry within the district. Notably, the three cases have received recognition, receiving state-level awards, with one receiving a national one.

These three puppeteers purchase materials such as table lamps, stretchers, colours, and other crafting supplies from Anantapur. While most of their artwork is based on tracing old puppets, their craftsmanship still needs to improve the experience and expertise seen in Anantapur. The primary themes in their performances include episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, with animals, birds, and flowers commonly depicted in their artwork. One can create his designs among the three, while the others rely on tracing older puppets. Though they excel at traditional puppetry, they require economic support to enhance their skills and production.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION AND FUTURE STUDY OF THE SCOPE**

This study examines the folk motifs and the manifestation of leather puppetry in Andhra Pradesh, focusing on the opportunities and challenges facing this traditional art form.

The main objectives are to assess the influence of folk art concepts on the significance of leather puppetry motifs, explore the relationship between the art form and the livelihood of puppeteers, and the available support mechanisms.

The analysis of secondary data of the study, to broaden the perspective on folk motifs, various visual narrative art forms were selected for analysis, including Lepakshi and Hampi temple paintings, Chitrakathy from Maharashtra, Cheryal scrolls from Telangana, Kalankari from Andhra Pradesh, leather puppet storytelling Paintings. These art forms typically employ complex compositional techniques, colour schemes, and drawing conventions, using complex patterns and motifs to express spiritual concepts and narratives.

Using a qualitative case study approach, the research selected states and districts based on factors such as the rich tradition, historical significance, and the continued prevalence of leather puppetry, along with considerations of accessibility and the mobility of puppet troupes. A pilot survey with random sampling identified puppeteers from two districts, resulting in eight detailed case studies.

These case studies provide insights into regional puppetry traditions, the use of motifs in narrating epics, and the creation of decorative handicrafts while also highlighting the challenges encountered by puppeteers. Data collection methods included direct and participant observation and semi-structured interviews with puppeteer family heads and other community members. Interviews occurred in various settings, including homes, villages, temples, and during puppetry performances and festivals. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, data from primary and secondary sources were triangulated and systematically organized to meet the study's objectives.

Through the primary data analysis from leather puppet artists in Guntur and Anantapur districts, among the art forms of leather puppetry in Andhra Pradesh, a diverse range of natural, geometric and mythological motifs is an integral part of the tradition, as natural folk motifs are often drawn from the environment, with artists using trees, plants, flowers and the

like. Filmed. The fruits, Birds like parrots, peacocks, swans, cranes, ducks and the mythical Gandabherunda are frequent sightings. Various animals are represented, including domestic animals such as horses, bulls, cows, dogs and goats, and wild creatures such as lions, tigers, leopards, elephants and buffaloes. We realise that aquatic animals like fish, turtles, crocodiles, snakes and powerful creatures like deer and monkeys give life to these intricate designs.

This chapter concludes by summarizing key findings and offering recommendations for reviving leather puppetry and enhancing the socio-economic conditions of puppeteers, particularly in areas where development efforts have been insufficient.

### **6.1 Summary of Findings**

In 13th-century poet Palkuriki Somanatha, in Pandita Aaradhya Charitra, mentions leather and rod puppets, suggesting shadow puppetry was well-established by the 12th century, especially during religious events like the Shivaratri festival at Srisailem. Further evidence, such as a 1521 inscription, highlights royal patronage of puppeteers, including master puppeteer "Bommalata Kala," honoured by Krishnadeva Raya. 1928 puppeteers Chandramayya and Bommalata Amrita Kavi donated a village to support shadow puppet performances. Later inscriptions from the 19th century indicate non-Telugu groups also practised puppetry, including communities like the Jangams, Kuthubus, Kuttadis, and others across South India.

Among these, the Aare Kapu Bommalata performers of Andhra Pradesh have seamlessly integrated themselves into Telugu cultural traditions while preserving their unique social identity. Their customs closely resemble those of their ancestors from Maharashtra. The four principal families—Thota, Shinde, Anaparti, and Rekandar—belong to the Rekandar and Vanarasa sects and intermarry exclusively within these groups. Touring puppeteers were once well-supported, but with the rise of movies and stage productions, many families have abandoned their craft due to dwindling audiences. In East and West Godavari districts, former puppeteers have turned to trade utensils for old clothes, while others in Anantapur have taken up farm labour. Despite this shift, puppets remain prized possessions, often divided among brothers when establishing separate households. A family collection typically includes around a hundred puppets; those who inherit them may need to buy additional ones to continue performances.

Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art: Guntur district puppeteers prepare small

puppets that are at most two feet long. When comparing with the Nimmalakunta puppeteer's example, A play called "Padmavyuham" requires at least two "ganiyam" (bamboo boxes for storing puppets) of puppets. It is a four-hour play and is performed with about 60 puppets. The number of these puppets. These puppeteers prepare six-foot-size puppets, and Guntur district artisans prepare to make lamp shades, wall hangings, and other handicraft items because making a giant puppet requires three skins. While making a leather puppet, large pieces of leather are well-spent, challenging to preserve, and very expensive.

