



Of the four categories of puppetry popular in India, the rod puppet is the most difficult to manipulate because of the weight of the three feet tall puppets and the iron rods connected to the limbs of the puppets. Mr. Ranganatha Rao, a world-renowned puppeteer took it upon himself to develop this form of traditional puppetry.

Mr. Rao received training in the art of traditional marionette theatre of Karnataka from his grandfather Narasingha Rao who was a professional puppeteer. He brought it out of the portals of the temple and took it to the educational institutions for a well-balanced mode of entertainment and communication. He conceived new puppets with indigenous raw material and resurrected plays of traditional repertoire.

He also devised special kits of puppets for using them as visual aids in schools in the rural areas of Karnataka. After teaching in secondary schools for over two decades, he turned professional to devote all his time and energy for the art and science of the rod puppet. He formed an expert team of performers and singers to make a wholesome mini theatre of the rod puppet in the ethos of truly traditional folk music and culture.

Mr. Rao toured the country with his puppets conducting lecture demonstrations and workshops to prove that the rod puppet could be a wonderful medium of entertainment and education. In recognition of his contribution to rebuild this passing art form, the Central Sangeeth Natak Academy honored him with the national award in 1981. Since then Mr. Rao attended a number of puppet festivals at the national and international levels.

Mr. Rao and his team were selected to attend various puppet festivals in Japan, California (US), Switzerland, Poland and Austria. At the national level he has participated in the puppet festivals at New Delhi and Hyderabad. He was appointed the director for the children's puppet festival during the SAARC festival at Bangalore. Also he was the director for the National Puppet Festival, Puthali'91 in 1991 in Bangalore. He has worked for Janapada loka, Karnataka and has set up a multi purpose puppet theatre there.

His puppets hold prominent places in museums around the world. To mention a few - Victoria Albert Museum, UK, Swiss Puppet Museum, Fribourg. Japan Puppet museum, China Puppet Museum and many others.

For the year 2012, he was conferred with the prestigious State Award "Parti Subbaiah Award" from the Karnataka Yakshagana Bayalata Academy

Although Ranganatha Rao has stopped giving puppet performances now, he can be reached for consultataion and references on the puppetry field at rao@rangaputhali.com