

Performers

There is hardly any formal training for the puppeteers in their art form. Members of the troupe gain experience through participation in the performances. It is not uncommon for infants and toddlers to be present backstage during performances and providing assistance from the age of 4 or 5. Outside shows, seniors help juniors improve their ability to read and memorize texts, often from handwritten manuscripts. All puppeteers are adept in the folk dances of their region, as they often dance with their puppets.

Performers are mostly wandering troupes. They wander for nine months in a year from village to village giving performances. The whole family will travel from to village to village. The villagers give some money and rice to the puppeteers.



Behind the screen the Puppeteers performing the puppet show.

The art is alive in some parts of the Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema districts like Ananthapur (Nimmalakuunta). Earlier, joint families used to travel together but today nuclear families are also performing. Sometimes they take their relatives or their neighbours with them. There are families that have also opted for alternate



Sugrivan and Hanuman puppets on the stage

livelihoods like production of decorative lampshades and wall hangings of leather. A co-operative puppet-making center in Ananthapur district helps to promote this art form.

References

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OGGU KATHA

Oggukatha is believed to be first performed by the Kurmas (Yadavas) who devoted themselves to the singing of ballads in praise of Lord Siva. 'Oggu Katha' is so named because of the instrument, the 'Oggu', used at the beginning of each story and at the marriage festivals of Mallanna. This is derived from the folk name given to Shiva's 'damaruka' - it is also known as 'jaggu'. The story narrated with the jaggu or oggu is known as Oggu Katha.

Oggu performers usually narrate the stories of Mallanna and Beerappa and the Shakti ballads of Yellamma. These ballads contain lyrical prose and are recited with great oratorical and rhetorical nuance.

The team consists of four to six members. The main narrator wears a chain made of seven shells, five silver rings, five silver chains, a wrist band, thick silver rings around the neck, a three-layered garland made of sapphire and round silver nooses and a garland with Mallanna's portrait on it.