**Making leather:** puppets require patience and an eye for detail. Craftsmen procure goat or sheep leather from local butchers and then process it as per the item they are making. Goat or sheep leather is easily pliable and lasts many decades. The leather should be as white as possible for lampshades to permit the play of light. But wall-hanging puppets can be coloured, too.

Creating leather puppets demands patience and a keen eye for detail. Craftsmen source goat or sheep leather from local butchers, carefully processing it based on the specific item they are crafting. Buffalo, Goat and sheep leather are chosen for their pliability and durability, often lasting for many decades. The leather should be as white as possible for lampshades to allow the light to shine through. However, for wall-hanging puppets, the leather can also be coloured. For quality leather, the skins are sometimes treated with a Myrobalan (cherry plum) solution to impart a light-burnished tone before being sun-dried.

**Giving Out Line to the Puppets:** Senior artists will develop design skills or be traced from old puppets. Guntur puppeteers do not prepare giant puppets and new designs. Ananthapur artists begin by sketching the design freehand on paper and then transferring it onto the leather without using a tracing method. The outlines of the figures and motifs are drawn in black. Colour fades, and almost all lost ones are re-painted and utilized. Ananthapur puppeteers are bringing new designs and preparing new puppets. Now, all puppeteers have stopped using vegetable and chemical colours available in all markets.

**The motifs:** Created based on the theme of the performance, such as depicting Sriram in the forest, Ayodhya, or scenes of war, each requiring different costumes and ornaments. This approach is similarly applied to characters like Hanuman, Ravana, and Sita. Once the piece is dry, intricate grooving is done using small tools. Most artists use cut pieces to make motifs for tools like arrows, cattle, trees, baskets, etc. Moreover, with slightly bigger pieces, we make small, 1.5 feet of Hanuman figures. Medium figures are four feet tall, and

prominent figures are five to six feet tall because Hanuman has about four or five forms.

Fixing the puppets: Both region puppeteers use the same techniques to fix the joints and bamboo sticks; Ananthapur artisans are more articulate, and hence, more sticks are used to fix different parts of the puppets.

Guntur Artisans brings all raw materials, such as iron frames for lamp shades, readymade leather, colours, etc., which are available in Nimmalakunta, Dharmavaram, and Ananthapur. Artists used to go there and bring 25000 to 30,000 of material at a time. Ananthapur artisans get all the materials near the town of Dharmavaram or Ananthapur.

Preservation of the puppets: Therefore, baskets are carefully bamboo-made to store these leather dolls, which we carry with us wherever the show occurs. Only some people can do these; even if they have experience, they can. We keep them in trunk boxes to protect them from rats, fire and dogs.

Skilled Artisans: In the two regions, it is difficult to get skilled artisans to perform or do puppet making; most Ananthapur artists have troops in their troops. All members are their family members or relatives. Artists have in this modern world, getting traditionally skilled artists is very difficult, where technology plays a vital role in our daily lives. Daily wage earners receive between 500 and 700 rupees for this skilful work. Although finding such skilled artisans is challenging, the demand for their craftsmanship remains high.

The decline in interest is mainly due to the highly specialized nature of the craft, which involves multiple complex steps like leather preparation, drawing and painting, punching holes, cutting shapes, and assembling parts. While the art remains captivating, the number of skilled practitioners has dwindled, making it increasingly difficult to sustain the tradition.

Language barrier: Historical accounts suggest that the bommalata vaaru (puppeteers) settled in Andhra Pradesh, though the puppeteers originally came from Maharashtra and continue to speak both Marathi and Telugu. The puppeteers from Nimmalakunta perform nationally and internationally, primarily in Telugu. Local people assist by translating when needed, and some puppeteers are also fluent in Hindi.

In contrast, artisans from the Guntur district often feel self-conscious during exhibitions but receive support from fellow artists to help them navigate these situations.

Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms have influenced leather puppetry in numerous ways. Many narrative art forms, such as Andhra Pradesh's Kalamkari, Rajasthani Phad, Maharashtra's Chitrakathi paintings, Jain miniature art, Lepakshi temple murals, and

the Sanchi Buddha stupas, share common features and have shaped the evolution of leather puppetry.

The use of vibrant colours and symbolic folk motifs, including the lotus, elephant, horse, deer, cow, bull, peacock, swan, camel, Hanuman, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, the tree of life, Ganesha, Saraswati, and more, has been drawn from Indigenous art. These motifs have enriched the representation of characters and themes in leather puppetry, particularly in depicting mythological stories, adding depth and cultural resonance to the art form's visual narrative.

**Youth interest in leather puppetry Art:** The ancient art of leather puppetry is facing a severe challenge, as the younger generation in the puppeteers' families of the Anantapur and Guntur districts need more interest in preserving this traditional craft. Once passed down from generation to generation, today's youth are increasingly drawn to careers that offer quicker financial returns, such as medicine, engineering, or trades like gas stove repairs, sofa fixing, or trading utensils for old clothes. These modern occupations provide more immediate income than puppetry's intricate, labor-intensive process, which requires a team of 6 to 8 people for performances. At the same time, other family members work on related handicrafts.

As a result, many young people are turning away from this ancient art form, putting its future at risk. Despite this, there is still hope, as some children who assist with exhibitions and shows may continue the legacy, helping to ensure the survival of this rich cultural heritage.

**Branding and promotion:** Puppetry has evolved into a crucial livelihood for many traditional performing artist families, but it now faces its biggest challenge from the rise of television and smartphones, which have severely impacted their income. In today's fast-paced entertainment world, audiences often lack the patience for long puppet shows. However, artists from the Anantapur district have adapted to these changes, sustaining their craft by branching out into painting and creating decorative items like lampshades and miniature figures. They have kept their art form alive and vibrant by exploring new markets.

Nimmalakunta has become renowned for puppetry, attracting pilgrims and researchers alike. The village's reputation has been further boosted through promotion on websites and social media. In contrast, the situation in the Guntur district is quite different. The artisans there are

not well-known outside their local area, and their products lack recognition. Although they hold occasional exhibitions, information about their work is scarce. Nimmalakunta, often synonymous with Tholu Bommalata, has built a strong brand around its leather puppetry, unlike Guntur, where many puppeteer families have moved on to other professions and are not as visible to the outside world.

**A fixed price for Handicrafts:** Anantapur is widely recognized for its rich tradition of leather puppetry, with local artists receiving national and international awards for their dedication and craftsmanship. Over time, the region has become renowned for its expertise in leather crafts. Anantapur has gained considerable exposure to the outside world, particularly through showcasing its leather puppetry creations, including table lamp shades, wall hangings, clocks, paintings, handbags, and pouches. This exposure has helped them become renowned artists, often surpassing their counterparts from other districts in craftsmanship. While there are no fixed prices for their products, leather puppetry items from Anantapur typically range from Rs. 200 to Rs. 50,000, offering a wider variety than those from the Guntur district. In contrast, due to a lack of specialized skills and a shift towards other occupations, Guntur artisans do not enjoy the same level of recognition within the community.

Ananthapur district Nimmalakunta craft product range varies from 100 rupees to 50,000 rupees, depending on the size and subject matter, But Guntur district craft works less cost due to lack of quality; At the same time, some people still purchase traditional puppets, the most popular items are lampshades and wall hangings, however, Nimmalakunta leather puppetry has much demand in the market.

**Financial support:** In the past, puppeteers in Andhra Pradesh held an important social status and were generously rewarded with wealth and goods by wealthy patrons. Sometimes, a goatskin costs less than ten rupees, or landlords provide the skin for free. Today, leather costs Rs. 250 to Rs. 350, and 1500 forms to prepare the leather. At least three pieces of leather are needed to create a six-foot puppet. The artisans of the Guntur district find it very challenging to cope with these rising costs. However, a few families in the Anantapur district can sustain themselves by producing acceptable art forms in puppetry, and their products are in demand in the market.

The craft of puppetry is expensive, and the quality of the work greatly affects its marketability. To create merchandise for the exhibition, Rs. 50,000 to Rs. 1,00,000, and if

these products fail to sell, the artisans face considerable hardship. Unable to take unsold goods home, they often sell their handicrafts to poor farmers at a loss. Many artisans from Guntur have gone into debt and subsequently left the profession. In Anantapur, however, a society was formed to preserve the products of local artisans.

**Problems of Puppeteers:** Manufacturing, performance, and preservation challenges vary by region. These challenges are relatively simple in some areas but more complex in others. Artists in the Anantapur district create new puppets more frequently than in other regions, where performers rely on older puppets. This is because making leather puppets is a labor-intensive process requiring significant time and patience.

In today's context, quality has become crucial in drawing, design, and colouring, with careful checks being made at every stage. Leather crafts often develop an unpleasant odor during the rainy season, deterring potential buyers, which has become a significant issue. While the Anantapur district faces this problem to a lesser extent, it remains a significant concern for artisans in the Guntur district.

In both regions of Andhra Pradesh, very few puppeteers possess a comprehensive understanding of the narrative episodes. Many current performers only have partial knowledge of the stories, and without regular practice, this knowledge risks being lost. This issue is particularly prevalent in the Guntur region, where the quality of performances has declined. Large teams have broken up into smaller units, reducing the strength of individual troupes and leading to a decline in musical accompaniment and puppet manipulation skills. This is less of a concern in Anantapur.

The tradition of shadow puppetry, traditionally an all-male practice, relies on the availability of male offspring to carry on the craft. This has become a major challenge in all regions, as declining male fertility poses a significant threat to the continuation of the tradition.

**Social, Economic and health issues:** In many cases, puppeteers from different regions now have permanent residences, and this takes place to form smaller families. The older generation, who had deep knowledge of the epics, no longer lived with the younger generation. As a result, the current generation of puppeteers cannot rely on senior artists' guidance during performances, which has negatively impacted the quality of performances. This social shift has become a significant problem, particularly in the Guntur district.

In Guntur, patronage for specific popular performing arts has increased at the Kotappakonda temple. Consequently, the festival's traditional cultural focus is rapidly changing from its

roots in religion and spirituality to one based on enjoyment and amusement. Due to this shift, shadow puppetry has become less common in villages, posing a societal issue and jeopardizing the art form's continued existence. The older generation of puppeteers often struggle with depression and low motivation, mainly due to their frequent consumption of alcohol. Their mood and drive diminish when they do not earn enough to support this habit. They also frequently suffer from health issues such as coughs, colds, and lung diseases. Some experience dental problems caused by using betel nuts (pan) regularly. Senior puppeteers in Kerala perform for long hours during the festival season and often face physical strain and frequent respiratory issues.

However, with the rise of television, cinema, and video and declining patronage, the number of performances has decreased, leading to poor economic conditions. In contrast, puppeteers in the Anantapur district have found an alternative source of income by selling leather craft items, which provides them with a substantial livelihood.

## **6.2 Summary of Case Studies**

Family background: Except for one, all the cases from both districts are middle-aged. All of them are Marathi, but their surnames are different.

All the cases from Anantapur were learned from their parents' profession, Puppet making. This emphasizes that puppetry is a profession passed down from father to son. They have shifted from a nomadic lifestyle to a permanent residence. These five individuals are performers and troupe leaders in a joint family structure. Alongside their shadow puppetry expertise, they possess high levels of craftsmanship and have earned national and international recognition. One case has been awarded the prestigious Padma Shri, while a younger member has been honoured with a doctorate. Their economic situation is notably stable, as they benefit from the support of a leather puppetry community society. All five artisans reside in multi-story or pucca houses in Nimmalakunta, a village renowned for its puppetry tradition. Two artisans are of similar age, with the third being older, and all three remain hopeful about the future of shadow puppetry in the district.

The three cases belong to the Aare Marathi Community from Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh; among these three, one is a performer, with one serving as a troupe leader and two as troupe members. One individual lives in a joint family, while the others reside in nuclear families. Almost all the cases from the Guntur district had occupations other than leather puppetry art. In addition to shadow puppetry, two cases have improved their skills through

training in leathercraft.

Two cases from the Guntur district are of similar age, while one is older, and all three remain hopeful about continuing shadow puppetry within the district. Notably, the three cases have received recognition, receiving state-level awards, with one receiving a national one. One individual focuses on securing a stable livelihood by selling craft items. This case is confident about himself and more interested in puppetry performance than crafting leather items.

**Raw Material and Process of Making Puppetry Art:** These five artisans serve as role models for aspiring puppeteers in Andhra Pradesh, offering training and providing materials such as table lamps, stretchers, colours, and other crafting supplies. While much of their artwork is based on tracing traditional puppets and creating new designs to meet market demands, their artistic skills have led to the development of a distinct style within South Indian shadow puppetry.

Nimmalakunta leather puppetry has earned geographical identity status, and their performances often feature themes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, with motifs of animals, birds, and flowers being prevalent. Each artisan demonstrates a unique ability to create original designs that appeal to customers.

The Guntur district's three cases use primary themes in their performances, including episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, with animals, birds, and flowers commonly depicted in their artwork. One can create his designs among the three, while the others rely on tracing older puppets.

In these three cases, the Guntur district purchased materials such as table lamps, stretchers, colours, and other crafting supplies from Anantapur. While most of their artwork is based on tracing old puppets, their craftsmanship still needs to improve the experience and expertise seen in Anantapur.

**Language barrier:** The five cases of Ananthapur District are performing nationally and internationally, primarily in Telugu. Local people assist by translating when needed, and some puppeteers are also fluent in Hindi.

In contrast, three cases from the Guntur district often feel self-conscious during exhibitions but receive support from fellow artists to help them navigate these situations.

**Other contemporary visual storytelling art forms Influenced Leather puppetry** in numerous ways. Many narrative art forms, such as Andhra Pradesh's Kalamkari, Rajasthani Phad,

Maharashtra's Chitrakathi paintings, Jain miniature art, Lepakshi temple murals, and the Sanchi Buddha stupas, share common features and have shaped the evolution of leather puppetry.

The Ananthapur District Five and Guntur District Three cases use vibrant colours and symbolic folk motifs, including the lotus, elephant, horse, deer, cow, bull, peacock, swan, camel, Hanuman, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana, the tree of life, Ganesha, Saraswati, and more, has been drawn from Indigenous art. These motifs have enriched the representation of characters and themes in leather puppetry, particularly in depicting mythological stories, adding depth and cultural resonance to the art form's visual narrative.

Youth interest in leather puppetry Art: The five cases of Anantapur, one case of a daughter studying MBBS, another case of a son working as a teacher, and three cases of Guntur districts one case of a son doing sofa repair profession, another case of a son studying B.Com computer, and another case don't have sons, these cases need more interest in preserving this traditional craft. Once passed down from generation to generation, mostly the eight cases of youth are increasingly drawn to careers that offer quicker financial returns, such as medicine, engineering, or trades like gas stove repairs, sofa fixing, or trading utensils for old clothes. These modern occupations provide more immediate income than puppetry's intricate, labor-intensive process, which requires a team of 6 to 8 people for performances. At the same time, other family members work on related handicrafts.

As a result, many young people are turning away from this ancient art form, putting its future at risk. Despite this, there is still hope, as some children who assist with exhibitions and shows may continue the legacy, helping to ensure the survival of this rich cultural heritage.

Branding and promotion of Leather Puppetry Art forms: the five cases from the Anantapur district have adapted to these changes, sustaining their craft by branding out into painting and creating decorative items like lampshades and miniature figures. These cases have kept their art form alive and vibrant by exploring new markets.

Nimmalakunta has become renowned for puppetry, attracting pilgrims and researchers alike. These five cases' reputations have been further boosted through promotion on websites and social media. In contrast, the situation in the Guntur district three cases is quite different. One case out of three is not well-known outside their local area, and their products need recognition. Although the three cases hold occasional exhibitions, information about their

work is scarce. Nimmalakunta cases, often synonymous with Tholu Bommalata, have built a strong brand around its leather puppetry, unlike Guntur cases, where many puppeteer families have moved on to other professions and are less visible to the outside world.

**Fixed Price for Handicrafts:** All Five Ananthapur cases secured a stable livelihood through the sale of handcrafted items and their participation in significant handicraft exhibitions across India.

In three cases, craft works are less costly in the Guntur district due to poor quality. At the same time, some people still purchase traditional puppets; the most popular items are lampshades and wall hangings; however, Nimmalakunta leather puppetry has much demand in the market.

**Financial Support:** The five cases are all well-established economically, but despite their mastery of traditional puppetry, they still require economic support to develop their skills further and explore more advanced techniques. While they are optimistic about the future of the craft, they express a stronger interest in the performance aspect of shadow puppetry over the crafting of leather items.

However, the economic status of these three cases from the Guntur district is not vital, as they rely on alternate occupations for survival and have not fully developed the skills needed to produce high-quality leather items for better marketing. Though they excel at traditional puppetry, they require economic support to enhance their skills and production.

However, all five cases from Ananthapur district have noted a decline in shadow puppetry performances in villages, attributing the decrease to a lack of patronage and support, which they believe is largely due to the rise of mass media, including cinema, television, and video.

### **6.3 Suggestions**

- Tholu Bommalata, the traditional leather puppetry of Andhra Pradesh, features intricate and meaningful folk motifs that are deeply rooted in the region's cultural heritage. These motifs not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of the puppets but also convey stories and cultural values significant to the community.
- One of the primary concerns raised by puppeteers is the difficulty in procuring and preparing animal skins for puppet-making. This issue could be addressed by exploring alternative materials, as seen in other countries. For example, Wayang Siam puppets in Malaysia, which were traditionally made from water-buffalo skin, have now been replaced with plastic materials. Contemporary shadow puppeteers globally are also using non-leather

materials such as plastic, acetate, cardboard, and art paper. These modern alternatives not only give a fresh look to traditional leather puppetry but also make the art form more accessible to a wider audience.

- Conducting training workshops on modern performing, art and design techniques, in collaboration with drama departments at academic institutions National Institute of Design, the National Institute of Fashion Technology, and Fine Arts colleges to create new designs that enhance their livelihood.
- Nimmalakunta Anantapur District Leather Puppetry Artisans have established a society. Similarly, in the Guntur district, Narasarao Pet may establish a society with a permanent training centre, including a theatre, through which many people can be trained and encouraged.
- Through the district education department, organizing school performances can greatly enhance the opportunities for puppet shows. By collecting a nominal fee of Rs. 5-10 per student, a steady income can be provided to local puppeteers, particularly in districts where many are facing economic hardships. This initiative would not only support their livelihood but also motivate puppeteers to create shows based on themes relevant to school curricula. In districts with a high number of puppeteers in need, this strategy could be particularly effective. Additionally, if puppeteers perform regularly in schools, they could be given the status of "teacher," further recognizing their contribution to education.
- Hands-on workshops in schools, art institutions, and local communities should also be organized to teach young people the traditional skills of crafting and performing with leather puppets. These workshops will introduce students to the history, cultural importance, and techniques of leather puppetry, offering them practical experience in this unique art form. Integrating these workshops into school curriculums or community programs will help young learners appreciate the craftsmanship and storytelling behind leather puppetry while preserving the tradition for future generations.
- Providing hands-on experience in digital literacy is crucial in today's interconnected world. Digital platforms can serve as accessible and interactive archives for cultural enthusiasts, academic researchers, and the general public. These platforms help leather puppetry reach a global audience and ensure its preservation for future generations, overcoming geographical and physical barriers. A dedicated website or portal should be developed as a comprehensive digital repository, housing a collection of recorded performances, artist interviews, scripts,

and step-by-step crafting tutorials for leather puppetry. As a one-stop resource, this archive will offer easy access to learners, from enthusiasts to researchers, fostering a deeper appreciation of the art form.

- Additionally, integrating CAD (Computer-Aided Design) and automated design tools can assist artists in creating new designs that meet market demands. Users can closely explore craftsmanship by offering detailed, digital 3D models of traditional leather puppets. This technology would allow artists to produce intricate designs more efficiently, meeting production timelines while maintaining traditional artistic quality.

#### **6.4 Future scope of research on Leather Puppetry Art**

The future scope of research on leather puppetry art offers a wide range of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural opportunities, especially given the rapid changes in technology, socio-economic conditions, and cultural preservation efforts. Below are several promising directions for future research:

**A. Technological Integration and Innovation in Leather Puppetry:** Explore how modern technologies like 3D scanning, augmented reality (AR), and virtual reality (VR) can be used to document and preserve leather puppets and performances. This could create interactive experiences that allow a global audience to appreciate the art form in virtual spaces.

Investigating how traditional leather puppetry could be integrated with animation techniques or used in multimedia formats such as short films or documentaries. This hybridization could appeal to younger audiences and enhance cultural awareness.

Research could explore how sustainable or alternative materials, such as synthetic leather or bio-based products, might replace traditional animal hides in creating puppets while preserving the authenticity and cultural value of the craft.

**B. Cultural and Cross-Cultural Studies:** Comparative Study with Global Puppetry Traditions: Compare Indian leather puppetry traditions with other global shadow puppetry forms, such as Indonesian Wayang Kulit. Such research could examine shared techniques, narrative styles, and cultural context and influence differences.

Explore the continuing relevance of epic storytelling through puppetry, especially focusing on how leather puppetry portrays mythological themes (e.g., Ramayana, Mahabharata). Research could also examine its role in disseminating religious and ethical values across generations.

Study how leather puppetry is integrated into regional festivals, temple events, and rituals. Research could focus on the role of puppetry in preserving intangible cultural heritage and how these events support the craft's survival.

**C. Social and Economic Research :** Investigate how globalization, tourism, and modernization affect leather puppetry, both positively and negatively. Are traditional puppeteers adapting to new audiences, or are they facing challenges in maintaining authenticity while pursuing commercial opportunities?

A detailed study on leather puppetry artists' socio-economic status includes issues like income disparity, market demand, and government or NGO support. The role of handicrafts in rural economies and their potential for entrepreneurship could be explored, along with sustainability practices.

Examine how gender dynamics play a role in the creation, performance, and transmission of leather puppetry skills. Are women equally involved, and how do their roles differ from men in puppetry families or communities?

**D. Cross-Disciplinary Research :** Research how leather puppetry can be used for art therapy, especially in rural or marginalized communities. Puppetry as a therapeutic practice could potentially promote mental health, offering creative expression and emotional healing. Examine the cognitive and behavioural impact of storytelling through puppetry on audiences, particularly children. Does exposure to traditional stories through puppetry influence values, empathy, or critical thinking?

**E. Sustainable and Ethical Craftsmanship:** Explore sustainable and ethical considerations in using animal hides to create leather puppets. This research could investigate alternative, cruelty-free materials or explore how artisans adapt to the increasing demand for ethical products.

Research the potential for developing fair trade markets for leather puppetry and handicrafts, ensuring that artisans receive appropriate recognition and compensation for their work.

**F. Policy and Advocacy:** Research the role of governmental policies in promoting, preserving, or potentially hindering the development of leather puppetry. Analyzing subsidies, grants, and cultural heritage initiatives aimed at artisans would provide valuable insights. Explore the role of NGOs, cultural institutions, and private initiatives in providing training, marketing, and financial support for leather puppetry artists. How effective are these interventions in sustaining the art form?

## 6.5 Conclusion

Folk art is a vital part of our civilization, serving as a medium for people to express their emotions, both joy and sorrow, and reflect their cultural struggles through the creation of functional and beautiful objects for everyday use. It connects us to the earliest periods of Indian history, when art truly embodied the spirit of the people. Our goal is to elevate the understanding of folk art as a legitimate and significant art form. Techniques like painting, weaving, and plaiting are deeply rooted in folk traditions, intertwined with the symbols, narratives, and visual styles that define them. In South Indian art, however, strong religious ties and adherence to classical traditions can make it harder to classify as folk art. Folk art plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage through generations, with motifs functioning as symbols that convey meaning and build larger narratives. These motifs—often featuring animals, plants, and geometric patterns—carry cultural and symbolic significance, reflecting a shared heritage across different traditions. While motifs and themes are sometimes used interchangeably, motifs are more concrete, represented by repeated objects or expressions, while themes convey abstract ideas and values. Mythmaking and storytelling are universal cultural practices, with myths often being carried through folk motifs, which serve as a medium for these timeless narratives. Myths have always been central to human storytelling, and motifs supported by myths have been passed down through generations. In Indian mythology, stories typically revolve around gods and demons, conveying specific ideologies and beliefs. These narratives remain alive today through oral traditions and illustrated texts like the Jataka tales, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Geet Govinda. Visual storytelling, dating back to prehistoric cave paintings, has continuously evolved through various forms—hieroglyphics, tapestries, statues, paintings, and multimedia—allowing us to trace history, culture, and lifestyle.

Puppetry, a traditional form of folk theatre in India, has long been a revered and popular source of entertainment. In recent years, governments and NGOs have effectively utilised puppet shows to communicate development messages and promote the potential of folk arts such as puppetry, theatre, dance, and storytelling. However, despite these efforts, the popularity of puppetry has significantly declined, forcing many puppeteers and their families, including women, to seek alternative livelihoods. Many have turned to low-wage or daily labour, including selling steel utensils for old clothes, gas stoves and sofa set

repairs. As a result, the status of puppetry and the art form itself has deteriorated, with little hope for revival. This study highlights the need for strategies to preserve the art and improve the livelihoods of puppeteers before the situation worsens.

Tolu Bommalata, a traditional art form with a rich history, once thrived under the patronage of kings and landlords. Today, however, this art faces a struggle for survival. In the past, these artists roamed from village to village as nomads, serving as vital transmitters of our great myths and legends for centuries. They had no difficulty obtaining raw materials for their leather puppets, allowing them to live contentedly, even without permanent homes or villages. But in the modern era, their lives have become increasingly difficult due to the rise of contemporary media and the decline of patrons.

Despite these challenges, these artists continue to serve selflessly, dedicating themselves to preserving and transmitting the stories of the Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Bhagavata—the foundations of our cultural heritage. Sadly, in some areas, they lack a permanent home and formal community recognition. Devoted to their art, they often struggle to live as equals in society and have been forced to pursue other professions to survive.

In the history of Indian art, from the 2nd century BCE to the 18th century CE, we see the emergence of distinctive styles such as Satavahana, Pallava, Chola, Hoysala, Kakatiya, Vijayanagara, Nayaka, Mughal, and Deccan styles. Each of these contributed to the rich and diverse artistic heritage of India. Throughout this period, artists often worked under the patronage of kings and rulers, which enabled them to create these enduring masterpieces. Today, individual artists have unique styles and often sign their works, as seen in the examples of renowned painters such as MF Husain, Raja Ravi Varma, SH Raza, and many others, each known for their signature artistic expressions.

In the past, painters and sculptors did not develop individual styles as we see today. Instead, their art was often tied to the identity of an empire, no matter how many styles existed. Similarly, puppeteers of both the past and present have followed this tradition. Artists' basic needs—food, shelter, and clothing—were provided by kings, allowing them the freedom to create pure and untainted art. This is why masterpieces such as the art of Ajanta, Ellora, Vijayanagara, Hampi, and various miniature paintings continue to speak to us through thousands of years.

When art becomes commercialized, it loses its essence. True artists desire nothing more than recognition and encouragement, which they received from kings in the past. These patrons

ensured artists had everything they needed, enabling them to create wonders. Today, however, art is treated more as a commercial product, stifling the creation of genuine artistic expression.

The puppetry artists of Andhra Pradesh, particularly those from Nimmalakunta in the Anantapur district, have breathed new life into this ancient tradition and are performing on global stages. In earlier times, Guntur, Nellore, Kakinada, East Godavari, West Godavari, and Visakhapatnam were all thriving puppetry hubs. However, over time, many artists abandoned puppetry for other professions. It is now more critical than ever for the government, NGOs, and society to respect and preserve these traditions to ensure their survival.

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## **ANNEXURES**

### **ANNEXURE-1**

#### **SEMI-STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR A CASE STUDY ON LEATHER PUPPETEERS OF ANANTAPUR AND GUNTUR DISTRICTS IN ANDHRA PRADESH**

1. Could you tell me about your family’s history with leather puppetry?
2. Could you describe the process of creating leather puppets, including the motifs or designs you typically use? What is the significance of these motifs, and why are they chosen? How do you understand the spiritual or cultural meanings behind these designs, and do these meanings change depending on whether the puppets are used in performances or as decorative items?
3. Do you find skilled artists who are available?
4. Do you experience communication problems when travelling to neighboring states to promote your goods or participate in craft fairs?
5. Do you see any connections between your leather puppets and temple murals in places like Lepakshi, Hampi, Chitrakathi Kalamkari, etc.?
6. Do you think the younger generation wants to keep this art alive?
7. Could you explain how you position your products in the market and how customers' minds feel that they belong to a specific category?

8. Are handicrafts typically sold at a fixed price? Could you share your experience with pricing—whether the cost is predetermined or varies based on different factors?
9. Do you feel you need financial support in your work? If so, how much financial assistance would be helpful, and could you explain why?

**ANNEXURE-2**  
**LIST OF INTERVIEWS OF ART PRACTITIONERS**

<b>Sl. No</b>	<b>Name of the Artisan</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Reason of Interview</b>
1	Vanaparthi Chinna Anjaneyulu	Shiva Prasad Colony, Narasaraopet, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh (A.P)	State-level Awardee specialist in drawing, present he is practicing among 30 families.
2	V. Venkat Kumar	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Computer-aided technology
3	V.Sri Koteswara Rao	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Senior Artist, Historical discussion and he gave a detailed description of three generations.
4	Rekhanuru Hanumanthu Rao	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
5	Vanaprthi Koteswarao	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
6	Rekhanuru Kotilingam	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
7	Rekhanuru Satyanarayana	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan

8	Rekhanuru Manikumar	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
9	Rekhanuru Kota Anjaneyulu	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
10	Vanaprthi Ramanjaneyulu	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
11	Rekhanuru Durgamma	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
12	Rekhanuru Narayana	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
13	Rekhanuru Tirupatamma	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
14	Rekhanuru Sathi babu	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
15	Rekhanuru Vijayalaskmi	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
16	Rekhanuru Sai Babu	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	He left his traditional art, doing gas stove repair work
17	Rekhanuru KotiLingam	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	He left his traditional art, doing cloth seller
18	Vanaparathi Gopi	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Participated in Group Discussion
19	Vanaparathi Venkateswara Rao	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Senior artist
20	Vanaparthi Ramanujamma	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Daily wise labor
21	Vanaparthi Ranga Rao	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	He left his traditional art, doing sofa repair work

22	Vanaparthi Chinna	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	He left his traditional art, doing cloth seller
23	Vanaparthi Sreenaadhudu	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	He left his traditional art, doing sofa repair work
24	Vanaparthi Krishna veni	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Home maker
25	Vanaparthi Ranga vallika	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	She left her traditional art, Selling stainless steel things for old cloths
26	Vanaparthi Mariyamma	Yakkalavari Palem, Guntur, A. P	Home maker
27	Vanaparthi Yedukondalu	Jamuna Nagar, Madhava Patnam,Kakinada. East Godavari ,A.P	Leather Puppetry Artisan
28	Padma Sri.Dalavayi Chalapati Rao	Nimmalakunta, Dharmavaram, Anantapur ,Andhra Pradesh.	He got, Padma Sri Award, National Award, and many more
29	Dr. Dalavay Kulayappa	Nimmalakunta, Dharmavaram, Anantapur ,Andhra Pradesh.	Present generation Artist, he received honored with Doctorate, and he is the finest artist

30	Dalavay Ramana	Nimmalakunta, Dharmavaram, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh.	Leather Puppetry Artisan
31	Dalavay Sarojamma	Nimmalakunta, Dharmavaram, Anantapur,A.P.	Leather Puppetry Artisan
32	Dalavay Ramana	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
33	Dalavay Venkatesh	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan
34	DalavayTirupatamma	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan
35	Dalavay Venkatamma	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
36	Dalavay Lalitamma	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
37	Dalavay Prakash	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
38	Dalavay Laksmi	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
39	Dalavay Durga	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
40	Dalavay Chinna Narayana	Nimmalakunta,	Now doing Teacher Job
41	Dalavay Shivamma	Nimmalakunta,	National Awardee, Leather Puppetry Woman- Artisan

42	Dalavay Kullayappa	Nimmalakunta,	National Awardee, Leather Puppetry Artisan
43	Dalavay Raju	Nimmalakunta,	Present generation Artist, he received honored with Doctorate, and he is the finest artist
44	Dalavay Durga	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan
45	Shinde Venkat Rayudu	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Woman-Artisan
46	Shinde Anjaneyulu	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan
47	Shinde Chidambaram	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan
48	Shinde Sriramulu	Nimmalakunta,	Eminent Artist Leather puppetry artist
49	Shinde Ramana	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan
50	Shinde Venkatesh	Nimmalakunta,	Leather Puppetry Artisan

## APPENDIX

### LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Sl.No	Title of the Paper with Author Names	Name of Journal/Conference	Published Date	ISSN No/Vol No, Issue No	Journal Indexing
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1	Development of Leather Puppet Art in Handicrafts by Usage of Computer Aided Process with Traditional Knowledge for Rural Livelihoods	AIP Conference Proceedings 2418, 030005 (2022)	May-22	0094-243X/24/2418, 030005 (2022)	Scopus
2	The Relationship of Leather Puppet Art and Folk Art Usage of Computer-Aided Process for Rural Livelihoods	International Journal of Applied Engineering Research	Number 7 (2021)	Volume 16, Number 7 (2021) pp. 516-52	2017 discontinued from Scopus
3	“A Novel on Industrial Management Folk Art By The Computer Technology”	AIP Conference Proceedings	The manuscript was Sent to the Production	The manuscript was Sent to the Production	(Scopus)

## LIST OF CONFERENCES

Sl.No	Name of Conference	Title of Paper Presented	Date
1	1st International Conference on Advances in Signal Processing Communications and Computational Intelligence	“A Novel on Industrial Management Folk Art By The Computer Technology”	23rd -24th July 2021.
2	International Conference ‘Exploring New Frontier and Methods in Arts ‘in collaboration with Lalit Kala Akademi, Govt. of India	Chitrakathi Painting: an ambassador for future generations to learn about our cultural heritage	25th June 2022
3	1st International Conference on English Language, Literature, and culture	Making Traditional Art forms more Advanced through Computer-aided design software	10th -11th Dec 2022





**1<sup>ST</sup> INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE  
ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE  
10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> December 2022  
Exploring Digital Humanities: Challenges and Opportunities**

Organised by  
The Achievers Foundation for English Studies (TAFES), Bhadohi, UP, India  
in collaboration with  
Madan Mohan Malaviya University of Technology, UP, India & Government College, Una, HP, India

**CERTIFICATE**

**CRN- 1265**

*This is to certify that Adisheshaiah Sade, Research Scholar of LPU, Punjab attended the conference.  
He / She also presented a paper entitled Making Traditional Art Forms more Advanced through  
Computer-aided Design Software.*

Dr. Raman Kumar  
Conference Secretary

Dr. S. N. Singh  
Conference Convener

Prof. (Dr.) Sanjay P. Pandey  
Conference Chairman